

SOCIALIST

ORGANISER

Eyewitness from Poland

Campaign for Solidarity with Workers
in the Eastern Bloc
Public discussion forum

Speakers from the Polish Socialist Party
RD and the Czech Left Alternative
7.30 pm Sunday 4 March
Red Rose Club, Seven Sisters Road,
London

USSR moves towards break-up

Despite noisy protests, only 24 members of the Soviet parliament voted against Mikhail Gorbachev's proposals to give himself very extensive presidential powers.

It is, in effect, a "legal coup". In future, the president will have to be elected. But that's at least four years in the future. For now, Gorbachev will have given himself near-dictatorial powers. The USSR has gone from one-party rule to one-man rule.

Gorbachev's powers, which will enable him to impose martial law, dismiss governments, and declare war, were endorsed by the Supreme Soviet — a body itself chosen partly by nomination and partly by elections which were at best quarter-free — while the Soviet Union is in the middle of a series of elections. Russia itself goes to the polls on Sunday.

Last week, on Sunday 25 February, the secessionist Sajudis movement in Lithuania scored a resounding victory in the republic's parliamentary elections. That will give a big boost to other militant nationalist movements, in the Baltic states and elsewhere, raising the question: can the Soviet Union survive? Or is it on the road to disintegration and collapse?

The Congress of People's Deputies, a larger body than the Supreme Soviet, has yet to discuss the proposals for new presidential powers, but there can be no doubt at all that they will be passed. The Congress will then, it is assumed, choose the man for the job; Gorbachev will get it.

The president's new powers give him the authority to:

- Declare a state of emergency
- Appoint the Prime Minister
- Sack the government
- Declare war (although not send troops to a foreign country)
- Appoint a Presidential Council not subordinate to Parliament
- Act as commander in chief of the armed forces

- Baltic states push for breakaway
- Gorbachev to get new powers
- Elections shatter one-party state

- Sign and veto laws
- Conduct negotiations with governments.

In some respects, Gorbachev's powers will not be unlike those of the American president, at least formally. But there are none of the elaborate "checks and balances" of the American system, and in fact Gorbachev's powers will be far greater.

As a counterpoint to the election victories for opposition forces, the formal declaration of an end to one-party rule, and the increasing nationalist ferment, Gorbachev is looking for ways to strengthen his personal position.

He is in trouble. The nationalist revolt is now uncontrollable, short of massive and risky military intervention. The Kremlin sent troops into Baku in Azerbaijan last month in part as a warning shot to the Baltic republics. But the Baltic nationalists were not deterred, and Gorbachev has promised them the right to self-determination.

The Baltic states and Ukraine are the most economically advanced parts of the USSR, containing, for example, the biggest coal fields. Azerbaijan has much of the USSR's oil. If all these nationalities exercise their right to self-determination, then the USSR will be finished as a



Moscow police chief looks down on the mass demonstrations that threaten bureaucratic privilege

superpower. Even if Gorbachev is prepared to entertain such a prospect — and it is not plausible that he is — there will be others in the bureaucracy who would rather die.

It may seem unlikely right now that the bureaucracy will launch full-scale repression in any of the Baltic states. But what if they feel they have no choice? The "Tiananmen option" cannot be ruled out.

Gorbachev's executive powers are an effort to find a solution to the problems. He can simultaneously allow elections, even quite free ones in which oppositionists can win in certain areas, but hold in reserve his own authority to restore "law and order" as and when necessary.

He also hopes, through the presidency, to distance himself from the crumbling and discredited Communist Party, although that must be rather a tall order.

In the increasingly chaotic situation developing in the USSR, there will be growing numbers of people, at least in Russia itself, who will be prepared to accept intervention by a "strong man". Whether Gorbachev is a credible candidate as strong man remains to be seen. Certainly his popularity is at an all-time low.

But in the attempt, if not the result, Gorbachev is not unlike Stalin, whose legacy he has inherited. Stalin gave himself full personal power to drag Russia out of crisis. For sure Gorbachev will never attain the same vast personal

power as Stalin. But there is a parallel.

Other strong men are waiting in the wings. Former Politburo member and Moscow Party boss Boris Yeltsin has come forward as the leading "radical" spokesperson against Gorbachev, although he has ducked out of standing against him for president. Yeltsin's policies combine firmer emphasis than Gorbachev on the market as an economic solution, and denunciations of corruption and privilege, with a strong element of Great Russian chauvinism.

Chauvinism is deepening. The forest-fire spread of anti-semitism

Turn to page 2

Nicaragua: a victory for terrorism. See page 5.

Redheads under the bed

PRESS GANG

By Jim Denham

What made you a socialist? This fascinating question can provide hours of fun at right-on parties.

The answer usually involves half-remembered early memories of injustice, books and pamphlets that now seem crass, charismatic individuals and (sometimes) altogether less reputable considerations that we won't go into here.

Thanks to Lord Wyatt (né Woodrow Wyatt, ex-Labour MP) in *The Times* and Mr Simon Clark in the *Daily Express*, I can now reveal what made me a socialist: the early morning 'Today' programme on BBC Radio 4 (né the Home Service). For nearly 30 years I have been exposed during those vital moments between sleep and consciousness (when, as is well known, we are all at our most suggestible) to a sustained campaign of subliminal left-wing propaganda from such insidious figures as Jack DeManio, John Timpson, and Brian Redhead.

You think I'm joking? You should have read Mr Clark's devastating analysis of 'Today' published in the *Express*. Mr Clark's 'Media Monitoring Unit' (described by the *Express* as 'centre-right') studied 200 items on 'Today', concluding that no less than 12 of them demonstrated 'anti-government bias'. The conclusive evidence was that Mr Clark 'noticed more Conservative than Labour MPs being interviewed.' Argue with that, if you dare!

Lord Wyatt weighed in with an article in *The Times* showing that 'Today' 'provides a steady drip-drip diet of anti-government propaganda.' Lord Wyatt has previously described the BBC as 'controlled by very left-wing producers who pretend they are concerned about everybody's democratic right to know...when that helps Russia they don't care.'

Clearly, the cunning of these BBC pinkoes knows no bounds. Suckers like me, who were weaned at an impressionable age to think of Jack DeManio as an avuncular fellow who couldn't tell the time, have been drawn into a fiendish conspiracy master-minded by the appropriately-named Mr Redhead.

Wyatt favours decisive action: sack Redhead. After all, he 'probably equates being anti-Thatcher with a normal, civilised balanced approach.'

Thanks to the researches of that well known 'right of centre' academic, Prof. Norman Tebbit (of the Paranoia Monitoring Unit) we now know that Ms Kate Adie is a self-confessed Russian agent, IRA supporter and one-time lover of a leading member of the notorious Revolutionary Workers Collective. Now Redhead is unmasked. But the pinkoes have a whole network of agents throughout the BBC. The vigilant Mr Clark warns us of 'Newsnight' reporter Jeremy Paxman and 'The Money Programme's Valerie Singleton.

In a desperate bid to deny the clear evidence, that well-known Heathite/Trotskyite mouthpiece, the so-called 'Independent' launched a cowardly attack: 'The natural inclination is to dismiss Lord Wyatt's McCarthyism as the feeble expedient of a man with a column to fill, a man, moreover, who has been known to charge that the BBC and *The Times* were 'in the hands of Roman Catholics' and to make attacks on black immigrants to this country so crude that they were censured by the Press Council. Lord Wyatt cannot muster the standing to speak of fairness.'

I am sure that de-programmed ex-cupes of the DeManio/Redhead conspiracy will dismiss the *Independent's* foul smears and instead consider these facts, brought to light by Messrs Wyatt and Clark:

1. Brian Redhead has a beard. He used to work for the *Guardian* and the *Manchester Evening News*.

2. Ms Singleton, cleverly, does not sport a beard. She once presented the influential children's TV show 'Blue Peter'.

Clearly, this is a conspiracy that was prepared earlier.

Israeli socialist on hunger strike



Israeli war resister Adam Keller is on hunger strike. Adam was imprisoned on 4 February for refusing to perform reserve duty in the Israeli army, and went on hunger strike in protest over his isolation and being forced to wear army uniform.

Following the pardon granted to four soldiers in the Givati Brigade convicted of lesser charges in the beating to death of Gaza resident Hanni Shammi in August 1988, Adam Keller wrote to Israeli Defence Minister Yitzhak Rabin stating that he was no longer prepared to serve in the army.

Later, Adam wrote in a letter to a Defence Ministry official: 'No means that you will take will convince me to serve in an army with

which I can no longer identify and the failure of whose attempts to suppress the intifada I wish for with all my heart.'

Keller was previously imprisoned for 3 months, with 6 months suspended. While on reserve service, he spray painted 'Down with the Occupation' on 117 military vehicles, and distributed pamphlets to his fellow soldiers calling on them to refuse duties in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. He also spent a month in prison in 1984 for refusing to serve in the Lebanon war.

The Committee for the Freedom of Expression of Palestinians and Israelis have taken up Adam's case. A picket in protest will be held at St Martin's in the Field Church, Trafalgar Square, London WC2 between 1 and 2pm on Saturday 24 February.

Messages of support should be sent to: Adam Keller, Personal Number 2213693, Military Postal Code 05734, Atlit, Israel.

Further Information: Committee for the Freedom of Expression of Palestinians and Israelis, 1a Highbury Grove Court, Highbury Grove, London N5. Tel: 01 226 7050.

USSR moves towards break-up

From page 1

in Russia is now well documented. Pamyat, the far-right group responsible for the recent bust-up of the Writers' Union conference, is growing: new members have to supply the names of three Jews.

Opposition to Pamyat has been a theme of some of the mass demonstrations in Moscow in recent weeks, providing some cause for optimism. But far-right, militarist or authoritarian forces are a big danger.

There are alternatives. A new Socialist Party has been formed, and the independent trade union Sotsprof, which is explicitly for a democratic socialist society, has some thousands of members.

Working-class action over the past few months has included far-reaching and radical demands. And according to Boris Kagarlitsky of the Socialist Party, one of the features of the miners' strikes was the absence of ethnic tension.

'The working class has shown itself as a real force... (it) is somehow counter-balancing the nationalist tendencies in society because the working-class movement was and is internationalist. In Karaganda, which is in Kazakhstan, I've seen Kazakhs, Russians, Germans, Tatars, Caucasians, everybody together in the same strike movement without any national problem among them'. (Interview in *Against the Current*, January 1990).

The USSR is lurching towards break-up. For now, the forces driving it that way are nationalist, and unpromising from a socialist point of view. But the crisis in the USSR is allowing a new working-class movement to emerge, which is the hope for its future — not as a revamp of the moribund Russian empire, but as a new socialist federation.



Solidarity with Soviet workers

A Soviet miner touring the United States — courtesy of the American Federation of Labour/Congress of Industrial Organisations and the US Information Agency. The US government and its labour lieutenants make links with Russian workers

for their own ends. Socialists in the labour movement need to make links for ours — workers' unity.

The Soviet independent union Sotsprof has recently had a member in Britain. The Cam-

paign for Solidarity with Workers in the Eastern Bloc plans to organise further such tours. Support the CSWEB 'Support the Socialists' appeal: write to

CSWEB, 56 Kevan House, Wyndham Road, London SE5.

Free the Iranian 5!

In September 1989 Iranian newspapers reported the trial of five members of a left wing organisation called Workers Unity.

Through confessions obtained under physical and mental torture, the Islamic prosecutor's office claimed that all five have admitted taking part in 'stealing and murder' in order to increase the group's funds.

By using such false accusations the prosecutor then tried to portray the proceedings against the five as purely criminal proceedings in order to ensure a speedy trial and the death penalty for the accused.

The five accused belong to an underground political organisation often described as workerist and anti-intellectual. Most of its members and supporters are

workers in the Northern province of Gilan and Teheran. More than 30 members of the group have gone underground since the arrest of the five in fear of their lives.

Amnesty International wrote to Iran's Minister of Justice Mr Shusharty on October 26th, enquiring about the case and possible threats of execution. There has been no reply from the Minister. It is therefore of great importance to organise a campaign in defence of the five, and in support of their comrades. We must act now to save their lives.

This small workers group has no international connections to raise its cry for help. However, CARI and supporters in conjunction with supporters of Workers Unity in Europe have launched a campaign to defend the five prisoners.

We hope that by emphasising their case we can also draw atten-

tion to the plight of thousands of other political prisoners in Iran many of whom are regularly executed by the regime labelled as 'criminals and drug pushers'.

- Raise the issue of the Iranian Five in your trade union, Labour Party branch, political organisation.

- Invite a speaker to raise the issue of political executions and show trials in Iran.

- Affiliate to the Campaign Against Repression in Iran (CARI) and given donations to the defence campaign to help members and supporters of the group who are in hiding in Iran — Habibollah-Salahshour (43), Saied-Farhadian (29), Kiomars-Yeganeh (28), Mohsen-Haghanifar (40), and Farid-Farhadian (28).

Contact CARI, BM CARI, London WC1N 3XX.

ACTIVISTS' DIARY

- Friday 2 March**
Two day conference: 'Employment in the 1990s: European labour movement responses'. Contact CAITS, 404 Camden Road, London N7 OSJ, 01-607 7079
- Saturday 17 March and Sunday 18 March**
Socialist Organiser AGM. Contact SO, PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA
- Saturday 24 March and Sunday 25 March**
Green and Socialist Conference, Kingsway Princeton College, Sidmouth St, London WC1. Contact c/o Socialist Society, 9 Poland St, London W1V 3DG
- Saturday 31 March**
Women for Socialism open steering committee meeting, Wesley House, Wild Court, London WC1. Contact Ruth 01 992 0945
- Saturday 7 April**
Constituency Labour Parties Conference, Wakefield Town Hall, 10am. Contact Lol Duffy, 11 Egremont Prom, Merseyside L44 8BG (051 638 1338)
- Saturday 19 May**
Two-day Labour Party Socialists conference at Sheffield Poly Student Union. Contact Ruth, 01 992 0945



Yes, they should have fought! Photo: John Harris, IFL.

The war we could have won

EDITORIAL

Exactly five years ago the miners' strike ground to an exhausted end after twelve bitter and glorious months.

They were glorious months, because during them the miners and their families showed again the mind and spirit that first made the labour movement.

All the courage, determination, far-sightedness and individual self-sacrifice which animated the pioneers who made a great self-bettering labour movement out of suffering and downtrodden masses of workers was shown to be still alive in the mining communities — and in great abundance. The year-long strike was like an encapsulated history of the labour movement of the previous 150 years.

The miners challenged the whole dog eat dog philosophy of the Tories, and put up against it a broadly socialist philosophy which rejected the rule of the profit motive in the pits, and proclaimed that people must come before profits. In response, they were hit with everything the ruling class needed to hit them with in order to beat them down.

When miners' leader Arthur Scargill said that the coal bosses planned to close half the pits in Britain — as they have since done — he was called a liar and a scaremonger-

ing agitator. The Tory government then organised a nationally controlled and coordinated army of militarised police thugs and unleashed them on the miners.

Often the police ignored the rule of law in their efforts to stop miner pickets and their supporters moving about the country. They illegally stopped people exercising their right as citizens to travel. Margaret Thatcher commented that if the law was not sufficient to cover what the police were doing, well then the government would make new laws — as many new laws as were necessary to win the class struggle.

Police thugs acted like armies of occupation in some of the Nottinghamshire mining villages. The miners fought back, the women and young people with the men, in a series of pitched battles — battles like that at Orgreave, where miners were beaten down by a powerful force of highly-trained state thugs armed with the most up-to-date equipment.

The glorious miners and their families held out against the harassment and violence of the state, defying all the screaming, hate-mongering venom of the opinion-formers in the media, whose chief stock in trade was to denounce the "violence" of the miner victims of the massive state violence, which had been planned and prepared years before.

That outcry against miners' violence alienated a lot of potential sympathy and support for the miners. It was one of the biggest frame-ups in British history.

They were 12 bitter months, too, and not only because of the suffering and hardship of the miners and their families. They bore all that without whingeing, in the hope of winning things they considered important.

The real bitterness of those months lies in this — that the miners could have won, and didn't. The working class could have won, and didn't. We could have beaten the Tories, but instead they beat us, and the Tories still rule Britain.

To do what could have been done, the miners needed the active support of other workers. We needed a labour movement led by people

against Thatcher's semi-militarised police sent to stop them, other union leaders joined in the media's condemnation of "violence" — that is, the miners' violence...

The leaders of the Labour Party did that too. The miners defending themselves were condemned; the police violence was accepted as "normal" and proper by those who had just led Labour to defeat in the 1983 general election.

When the miners' strike started, Thatcher had had almost five years in office, using the state power as a weapon in the class war to grind down the labour movement. The labour movement had had five years of slow cumulative retreat, which added up to a defeat.

Yet the leaders of the labour movement — trade union leaders, Labour Party leaders, and the Labour leaders of local councils — could have taken on and beaten the Tories in 1980 and '81, before the great mass unemployment sapped the confidence, strength, will, and fighting spirit of the labour movement.

They didn't, and the Tory juggernaut rolled over the labour movement, shackling the trade unions, beginning to dismantle the welfare state, undoing the achievements of the 1945-51 Labour government.

The miners' strike came late in the day, when the feeling of defeat had already eaten into the labour movement. But not too late.

If the trade union and Labour leaders had wanted to fight the Tories — if they had faced the Tories with a fraction of that class-war spirit with which the Tories faced us — then the miners' strike could have been the occasion for a great rallying of the forces of organised labour.

They didn't want to fight. The miners were left isolated, abandoned to a slow war of attrition which dragged on through the winter of 1984-85 until, finally, the miners went back to work.

In some places they marched back led by bands behind banners, proud and inwardly undefeated. But it was a defeat nonetheless, an

awful defeat, and all the more awful and terrible because it need not have happened like that.

Thatcher and Coal Board boss Ian MacGregor won. And they behaved like victors in a counter-revolution always do: like pigs. Many hundreds of miners were victimised. Long-established trade union rights were ripped up. A vast programme of pit closures was commenced: in the last five years, more than half the pits in Britain have been closed.

It would be easy after such a defeat, followed by such catastrophic consequences, to find reasons to say the whole thing was a mistake, that Arthur Scargill and the other miners' leaders should have avoided open all-out war with Thatcher and MacGregor. But the miners were not wrong to fight.

Their defeat was not inevitable. They were right in their guiding instinct that the Tories had either to be confronted head on and beaten, or else allowed to get on with their programme of making Britain a better place for the rich and a hell for the poor and vulnerable.

The miners did not just fight for the miners: their challenge to Thatcher was not just about the running of the mines, but also about the running of the country. We all lost a great deal that day five years ago when the miners were forced back to work.

No, the miners weren't wrong to fight — the rest of the movement was wrong not to make sure they won.

Karl Marx — writing about a far bigger event, the seizure of power by the working class in Paris in 1871 (the Paris Commune) — also answered our own wiseacres who let the miners be defeated without doing anything to help them and then crowed that the defeat proved that they could not have won and should not have fought.

"World history would indeed be very easy to make if the struggle were taken up only on condition that the prospects were unmistakably favourable". (Letter to Kugelmann, April 1871).

"The miners' strike came late in the day... but not too late"

possessed of the normal human feeling of pride in themselves and in the movement they led, the feeling of responsibility towards it combined with the elementary courage to defend the movement and themselves.

But our movement was led by people who acted as if they had none of those things. The trade union leaders left the miners in the lurch. Some of them plainly wanted Arthur Scargill to get a beating far more than they wanted Thatcher to be beaten.

Where solidarity was needed, they gave sage advice to the union about "moderation" and "non-violence". When the striking miners fought for the right to picket out scabs and defended themselves

Monday

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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 GRAFFITI

Miming mutilation

GRAFFITI

The image of doctors miming the extraction of vital organs to immigrants who speak not a word of English is not an appealing one.

Yet this, it seems, is what an anaesthetist did in order to obtain the permission of a Turkish immigrant to remove one of his kidneys. Considerately, they were going to pay him for it, though whether at any time they mimed handing over cash has not been revealed.

Anyone who has every played charades might know that miming is not easy. You stand up to explain that it's a film and a book, with four words, and even after they know that the second word is 'exit' some idiot still hasn't got the hang of syllables. Ten minutes later, you're tearing your hair out raging that no it isn't 'Fast exit in Wandsworth'.

I mime for a living sometimes, teaching English to foreigners, and I'm telling you, I would not fancy doing an improvisation on the theme of 'me doctor, you kidney donor, this scalpal, don't worry, no pain, fifty quid under the table, no questions asked.'

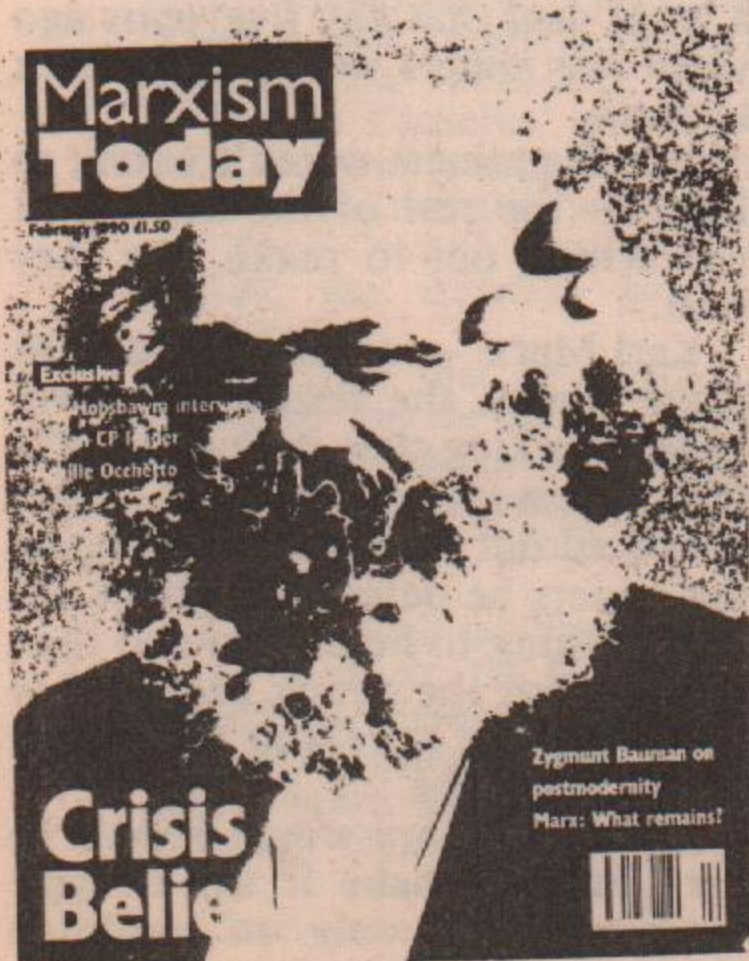
If this is really what happened, it is a racist scandal. How many more people have lost parts of their body just because they don't know enough English to turn the insistent doctors down?

The people most likely to inspire bigotry, according to a report carried out by a team of management consultants, are estate agents, Volvo drivers, homosexuals, men who wear gold medallions, and rather surprisingly, men who wear white socks.

No homosexual would have the poor taste to wear a gold medallion.

But there must be estate agents who drive Volvos. Poor things.

The demand of some Muslims, now being tested in court, that the blasphemy laws be extended to include their religion, is dangerous and reactionary and should be fought. Banning something that one religion finds



Marxism Today?

offensive is a recipe for religious intolerance.

But you will note the Labour leaders keeping their heads down on this, as on everything to do with the 'Rushdie affair'.

Mark Fisher, shadow spokesperson on the arts, was invited to take part on Newsnight to comment on Rushdie's most recent writing — his article in the Independent on Sunday, and his Herbert Read memorial lecture.

After a shadow cabinet meeting, Fisher declined the offer.

Labour is afraid, of course, of losing Muslim votes. But they can't believe they will keep the respect of the 'Muslim community' if they just keep their mouths shut. Fence-sitting never won anyone an election.

'Marx was no more responsible for the gulag than Nietzsche was for Auschwitz. But it is the case that the legitimacy claimed by Lenin and Stalin was bequeathed by Marx...

"The one social and political alternative to capitalism constructed on the basis of Marx's ideas, although arguable more egalitarian, has proved itself to be more authoritarian, less efficient and less desirable than the system it was supposed to replace..."

"...It is time that the Left abandoned its adherence to Marxism..."

I won't play a 'who said that?' game. That was Gareth Stedman Jones, writing the lead editorial in February's *Marxism Today*.

For God's sake change the name of your magazine then, and let people who think Marx is still relevant have exclusive rights to the term 'Marxist'! You, in your grubby Stalinist past, might have thought Stalin was something to do with Marx, but there are a lot of us who never did.

'It's straining your belief', a high court lawyer last week told athlete Tessa Sanderson, who is suing Mirror Group Newspapers, 'that a virile young man who is married, and an attractive young woman... share a double bed by choice and with deliberation without any sexual contact between them whatsoever'.

It's a funny thing, conventional morality. I of course have no idea whether Tessa Sanderson had sex with her trainer or not, but if the evidence that she did is no more than that they shared a bed... Well I hope I'm never held to account for all the conferences I've been to.

According to the upholders of our morals, decent and honest people shouldn't really have sex with each other anyway, unless God has given them the OK. But at the same time, they seem to see sexual desire as so overpowering a force that even the most upright, or should I rephrase that, of gentlemen, left in the company of women, and vice versa, will simply lose control.

For my money, if Tessa Sanderson says she shared a bed with the guy and that's all, I'm with her. I'm for the right to share a bed. Mr George Garman QC shouldn't visit his own sordid little problems on the rest of us, Shut up, you old beak.



The Tory response to the ambulance workers. Ambulance driver David Mollant leaflets Conservative Party Conference. (Photo: Paul Herrman, Profile).

Friday night is solidarity night

Jim Denham reports on one of the many concerts being held to help the ambulance workers

It is not often that this reviewer balks at the prospect of a night out involving live entertainment and a late bar.

However, the ornate pink card inviting me to spend a Friday evening at the Bownbrook Club and promising a Comedian, a Conjurer and (most ominous of all) a Male Vocalist, did not arouse my initial enthusiasm. I finally dragged myself out because it was All In A Good Cause.

The Bownbrook Club is a fairly typical Midlands "Working Men's" institution affiliated to that mysterious proletarian off-shoot of the Mafia known as the CIU. The Club's edifice is a fairly representative example of what passed for architecture in the early 1960s — "functional" being perhaps the most charitable description. Once over the portals, however, you enter a vast wonderland of glitter, mir-

rors and quilted upholstery. A bit like the Tardis, I always think.

To my surprise, the place was packed. Men and women, teenagers and pensioners, sat at tables or crowded round the 100-yard bar. Everyone was splendidly turned-out, the men either "smart casual" or in wedding/funeral suits while amongst the women little black numbers vied with bright reds and lime greens in the fashion stakes. Only a small cabal from the local Labour Party let down the sartorial standard.

I arrived in time to catch most of the comedian's act. He made me laugh, which is more than the likes of the 'Comedy Store' do. He was a black-countryman whose material revolved around the various bodily functions and the pitfalls of sexual experimentation. I kept expecting him to say something racist, but he never did. He signed off with an obviously genuine statement of support for The Good Cause.

This very entertaining act was followed by a group of school kids overseen by a man whose main mission in life was to strike a bass-drum harder than anyone in history. The kids hit various percussion instruments, creating impressionistic renditions of such old favourites as

'The Saints' and the 'Z-Cars' theme. The audience applauded enthusiastically — especially at the mistakes. This remarkable turn was followed by the female EmCee, resplendent in red tailcoat and fishnet tights, who proceeded to demonstrate her abilities as a torch-singer, accompanied by electronic organ and drum machine. She did full justice to the repertoire of Mr Andrew Lloyd Webber.

The raffle and auction of a Bottle of Something was followed by the "Club Entertainer of the Year". His act consisted of Elvis impersonations (complete with very enthusiastically-received hip gyrations) and "saucy" asides reminiscent of the late Max Miller. All carried off with great aplomb.

Then the EmCee announced that all the entertainers had forgone their usual fees and donated them, instead, to The Good Cause. Nearly £1,000 had been raised even before this generous decision. The comedian, the school kids, the conjurer (I missed his act) and the Elvis impersonator were then joined by a hesitant group of ambulance workers for a final rendition of 'Down by the Riverside'. Much of the audience immediately rose to their feet, some brandishing clenched fists and chanting 'Here We Go!'

I'm an old hand at "solidarity benefits" and over the years I've sat through countless evenings of Woody Guthrie-copyists, no-hope punk bands and right-on Ben Elton imitators. This was different.

As we staggered out into the night, a woman whose mascara was running down her cheeks, turned and said: "With support like this, how can they lose." It was a statement, not a question. I hope she's right.

LETTER

An Irish question

Perhaps you, or Patrick Murphy himself, would care to respond to the apparent contradictions of these two statements, his in SO, 15 February 1990:

"No more depressing evidence of the chronic communalism of Sinn Fein politics can be imagined than the declaration by the IRA last week that all workers at Shorts Engineering factory are legitimate targets because they work mainly on defence contracts," and that from *An Phoblacht* of the same date:

"There will be no departure from that principle and ordinary workers in Shorts or elsewhere have nothing to fear."

Alex Simpson
Cambridge CLP

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THOSE WHO DO NOT LEARN FROM HISTORY ARE DOOMED TO REPEAT IT

Nicaragua: a victory for terrorism

By Frank Higgins

The victory of the "UNO" 14-party coalition in the Nicaraguan election is a victory for US military and economic terrorism.

For ten years the rag, tag and bobtail army of the 'contras' has conducted a campaign of indiscriminate slaughter from across Nicaragua's border. Without US funding, support and encouragement, the contras would not have existed.

The US government has harassed Nicaragua economically, discriminated against it, and, for half the decade, operated a full-scale trade embargo against it.

It provided anything up to \$20 million to finance Ms Chamorro's "UNO" election campaign. No let-up was in sight. Contra killings continued. The economy was in ruins. Most Nicaraguans must have reckoned that they could not hope to continue defying the Yanqui giant alone.

So the voters were under tremendous pressure to vote themselves off the hook. And enough of them did that to give the victory to Chamorro and her allies, who included many conservative parties together with the two segments of the old Nicaraguan Stalinist party.

President Daniel Ortega has promised that the Sandinistas will allow Chamorro and her allies to form a government, and will act as a loyal opposition, defending the gains of the revolution. He has made the handover of power apparently conditional on the prior disarmament of the contra terrorist bands.

What was really going on in the Nicaraguan election was portrayed plainly by the way the TV and newspapers reported the result. They went straight to George Bush for a comment, as if he were the real opposition to the Sandinistas.

The strangeness of the world we live in was shown in another way, too: Henry Kissinger was brought in, as a great philosopher-cum-elder-statesman of the American system, to offer his thoughts about the prospects for Nicaraguan democracy. This was the same Kissinger who was, with Richard Nixon, responsible for bombing Cambodia into the Stone Age and thus indirectly for the genocidal Khmer Rouge. He is a greater war criminal than most of the Nazis hanged at the end of the Second World War.

Much of the television coverage was crudely biased: one news programme claimed, quite untruly, that it was the first election called by the Sandinistas since they overthrew the Somoza dictatorship in 1979.

Yet, in one sense, the outcome of the election may be the best thing for the Nicaraguan people now. Given the relentless ten year war on them — and that is what it was — by the American government, there was no way out for this small country, with its ruined economy.

The formation of a Chamorro-led coalition government must force the US to stop the war and give "aid", which in fact will amount to some reparations for their war on Nicaragua.

A Chamorro government does not necessarily mean an end to the Sandinista revolution. The Sandinistas still have great strength and resources. The army and state apparatus is Sandinista, and it is improbable that it will allow itself to be purged and broken up.

The Sandinistas are by far the biggest party, with over 40 per cent of the vote. Against them is arrayed an improbable coalition, ranging from old-line Stalinists to right-wingers. It will have great difficulty staying together as a ruling coalition, even should great US financial support be forthcoming.



Effectively the Sandinistas will still have state power, or a large share of it. Any attempt to change that quickly and drastically would mean an immediate civil war, which the Sandinistas would clearly win.

What is opening up, therefore, is the beginning of an evolution towards something rare in Latin America: a representative democratic system. With justice the Sandinistas claim to have won that for the Nicaraguan people, through their revolution against the US-sponsored Somoza dictatorship and their ten year war for the integrity and independence of the country.

The Sandinistas and their revolution have always been a shifting mixture of contradictory things. The movement began in the '60s as a Castroist guerrilla current, with essentially Stalinist politics. It then divided, and the "Tercerista" faction, led by Daniel Ortega and his brother, worked out a broader strategy to overthrow Somoza in alliance with bourgeois and other forces.

The Somoza family had ruled Nicaragua since the 1930s — father, older brother, and then the younger brother chased out in 1979 — and ran the country as a family farm, squeezing out much of the bourgeoisie. The "Terceristas" put together a broad coalition including large sections of the bourgeoisie.

The Sandinista army was the spearhead of the battle against the dictatorship, but there was a mass movement, and it was partly organised by the bourgeoisie. For example, the 1979 general strike was supported and partly organised by the bourgeoisie.

When Somoza fled, the armed power in the country was the Sandinista movement. They immediately started to create a structure in which their party-army reconstructed the state around itself — that is, they moved towards a Stalinist-type state.

The bourgeoisie who had allied with the Sandinistas — Ms

Chamorro for example — moved into opposition in 1980. Though at first viewed with comparative favour by the Carter administration in the US, the Sandinistas soon came under vicious attack from the Reagan administration and its "contra" proxies.

Yet the Sandinistas were not simply Stalinists. While they had

"A Chamorro government does not necessarily mean the end of the Sandinista revolution. The Sandinistas still have great strength and resources. The army and state apparatus is Sandinista, and it is improbable that it will allow itself to be purged and broken up".

ties to Cuba and supported the Soviet Union on most foreign policy issues — for example, the invasion of Afghanistan — the Sandinistas also showed that they were trying to avoid grafting full Stalinism onto Nicaragua. They did not want to go the whole Cuban way; they were genuinely committed to a degree of pluralism.

They did contradictory things. They allowed private enterprise to survive on a large scale while banning strikes for long periods.

The US-contra offensive crippled and warped the development of the

revolution. Now, paradoxically, there may be a chance for things to straighten out.

There is a rough parallel in the Irish Free State in the '20s and '30s. Sinn Fein split over the 1921 Treaty, dictated at gunpoint by Britain. The "Free Staters", predecessors of today's Fine Gael party, accepted the Treaty. Republicans, forerunners of both today's Fianna Fail party of Charles Haughey and the Provisional IRA, opposed it.

Civil war followed for a year, very bitter and destructive. The Free State state machine was constructed by the Fine Gael party (to use its present name) to repress the others.

Yet in the mid-'20s Fianna Fail became a legal opposition (the IRA split off), and in 1932 won a parliamentary majority. Fine Gael let them take power peacefully.

There was then a period of great tension, and a few state officials were purged. The Fianna Fail government relied on the unofficial army, the IRA, until the mid-'30s. But things settled into a sort of democratic two-party system.

No two cases are the same, of course; and the destruction and damage has been greater in Nicaragua than in Ireland. Yet the parallel does indicate that not all is lost, by any means, for the Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua.

The Sandinistas are populist nationalists, not working class socialists. They have organised trade unions, but then so have many petty bourgeois nationalist groupings. How the Sandinistas will evolve now is far from clear.

Against brutal American bullying they are entitled to the support of socialists everywhere. But socialists should not confuse the issues of national self-determination and of class politics.

In Nicaragua socialism will develop by way of the independence of the working class from both the bourgeois pro-US forces represented by Chamorro and the populist nationalists of the FSLN.

Tunnelling for profit

THE HIDDEN HAND

By Colin Foster

Given that failure would ruin all involved, it's no surprise that the impasse over the building of the Channel Tunnel was resolved, for a while anyway.

But it was bad. The company running the Tunnel project, Eurotunnel, is technically bankrupt. A court had ordered it to pay £62 million to the building contractors' consortium TML, and it only had £30 million.

The banks would not bail out Eurotunnel until an agreement to cut future costs was signed by Eurotunnel and TML, and TML refused to sign until Eurotunnel boss Alistair Morton was sacked.

Meanwhile British Rail has given up and declares that it cannot build a high-speed rail link from the Tunnel to London unless the government helps it out with £1 billion. Without that rail link, the Tunnel won't be much use.

So much for the Tory Government's prize demonstration on how the free market can tackle major infrastructure projects!

It was never really a free market project, of course. There was never any question of a number of different companies building different Channel Tunnels — as competing companies built parallel railway lines in the 19th century — and competing so that the market would decide who had done the best job. The whole affair was licensed, regulated, and decided on by the Governments of Britain and France.

The "free market" bit is that Eurotunnel is a private company, raising money from private investors, and reckoning on covering its costs and making a profit by charging a "market" rate for the use of the Tunnel once it is built.

This means that charges for the Tunnel — and, correspondingly, rail fares between London and Paris — will be much higher than they need have been.

The banks which have invested in Eurotunnel will demand big, fat dividends once the Tunnel opens, to compensate them for the time their money has been tied up and the risk they have run. The risks may not be all that big in reality, since the banks would surely have enough political clout to force even the most dogmatically free-market Government into a bail-out if the Tunnel project really did collapse — but certainly the banks are demanding compensation for the risk.

They should be able to get it, because the rail route should be quicker than air and much quicker than ferry, enabling Eurotunnel to push up the charges without limit short of making the rail fare much dearer than air. Passengers — and consumers of everything transported through the Tunnel — will pay.

The Tunnel will make rail fares more expensive. It will, however, make ferry fares cheaper, as the ferry firms cut costs and squeeze their workers to stay competitive. Hence the 'Herald of Free Enterprise' disaster at Zeebrugge and the Dover P&O seafarers' dispute — all part of the magic of market economics.

One other social effect of the free market approach will be found in London. Against the wishes of almost everyone living in the areas concerned, BR has insisted on siting the Tunnel rail link terminus at Kings Cross rather than Stratford.

Why? Because BR is also selling off vast areas near Kings Cross for property development. It will get a better price if Kings Cross is the cross-Channel terminus. If Stratford is the terminus, the gain in property prices will instead be spread among the landlords and business people of Stratford.

And the redeeming feature of the "free market" approach? It should be that it imposes market discipline and keeps costs down, preventing the huge overruns common on public projects. In fact it has done nothing of the sort. The cost of building the Tunnel is now reckoned at £7.2 billion — way above the £6 billion "worst case" forecast, let alone the £4.7 billion initially quoted by TML.

We stand for workers' liberty

Clive Bradley outlines what Socialist Organiser stands for. (First of two parts).

The think tanks of the Western world say socialism is dead. In the last few months, regimes which for nearly half a century had claimed to be socialist have been forced, by huge popular opposition, to step aside. They are leaving socialism, as they and their advocates in the West had defined it, in ruins.

In contrast, Western capitalism, they say, is a system of democracy and liberty, economic efficiency and political freedom.

This conclusion is shared by those like Mrs Thatcher who want to let free-market capitalism rip, and those like Neil Kinnock who think it can and should be tamed. Socialism is dead, long live capitalism.

There is an alternative view, not given much publicity, that the opposite is true. It is totalitarianism that is dead, or dying — not socialism. Socialism is being reborn. The end of the totalitarian parody of socialism will give real socialists a new chance.

Socialist Organiser subscribes to this view. For our whole existence we have insisted that the regimes of Eastern Europe are not socialist. We want real workers' liberty, East

and West: real control by working class people over their lives, over their communities and workplaces, over government and the economy. We want a society without rich and poor; without bigotry, without racism, where women are recognised as equal to men, where different nations don't blow each other to bits, but live together democratically. All this is what we mean by socialism.

Those in the East today who believe that capitalism can fulfil their dreams of prosperity and freedom will find they are wrong. Capitalism is not only the economic success stories of West Germany and Japan: it is the disaster of Bolivia, where almost an entire population is reduced to growing the plant from which cocaine is made; it is the catastrophe of Ethiopia, endlessly hit by famine; it is the death squads of El Salvador.

For every person in Western capitalism who is comfortable and well-off, there are thousands who are starving, have no homes, have seen their countries ravaged by senseless wars. For every capitalist country with a parliamentary democracy, there is one with a military dictatorship. Some that are democracies now were dictatorships less than twenty years ago, even in Europe: countries like Spain, Greece and Portugal.

And even the richest capitalist countries contain within them massive inequalities. Every US city has ghettos of appalling poverty, where kids survive by selling crack to each other. Every major European city has a huge pool of unemployed.

On the streets of London it is now commonplace to see teenagers sitting in doorways wrapped in sleeping bags. Everyone knows that in the inner cities, the majority is poor, and in many cases getting

poorer.

In the West as in the East, society is divided into classes. There are those with wealth and power, and those without it.

In Britain today, we elect the government. But no one elects the top civil servants. No one elects the bankers. No one elects the army top brass. Socialism would be a society in which all these things, government and the economy, administration and defence, are under the control of working class people.

A socialist movement aims to organise the powerless in society to fight militantly for their interests against the rich and powerful. It aims to break the power of big business, the Tories and their backers, and replace it with the real, democratic rule of the majority.

Fanatics and democrats

Socialist *Organiser* aims to help build such a movement.

Socialist Organiser is a legitimate part of the Labour Party and the labour movement. It is a Marxist newspaper, though that's an unfashionable thing to be. Throughout the history of the labour movement in Britain, Marxists have been active. One of the earliest real rank and file unions was organised by one of Karl Marx's daughters. From the birth of the Labour Party, there have been Marxist newspapers and organisations trying to influence the wider movement.

The word 'Marxist' conjures up either wild-eyed fanatics with secret arms supplies in their bedsits, or Ceausescu clones whose sole ambition in life is to force everyone else to eat black bread and wear drab uniforms. And unfortunately, some

people who have seen themselves as Marxists have rather lived up to these stereotypes.

But Marx himself was not fighting for anything Ceausescu would have recognised. He was no secret plotter or supporter of nasty dictatorships. He was a **revolutionary democrat** who worked out a theory of how capitalist society works, and how working class struggle against it can develop.

Marxists try to understand the overall interests of the working class, to unite the working class movement, and **think ahead**. As Marx put it, they represent the 'movement of the future' in the movement of the present. Marxists try to bring the lessons of the whole history of the international working class struggle to the struggles of today.

For example, in Eastern Europe, real Marxists are trying to convince the mass democracy movements that capitalism is not the answer they are looking for. Marxists try to provide an **overview** of capitalism and totalitarianism.

Unless Marxists **convince** the mass movement, they will get nowhere. Marxists aim to achieve the rule over society by its majority — something which can't be imposed by small groups of people. Indeed, one of Marx's distinctive contributions to socialist theory was to challenge the dominant view of his day, that socialism would be brought about by 'conspirators'. No, said Marx: we need to win the mass working class movement.

For socialists today, after all the abominations of the Eastern European and Chinese regimes, it is important to reassert the connection between socialism and democracy. Ours is a socialism of **more** democracy than exists in Britain today, not less.

What kind of democracy? Over and over again, all across the world, in intense periods of struggle, workers have formed **workers' councils**, which can take control of enterprises, localities, and if linked together nationally, the whole country. Representatives in these councils are accountable to the people who elected them: they can be recalled if they are not acting according to their electors' wishes, they don't get paid more than the average worker, and posts are rotated. We want a democracy based on these kinds of institutions, rather than inadequate Westminster-style parliaments, where the people we elect can ignore us for the next five years, and anyway have less real power than the permanent civil service.

Parliament is better than no democracy at all, of course. And in reality it is the ruling class that considers parliament expendable. It is now well-known that the 'security forces', like MI5, have plotted to bring down elected Labour governments in the past, and would do so again: that was the revelation contained in the book 'Spycatcher' that Mrs Thatcher most anxiously wanted kept secret. Top army officers are on record as having planned 'if necessary' to organise a military coup against the last Labour government: 'if' law and order and national security were under threat — as they defined them.

We believe that every democratic freedom we have in Britain, which was won by struggle, is essential for the working class and the labour

movement. We believe that democracy in Britain and elsewhere needs to be defended, and we have to fight against all sorts of erosions of our civil liberties. Democracy must be extended. All we say is that parliamentary democracy is not the only kind, and that something better is possible.

Socialism means also **economic** democracy, abolishing the inequalities of capitalism. Capitalism **causes** inequality. It is a system based on exploitation: that is, some people, the majority, work to produce society's wealth, while others get most of the wealth that is produced. A tiny proportion of society own most of its wealth. 200 or so monopolies control 80% of production in Britain. 10% of the population own over 50% of the country's marketable wealth.

The purpose of production, in capitalist society, is **profit**. Goods are not made just because people need them: a profit has to be possible. It is because of profit that the inner cities rot; it simply doesn't pay to build decent houses (or houses at all, these days) or provide people with jobs.

It is because of profit that the health, education, transport and other services have been cut. They don't make enough money.

It is because of profit — the 'market' so beloved of Thatcher — that the Third World is starving. Many Third World countries export only one basic commodity. If its price on the world market falls, the Third World economy suffers. The country has to borrow from foreign banks which insist on an 'austerity programme' — spending cuts, unemployment.

There's no money to be made in aid to the starving. So they're left to rot, by governments and private enterprise, and charities foot the bill.

Even in the richer Third World countries, like Brazil, local profiteers make millions while the majority of society still ekes out a living in squalid shanty towns. According to recent reports, in the shanties of Rio de Janeiro, unwanted and homeless children are being shot in the streets like dogs. There are — literally — millions of such children swarming in the streets of Brazil.

Socialism aims to replace the principle of private profit with democratic planning to meet society's needs.

The Thatcher decade

Millions of working class people now hope to god that Thatcher will lose the next general election and that the Labour Party will win it. So do we: and supporters of *Socialist Organiser* will be campaigning for a Labour victory in the future as we have in the past.

How have the Thatcher years shaped Britain? Was she as invincible as she sometimes seemed to be? How have different political forces changed over the past Thatcherite decade?

Thatcher was elected in 1979, after five years of a Labour government that had promised to 'squeeze the rich until their pips squeak'. In fact, that Labour government, after doing a deal with the International Monetary Fund, launched a pro-



Homeless in London



Gluttony in the City

gramme of cuts in health, education and welfare that the Tories only continued. Moreover, through its 'social contract', a deal this time with the trade union leaders, the Labour government presided over years of wage restraint and decline in workers' living standards.

It was a public sector revolt against the government's wages policy, the so-called 'winter of discontent', that forced it to call an election, which it lost.

So the Labour government functioned in fact as a thoroughly capitalist government, trying to 'run the country' without in any way challenging the centres of economic power. Harold Wilson, who was Prime Minister until 1976, and had been Prime Minister from 1964-70, recounts in his memoirs how, in a conversation with the director of the Bank of England, he was told that the Labour government would not be allowed to carry out its manifesto promises, which were considered too damaging to big business' interests.

By neither fighting the powers

that be, nor defending the interests of the people who had elected it (with high hopes, after defeating the Tory government of Edward Heath), the Labour government succeeded only in demoralising its own supporters. The result was a big Tory victory, and the beginning of Thatcherism.

But it was by no means inevitable that Thatcher would still be in power eleven years on. It was possible to beat her — with mass campaigns and trade union muscle.

There were campaigns. Liverpool and Glasgow saw huge demonstrations against unemployment in the early 1980s. The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) mobilised thousands against the siting of Cruise missiles in Britain, Polaris missiles elsewhere in Europe, and the development of Britain's 'independent deterrent'. The campaign against the anti-abortion Corrie Bill, in 1979, was successful.

And there were strikes. In 1980, there was a big strike by workers in a central industry — steel. Steel

workers chanted slogans for the TUC to call a general strike.

But the steel workers were defeated, and following their defeat, employment in the steel industry decimated. A pattern had been set. But the Tories still didn't get it all their own way. During the health service dispute of 1982, once again demands were raised for a general strike, and for a day — in September — there was the most widely-supported strike action of recent years.

The biggest battle of all was to come after the Tories had been re-elected in 1983. In March 1984, in response to a deliberate provocation by the National Coal Board, a strike spread across the coal industry. The miners' strike was to last almost exactly a year. It was a decisive turning point in the recent history of Britain, summing up all the lessons of the struggle against Thatcher.

The miners lost, with terrible consequences for their communities. But they didn't need to lose. The Tories and the NCB knew

it wasn't an easy matter to beat the miners: they had shied away from confrontation before, and during the strike did everything they could to stop other sections of workers joining the miners on strike. Railworkers and others got much more favourable pay settlements than they would have otherwise; and Liverpool City council was bought off at the height of the summer when it looked like there could be a city-wide general strike against the government.

So why did the miners lose? Because of the abject failure of the labour movement as a whole to stand by them. Serious solidarity action could have stopped the Tories; a general strike could have defeated them. But the trade union leaders didn't lift a finger to help the NUM. Neil Kinnock sat on the fence, only timidly supporting the miners; solidarity actions remained isolated.

The miners' defeat showed up the weaknesses of the organisations of the labour movement. These organisations, the trade unions and

the Labour Party, while still quite strong (Britain has a great many more trade union members, proportionately, than most countries, even after a fall in membership as a result of mass unemployment), were simply not up to the task of building solidarity and standing up to the Tories. They 'bottled out'. If we are not to see defeat after defeat, the trade unions and the Labour Party will have to be radically changed.

Changed how? They need to be more democratic, more responsive to their members' needs. Officials often aren't elected, and some have been there for years. The leaders who usually don't identify with their own rank and file much, and often get paid massively more, should not only be made more accountable, but got rid of: the trade unions need new leaders, who are committed to the notion of struggle.

The NUM leaders proved very unusual during the strike, because they really did fight with everything they had. Yet even they had serious shortcomings. Despairing of real help from the other trade union leaders, Scargill called over their heads for a general strike, but there was no organisation in the unions, independent of the inert leaders, who could even begin to deliver such solidarity. That also needs to change: we need a rank and file movement, organising the militant activists, within and across the trade unions.

In the Labour Party, too, the feebleness of the leadership's support for the miners indicated, once again, the need for big changes.

There had already been attempts at change. Many people in the Labour Party had concluded from the Wilson-Callaghan years that there was only one way to avoid repeating them: greater accountability and democracy in the Party. In carrying out their cuts and IMF plans, the Labour leaders had defied Labour Party policy. That should never be allowed to happen again.

The individual who best represented this new Labour Left, with its focus on Party democracy, was Tony Benn, who in 1981 narrowly missed being elected deputy leader. Already, by then, the Left had won significant victories: Labour Party leader and deputy leader were, after 1980, to be elected by Party conference, rather than just MPs, and there was to be automatic reselection of the MPs, so no one could be in a safe seat for life without ever being held to account by his or her local party. *Socialist Organiser* played a significant part in these democracy battles: we initiated a united campaign of the whole Left, the Rank and File Mobilising Committee for Labour Democracy, which was decisive in getting the democratic reforms pushed through.

But we also warned that a lot more needed to be done. The Labour Left was strong in the local Labour parties, but not in the trade unions. And the democracy campaign needed to be linked to a more radical challenge to the policies of the Labour leaders. Accountability was important, but not enough: Labour needed to be able to fight the banks and monopolies

Continued next week

The coming class struggles in Eastern Europe



General strike in Czechoslovakia

Gerry Bates sums up the results and prospects of the recent upheavals in the Eastern Bloc. These theses will be discussed at the Socialist Organiser supporters' AGM on 17-18 March.

The revolutions that began in Eastern Europe last year are, as yet, incomplete.

New regimes have been set up (except in the USSR and China, the two strongest state-monopoly regimes, and Albania and Cuba, two marginal ones, and the USSR's regime is in deep trouble).

Yet the old bureaucracies still retain much power. Former oppositionists now hold power in coalition with the old party apparatus; in the country which saw the most dramatic (and violent) revolution — Romania — old party hacks still hang on to power. At the time of

writing the outcome of elections, due soon in most Eastern Bloc countries, is unpredictable; but for certain in most cases the old Stalinists, even in reformist mood, are likely to do badly.

The old ruling class — the top bureaucracy — is still in power. They have been severely shaken up, and conservative sectors have been battered. Their means of rule for 40 years, the one-party state, has been shattered. But the bureaucracy retains much state and social power.

2. The forces which dominate the democracy movements, and in many cases in the new governments (and which will surely emerge stronger from elections), support the Western capitalist model, both economically (the market), and politically (parliamentary democracy). They also look to the west for investment, aid and trade.

Ideologically, the broad movements are not coherent. In many countries mass support for market economics is combined with grass-roots hostility to its consequences for inequality and unemployment; in Czechoslovakia, for example, only 3 per cent in an opinion poll said they wanted full-fledged capitalism. But the 'experts' in power, or in the strongest positions, tend to be free-marketiers. The dominant layers of the

democracy movements were and still are middle class. The working class has been important as a social force, but not as an independent political actor.

3. The "democratic revolutions" will lead not to classless harmony, but to intense class struggle. The danger of right-wing nationalist authoritarian or military regimes, and of bloody national conflicts, is great.

4. The inspiration for much of what happened in the last few months of last year must have been the events of China in May-June. But the general background is Gorbachev's attempt to lift the Soviet economy out of its severe impasse through market-oriented reform, and political "openness".

In the USSR Gorbachev's policy is running into difficulties that flow from the nature of his enterprise. He is a reforming bureaucrat, a representative of the ruling class, trapped between the necessity of reform and the risk of the popular explosion reform could trigger. Last year, especially in the mines of Siberia and Ukraine, there was mass strike action, which the bureaucracy was able to stop only by making promises it cannot possibly keep.

Now the depth of the economic crisis is rapidly losing Gorbachev

the support he once had. Mass opposition has emerged within Russia itself.

5. The most serious challenge has come from the national minorities. Especially in the Baltic states and in the Caucasian republics, secessionists are very strong, or dominant. Hard-line nationalists have already won in the elections in Lithuania. Gorbachev has been forced to abandon the one-party system.

The tendencies towards the break-up of the Soviet Union look very strong. But the bureaucracy cannot allow this to happen, or at least will try to limit it. The prospects must be for a more and more central role to be played by the army. A military regime could be expected simultaneously to 'restore order' and push through the free-market reforms.

A variant of that might be the personal rule of Gorbachev as a dictator, relying heavily on direct control of the army and police. Gorbachev is now taking vast dictatorial-Bonapartist powers — including the power to declare martial law in any part of the Soviet Union, for example — and assuming personal control of the state apparatus. He is being elected to these powers by a parliament which itself was not democratically elected.

6. A socialist approach to the national question in Eastern Europe would (a) recognise the rights of compact national minorities to self-determination; (b) stress the need for democratic attitudes to the national minorities' own minorities (for example, the large Russian minorities in the Baltic states); (c) stress the need for unity between the workers and oppressed peoples of different nations: a new, socialist and democratic federation is needed to replace the moribund and reactionary Russian empire. (We advocate smaller federations where possible, also, for example in central Europe).

We favour the reunification of Germany. But reunification will not be a smooth, uncontested process. We are for workers' unity, defence of workers' living standards, democratic rights throughout Germany, and levelling-up of workers' gains across Germany.

7. Socialists must not take a sectarian attitude to the democratic struggles in the East. We are positively for parliaments. And we want to see parliaments that are more democratic than those we have in the west: where representatives are subject to recall and have no privileges, where elections are more frequent than in the west (every year or two years), where there are citizens' militias, freedom of assembly and political organisation, etc. The Executive power should be chosen by parliament, not a separate presidency. We don't

counterpose 'socialist democracy' based on workers' councils to democracy as it is demanded by the mass movements. We seek to develop the democracy movements in a socialist direction. The workers will develop their own workers' democracy, workers' councils and "workers' parliaments" through becoming convinced of the necessity of such democracy in struggle, not through abstract propaganda.

8. At the same time, we fight to help and promote the emergence of politically independent workers' movements; indeed, everything depends on whether the East European workers can develop workers' parties, armed with the lessons of class struggle both East and West. We are for workers' self-defence against the devastating attacks on living standards and job security that will result from the East European economies being opened to western capital and free-market competition. We are for workers' control over production, the establishment of a workers' government, and a workers' plan to deal with the economic crisis. Such a plan would include: workers' control over the distribution of food; a sliding scale of wages and hours; control over foreign investment; plans for retraining workers on full pay.

9. We fight every inch against the wrecking of East European workers' lives by the onrush of western capital and the free market. We counterpose not Stalinist planning, but workers' self-management and a workers' government. That workers' self-management will be as far from Stalinist planning as from the capitalist market. It cannot be a matter of just replacing the Stalinists in the planning offices by democratically elected people. Socialist planning presupposes accurate and comprehensive information on costs and technologies. It cannot be built on the bureaucrats' bungled and false accounting, nor use its ultra-centralised methods. A workers' government would need to use market mechanisms for a long time — controlled and shaped by the control of the workers' government over credit, taxes and the state budget.

10. The prospects for Eastern Europe are not, in reality, for the consolidation of stable bourgeois democracies (except in a reunified Germany and Czechoslovakia, perhaps). Fascist, authoritarian or militarist forces could become dominant. In Poland, for instance, with a particularly severe economic and social crisis, catastrophe threatens. There is a race between the working class movement and authoritarian forces to solve that crisis. Giving practical support to socialist movements is therefore a doubly important duty for western socialists.

WHERE WE STAND

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

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

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

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

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

We stand:

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

Against racism, and against deportations and all immigration controls.

For equality for lesbians and gays.

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

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

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

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

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Czechoslovakia's left issues its manifesto

The 'Left Alternative' in Czechoslovakia has issued this manifesto under the title 'The goals of the Left Alternative (movement for democratic and self-managed socialism) for the immediate period'

We are for:

That the elections don't create an undemocratic political system in which a narrow layer of politicians (leaders of political parties and movements, their apparatuses) dominate society.

A truly democratic functioning of the newly forming political structures. The Civic Forum movement is a general democratic form of society's self-organisation and self-management. If this movement wants to bring in democracy over the whole of society, it itself must be truly democratic.

Up until now, Civic Forum has had to play the role of a crisis structure, it had to function undemocratically. It is now necessary to make sure that all organs of Civic Forum be democratically elected from the bottom up. We oppose the oligarchic tendencies in this movement.

We support the Civic Forum movement and are working in its structures.

A strong, functioning local self-management, using the elements of direct democracy so as many as possible of the matters which directly touch people's lives can be directly influenced by those people.

A democratically functioning factory self-management. The mammoth "state enterprises" must be divided into rationally functioning economic subjects. The self-management structures must work not just on the level of factory management, but also the plant and workplace level.

The bureaucracy must be rejected. It's necessary to find a form of organising work, and of legal authority, which would not just guarantee productivity, but in which the paid employee would have a real influence on the management and results of his labour and on the distribution of the profits created.

Independent self-managing trade unions, unbureaucratised and active. All power in the unions should go to the membership base! We fully support the association of strike committees, and are going to work in the strike structures and trade union organisations.

Wide involvement of the public in environmental matters, using the developing forms of self-management and self-organisation of society. We mustn't just support



Protest at bureaucrats. The banner reads, "We're waiting for you in the labour camps".

the new state organs which are supposed to look after the environment, but really control them, if necessary, decisively criticise them. We are working in the independent ecological structures.

Join us. We are an informal

movement, for the creation of a new, authentic political left, which is a part of the spectrum of every developed country. We want to be society's conscientious, radically democratic conscience.

Our principles are wide tolerance,

dialogue, searching for and defending the truth.

Prague, 7 January 1990
Contact: Sekretariat LA
Martin Hekrdla
Liliova 5
110 00 Prague 1

'Without utopians people would still be living in caves'

This article, 'Several Remarks about the Issues Facing the Political Left' by Petr Kuzvart, explains the Left Alternative's politics

"Truth is revolutionary" — Antonio Gramsci

The following text contains viewpoint and ideas based on the platform of the Left Alternative movement. It is not, however, any kind of basic programmatic statement, but rather a proposal for further discussion.

If I had to illustrate our goal in a few sentences, I would say this: We want to achieve the widest possible democracy, a democracy which would ensure the real participation of all in making decisions on the matters of society.

We want the wage-workers, the real creators of the wealth of society, to have a real influence on the arrangement and results of their work, and on the distribution of the surplus product which their work

produces. For this, it is necessary to build functioning enterpris self-management.

We want to strengthen the creation of independent, self-managing trade unions, active and non-bureaucratised. The membership base and its directly elected organs, the factory committees, must have full legal authority. The amount of authority they delegate to various coordinating organs, and leaders of union sections, should depend on the decision of this union base.

We support the All-state association of strike committees, and, from the first moments of the revolution, we have been working in the strike structures.

Our relationship to the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (CPCZ) and its members is as follows: As consistent democrats we tolerate this party as an equal part of the political spectrum. In this spectrum it can have only as much weight as it earns with its own political work.

This party, however, was for 60 years the bearer of the crude theory and practice of Stalinism. For 40 years it was the power structure of the Stalinist dictatorship. Throughout the whole period it was decimated by purges, eliminating its best members.

That is why, today, you find so many pragmatic gold-diggers,

bureaucrats, and a faceless mass, accustomed to always listen to their superiors. We are sceptical whether it is at all possible to really renew it, ie. to thoroughly de-Stalinise it.

It's also a question whether after 60 years when to be a Communist mean to be a Stalinist, we are talking about "communists" at all. Exceptions only prove the rule.

The old party apparatus must be rejected. It's necessary to approach CPCZ members — past or present — in a differentiated way.

Basic distrust is fully appropriate. There are, of course, exceptions. There are even members of the CPCZ who have stood firmly with us since the first days of the revolution, in the time when things were not by a long way won, and when the opponent — the power apparatus, full of their own comrades — moved against us. Those individuals who risked even more than the rest of us, those Communists who proved themselves in the decisive moments of the revolution, those are perhaps the one hope from the party, which is totally politically bankrupt.

They have our trust and sympathy. The other members of the CPCZ must rehabilitate themselves, in the light of all their activities and positions, and earn moral and political trust.

The left decisively belongs to the developing political spectrum. Our attempts to create a new, authentic political left is today the most important task which we can give ourselves. We accept this task freely and with the conviction that our attempts are essential to this goal.

The system which used to exist in this country is not, for us, considered to be socialism. Some of us confirmed this conviction with our imprisonment. For us, socialism without decisive, actual democracy is impossible and unthinkable.

Our basic principles are a wide tolerance of ideas, mutual dialogue and cooperation with all really revolutionary forces. The attainment of a wide, really functioning democracy is our unqualified goal.

We are radical — and so consistent — democrats. So we will try to be the bad conscience of ruling groups. We don't aspire to occupy their positions.

We will stand with all those who with their paid work create social wealth, against manipulating and exploiting mechanisms, which will be disguised in various ways, and more and more so. We will defend the existence of state guaranteed social enablement policies and criticise, talk of private voluntary charity.

We will try in all ways to ensure fully developed trade unions. These are going to become essential for us. The bringing in of a market mechanism is necessary. Deep economic reforms are coming. Those who today insist that economic reform will not touch our living standards are wrong. Difficult years of change and reconstruction in virtually all spheres await us.

This cannot come without economic and social shocks. We will oppose the growth of social differentiation, reduction of the living standard of the many, and enrichment of the few.

For the time being the masses are content with slogans in place of ideas and consideration, journalistic editorials in place of provocative analysis. They understand the hitherto existing order as one of

left, marxist, aristocracy, as "an attempt to realise the marxist utopia".

At this time, they are still not conscious of the fact that what we had here didn't have anything to do with an authentic left, was no attempt to realise any kind of utopia, but an attempt to realise a totalitarian dictatorship, dressed up in Stalinist ideology, fundamentally reactionary, and so objectively right-wing.

The majority of people still think in abstract terms of democracy, free elections, consensus and justice. However, from their usually unconscious assistance a new social order is starting to form.

Unfortunately, these people will start to really consider this new formation's concrete reactionary aspects only when they start to experience them directly. It will be very difficult to evaluate them then — and more importantly it will be too late.

The political right in general isn't able to offer anything new. They are coming forward with old concepts. It can't be ruled out that, in the interests of achieving power, they are willing to make a compromise with a certain part of the hitherto ruling bureaucracy. They are joined by pragmatism, a conservative orientation and a longing for power.

Our firm conviction springs from a viewpoint which far exceeds current revolutionary events, which indeed exceeds this country and its history. We are a component of the international non-Stalinist and anti-Stalinist political and ecological left, which as a whole is searching for a path of future development.

This non-capitalist and non-Stalinist path is one which will no longer impoverish and starve the developing world, barbarically savaged by the developed countries, one in which there will be a place for a better and more human world, for a free and decisive perspective of all human existence.

Are we utopians? Maybe a little, but as Anatole France said, without utopians people would still be living in caves like animals.

INFORMAČNÍ BULLETIN

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ALTERNATIVA

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silných místních samosprávách, kombinujících přímé a nepřímé formy demokracie tak, aby maximum záležitostí, jež se přímo dotýkají života občanů, mohli tyto občany bezprostředně ovlivňovat. Volební zákon musí zajišťovat důstojné demokratický vznik a ohmá...

The Left Alternative's bulletin

Deep in the pain of Vietnam

Belinda Weaver reviews two new films about the Vietnam war, 'Born on the Fourth of July', which opens in London on 2 March, and 'Casualties of War'

You can't protect yourself from 'Born on the Fourth of July'; the film simply tramples down any defences.

It taps unerringly into our own fears of death, disfigurement and disability and forces us not just to face them, but to feel them in all their stomach churning terror.

Oliver Stone's movie, which is based on the autobiographical book 'Born on the Fourth of July' by disabled Vietnam veteran Ron Kovic, takes us well beyond understanding into an intense emotional identification with Kovic. You don't just see what happened to him in Vietnam and later; you feel it in your guts.

Kovic at first isn't particularly likeable. We see him first as a war-obsessed youngster, then as the ultra competitive teenager who wants to prove his manhood by going off to war. He's amazingly gung ho, eager to serve his country, desperate to stop the Commies.

So he volunteers for the Marines, goes to Vietnam, and meets the sniper's bullet that will almost destroy his life.

Kovic took it in the chest, and came home paralysed, came home to a world he no longer fitted. Anti-war protestors were burning the flag he revered, the veterans' hospital he entered was filthy, underfunded, and unsympathetic. The mostly black staff were not uncaring, but they were revved up about their own struggle for civil rights and not wanting to be treated like menials any more.

No horror film has ever frightened me as much as this one. It's not the war scenes that are so horrific; it's the hospital ones, both in Vietnam and back in the States, which play on our own fear of paralysis, of neglect, of helplessness. After the battle in which Kovic is wounded, the military hospital can't cope with the numbers pouring in. As he lies, shattered, on a bunk, a chaplain comes to him with the words "No-one's free to deal with you right now. All you can do is try to stay alive. Just try to stay alive."

Kovic is first both terrified and bewildered; his life has unravelled overnight. Then he goes through anger and drunken self pity all the way down to the hell pit of despair. He claws his way back by joining the anti-war movement, by trying to stop the war that wrecked him.

This is the weakest part of the movie. We never really know why

Kovic switched from gung ho supporter of the war to prominent opponent. Was it because of the indiscriminate killing of Vietnamese, which he saw at first hand, or because of what happened to him, or because he lost his faith in a country that could lie to him? It could be any of these, but my guess is that Kovic did it to save his own life, to give it meaning and purpose after scraping bottom.

'Born' isn't a film about Vietnam; it's about what happened to one guy there, and how he saw the war. As such, it's a limited vision.

"The American government used up men like Kovic, wrecked their bodies and their lives, then left them to rot..."

But if it isn't wide, it's deep, and the insights we get into the life and feelings of someone who was a casualty of war ring true. They're painful.

I have rarely seen anything as harrowing as the return of the injured Kovic to his family home. His family gather round in welcome, trying to pretend everything is normal, yet knowing that nothing will ever be the same again.

Tom Cruise is simply extraordinary in this part. We see him change from an open, eager, hopeful boy into a bewildered, frightened and angry man and he's never less than believable. Some of his scenes are unbearably sad; they stab you to the heart.

The view is one-sided; we're not asked to pity the Vietnamese. Yet this is an important story to tell. The American government used up

men like Kovic, wrecked their bodies and their lives, then left them to rot while they tried to bury the memory of the war. Stories like this stop us from discounting the human cost of war.

'Casualties of War' poses the question "What constitutes murder in war time?" and proceeds to show us. Based on a real incident in the Vietnam war, it relates the story of an army patrol who kidnapped a Vietnamese girl from a village and forced her to accompany them on a long march. The men wanted her as "portable R and R", someone they could rape when they felt like it.

The patrol consisted of five men, led by the brutal sergeant Meserve. Only one man, Erickson, refused to participate in the rape of the girl. Tortured by guilt, he tried to show the girl kindness and help her escape, despite threats and intimidation from the rest of the men.

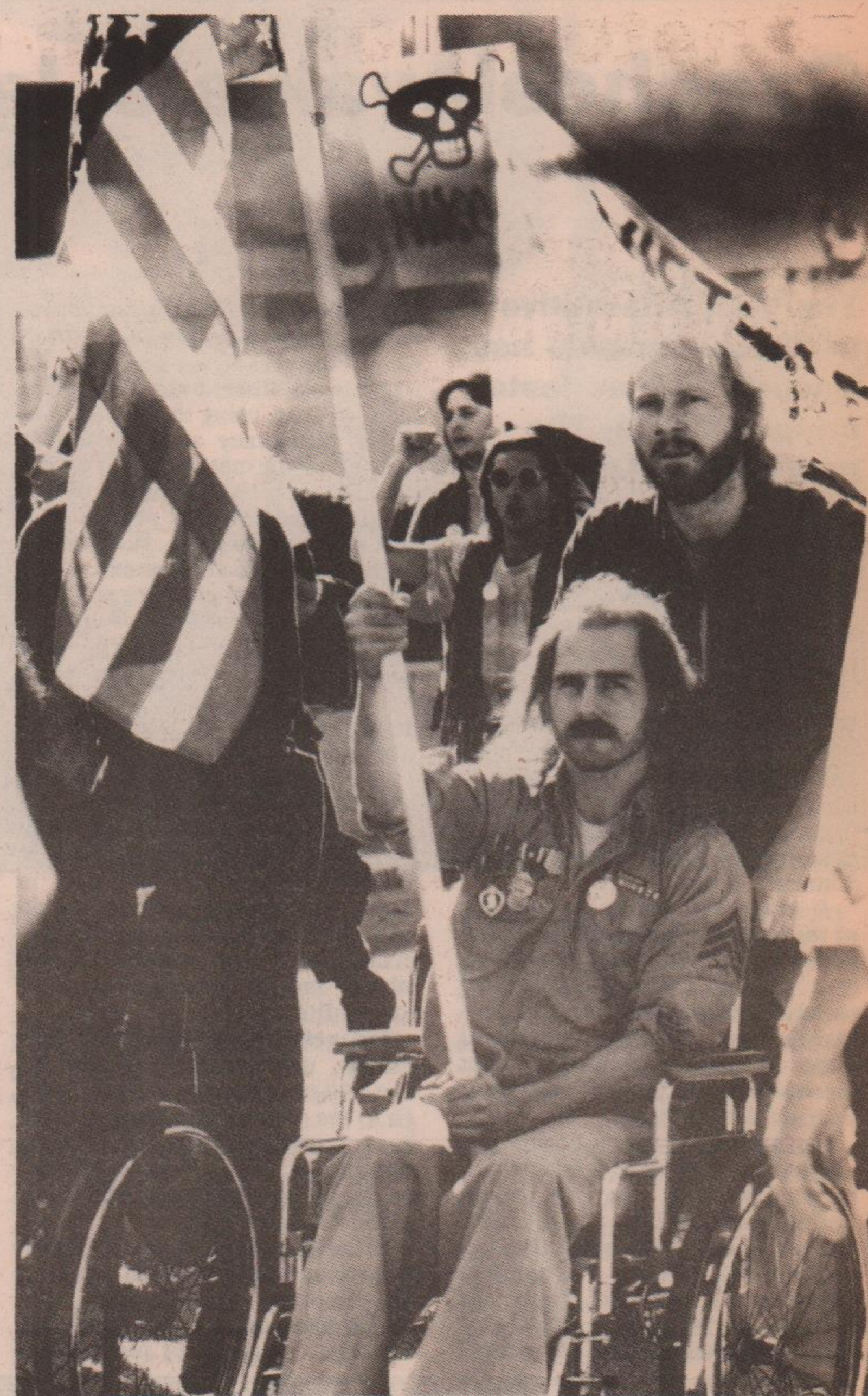
The film is a study of someone trying desperately to hang on to his humanity in the face of war, the greatest inhumanity of all, yet it's full of ironies.

Erickson shoots and kills the "enemy" without even thinking about it; he's been "programmed to kill" all right. But the war is one compartment. The girl belongs in another, the one where he keeps his family and his home and his religion, the compartment that looks at evil and says "It ain't right".

Erickson hasn't let himself become as brutalised as the others. To him, war and the ever present threat of death are no excuse to "act as if you can do anything". For him, lurking annihilation is a powerful reason to try to do what is right, rather than give in to evil.

This is a very moral film, one that argues the case for doing right. Even in war time, it says, rape is rape, murder is murder. Erickson's only reward is his feeling of acting rightly. Most people turn against him; he's ridiculed, threatened and attacked.

The film is scathing about the army's ability to regulate itself. How



Tom Cruise as Ron Kovic can you ever control men you've trained to be killing machines? How and where do you draw the line?

Fairly generously, it seems. The top brass were desperate for a cover up. They didn't want the story to get out and to make them look bad.

If truth is the first casualty of war, it wasn't the only one in this story. The girl, the pathetic victim of army brutality, was a casualty, and Erickson too, forever guilt ridden about his failure to save her,

was scarred. Meserve and his men were also casualties; brutalised by a war that warped their souls.

Both these films are anti-war, or anti the Vietnam war; 'Born' because of what it did to American men's bodies, 'Casualties of War' because it wrecked American men's souls. Neither film looks at the why of American involvement; they simply deplore the how. We'll have a long wait before we get a wider view, or a view from the other side.

Below the belt

LES HEARN'S SCIENCE COLUMN

The Gardner report on leukaemia cases around Sellafield seems at first sight to answer an important question.

There are more cases of childhood leukaemia around Sellafield (and three other nuclear sites) than expected. Leukaemia can

be caused by exposure to radiation and yet, according to British Nuclear Fuels at least, there was insufficient evidence of radiation leaks to explain the observed levels of these cancers.

Other explanations were proposed. One, that radiation leaks had been greater than claimed, was popular with opponents of nuclear power but less so with BNFL. Another, that some sort of virus infection was responsible, had the merit of accounting for clusters of leukaemia in places remote from nuclear installations, though no specific virus could be identified. In any event, the coincidence of nuclear power and leukaemia at Sellafield was too great for the virus theory to be taken seriously.

Now the Gardner report points the finger back at Sellafield, showing a statistical relation between exposure to radiation of men working in the plant and the incidence of leukaemia in their children. It seems that where men were exposed to 10 milliSieverts (mSv) in a six-month period, their children ran a 6-8fold greater risk of contracting leukaemia, up from 1 in 2000 to 1 in 300. It should be emphasised that this exposure is less than the "permitted" level of 50mSv per year.

The report also points towards a possible mechanism for these leukaemias. It surmises that radiation may have caused mutations in sperm cells so that the resulting children became ill. But this theory raises several other questions.

Why should these mutations

cause leukaemia and not other cancers or genetic disorders? And why was no similar excess of leukaemia found in the children of the far larger group of men exposed to radiation in the Hiroshima and Nagasaki explosions? Furthermore, is it feasible that a tiny dose of radiation to the genitals could have this effect? Remember, the dose of 10mSv is that received by the whole body.

These paradoxes have strengthened the arguments of those trying to dismiss the Gardner findings. BNFL has announced its own survey into clusters of childhood leukaemia around Sellafield and elsewhere, as well as appointing a prominent scientist to review the Gardner team's findings.

More important is, or rather should be, the action proposed by BNFL and you might suppose that BNFL would take seriously the possibility that the exposure of its workers to radiation might harm their children. Indeed, BNFL is to "attempt" to reduce radiation exposure not by increasing shielding or by introducing mechanical aids for the more dangerous tasks but by rotating workers in "hot" areas.

They are also going to use "volunteers" from those who have completed their families or who do not wish to have one.

This would not prevent mutated sperm. Sperm have a fairly short life and it is likely to be radiation exposure over short periods which will damage them. Any children conceived during these periods, not-

withstanding the intentions of the couples, will therefore be at risk.

BNFL are not the only authority responsible for the health of nuclear industry workers. The National Radiological Protection Board also has an important role. It was two years ago that the NRPB recommended a reduction in the maximum yearly exposure from 50mSv to 15mSv. This was in light of evidence that the Japanese A-bomb victims had suffered more from low level radiation than previously thought. However, the NRPB can claim little credit since they have done little to get their recommendation adopted.

Apart from the above steps, BNFL has offered to counsel any of its workers who may be worried and its director of health and safety proffered the profound advice that such workers should just not have children. Admittedly, BNFL quickly disavowed this callous and indeed useless piece of advice. It is stating the obvious to say that more research is necessary. For instance, it may be that the radiation damage to the sperm is due to radioactive elements absorbed by the body and concentrated in the genital region. Thus, records of whole body exposure may be underestimating the dose to the sperm-making cells.

In the meantime, it is imperative that maximum exposure levels be reduced to those recommended by NRPB, if not lower, regardless of the operational difficulties to BNFL.

Prague, November '89

**"It's a pity I'm so old," the woman said,
"But still I'm glad. Oh, I'm glad, I'm glad!"
And sad, like one who knows she'll soon be dead.
In fifty years but two such Springs she's had,
And all her adult life was spent in bondage,
To Hitler, then to Stalin, then to Stalin's
Brutal enfeebled heirs in brigandage;
And now she's old and ending, life begins!
Old worker in our "workers' state", who never
Knew that we approved (reluctantly)
And maybe never cared quite what the answer
Was, about their place in history...
In Prague, November nineteen eighty nine,
When Stalin's heirs had reached the end of the line.
Sean Matgamna**

Anatomy of a sell-out

INSIDE THE UNIONS

By Sleeper

Figures were never the Somnulant One's strong suit. But even I can work out for myself that 13 divided by 2 comes to 6.5.

It seems that quite a few ambulance workers have an equally firm grasp of rudimentary mathematics. Mr Andy Lawrence, spokesperson for crews at Crawley and East Grinstead has been widely reported saying, "basically all they are offering is 9% which we turned down in October." That 9% offer was for 18 months which meant that it was, in turn, the same as the original offer of 6.5% over 12 months — a point that has not escaped Mr Ray Clayton of Merseyside NUPE who demonstrated his arithmetical skills to great effect on BBC Newsnight last week.

So how can superstar Roger Poole describe the deal as "simply staggering" and talk of a "coach and horses" being driven through government pay policy? The answer seems to lie in some pretty fancy mathematical juggling which can make the deal look like 17.6%; it can

even be made to look like 19.6% if you include an extra 2% for "local productivity" — which in practice (as Mr Clayton points out) means selling jobs and maybe even going along with privatisation of non-emergency services.

None of this changes the simple fact that the deal will cost the government 13% over 2 years; Kenneth Clarke and Duncan Nichol have no hesitation in pointing this out and explaining that all they have really done is a "re-packaging" job on the original offer. It would be tempting to go along with the *Independent's* assessment: "The two year pay package... is by no means as 'staggering' as the unions are claiming and not quite as moderate as the government would have us believe." But in fact, the government's description is plainly nearer the mark than Mr Poole's. And all that is before we even come on to the small matter of the pay formula that was supposed to be central to the union's demands...

Of course, Clarke is taking a risk in talking-down the size of the deal: he obviously reckons that the danger of provoking a rejection of the deal is less pressing than the need to drive home the point that the government has held the line.

So why is Roger Poole presently on automatic pilot, talking in sound-bites about coaches and horses? Why is he (let's not mince words) telling lies? Part of the explanation is to do with the in-

ternal politics of NUPE — the General Secretary election is coming up and Poole's prospects of replacing Bickerstaffe largely depend upon the general perception of the outcome of the ambulance dispute. But he is also motivated by the natural (and not always dishonourable) bureaucrat's instinct to put as good a gloss as possible upon any negotiated settlement.

So what do we say about it? I for one have no hesitation in simply branding Poole's deal a sell-out.

I do not use this term lightly, and, indeed, have often criticised people who bandy it around willy-nilly. Very few disputes end in outright, unambiguous victory for the union side. All disputes are finally settled at the negotiating table. Negotiations by definition involve some degree of give and take.

Some examples of unsatisfactory settlements that were not sell-outs immediately spring to mind: the 1987/8 Ford strike ended with a deal that fell far short of what many militants felt was possible and lefties of the 'Socialist Worker'/'Briefing' variety immediately started squawking about a "sell-out".

Some of us took the view that while more could, indeed, have been won, the final outcome was essentially a victory; management had been forced to make real concessions and the government's unofficial 7% pay norm had been breached. In addition, workers throughout industry saw the Ford settle-

ment as a breakthrough and it very soon sparked a significant resurgence of militancy.

In March 1988, workers at Land Rover Solihull (partly inspired by Ford's) came out over their pay claim. A bitter 5-week strike resulted in a return to work with a deal worth very little in practical terms and no "new money".

The Land Rover settlement is roughly comparable to the ambulance deal as far as I can see...except that (1) the Land Rover officials and stewards didn't pretend that the settlement was any sort of famous victory, and presented it honestly as a disappointment but the best that — in their estimation — could be achieved under the circumstances.

(2) After 5 weeks the Land Rover strike was on the verge of collapse and no realistic strategy could have saved it by that stage. An orderly retreat was the only option open to responsible officers and stewards.

Nevertheless, the ritual cry of "sell-out" went out from the usual quarters.

So why is the ambulance dispute any different? Most obviously, because Poole is not presenting the deal honestly or objectively. But also, because Poole does have a realistic option for progressing the dispute — building solidarity action. Why Poole has deliberately avoided going down that road is a subject for another article, but suffice for now to note that he was willing to make concessions to militants calling for "internal

escalation" but avoided calls for solidarity strikes, like the very plague...

I am aware of an excessive use of the past tense in this discussion of the ambulance dispute: hopefully, the crews will throw out Poole's deal and return to the fray with renewed vigour and a decisively different strategy to that pursued so far. But the point of this article is to demonstrate that while some poor settlements can be justified under certain circumstances, the proposed ambulance deal is only "staggering" in the literal sense of the word (ie. weak-kneed).

Roger Poole has done me, personally, one big favour: his actions over the last few days encouraged me to re-read Farrell Dobbs' splendid 'Teamster Rebellion'. In this book, Dobbs describes a disappointing deal that he and other militant Teamster leaders were forced, reluctantly, to recommend to the membership:

"Unlike the snake-oil seller's pitch with which the AFL (American Federation of Labour, cf British TUC) official had presented the coal settlement the previous February, this proposal was frankly described as a compromise with the bosses. What it did and did not accomplish with respect to the original union demands was forthrightly and fully discussed...Recognising that they had won a limited victory...the strikers voted to accept."

Someone should tell Roger Poole about snake-oil.

No retreat in shorter hours fight!

British Aerospace management are now under quite severe pressure in the engineering unions' 35-hour week campaign.

After 5 months of strike action, the disputes at BAe Preston, Chester and Kingston plants is estimated to have cost the company up to \$200 million.

Particularly intense pressure on management comes from the European Airbus consortium. [BAe produce the wings for the Airbus.] Mr Jaques Plenier, head of Aérospatiale's aircraft division has described the strike as "an open act of sabotage to the Airbus system by BAe management and the unions."

On March 2, BAe could face fines of over £40 million for failing to deliver wings on time. All the other European

managements in the consortium are particularly exasperated by BAe as they already operate much shorter hours than the British company.

In these circumstances it doesn't make any sense for stewards at Preston to recommend a local deal this week for a 37 hour week. The deal includes loads of strings, many of which were overwhelmingly rejected at a mass meeting two weeks ago.

- They include:
- Bell to bell working, ie. abolition of tea breaks.
 - Flexibility between trades [ie. fitters to do 9 other different kinds of jobs 'similar to those done at home']
 - Skilled workers to do their own checking, inspecting and 'housekeeping'.
 - No reduction below 37 hours for any workers including those white collar

workers already working 37.

All these proposals were put forward before the strikes began. The fact that some Confed leaders want to recommend this offer should be a source of concern for rank and file engineers.

Even more worrying is the fact that AEU 'left winger' Jimmy Airlie was overheard saying that bell to bell working wasn't that bad because even if tea breaks were given away formally they could be won back through industrial action!

Stewards should beware of such false flattery. Officials who are prepared to sign away things like tea breaks to get themselves out of a dispute they didn't expect to become so bitter are unlikely to back unofficial action to win them back.

BAe workers need to keep up the pressure for the full claim of a 35-hour week with no strings!

Leaders of the Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions (CSEU) are expected to call strike ballots this week at three more companies in an important escalation of the engineers' 35-hour week campaign.

Catton's foundry in Leeds and the Glasgow, Alloa and Manchester sites of Weir pumps have already been named. In addition, at least two plants belonging to the Lucas car components firm

are likely to be called out.

Strikes at these three companies will undoubtedly pile on the pressure in the shorter working week fight, and should obviously be welcome. However, national action is going to be needed to force the employers back to the national negotiating table.

Immediately engineers need to start pushing hard for a one-day national engineering strike as the first step in an escalating campaign of national action to win a 35-hour week as part of a national deal between the EEF and the CSEU.

National action would not run against the grain of the local action we have seen so far. On the contrary, a campaign for a national deal to protect and unify all engineering workers could base itself on the best that has been won in various local battles.

Rover group have become the first major UK car manufacturer to concede the principle of a 37-hour week. Despite the fact that management at Rover are insisting that the reduction must be 'self financing' it still represents an important concession to the engineering unions.

The announcement will put increased pressure on the other motor industry bosses who also face shorter hours claims.

Ambulance deal is a sell-out

WHETTON'S WEEK

A miner's diary

I see the outcome of the talks between Roger Poole and NHS management as a straightforward sell-out.

Both parties seemed determined to find a 'face-saving' solution. What they came out with leaves the rank and file ambulance workers out in the cold.

I hope they reject this deal. But all kinds of pressure will be applied over the next couple of weeks to get the crews to accept the offer. They've been stitched-up. It's a terrible tragedy.

All the hard work and effort of the rank and file is going to be thrown away.

But it's not a complete defeat. Many important political lessons have been learnt.

Again we've seen something similar to what happened to the miners. Solidarity action was needed to win, but it was denied to the ambulance workers by the leadership of the labour movement.

If this deal is rejected, and I hope it is, then I would dearly love to see rank and file ambulance workers taking things into their own hands, setting up picket lines at pits and factories, up and down the country, to get some action. Let's defy the law and see what the government's response would be.

If the Tories made any legal move against the ambulance unions there

would be a tremendous response. But I'm not optimistic.

It's ironic that the end of the ambulance dispute comes five years after the end of the miners' dispute.

If we look back at that dispute, and all the other battles since the miners, the printers, the seafarers, dockers, they all have one thing in common. The strikers were left to fight on in isolation. The TUC did nothing. It just waffled.

We've got to realise that the TUC, which was founded to help working class people defend themselves and change society in our favour, has become a pillar of the establishment that it was set up to challenge.

We've got to win back the TUC for our class. The TUC has been hijacked by professional officials in the same way that the Labour Party has been hijacked. We've got to win it back and reclaim it.

David Owen has talked about a possible grand alliance with Labour.

But we don't want a deal at the top. Just like Germany should be united from below, by ordinary German workers themselves, so the SDP rank and file can unite with Labour by joining the Labour Party!

But there is no place for the Gang of Four in our party. It's the same as taking back the UDM.

There is a place for the rank and file in the NUM, but we are not going to talk to class traitors.

Paul Whetton is a member of Manton NUM, South Yorkshire

Which way forward for the left in the TGWU?

A discussion meeting for all those interested in developing the TGWU into a fighting organisation for its one and a quarter million members has been organised.

The TGWU with 1,250,000 members

Ford strikers mass picket

A successful mass picket of 250 electricians and engineers was held at Ford's Halewood plant this Monday (February 25).

The vast majority of contract workers refused to cross picket lines as did all the Spanish and German workers brought in to do the strikers work.

boasts that it is "Britain's biggest and strongest union" and yet it continues to lose membership and influence.

Leadership of the union continues to move rightwards and there have been a series of major defeats for the TGWU and its members; the most important and recent being the dockers last year.

In addition, the lukewarm support

given to the Fords Dagenham branch chair, Mick Gosling, allowed the company to sack him and pave the way for further attacks against union activists in Fords. The result is that TGWU members are now being cajoled into crossing EETPU picket lines.

Meanwhile the strategy of relying on public support means that TGWU ambulance workers remain, after 6 months in dispute, no nearer winning than they did at the start.

If you are a TGWU member and concerned about these, and other issues, then come along to this discussion meeting on **Saturday 10 March, Red Rose Club, 129 Seven Sisters Road, London N7.** Nearest tube: Finsbury Park. Starting 10am, we hope to finish by 12.30pm. Speakers include: Micky Fenn (victimised docker), Mick Gosling (victimised Fords worker), Ross Galbraith (sacked by Granby plastics for refusing to handle South African goods). Chair: Jim Kelly, Taxi branch.

Meeting organised by the Solidarity Network. Details from LW, Box 31, 136 Kingsland Road, London E8 2NS.

SOCIALIST

ORGANISER



Merseyside ambulance workers have set-up an alternative service after starting their strike on Monday.

Photo Paul Herman (Profile)

Reject Poole's dirty deal!

The only thing that's 'staggering' about the deal worked out between ambulance union leaders and NHS Management is the fact that Roger Poole had the cheek to recommend it to the membership.

There is very little in the deal beyond the 6.5% offer to the crews in September, which Roger Poole wanted to accept even then.

Amazingly, at one stage in the negotiations Roger Poole even wanted to give up demanding back-pay for those suspended during the

dispute!

There is to be no pay formula which was the ambulance workers' central demand. What's more, the deal opens the door to the creation of a two tier service, with local deals and even privatisation.

This deal should be chucked out. Stewards and activists should hold mass meetings to explain what's wrong with the deal and why it should be rejected. Ambulance workers should tell Poole what they think of him. A lot more could still be won.

Ambulance workers shouldn't surrender so easily.

Don't give up!

"Has it all been for nothing? Have all the months standing in the cold collecting from the public been for nothing? Have all the demonstrations, meetings, rallies been a waste of time? It's a kick in the teeth for us and two fingers for all our

supporters.

If we give up our claim now for a pay formula, then Clarke will have won. We will be held up to the rest of the trade union movement as an example of what happens when a group of workers dares to take on the government.

Where should the blame lie? It rests with Poole and the other negotiators and it particularly rests with Willis and the TUC who haven't done a thing to help us. The support we need has been there but the trade union barons have been afraid to mobilise that support as it would threaten their comfortable lifestyles. On £40,000 plus a year, expense accounts and chauffeur driven cars they've lost touch with realities of working class life.

If we give up now not only would we let ourselves and our families down but we would let the public down and the rest of the labour movement.

**Don't give up.
Merseyside Ambulance
worker**

More on page 11

'We've been sold out!'

By Stan Crooke

At 7am last Monday (26 February) ambulance crews on Merseyside began an all-out strike.

The ballot result in favour of an all-out strike had been announced the preceding Monday. At first it seemed that the result might be left open "lying on the table", pending the outcome of the previous week's national shop stewards' conference (which had agreed that crews would not accept instructions from management, thus provoking suspensions).

Matters were brought to a head by last Friday's announcement of the deal which Poole had stitched up with management. A mass meeting of 300 crew members voted to go ahead with strike action to show their disgust at the modest pay offer, and the complete absence of a pay formula for pay rises in future years.

Jeff Clare, one of the activists involv-

ed in the dispute on Merseyside, explained: "The offer has been portrayed as around 17% or so, but all that is on offer is 9% through to next October, then another 7.9% from next October through to March of 1991. The offer is not backdated, instead there is just a lump sum payment. This works out as 13% over 2 years, and there is no pay formula.

"This is why we decided to go ahead with strike action. The strike is pretty solid, with only seven staff turning up for work today (Monday) out of a total workforce on Merseyside of 520.

"We have also set up an alternative service. We have pledged for the outset that we would always maintain an emergency service. An alternative service has also been set up in St Helens, and alternative services are in the process of being set up in Sefton and the Wirral.

"We are continuing to collect money in the city centre, and local shopping arcades. If anything, the collection has increased since the news of last Friday's offer, and people are saying to us that

we have been sold out, and should carry on till we get what we want.

"As regards the situation elsewhere, as far as we know, London, Oxford and Glamorgan are continuing with their action. Sheffield is meeting tomorrow, and crew members from Merseyside will be attending the meeting to argue our point of view.

"Leeds met today, but we don't know the outcome. In the West Midlands, shop stewards have decided not to make any recommendation to their members, and Belfast seems to be pretty evenly divided.

"We need to lobby crew members elsewhere, and hope that they will follow our example."

The decision of Merseyside ambulance crew members to reject the deal and to step up their action in support of a decent pay settlement is the correct response to Poole's miserable climb-down. Labour movement activists should give every assistance to the Merseyside crew members to help them get their message across to ambulance crew members elsewhere.

Stop the new Labour purge!

The Labour Party NEC decided today (28 February) to go ahead with its investigations into Birkenhead and Wallasey Constituency Parties following allegations made by deselected

Birkenhead MP, Frank Field.

Field's selection process is to be repeated. What will he do if not selected a second time? In the past he has stated that he would stand against Labour. Interviewed on television this morning, he said only that he 'would be finished'.

The investigation means in particular looking at alleged misconduct by people associated with the *Militant* tendency in Birkenhead, and looking into *Socialist Organiser*, which has supporters in Wallasey. In fact, much of Field's own dossier, which is the preliminary evidence for the enquiry, consists only of tittle tattle, accusations about people's personal lives and lies about allegedly in-ordinate meetings.

It seems likely that the enquiry will clear the way for a purge of Labour Party members on the Wirral. Labour Party activists around the country should be ready to fight this attack on the democratic rights of Party members.

This model resolution is being circulated:

a. Frank Field refused to support the official Labour candidate in the constituency next to his, Wallasey, in the 1987 general election. He released to the local press a letter saying 'I can tell you in the most definite terms that I shall not be supporting Duffy'. (Wirral Globe, 21.5.87). This intervention may well have lost Labour the seat. The candidate whom Field had condemned increased Labour's vote by 40 per cent, and came within 279 votes of winning Wallasey for Labour for the first time ever.

b. After he was deselected by his CLP in Birkenhead, Field threatened to force a by-election and stand as an 'independent' against Labour.

c. Even after the National Executive had agreed to an inquiry into his allegations, Field refused to commit himself to abide by the findings of the inquiry or to withdraw his threat to stand against Labour.

We condemn the 'Field dossier' and the National Executive inquiry launched in response to it as a diversion from the central task of fighting the Tories. We further condemn the release of the dossier to the capitalist press, the unwarranted intrusion into people's personal lives contained in the document, and the proven factual inaccuracies contained in it.

We deplore the Organisation Sub-Committee's decision to make further inquiries in Birkenhead and to 'investigate' *Socialist Organiser*. These are further diversions.

We call for:

a. All party organisations and members who are the subject of accusations being investigated to be provided with all the material relating to them and to be given the right of reply.

b. No suspension of Labour Party bodies in the course of, or as a result of, the inquiries.

c. No imposition of Parliamentary candidates by the National Executive on CLPs where the selection procedure has been properly carried out.

d. No expulsion of Party members for their political views. Recognition that the right for Labour Party members to associate to publish and distribute journals such as *Socialist Organiser* is an essential part of the democratic life of the Party.

NO POLL TAX

the DEMO

Sat 31st March
Meet at Kennington Park at 12 noon
March to Trafalgar Square LONDON