

SOCIALIST

ORGANISER

"If you lock a dog up the way those men are locked up it would go berserk."

South Africa: Thatcher is a hypocrite

Thatcher and the Tories say that Nelson Mandela's release had something to do with their refusal to impose sanctions on South Africa.

The less the "international community" does, the more progress there will be. No doubt if the world's governments all proclaimed their wholehearted support for apartheid, de Klerk would fall tomorrow!

In reality, of course, *pressure* on the South African state has forced it to make some reforms. Sanctions have doubtless been part of that pressure.

But the main pressure has been *internal*. The old apartheid system is no longer viable because the black people of South Africa have made it unviable. The racist ruling class could not go on ruling in the old way. De Klerk, like Gorbachev, inheriting the rule of a system that could not survive without changes, has made changes, to help the system survive in modified form.

The unviability of apartheid was the result of long-term pressures. It was not just caused by a rising revolutionary movement. Indeed, the mass struggle in South Africa reached its peak in 1985-6. Instead of a revolutionary overthrow of the system, there is a coming together of the regime and its most powerful opponents, through negotiations.

Can De Klerk negotiate away white supremacy? It is certainly his long-term objective: to reconstitute South African capitalism on a new basis — not non-racial, but with the racism de-institutionalised to a significant extent.

The African National Congress has, in practice, the same objective, although from a different direction. It now looks quite possible that between them, over the next few years, they will bring it about.

There is a long way to go until apartheid is abolished, and the solidarity movement should keep up its pressure. *It should also intensify its aid and solidarity to the working class in South Africa.*

Thatcher deserves no credit whatsoever. The policy of her government, like that of successive British governments, has been first and foremost to defend the interests of British investors in South Africa, and has nothing to do with the rights of the black majority.

Thatcher will continue to side with De Klerk if he backtracks, will continue to support the repression, and, most of all, will continue to support the system of exploitation of black labour.

REBELLION IN HELL

"The only voice prisoners have now is a riot."

By Terry Gould, former prisoner at Strangeways

Strangeways was an Sunexploded bomb ready to go off. It's been going on for years: squeezing them in, three to a cell.

Visits are only twenty minutes a month, in a packed, overcrowded, screaming visiting room. Twenty minutes a month to see your loved ones, who might be having to queue up for three to four hours for a visit. Exercise — if you get it — is once a day for half an hour, none if it's raining. The rest of the time you're banged up: twenty three hours a day. Slop out, bang up — that's the regime.

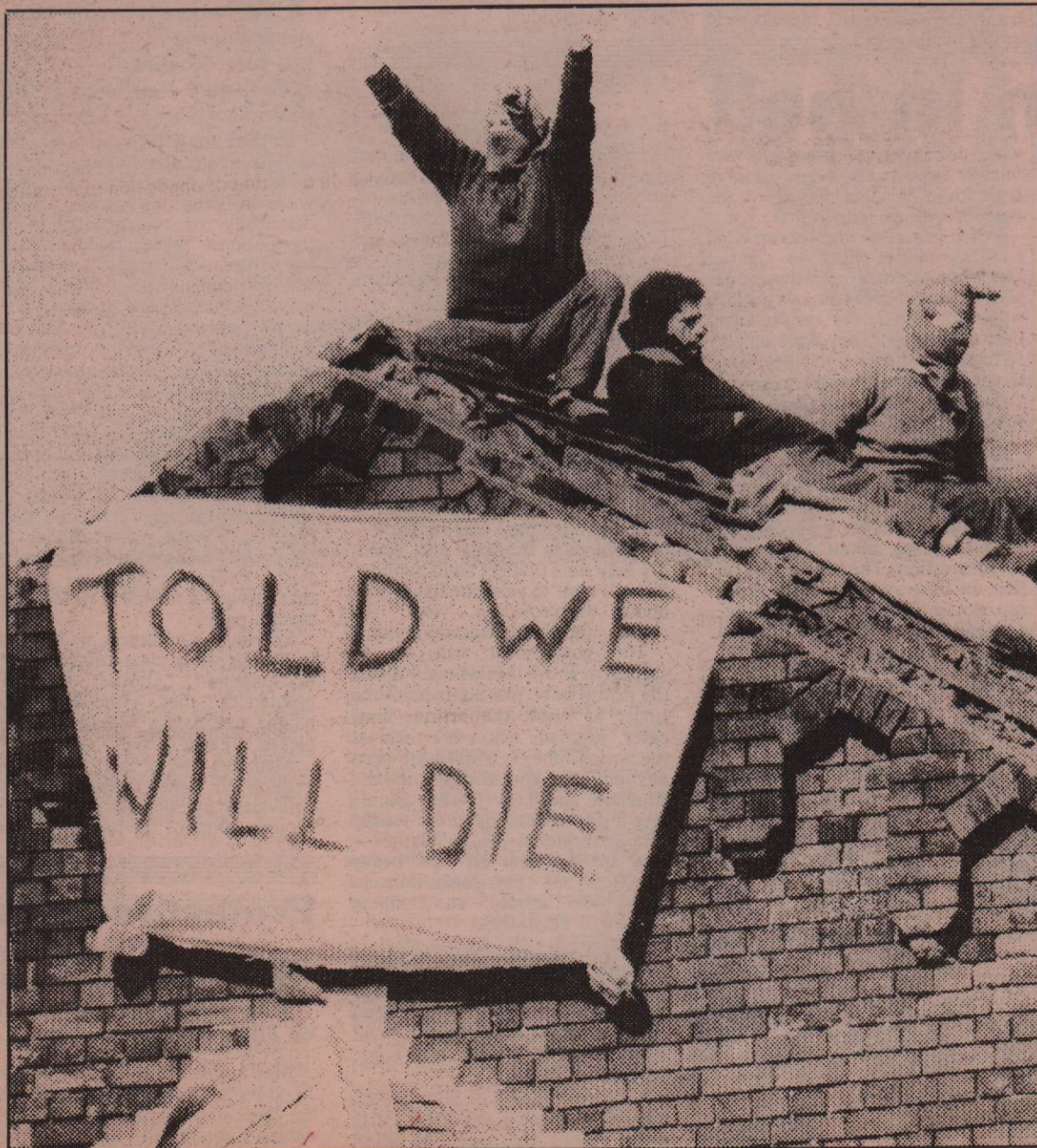
If you want to use the toilet, you just can't — if you press the bell you get no response. So you have to wait till the others in your cell are asleep and do it on paper, make a shit parcel and throw it out the window. In the morning there is a team of young kids to clear up — 'bomb disposal' they call it. No-one wants that job but they're forced to do it.

Very little is done to relieve the kids in there, there is very little association or anything like that.

Strangeways is what they call a 'dispersal prison' — all sorts of prisoners herded in together. You could have a lifer just starting a life sentence in the same cell as someone doing three months. You can imagine the frustration. That's what produces the aggravation.

You're talking about 17-18 year old kids being taken into a place where there is a bomb set to go off — with the government knowing full well the situation.

If you lock a dog up the way those men are locked up it would go berserk. Do you know the experiment they do with rats? If you put them in together with enough space



Prisoners at Strangeways try to state their case — against a barrage of police sirens and helicopter

Turn to page 2

Soviet miners plan independent union

Soviet coal miners are set to form a new independent trade union.

On the weekend of 31 March-1 April, according to the *Financial Times* (4 April), representatives of the strike committees set up last year walked out of an extraordinary congress of the official coal industry unions, claiming that the event was simply "a congress of apparatchiks and employers".

"The need to create a Union of Mineworkers remains high, and we will establish such a union. Only

then will unity appear in the miners' ranks and the country not be faced with the threat of spontaneous strikes".

Strike committee leaders said that the official leadership had packed the congress with full-time officials and mine managers, giving the strike leaders no right to speak.

The strike committees set up in the miners' strikes last year — strikes during which officials of the government-run union took part in negotiations on the bosses' side — have continued in operation since the strike. There was talk of a new independent union from the start,

but there were also attempts to reform the old state-controlled organisations, attempts which now seem to have been abandoned in favour of independence.

The *Financial Times* also reports that Arthur Scargill was at the congress and appealed to the strike leaders to stay with the state unions.

This was nothing less than an appeal to the militant miners to collaborate with their exploiters — an appeal of a sort which Arthur Scargill himself would rightly and angrily reject if it were made in Britain.

If the new independent miners'



Striking Soviet miners

union can be launched with mass support, it will be the most important independent workers'

organisation in the USSR, and one of the most important in the Eastern Bloc.

Who runs Britain?

By Martin Thomas

Who really runs Britain? After all the bluster about poll tax protests being evil because the law reflects an equal say for everyone through the ballot box, it is a little eerie to find the *Sunday Times* opening a feature with the question "Who really runs Britain?" and replying with a list of the 200 richest people in the country.

"Influence and wealth are not the same thing", adds Ivan Fallon in his introduction to the feature, "but there is no question that the possession of great wealth brings with it the opportunity to affect events."

Moreover, the survey shows that the core of the super-rich are not the dynamic entrepreneurs of Thatcherite myth. "Even in the Thatcher years, the best this century for the new entrepreneur, old money has reinforced its power...new wealth is both fragile and

The rest of the self-made look more like spivs and wide boys. This, for example, is the story of Christopher Moran's £100 million fortune:

"Leaving school at 16 proved no handicap to Christopher Moran. He went to work in the Lloyd's insurance market. In 1982, by the age of 32, he had been expelled. He had built up a £3 million fortune.

"Since then he has successfully traded his way in and out of companies."

"We have 50 property millionaires (if we include builders)", comments Fallon, "and 13 retailers...Without them Britain's wealth would be truly dominated by the landed gentry."

Getting rich in capitalist society mostly has little to do with producing things that meet consumer demand. Indeed, one strong impression from the *Sunday Times*'s list is that the super-wealthy class of Thatcherite capitalism is made up of categories not so very different from the elites of bureaucratic

vulnerable, while old wealth is remarkably stable."

The "overpowering strength of the old moneyed classes" is tempered by "a continual state of movement and renewal, with the New Rich becoming the establishment several generations on"; but overpowering strength it is.

The richest, and probably the most powerful, of the super-rich, are people who did nothing to get their wealth except to get born into the right family and then to refrain from wantonly ruining themselves. 54 dukes, earls and marquesses are among the top 200, alongside inheritors of industrial empires like the Sainsburys, the Swires, Garfield Weston, and the Vesteyes.

96 out of the top 200 are self-made millionaires, but they rarely fit the ideal of the entrepreneur whose wealth is the reward for his or her skill in bringing together new ideas for production with new markets. At best four or five of the top hundred have any resemblance at all to that ideal.

state-monopoly societies.

Some are there because they come from elite families; others, because they have sharp elbows and exceptional talent at intrigues; and then there are the wide boys, who in different societies would probably be black-market moguls. So much for the miracles of free enterprise!

The *Sunday Times* notes that the "actual size" of the fortunes of their top 200 "could well be, and

probably is, much bigger than the figure we have given". Even the figures given are huge beyond imagination. The poorest of the 200, if they never did another hour's work or made another business deal, could still spend £4000 every day for another 50 years without running short.

The survey does not record how much better off they will be made by the poll tax.

Green party blues

By Les Hearn

In a less euphoric mood than at their last meeting (after their triumph in the Euro-elections), the Green Party have just been debating the Poll Tax and whether they should have leaders.

In their conference last week, the Greens made some fairly predictable and sensible decisions. They voted in favour of banning CFCs, drastically reducing production of "greenhouse" gases, rapidly reducing release of acid gases from power stations and motor vehicles and banning the import of toxic and nuclear wastes. They ridiculed the government's "green" pretensions, referring to the massive understaffing of the Inspectorate of Pollution.

The question of the Poll Tax caused some dissension. All opposed it and many said they would not pay it but most "leading" members said they would not ask others to withhold payment. They said that the party's position was merely to "support" non-payers. The Green Party Policy Co-ordinator stated that this was a mistaken view of the party's policy.

Previous conferences had voted in favour of a mass campaign of non-payment. Another member pointed out that, without a campaign, non-payers would just be picked off one by one.

Members of the Socialist Green Federation (the Green Party's equivalent of Socialist Organiser?) brought some of the harsh realities

into the conference. One pointed out that the predicted eco-crisis would result in massive dislocation and civil unrest. The Green Party would have to "clarify" its position on the law and civil disobedience. Another predicted that Greens could become the target of violence by those that had an interest in continuing to exploit the environment (capitalists?).

Another SFG supporter described the police as "trained thugs of the establishment". For good measure, he then characterised the Labour Party and trade unions as tools of the establishment for containing working class militancy.

The SGF was formerly known as the Association of Socialist Greens. The change of name was presumably prompted by the unfortunate image conjured up by the old one (red cabbages?).

The greatest amount of heat was generated by an inward-looking debate about whether the Greens should have leaders. This was seen as part of the reason for the recession of the Green tide since its high point last year. Though the Greens are flush with members and money, their candidate's performance in the recent by-election was disappointing to say the least, with a lost deposit as the reward. (Non-) leading Green David Icke pronounced himself, in true sports commentator style, "gutted" over this.

Of course, the Greens do have leaders — they just don't elect them as such and they don't call them leaders.

Rebellion in hell

From page 1

they all procreate, but crowd them in and they just start eating each other.

When I got in from work on the Sunday I saw the kids on the roof. I thought it was just a small demonstration. But when I got in from work on the Monday I heard they'd found bodies and knew it was a serious situation. I'd been in the Hull riot in 1974 — we went to the limit. But these lads have gone to the limit and gone over it.

I thought that with a few of the other lads that have been in prison we could go to see the senior officer and ask if we could go in there to talk them down. The prison officers told me to piss off and mind my own business. The only way I could protest peacefully was to go up on the roof myself near the prison,

which I did with two other lads who felt the same as me. I was up there three days, and explained to the press how those lads in there felt.

When I came down I was arrested and eventually taken to Central Detention Centre in Manchester where I was in with some of the lads who had been in the riot and had been taken out. They were all suffering from shock. I got the chance to ask them exactly what happened — not as a reporter or someone official but as someone in with them.

On Sunday morning they had gone to church like everyone does — not for the church but to pass messages on; you can't see your friends at any other time. Nobody knew anything about a riot or a demonstration. The service was getting on its way when Paul Taylor ran up, grabbed the microphone, and said let's have a demonstration.

I asked them, did anybody at that time mention a riot? They all agreed nobody did. But when a prison officer grabbed the microphone back from Paul that was the trigger and the bomb went off. There was no control whatsoever, just screaming and shouting and total panic.

It reminds me of the people in the tube and the football disaster. The prison officers didn't know how to handle it and a peaceful protest turned into a riot.

The only voice prisoners have now is a riot. There's been loads of demonstrations throughout the prison population for the last ten years — something like a sit-in in the church happens every month — but it's got to the stage now where it's only riots that get any attention. So we've got to raise the issues now about overcrowding, visits, the regime, and these dispersal prisons.

The government will try to scapegoat those lads who are up on the prison now. But don't point the finger at them, they're not hard cases, just lads who were there at the wrong time. It could have been anybody. The government knew the situation and kept forcing people into a prison bursting at the seams. The government are to blame — they are hell bent on these heavy sentences but they don't want to spend the money on building prisons or on staff.

• Terry Gould has been victimised at work after his rooftop protest. He says "As I see it, I've been sacked for trying to save lives". Send letters calling for his reinstatement to Royden Engineering, Mill Lane, Rainsford, Wigan.

• Former inmates of Strangeways are willing to speak at Labour Party trade union, etc. meetings about conditions in Strangeways. Contact via Socialist Organiser.



Protest for Martin Foran

The defence campaign for Martin Foran is planning a week of action to start on Friday 13 April.

Martin Foran has been in jail for 12 years after being convicted on the basis of a confession which he denies, got from him by the notorious and now disbanded West Midlands Serious Crimes Squad.

In prison he has frequently been denied proper medical treatment. On 6 March he attempted to break out onto the roof of his jail in order to stage a protest, but fell and broke his leg. He is currently in the prison hospital and pursuing his protest through a hunger strike.

Contact: Martin Foran Defence Campaign, c/o Box 7, 190 Alum Rock Rd, Saltley, Birmingham. Tel: 021 327 1187.

Stop sending prisoners to hell!

EDITORIAL

If you lock a dog up the way these men are locked up it would go berserk".

That comment by former Strangeways prisoner Terry Gould says part of it.

It recalls the question put by lawyer Sean MacBride to an Irish prison official in the 1940s during the inquest on a Republican prisoner who had died on hunger strike. MacBride described the wasted condition of the prisoner in all its horrible detail, and then asked: "Would you treat a dog like that?"

The official answered, "No". Would you treat a dog as the men in Strangeways have been treated?

Much of the problem in discussing Britain's prison system is in getting ourselves to be able to see things as they are, to take it in, to register it, to realise what it is we are dealing with. We are too used to it, too calloused, at one and the same time too ignorant and too unimaginative to form an adequate idea of what it means in human terms and how things should be done differently.

For a non-violent crime against property, a youth or an adult can be taken prisoner by a policeman who will routinely abuse him or her and offer physical violence if "provoked" by resistance or "cheekiness" or — as many cases testify, including cases of murder in police custody — by the colour of the prisoner's skin.

He or she will be hauled before a court where the police will lie as much as necessary to get a conviction. Even when someone is guilty as charged, what the police tell the court to "prove" it will frequently — and routinely: it is the British system — be lies.

Often the police — not the magistrate or jury — decide that someone is guilty and then, as the apt phrase puts it, fit him or her up for the court to register what the police have first decided.

Everyone who works in the courts, at every level, *knows* that this is how things work, and thus at every level there is collusion in this system. The open, politically-motivated refusal of the judges to admit that the Birmingham Six are the victims of a police conspiracy is no more than a particularly scandalous and visible part of that whole corrupt system of police and justice administration.

From court the victim then goes to jail. He or she is now a thing without rights.

Abuse and cuffs or more serious violence from the warders are a normal part of life.

In a jail like Strangeways, a prisoner is locked away with maybe two others in a tiny cell built for one by the Victorians, who had a notoriously punitive and vindictive way with prisoners. He is locked up like that for up to 23 hours a day!

Prisoners piss in buckets, frequently have to shit in them. They have no right to a sexual function.

More than that, the prisoner is



Wreckage in Strangeways

forced into an abnormal and vicious and artificial society of prisoners — a society with its own values, its own hierarchy, its own currency. Violence, legal and illegal drugs, and explosively uncongenial sexual relations dominate this society in Britain's hellish gulags.

It is the pent-up energy of anger and frustration generated in this

wall-bound society which can explode — and deal so savagely with its own pariahs, like sexual offenders — as it did in Strangeways and other prisons last week.

Over 50,000 people are forced to live like this, for years, most of them offenders against property.

We take it for granted because most of us don't know about it as something real, don't know about it in any real and feeling human way.

Yet future generations will think of these things what we think of locking people away in deep dungeons and letting them starve to death, or about that legal system which chops off people's hands.

It is a general problem: familiarity destroys the ability to take in what we are familiar with. It stops people reacting sharply and freshly to many of the horrors of capitalist society.

We don't know what happened in Strangeways, or how many, if

any, dead bodies will be discovered. We know that if you lock people up the way British capitalist society locked these people up; if you brutalise people as the prison system does; if you create a viciously artificial society like that which exists in British capitalism's macabre gulag, with its more than 50,000 victims — then terrible things can happen there when the system breaks down.

The labour movement should make the *abolition* of the system part of its immediate programme.

No-one should be locked up in inhuman conditions like those in Britain's jails now. No-one should be confined to near-total inactivity as prisoners are. Prisoners and their partners should continue to have their sexual rights (as they do in certain countries now) after conviction.

No-one should be jailed for crimes against property.

Hong Kong: let them all in

Thatcher's policy on Hong Kong is filthy, but Labour's policy is sanctimonious and hypocritical.

Thatcher's proposes to let in only Hong Kong's rich, if they want to come to Britain when Beijing takes over in 1997, and that, as Roy Hattersley and others have said, is elitist and disgusting.

But what would Labour do? The implication of the Labour front bench's decision to vote with Norman Tebbit is that they *would not let anyone in*.

The party chooses to pander to the insularity reflected in polls, but does it under a cloud of noise and ink denouncing Thatcher. This is ugly and nasty, and unworthy of the Labour Party.

Yet it is wholly in Labour's tradition. In 1968 when the British passport holding Asian population of Kenya was expelled, it was a Labour Home Secretary, James Callaghan, who quickly changed the law and slammed the door in their faces.

Enoch Powell is still remembered as a racist for his "rivers of blood will flow" speech against immigration. Callaghan's racist action is virtually forgotten.

By contrast, four years later, in 1972, the Tory government honoured the British passports of the Asians of Uganda when they were expelled.

Whatever about the smart verbal footwork, in practice Labour is now to the right of Mrs Thatcher on this question. Labour should indeed denounce Thatcher's obscene elitism. But it should do so by demanding free entry for Hong Kong's non-elite.

Europe's workers must unite

Ford's decision to move a planned new engine plant from South Wales to Germany once more confronts car workers with one of the great facts of their lives: their employers are powerful multinational conglomerates, and they are mere pawns in the chessboard which the map of Europe and the world is for such mighty business empires.

What can the workers do to retaliate? Strike? Ford says its reason for channelling work out of Britain is working-class militancy here.

So long as the car workers of Europe — and beyond Europe too — are split up and divided, the workers of any one country are helpless against an international company which finds such tactics advantageous.

So long as trade unions continue to think — entirely or mainly — in national terms, they will be more or less helpless before the soulless bureaucrats who run Ford and other big companies.

The labour movement must set itself the goal of unity with the workers all across Europe, so that there can be common policies and a coordinated response to an employer such as Ford, whether the point of conflict is in Germany, the UK, or anywhere else.

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

Karl Marx
Socialist Organiser
PO Box 823
London SE15 4NA
Newsdesk: 01-639 7965
Latest date for reports: first post
Monday

Published by WL Publications Ltd
PO Box 823 London SE15 4NA
Printed by Press Link International
(UK) Ltd (TU)
Registered as a newspaper at the
Post Office
Signed articles do not necessarily
reflect the views of Socialist
Organiser

4 LETTERS

Discipline City-style

GRAFFITI

Salesmen for a City stockbroker were punished for poor performance by having their office chairs removed and being forced to work standing up, according to the *Financial Times*, reporting on a conspiracy trial.

It does not report whether the worst performers had to stand in corners with dunce's hats.

These people are concerned with nothing but making money. They do anything to make a profit.

Some pinko bleeding-heart liberal moaning about Thatcherite capitalism? No, the Iron Lady herself — denouncing tracers in illegal drugs. (Not of course, those pillars of decent society, traders in legal drugs like tobacco and alcohol).

Even if Thatcher herself is weakening on the principle that what makes profits must be good, and what's good makes profits, other Thatcherites aren't.

In the *Sunday Telegraph* (8 April), Alfred Sherman argued that "there is nothing wrong in selling your kidney".

Giving up a kidney is safe, he argued, and anyway "People are permitted to earn a livelihood in dangerous occupations, indeed praised for doing so as firemen or soldiers" — so why not also the "dangerous occupation" of kidney donor?

"It will be objected," he continued, "that rich people should not be in a position to buy life for themselves or their loved ones, while ordinary people must...wait...But that is a manifestation of socialists' institutionalised envy, not medical ethics."

I'll bet Mr Sherman is confident that his is one of those rich enough to afford to condemn "socialists' institutionalised envy" rather than to feel it.

He could be wrong, at that, if revelations of over-charging at private hospitals made in last Sunday's *Observer* are anything to go by. "Private hospitals", reports Adam Raphael, "have been charging patients £2 for an aspirin, £6.80 for a five centimetre strip of Elastoplast, £7.45 for a 15p disposable razor, £10 for a sleeping pill, and £68 for an injection of a

drug costing less than £4."

Similar rip-offs in US private hospitals have driven big business leaders there towards favouring some sort of socialised medicine as the only way of controlling the costs.

I'll bet Strangeways prisoners would feel a bit of "institutionalised envy" if they read last Sunday's *Observer's* report of Adnan Khashoggi's conditions while on trial in New York.

Khashoggi, who became a multi-millionaire through commissions on Saudi arms contracts for US corporations, is on trial with Imelda Marcos on fraud charges. Instead of being banged up in a squalid jail on remand, he lives in "a palace in glazed walnut fit for Kubla Khan, lush with vegetation, including orchids and roses with no thorns, littered with silver, gold and marble knick-knacks, with ivory tusks, dragons, statues and bronzes..."

Over on the West Coast of the US, the convicted rich can pay to serve their sentences in private jails. The private-enterprise jailers emphasise, as a prime selling point, the much lower chance of being raped in their facilities than in the public jails of Los Angeles.

Those private jail-owners, however, have little to teach about profit-grabbing to the rulers of China.

According to a report in the *Financial Times* (4 April), Chinese wines produced by a joint venture involving the European company Remy Martin and served in expensive Western restaurants uses grapes grown by prisoners in forced labour camps.

The Remy operation in China has been running since 1980, and Remy managers told the *Financial Times* that they were well aware that the grapes came from labour camps.

According to the labour camp commandant, the Tuanhe labour camp made profits of \$326,000 in 1986 from the labour of 2,000 prisoners. 60 per cent went to the state, 32 per cent to the camp warders, and 8 per cent to the prisoners.

Chinese exiles say that there may be as many as twenty million people in Chinese labour camps — making them more extensive than Stalin's at their worst — and they export goods including silk, cotton, plate glass and machine tools to Europe and the US.



Khashoggi on his way to court

Unfair to Militant?

LETTERS

Last week's editorial on the poll tax violence was a disgraceful slur which if widely read will split the anti-poll tax movement and damage it, thereby ushering in failure and defeating this unjust Tory tax.

It reads "the All Britain Anti-Poll Tax Federation is completely (and very bureaucratically) controlled by Militant". This is implying that the federation is an undemocratic stitch up which I cannot agree with.

I myself am a delegate to my

regional branch of the federation and also a supporter of Socialist Organiser and I have total faith that this growing movement elects the representatives it wants to lead it and the supporters of Militant with positions, hold those positions, with the support of the majority of the members. To suggest otherwise without giving evidence is not merely unjust but also very damaging to the movement's future growth in that it sows doubts that do not stand up.

Another extract reads that Militant are "channelling the anti-poll tax movement away from concern with the trade unions or with local government". My own experience of the Militant's attitude to trade union non-implementation of the poll tax is that they merely ignore it, not that they actively channel the movement away from it, and as for the second point about the federa-

tion's attitude to local government, this is an absurd thing to say after our witnessing and participating in the wave of demonstrations up and down the country organised by the Anti-Poll Tax Federation as councils set their poll tax rates.

I have been involved in the fight for a socialist Labour Party since 1983 and I disagree that Militant's role in the Federation is their usual ultra-sectarian spirit. I actually think that this is the one time since 1983 that the Militant has successfully worked with others on the left and in the communities without putting their own narrow interests before the issue at stake, and I appeal to all supporters of Socialist Organiser to help build the Anti-Poll Tax movement and avoid damaging splits at all costs.

Forward to left unity,
Christopher Barnes
Newcastle

Splitting, bureaucracy, grassing

Chris Barnes accuses SO of wanting to split the anti-poll tax movement, not caring if this leads to the failure of the whole campaign.

This is nonsense. SO has consistently argued for a united campaign — involving both the organised labour movement and community groups; our supporters have participated in building local groups, and argued successfully in union branches for non-implementation since the early days of the anti-poll tax movement.

We say that it is the bureaucratic approach of Militant that will lead to any split in the campaign. There are two major problems with the Militant Tendency's regime in the Anti-Poll Tax Federation.

Organisationally, the Militant are as bad as ever. The Labour Party Young Socialists was run by the Militant from 1969/70. Minorities in the LPYS had no access to the LPYS's press; no rights for minority status (through STV elections) on committees; no rights to debate at LPYS events. It was in the LPYS that the Militant learnt that the best way to whip into line your troops is to give out the line as "recommendations" from the platform, before any vote. All these techniques were adopted at the November 25 Anti-Poll Tax Federation founding conference.

Indeed, the whole event was run as a Militant rally: take the debate on motions that anti-poll tax unions had bothered to discuss and send to the conference. This was interrupted — without any consultation with the delegates on the conference floor — so that Tony Mulhearn, Militant surcharged Liverpool City Councillor could make a plea for financial support for the councillors. Not that we don't support the councillors, but the blatant disregard for the conference business shows what contempt Militant show for debate and discussion. And Mulhearn was granted 15 minutes — five times longer than any ordinary delegate to the conference.

Just like the LPYS, the Militant Tendency utterly dominate the formal structures of the Anti-Poll Tax campaign (12 out of 15 places) and then ignore the structures. All the decisions are made elsewhere — by Militant committees.

It is quite true that the Militant have done a lot of work on the poll tax, and are a big "current of opinion", so would have a big say in any poll tax campaign. But I defy anyone to tell me that they have not been packing meetings, setting up



Don't pay, don't collect

'front' anti-poll tax unions, and local federations — often as rivals to already existing democratic groups or federations — to grab hold of the committee structure of poll tax campaigns. There are plenty of reports of such activity from all round the country.

Politically the Militant bent their stick so far towards mass non-payment and away from non-implementation that the stick broke long ago. Indeed, one Militant supporter recently argued at a local meeting that it would be sectarian to be involved in the Labour Party at this time!

Of course, any campaign, whatever its politics, would find the council meetings which set poll tax rates good focuses for demonstrations. I don't see that this tells you anything about the politics of the campaign.

It is a fact that Militant have done very little in the unions. In NALGO, the key union in regard to the poll tax, it was not the Militant-controlled Broad Left which has set the pace on the issue, but a coalition of branches led by non-Militant people, many of whom are sceptical about the Broad Left and Militant.

The Federation has at last decided to call a trade union conference in June. But, they have only done this after being approached by the Socialist Movement Trade Union Committee which originally floated the idea at a 500-strong delegate based conference of trade unionists six months ago.

The Militant officers of the

Federation have not replied to any communication from the Socialist Movement on this issue, including an appeal from Tony Benn. Instead they have stolen the idea.

There is little reason to believe that a conference organised by the Militant office holders will be little more than a Militant rally.

Chris argues that Militant ignore the trade unions. But he doesn't ask himself why. The reason is simple: Militant's obsessive focus on non-payment reinforces the illusion that on its own direct action community resistance will be sufficient to defeat the tax. Militant's fixation with non-payment has led them to adopt an extremely sectarian posture towards honest trade unionists who could be won to a policy of non-implementation but who have doubts and reservations about non-payment.

The basic fact still remains that unless the anti-poll tax campaign takes the struggle into the trade unions the mass non-payment movement will be easily isolated. The maximum force for smashing the poll tax will not be mobilised.

Militant have taken control of the anti-poll tax campaign to suck up as many recruits as possible, 'processing' them to speak the three sentences of Militant gobbledegook that are necessary for 'supporter' status and are believed to contain the basics of Marxism.

For our part we cannot step back from criticising what is wrong in our movement. For example, we refuse to support — and are right to criticise — the likes of Steve Nally and Tommy Sheridan (both Militant supporters) when they promise to witch-hunt members of the Federation and "name names" of demonstrators on the March 31 demonstration — to name names, in effect, to the police. We think that this sort of class collaboration — or can Chris Barnes think of a better name for it? "Reformist grassing" perhaps — is more likely to split and confuse the campaign!

And demands such as demanding a recall poll tax conference; organising regional committees and conferences to hold the National Committee's regional reps to account are bound to bring us into further conflict with the Militant. Militant have never been prepared to tolerate opponents or competitors. We would be serving the anti-poll tax movement badly if we didn't try to prepare it for the bureaucratic methods Militant will apply in the future, as they have in the past.

Cate Murphy

Student left strikes back

By Steph Ward
(Sheffield University
Student Union
Executive and NUS
Lesbian and Gay
Committee, in a
personal capacity)

The Left struck back at the 'independent' right at last week's conference of the National Union of Students.

Labour mainstream and Left Unity candidates beat most of the 'independents' in the elections to the NUS National Executive Committee. This is a victory for *political campaigning* against the threat of depoliticisation of the union which the 'independent' right represented.

Cosmo Hawkes, the right's candidate for President, would if elected have taken NUS much further down the road already prepared by the Kinnockite NUS leaders — towards a union based narrowly on the universities, on providing services *rather than* campaigns, on lobbying backbench MPs *rather than* building mass campaigns in the colleges.

But Left Unity supporters Emma Colyer (new National Secretary), Steve Mitchell (new Vice President Further Education) and Mark Sandell (new Executive Member) were elected, joining Janine Booth, who was elected Women's Officer at NUS Women's Conference. As far as I know, this is the best result for any left group for the last twenty years.

Left Unity won because we are decent Labour Party members, we stand for *left unity*, we have a good record of campaigning, and we provide virtually *all* the campaigning strategy for NUS. And NUS's activists want an executive which will *do what it says it will and democratically abide by conference policy*.

The year ahead will be very difficult. The Tories are attacking education and the living standards of students. Left Unity supporters will not only have to fight Tories, but also combat a hostile Executive majority who often seem more interested in attacking the NUS Left than fighting Thatcher.

The problems for Left Unity and the NUS Left are posed most sharply over the issue of the Poll Tax. NUS's Christmas conference adopted Left Unity's policy of *Don't Pay, Don't Collect!*

It has remained a dead letter. Both the 'independent' right and the dominant faction of Labour Students disagree with the policy and have not implemented it.

But the Poll Tax is *already* biting. College mergers and cuts are *already* being made by local coun-



cils. In the next year *this is the issue on which lines must be drawn*. Left Unity will not back off! NUS must

implement its conference policy against the Poll Tax!
Join Left Unity: write to 56

Kevan House, Wyndham Road,
London SE5, with 50p (no grant) or
£2.50 (grant).

Putting Further Education on the agenda

By Paul Albert,
President, Barnet
Further Education
College Student
Union, in personal
capacity

The big majority of the members of the National Union of Students are not in the high-profile University sector where many students

have grants (however inadequate).

Most NUS members are in the Further Education sector, where benefits and grants of any type are rare and student unions are underdeveloped.

Generally NUS has based itself on the Higher Education colleges — universities, polys, and so on. That is where the money is. That is where most of the NUS executive have come from.

At the last NUS conference Left

Unity fought to get Further Education Union Development on to the agenda. Many Further Education colleges responded and sent delegates to the conference. They expected the issue to be taken seriously and the NUS leadership to be instructed to take the sector seriously.

Virtually the whole of the Further Education sector was up in arms about NUS's record. At conference there were large meetings of Further Education delegates (including one with 250 present) demanding FE rights.

The FE delegates were *not* being "FE chauvinists". They were simply demanding *equal* rights within NUS. If NUS is going to campaign, the *whole* membership must be mobilised. That means that NUS must find the lever in every campaign it runs that can mobilise FE students by relating to their interests and needs.

Unfortunately, the FE debate, crammed into an hour on the last day and debated in front of a half-empty conference, was derailed by bitter right-wingers who had been beaten in the previous day's elections. It became a forum for a series of attacks on Left Unity and Socialist Organiser.

But the Further Education college students will be back! We want to give the right wing notice of that! We now have a Vice President Further Education, Steve Mitchell, who is dedicated to the development of this sector of student unionism. And that is a big victory from the conference.

Witch-hunt in NUS

By Paul McGarry,
NUS executive
member, in personal
capacity

The witch-hunt against Socialist Organiser is *hotting up*. And not just inside the Labour Party.

By the end of last week's conference of the National Union of Students, the whole of the NUS right was rallying to attack Socialist Organiser. By the last day we were being verbally spat at every ten minutes — from the platform as well as from the rostrum.

The assault was led by the ragbag of right-wing 'independents' who had lost elections to Left Unity supporters who are also supporters of Socialist Organiser. They did not ask themselves why the majority of conference delegates had backed Left Unity — against them — in an open, fair, democratic election by single transferable vote. They just hurled abuse.

It was all pretty crass. Being called "a pile of shit" by the tiny rump Communist Party would be laughable if it were not the dying cry of an organisation which for decades has covered for a series of Soviet dictators who destroyed the lives of millions.

There was no politics to it. The

right wing had not got an *issue* to hang us with. All they had was the word "Trotskyist".

It will not be possible to build a long-lasting campaign against the word "Trotskyist". I am a Trotskyist, and proud of it, but the bulk of Left Unity supporters and the big majority of those who voted for our candidates are not (though some, spurred to investigate by all the noise, may *become* Trotskyists as a result of the right-wing's campaign).

The right wing should wake up. Students voted for us because we are decent activists, we have the best ideas, and we stand for democracy and rational debate inside NUS.

Sisters?

WOMEN'S
EYE

By Liz Millward

Q. When is a feminist not a feminist? A. When she's at NUS conference.

The last two weeks saw the election of two women Socialist Organiser supporters to full-time posts in the National Union of Students. Janine Booth is NUS women's officer and Emma Colyer National Secretary-elect. Both won in fair, open and democratic elections.

Since their elections both have been the victims of NUS's "leading feminists". Janine's election was condemned as "a disgrace", "sinister", and the result of "dirty deals and secret carving" in a leaflet signed by "Non-aligned women who care about our campaign..." (my emphasis).

Emma Colyer was denounced as stupid by Jane Marshall (defeated VP FEUD candidate). Jane is someone else who has tried to take the feminist high ground in NUS. Words that spring to mind include petty, small-minded, bad losers. But feminist? Never.

Starting with the leaflet on Janine: it purports to tell the truth about Socialist Organiser's views on women's politics. It reads: "SO...has come under fire...for producing literature on issues like sexual abuse, sexual harassment and women's autonomy which has been highly offensive to many women." Let's look at the FACTS.

Socialist Organiser has produced a pamphlet by Jean Lane 'Woman in a man's job' on sexual harassment at work. It was on sale at NUS conference. Not one person complained. To my knowledge, Jean has received only praise for her pamphlet, which is highly disturbing for some men.

Two years ago, just before my election to NUS Executive, a group of incest survivors produced a leaflet purporting to tell my views on sexual abuse of children. I was the last person to receive a copy, *after* it was circulated to all the national media and every student union in the country. It was a *complete fabrication* from start to finish, and even political enemies said so. Socialist Organiser carries regular articles on women's issues (including this column) and facilitates production of a monthly Women's Fightback. Disagreements are common — and publicly aired.

All letters disagreeing with articles are printed, eg. pornography debate, children of divorce debate.

The left in NUS first stood a black woman candidate for the NEC three years ago. The same women who accuse us of "carving" a black woman now actively organised *against* one three years ago.

Socialist Organiser is hiding nothing. It is the so-called "feminists" who have to hide behind lies and distortions.

The slandering of Emma Colyer is, if anything, even more disgusting. To accuse your female opponent of not being very bright is to pander to the "little woman, only good for making the tea" syndrome which has kept women out of politics for centuries. The only good thing I can think of to say about Jane Marshall's behaviour is that she didn't hide behind an anonymous leaflet.

That such people have been able to steal the "feminist" high ground is sadly due to the failure of the left. Some left groups do have pretty useless women's politics, and would deny women an independent voice. Others fall into the rainbow-coalition trap. Consequently the Jane Marshalls and "non-aligned" women have been able to get away with talking about "their" women's campaign. They have been able to spout anti-feminist nonsense, and to tell lies with impunity.

The elections last week should go some way to putting real feminist politics back on the agenda. The women's campaign is about liberating *all* women, not just the ones we like.

The working class and the democratic revolution

The following discussion on the working class in the GDR, Poland and Hungary was organised by *Inprecor*, a socialist bi-weekly published in Paris.

The participants: **Annett Seese**, an East German student and a member of the United Left in Leipzig; **Milka Tyszkiewicz**, from Poland, a member of the Socialist Political Centre in Wrocław; and **Laszlo Andor**, a Hungarian economist and a member of the Left Alternative.

What has been the attitude of the working class towards the recent events in Eastern Europe?

ANNETT SEESE: The first problem in the GDR is that the movement did not start from the working class, but has been a movement of the entire people, and has been experienced as such. It is thus difficult to speak of a specific attitude of the working class.

There was certainly an important working class participation but the working class was not there as a specific social category. Strikes only began much later, in the form of "warning strikes". But these consisted of walk-outs — the workers would leave their factories, express their demands, then return to work, even working extra hours to make up for those that had been "lost".

MILKA TYSZKIEWICZ: As you know, for the majority of the Polish working class, the market has become a kind of universal alternative to self-management, to socialism. In the consciousness of the workers, the very word "socialism" has become synonymous with Stalinism.

In the spring of 1988 and the summer of 1989, during the strike

waves that preceded the "round table" accords, the working class was not divided and constituted a bloc against the bureaucracy. After the "round table" accords, the working class divided into two — a group supporting Walesa and his political line, and another demonstrating in the street.

During the last five months, after the application of the austerity measures of the new Mazowiecki government, this second group has also split in two.

A first group, very radical, has decided to cooperate again with Walesa so as to maintain the unity of the working class. But, to the extent that the leadership of Solidarnosc has put itself to work with the enemies of yesterday, the Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR) and Jaruzelski, the notion of the "common enemy to overthrow" has disappeared and certain members of this group have begun to speak of fascism as the only alternative which can resolve the political crisis. They have started to demand "guillotines" to "cut off the heads of all the leftists"... That said, these groups remain marginal.

There exists also among the working class a great interest in everything that happens in the neighbouring countries, notably in the Baltic states (a part of these regions, for example in Lithuania, belonged to Poland before the Second World War). The debate on German reunification, the uprising in Czechoslovakia and in Rumania have also had a very deep resonance.

An idea which is very present is that of the necessity of preserving national independence at all costs. Some of the government's measures have been rejected by the workers because they could imperil independence, through the sale of Polish factories to foreigners. For these same reasons, the idea of self-management has also begun to regain an audience amongst the workers.

But the problem is how to combine this will for independence with links with the West, believed to be nonetheless necessary.

LASZLO ANDOR: So far as the attitude of the Hungarian working class during the recent events is concerned, it is necessary first to make it clear that the situation is not at all the same as in the other countries, even if there appear to be some similarities.

You have to take into account

here the attitude of the workers in relation to what is called in Hungary the PT, the "peaceful transition"... towards the restoration of capitalism! Because the PT is very much on the order of the day in Hungary.

This state of mind is the result of the history of the past decades — the dramatic level of the country's debt, the worsening of the exploitation of the workers, the fall in their standard of living and their real salaries. The workers, then, react very violently to all that they consider as being the cause of this growing economic and social crisis.

1989 was a year of great hopes and illusions for the working class and the whole of society. After 40 years of Stalinist dictatorship, very much was expected of pluralism — and the market — which were supposed to resolve all the problems. There was a tremendous euphoria, a tremendous optimism.

That said, all this happened without the effective participation of the workers. The new parties were founded without any base in the workers' movement.

A first disillusionment came when it was revealed that the new parties were not noticeably better than the old single party and their leaders were not particularly more intelligent!

It is possible to distinguish three kinds of attitude in response to this. Firstly, among certain workers, a rejection of all this political show, of pluralism and so on, and a total demobilisation. The second group could be tempted to vote for the right, under the influence of the mass media which repeats day in and day out that socialism represents a shameful episode in our history, that the USSR has played an ignoble role in Hungary, and so on.

And, finally, a small minority of workers, amongst the most conscious, in the workers' councils, the trade unions, and the little parties of the left — and also the Hungarian Socialist Party (HSP) or the Socialist Workers Party (HSWP), the two wings coming out of the split in the old Communist Party in power — who are going to oppose this peaceful transition.

What are the forms of organisation of the working class today, and its attitude to the structures already in place?

ANNETT SEESE: Until October 1989, the German Federation of

Free Trade Unions (FDGB) was the only existing trade union organisation.

All workers were de facto members of it. It was not then a trade union of militants. Official propaganda pretended that property was collective and that the means of production belonged to everyone. But the people did not see things in that way.

The FDGB profited very much from its privileged links with the West German trade unions which, in certain circumstances, lavished financial aid upon it.

Beginning in October, a reform movement began at the base of the FDGB to make it a genuine trade union. Other worker militants were of the opinion that the FDGB was not reformable, that the apparatus could not be remodelled and that it was thus necessary to aim towards the creation of independent unions.

But the independent unions have remained very much in a minority and exist only in certain cities, like for example Berlin. On the other hand, in Leipzig, in certain small enterprises, workers have begun to put into practice forms of self-management outside of any structure of the trade union or workers' council type.

Moreover, in addition to the traditional unions with elements of self-reform and the small independent unions, there exist three varieties of workers' councils. The first, very much in a minority, considers workers' councils as instruments for the implementation of a genuine self-management. A second variant, of which I have already spoken, is based on the involvement of the workers in production, on the West German model. The third advocates representation of the workers amongst management.

During its recent congress, the FDGB adopted a very radical language — quasi revolutionary! — in defence of the workers and their trade union rights. But it is hard to know if this will be followed through and if it still has enough of a genuine base to put its words into practice.

MILKA TYSZKIEWICZ: A multitude of workers' organisations exist today in Poland and the situation can be summarised in the well known witticism — every time two Poles meet, three organisations are founded...and there are 35 million Poles!

Leaving aside the Stalinist organisations or those linked to the Church, I will content myself with speaking briefly about some of the organisations linked to Solidarnosc or to the clandestine activities of the working class in the 1980s.

Solidarnosc was originally a mass organisation with, roughly, one single type of membership. Today, a series of little organisations exist having very complicated structures. Solidarnosc now has nearly two million members, with two structures at the national level.

The first is a vertical structure, bureaucratic, led by Lech Walesa. It supports totally the Balcerowicz plan and the reforms of the Mazowiecki government.

The second is a horizontal structure of the different industrial sectors. Today, there are 25 structures of this type organised at the base by the workers.

This problem is very intimately linked to the workers' con-



An image of liberty from France's revolu-

tion, or in any case that of the members of Solidarnosc. At first, everybody was in favour of capitalist "laissez-faire" but when people saw that it had become difficult to find work, when they had tasted the popular soup of Mr Kuron and when they had seen the real nature of the paradise which they had expected, they began to organise themselves.

Thus, in my region, the enterprise-based trade unions used to pass on 25% of the dues of their members to the regional structures — recently, they have decided to reduce this proportion to 10% and keep the rest for their own expenses. The majority of this sum is henceforth to be devoted to these horizontal structures. There also exist regional territorial structures, the networks. These are essentially groups from different enterprises in the same city or region who coordinate together for local activities.

Some clandestine structures of Solidarnosc continue still to function at the regional level, with regional strike committees. The majority of their members belong also to the legal trade union, but maintain their clandestine structures, their equipment, and so on.

I must also mention "Fighting Solidarnosc", another clandestine organisation, which is half way between a classical trade union and a political organisation. Politically, "Fighting Solidarnosc" can be placed in the social democratic current — initially, under martial law, it had a radical enough programme on self-management, then it veered to the right.

Another interesting fact is that, since nearly a year ago, a trade union of sectors of the army and, more recently, a police trade union have begun to organise themselves. There is also a structure of Solidarnosc of small peasant proprietors which also organises the agricultural workers on state farms. They are very radical and are almost nostalgic for the good old days of Stalinism when their living conditions were not as bad...

I must also mention the Committees of Citizens of Solidarnosc, which are political structures set up before the parliamentary elections. They bring together both factory workers and sections of the intelligentsia and envisage transforming themselves into political parties. But the level of political consciousness of the working class, as



Democracy Wall outside CP headquarters in Prague, December 1989



tionary past

opposed to its level of organisation, is fairly low.

Under martial law, and a little before, a kind of "clandestine state" existed, composed of groups of intellectuals from the working class and of permanent workers, organised at different levels, in trade unions or in cultural clubs. One of these is the Informal Information Agency. These kinds of agency existed even at factory level with structures independent of Solidarnosc.

Today, they are important, the leadership of Solidarnosc tries to dominate the media, notably the television where the news emanating from the bureaucracy has simply been replaced by that emanating from Solidarnosc.

LASZLO ANDOR: The last decade of economic crisis has weighed very much on the evolution of the trade unions because the workers have been disoriented by these unions which did not defend their interests, despite the fall in the standard of living and of wages.

But, paradoxically, the official trade unions have not experienced a significant decline. They have however been paralysed, losing their capacity for mobilisation.

It was an ideal situation for the proponents of the peaceful transition. Under capitalism, the trade unions could only be a source of problems, of conflicts, and so it was best to weaken them to the maximum in this period of transition. There has been pressure to fragment the trade unions, and create a multitude of groups so as to divide the workers — the League of Independent Trade Unions (LITU) and Solidarity are two examples of this.

The LITU is under the thumb of the Free Democrats who are one of the right wing organisations in our multi-party system. Certainly, there are honest trade unionists in these two groups — more in Solidarity than in the LITU — but the effects of this division have been disastrous for the workers.

The parties of the right and these new structures have demoralised the old trade unions and tried to destroy them.

Of course, very many of the leaders of the old trade unions were corrupt, they did not do their work as trade unionists and contented themselves with observing

developments. They complain incessantly about not being consulted about the measures which are taken, but they have lost their capacity for initiative.

As to the groups of the right, they are too preoccupied with their parliamentary tasks, by the privatisations and so on, to have the time to take any interest in trade union questions! Except when it comes to attacking the old leaders.

For example, they launch attacks in the press on the corruption of the trade union leaders — which is correct. But the principal reproach which they address to them is not to do with their passivity in the face of government decisions (for these trade unions act as transmission belts for the regime) but rests on the fact that they menace the peaceful transition to capitalism!

But, after the elections, the attacks against the trade union movement will be still harder and, because of the disarray of the workers, it will be even harder for them to defend themselves. The real debate then revolves around the necessity of creating a new and genuine trade union structure which defends the interests of the workers.

It is in this context that the movement of workers' councils must be analysed. Historically, workers' councils have always been a last recourse for the working class, when it could no longer make its voice heard by other means — that is the situation in Hungary today.

Firstly, the government and the directors of the economy are preparing to sell the factories and enterprises of the country to foreign countries. Very many workers have doubts about this economic robbery of the peaceful transition, about the privatisations and the sell-offs of state property. There are of course some notable differences between the marvellous abstract capitalism and actually existing capitalism.

Besides, in most cases, the new local capitalists or the new managers are none other than the former enriched bureaucrats or the former directors, the very people whose management has led the economy and the enterprises to bankruptcy! Which poses some problems in the minds of the people...

The workers have realised that their factories are going to be sold at very low prices and that in the future they will have no right to

participate in decisions in the enterprise. So they want to forestall this and create a counter power — this is one of the reasons for the creation of workers' councils.

Another factor, especially in the small towns, is that the workers no longer want the big enterprises, and so they want to take in hand the management of these small concerns.

Two conceptions and objectives underlie the formation of workers' councils. Initially, it was about substituting for the decaying trade unions and taking their place. These first councils were led by supporters of the Democratic Forum. That tied in with their strategy for the destruction of the trade union movement.

A second conception then appeared, according to which the workers' councils must coexist with the trade unions and play a complementary role. Today this conception seems to predominate in the majority of the existing councils.

The movement for workers' councils is in full flow in Hungary, their number has not ceased to grow, above all in the last few months. The first national meeting of workers' councils was held in December 1989, with 20 trade union delegates, as well as representatives of the political parties and other movements.

The second meeting, which took place last February, brought together more than 50 delegates and established a national council and a trade union information bureau. This bureau works with the intellectuals who are sympathetic to the workers and who play a role not of "proselytism" in favour of the creation of new councils, but of help and assistance to the workers who want to create councils in their factories.

MILKA TYSZKIEWICZ: A part of the bureaucracy continues to enrich itself, notably with speculation on the exchange rate of the dollar and the zloty, through contact with foreign entrepreneurs. It expands its business relations with foreign capitalists and serves as a political cover for them. In exchange, the capitalists provide 99% of the capital...but the profits are divided equally.

They buy the enterprises — as in Hungary — of which they are directors or technical engineers, which they have directed in the past with such incompetence! In some cases, they sabotage production to lower the price at which the factories can be sold, and then, after their privatisation, they pocket huge profits.

The market has become a universal alternative to bureaucratic planning. When you go into the factories to ask the workers if they support the introduction of the market, they will respond almost unanimously in the affirmative.

But if you ask them what the market means to them concretely, they reply that it means the absence of inflation, low prices, high salaries, enrichment and happiness for everybody! It is, to say the least, a very idyllic vision of capitalism...

There is a real absence of initiatives coming from the working class. The workers sense that they can launch strike movements — which is easy, they know how to do it — but they have no alternative project. This leads to a certain paralysis.

The East German United Left needs your help!

Solidarity appeal to trade unions, Labour Parties and women's organisations

Our organisation was an important part of last autumn's anti-Stalinist opposition movement in the GDR. We are the only group which has always combined the fight against the old dictatorship with consistent anti-capitalism. We are anti-Stalinist, anti-capitalist socialists.

The results of the GDR's recent elections means that the old opposition remains in opposition. The 'Alliance for Germany' had promised a 'Deutschmark paradise'; now they are forgetting their words.

The reunification of Germany now being prepared will have to be paid for by the working people of both countries. We are arguing for and organising genuine, fighting unions to protect the interests of working people. We are demanding:

- Bringing democracy into the workplace. The workers must have a say in governing the factories; we want workers' control.
- State funding for co-operative ventures.
- The development of forms of direct democracy in the political system. We must keep alive as much as we can of the direct democracy that existed in the Autumn of 1989.
- The defence and development of the GDR's social security system (kindergartens, creches, health ser-

vice, education, etc.)

- The creation of a multicultural society which is internationalist, anti-patriarchal and ecologically conscious. We must fight racism and nationalism and the activities of fascists.

- The demilitarisation of the two countries.

It is a sad fact that we are still unable to produce a newspaper or magazine to put across our views. There is an utter lack of technical equipment of any kind and, of course, a lack of money.

We need the help and support of the British labour movement. Your backing will have an immediate practical effect on the development of the East German labour movement.

Our struggle is your struggle too. Many of the multinationals which are looking to come into the GDR also exploit workers in Britain. The British labour movement needs a strong labour movement in the GDR or the multinationals will be able to play off one set of workers against another. We need direct links with your organisation.

Our address is:
Vereinigte Linke, Reformhaue,
II Grosse Klausstrasse, Halle 4020,
GDR.

Make a donation to our work — no matter how small. Fill in the form below and send to Co-op Bank, 1 Islington High St, London N1 9TR.

Please pay the enclosed cheque/Postal order into the account of the 'United Left'.

Name of my account:

Cheque number:

More on socialism and Eastern Europe



60p plus 32p postage from SO, PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA

"Not only workers' liberty from Stalinism, but also workers' liberty from capitalism"

Jozef Pinior, a leading Polish socialist and anti-Stalinist, spoke to Mark Catterall

Our party comes from the Solidarity trade union movement, most of the party leadership coming from clandestine Solidarity.

In 1987 we felt that now in Poland, it was necessary to build a left alternative, inside the workers' movement — not only an alternative in the workplace, for workers' self-defence, but a project for the future.

We tried to organise the Polish Socialist Party. Of course it is an experiment; as with every experiment, we have had problems.

In Poland Stalinism is at the crossroad. Stalinism has compromised all left traditions. Stalinism was a disaster for the workers' movement. Our socialist language was something new in the workers' movement.

But since 1987 a new generation of young workers, and students, have come to our left alternative, an alternative of workers' power and workers' self-management.

Inside the Polish Socialist Party (Democratic Revolution) (PSP-DR) there are a number of political currents. We want our party to be very democratic, with a lot of ideological and political currents. We have a Trotskyist current, close to the Mandel wing of the USFI, an open Trotskyist current, and a left social-democratic current. We want to discuss in our party, and build with all political currents in our party a new force which works for workers' liberty, not only workers' liberty from Stalinism, but also workers' liberty from capitalism.

At present we have a lot of problems in our party because of our differences over tactics and ideology.

I personally belong to an open Trotskyist current in our party. Our first difference is over tactics in party building. My current and the other Trotskyist current want to build our party through serious work inside the real existing workers' movement. For us the existing movement is the Solidarity trade union movement, in the first place rank and file Solidarity.

Of course we oppose the existing Solidarity leadership. For us the existing leadership is a classic bureaucratic reformist leadership. But we are close to the rank and file of Solidarity, and in my opinion it is wrong to try to build a new trade union outside Solidarity as others wish to do in the party.

Our second difference is over ideology. My current and the other Trotskyist current believe that the October Revolution was a workers' revolution. The members of our party in the left social-democratic current reject that tradition.

We have a lot of problems over this point and recently this has led to organisational problems inside the PSP-DR.

Secondly, our programme on the economy differs from that of the social-democratic current over market reforms. We reject free market reforms. Our friends from the social-democratic current have a programme with free market reforms.

They also want a state without classes. For us that is irrational, and a fantasy.

Our programme on the economy looks to planning from below. We work for democracy and a self-governing society. Of course, we do not reject the market completely. We want to control the market by democratic control of the workers from below.



This pensioner is selling a few battered tins and a few pounds of bruised apples to supplement his pension.

We reject the possibility of a state without classes. We fight for our future project, which, of course, is a self-governing society, a society with massive democracy where in the first place workers control society from below, and where eventually all of society democratically controls society.

"In Poland you have a real existing workers' movement, not in the OPZZ (the old official trade unions), but in Solidarity — not in the leadership but in every factory and factory commission"

My personal tradition is close to that of Rosa Luxemburg, not the tradition of the pre-World War I Polish Socialist Party of Pilsudski, and that is an important difference. I am personally close to the left-Zimmerwald, Luxemburg, Trotskyist opposition tradition. There are deep differences in tradition inside the PSP, with others closer to the classic social-democratic tradition.

I am very afraid of following the road of a sect. There are a lot of revolutionary sects in the world, with a good ideological platform, but without any relation to the mass existing workers' movement, and it is a sad situation.

I think that now in Poland and the Eastern Bloc it is time to build a new workers' movement. Workers need alternatives because of the IMF measures which attack workers' living standards.

Workers and most of society must defend themselves against these attacks. Now is the time for building an alternative, a new workers' party.

To me a very interesting model for a political party is the Brazilian PT (Workers' Party). For me, a workers' party must have freedom for all political currents, freedom of discussion for ideological left currents inside the party. A party must fight for democracy as a key to socialism. In my opinion democracy is a key to socialism. You must have democracy inside your political party, you must have discussion, you must have debate.

In Poland it is time now for building this kind of party. This political party must represent workers' real interests. It must have a good relationship with rank and file Solidarity.

In Poland you have a real existing workers' movement, not in the OPZZ (the old official trade unions), but in Solidarity — not in the leadership but in every factory and factory commission.

There is a danger of having a sectarian platform in relationship to Solidarity. Because we reject the Solidarity leadership, it can become easy to reject all of the Solidarity movement. That is a sectarian way.

We must work inside rank and file Solidarity, build a new left alternative for workers' liberty inside this movement and, from the best workers' consciousness, build a workers' party that represents workers' interests.

Miners went on strike in January and while on strike they rejected the Solidarity bureaucracy. Now in Solidarity there are elections leading up to the Solidarity Congress and in these elections the radical wing of Solidarity is having some success.

For me this is good news. It proves it is possible to fight for democracy inside this movement.

My plan for Solidarity? In the first place support every strike, support workers fighting. Secondly,

support the fight for deep democracy inside Solidarity and organise for free elections to reject the bureaucracy.

Of course it is not easy, but we must fight for the fate of the workers' movement.

You must remember that the Walesa leadership is a very bureaucratic reformist leadership under the influence of Western propaganda, with a lot of illusions in free market reform and the possibility of capitalism with a human face.

"We want to organise a campaign against chauvinism and racism (including anti-semitism) both on a Polish level and on an Eastern Europe level, linking with such campaigns in the West"

On the other hand this bureaucracy is very new and not that strong. It is possible to fight the bureaucracy and to put forward a workers' platform.

In my personal opinion the rise of the right is a danger, not only in Poland, but in all the Eastern Bloc.

You have a very deep frustration, with a very deep economic crisis. In this situation you have a lot of right wing groups — not only liberal right wing, but also a strong authoritarian right wing.

For example, in Poland we have a problem with a very chauvinistic group. It is a marginal group, with its anti-semitic and racist slogans. But it is a danger for the future. As we see the results of the IMF/Solidarity austerity measures, these groups can grow. The PSP-DR fight against these groups.

A few months ago we condemned an anti-semitic statement by Cardinal Glemp and recently we helped protect African students from physical attack in Wroclaw by 'Nazi Front' skinheads.

We have relations with the anti-racist movement in Europe, eg. SOS-Racisme in France. We want to organise a campaign against chauvinism and racism (including anti-semitism) both on a Polish level and on an Eastern Europe level, linking with such campaigns in the West.

As for German unity — personally, I think that Germany as a nation has a right to determine its own future. Within the process of reunification we support the workers' movement in the East and West.

We support and have links with the 'United Left' in East Germany.

Our project is for a United Socialist States of Europe. We must defend workers against reunification with nationalistic slogans. We must support those in Germany who are fighting for a United Socialist States of Europe.

We struggle for a Europe without armies, a Europe with complete disarmament. We want a Europe with workers' liberty east and west.

We must have a close relationship to the comrades in Germany, we must reject completely nationalist platforms against Germany. Both the Stalinists and nationalists in Poland have positions against Germany. Many ordinary Poles agree with them.

In my opinion the breakdown of Stalinism means it is time to build a new international consciousness, a new workers' movement in Eastern Europe. It is a time to look for new roads to the future. We have good relations with the new left in Eastern Europe. Personally I have a good relationship with my friend Petr Uhl of the Czech Civic Forum and Left Alternative, who I have just heard has become a top civil

Turn to page 9

Workers' liberty

From page 5

servant in Prague.

During the time of clandestine work, for a number of years, we would meet in the mountains. In 1987 we organised a Polish/Czech solidarity committee. It called for a legal open opposition in Poland and Czechoslovakia.

"But you must provide British and Western European socialists with information about our struggle, our fight. Build solidarity with our fight. Tell British workers about all currents in the Polish labour movement, they all have something to say."

A couple of months ago I visited Petr in Prague. We discussed the need for the left to discuss political and ideological questions.

For a number of years we have had contact, first in clandestinity and now in the open with a Trotskyist group in East Germany under the leadership of Herbert Misslitz.

Also we have contacts with Boris Kagarlitsky's group in the USSR

and a small left group in Hungary. We take these contacts seriously and wish to deepen our discussions with Eastern European socialists.

When I spoke of the need to build a new international consciousness, I was thinking not just a solidarity platform for Eastern Bloc socialists, but for a Western and Eastern European platform. Naturally we are all part of one Europe and one world.

We must build a relationship between East and West through conferences, meetings, and visits, etc. We need to develop ideas through papers and discussions and perhaps in the future this new international consciousness will help build a new socialist organisation which will go further than Solidarity.

We in Poland try to inform Polish workers through our press about the lives and struggles of Western European workers, and Latin America workers and where possible to support those struggles.

Every labour movement success in Western Europe is a success for our movement. Every successful battle against Thatcher's government provides us with strength.

But you must provide British and Western European socialists with information about our struggle, our fight. Build solidarity with our fight. Tell British workers about all currents in the Polish labour movement, they all have something to say.

Support our fight for socialism. Together we can build a new international consciousness. Together we can use the chance provided by the near collapse of Stalinism to change Europe.

• Since this interview was done, the PSP-DR has split, and Jozef Piniór and his comrades have set up a new group, the 'Socialist Political Centre'.



Prague 1968.

What's in the coffin at the funeral of socialism?

AGAINST THE TIDE

By Sean Matgamna

Bourgeois propagandists and ex-Stalinists alike tell us that we are witnessing the end of socialism.

Socialism is dying of shame, failure and self-disgust before our eyes in Eastern Europe. Socialism has been tried and is now deservedly rejected as an all-round social and historical failure.

It is rejected most explicitly by the working class who, for example, gave the right the bulk of its vote in last month's East German election.

The workers want capitalism, and socialism, "history's great dream" — so bourgeois and ex-socialist propagandists alike say — goes the way of other ignorant yearnings and strivings, taking its place in the museum of quackery alongside such relics of barbarism as alchemy.

For sixty and more years, "socialism", in common discourse, has been what existed in the USSR. The ideas conveyed by the words socialism and communism before Stalin established his system sixty years ago faded into the mists of pre-history, and "socialism" came to be the theory and practice of Stalinism — what became known in the '70s as "actually existing socialism".

That was "socialism". There has been no other socialism (unless some fool wants to cite Western "democratic socialism", Sweden for example).

And yes, it is this "actually existing socialism" that is ceasing to exist, melting like islands of ice in the warm seas of international capitalism. And yes, its enemies are the very working class in whose name the "socialist" states claimed their historic legitimacy.

So much for "socialism", "actually existing socialism". But for the socialism of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Trotsky, Luxemburg and Gramsci, it is a good thing that millions of people in Eastern Europe and in the Soviet Union have risen in revolt against "socialism" and "communism". In fact it is the best thing that has happened for socialists in fully half a century.

The fact that those millions hate

and despise "socialism" is the best pledge we could have that socialism has a future, that socialism is indeed the "wave of the future".

This becomes clear when you ask yourself the question: what have the workers revolted against when they revolted against "socialism"? What has been proved or disproved by the indisputable failure of the Stalinist system?

The workers and others have revolted against:

- National oppression by the USSR and within the USSR.
- Subordination of individuals, social groups, and nations to an all-powerful regulating state through which a bureaucratic ruling class exercised its dictatorship.
- The denial of free speech, free press, free assembly, free organisation.
- Exploitation and poverty, combined with outrageous privilege.

They want instead:

- National and individual freedom.
- Democracy.
- Prosperity and equality — an end, at least, to the peculiarly glaring sort of inequality imposed on the Eastern Bloc by bureaucratic privilege.

That the workers think they can get these things, or get more of them, under a market system, is very important, and it determines what happens now, but it is not the whole story. It is not even the gist of the story. And it is not the end but the beginning of the chapter that opened in the East last autumn.

And what has the failure of Stalinist "socialism" proved? That rigidly bureaucratic systems, where all power, decisions, initiative and resources are concentrated in the hands of the state, cannot plan their economies effectively. No Marxist ever believed they could.

That the workers become alienated when a supposed "workers' state" actually means rule over them by privileged bureaucrats.

That socialism is impossible without freedom and democracy, without free initiative and comprehensive self-rule.

That socialism is impossible when the socialists set out to develop backward national economies, rather than the working class seizing power on the basis of the technology created by advanced capitalism and beginning with equality and freedom.

Eastern Europe proves all these things. But then its evidence vindicates, rather than disproves, "he

idea of Karl Marx.

Marx argued that socialism would grow out of advanced capitalism, which had developed the means of production far enough that what could be abolished almost immediately; that socialism would be the creation of the mass of the people, led by the working class, and, by definition, therefore, democratic; and that socialism would immediately destroy the bureaucratic state machine, substituting an accountable system of working-class administration.

What came to be known as "socialism", and in fact was the "actually existing socialism", was never socialism. Lenin and Trotsky did not believe that socialism was possible in the backward Tsarist empire. What they believed was that the workers could take power there, and make the first in a chain of revolutions that would reach the advanced countries where socialism was possible.

The revolutions in Western Europe were betrayed and defeated. In isolation, the Stalinist mutation, a new form of class society with collective property, emerged by way of a bloody one-sided civil war against the workers of the USSR, led by the genuine Marxists, Trotsky and his comrades. After World War 2 it spread.

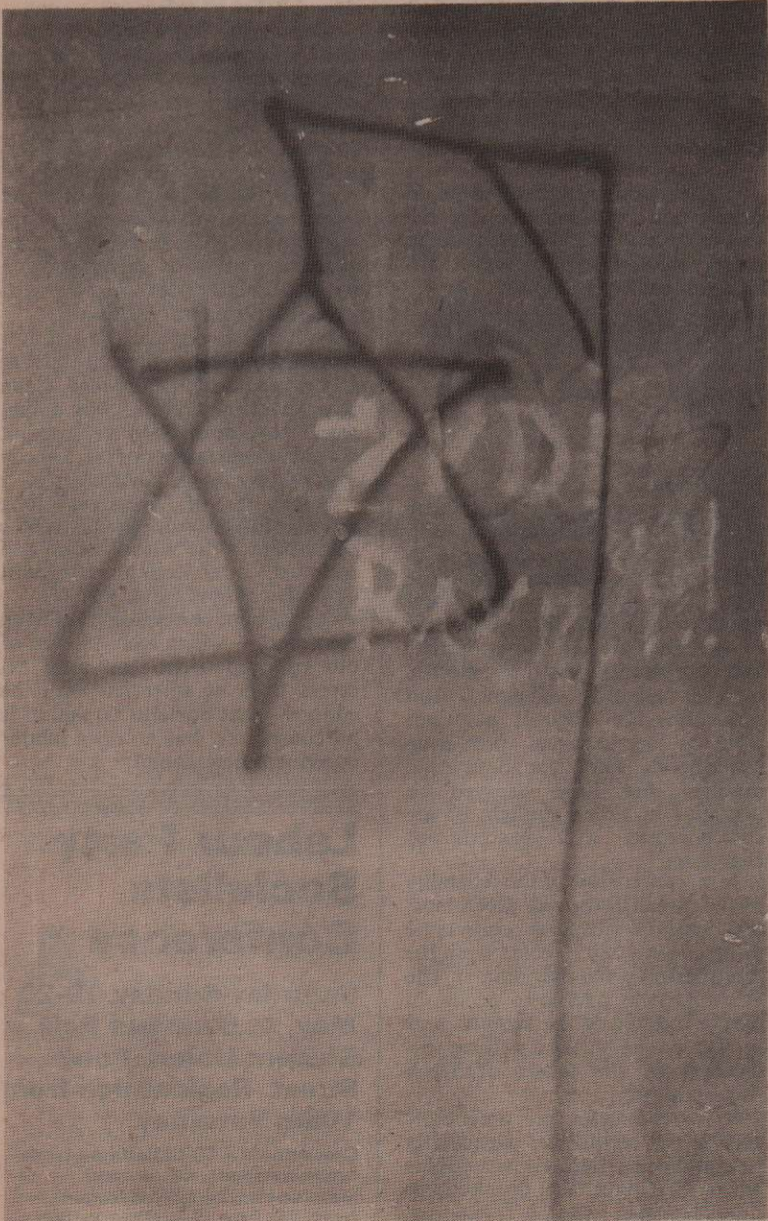
Stalinism was never socialism. But the revolt against it is socialism in embryo — the mass self-assertion and revolt of millions of people is the raw material of socialism.

It would be a true miracle if the workers in the Stalinist countries had political clarity after years in darkness. It would be remarkable if they were not confused by the official "socialism" which meant tyranny and poverty, and by the capitalism of Western Europe which means comparative prosperity and liberty.

What they are gaining now is the freedom to think, to organise, the freedom to struggle and to learn from their struggle. Some of the first steps towards socialism — independent workers' organisations, parties, and trade unions — will emerge again in countries in which History did indeed seem to have ended in hell forty or more years ago. In the East, working-class history has begun again.

Working classes which fail to shape their own history sometimes get a second chance — in the first place the chance to learn from and not repeat that history.

"Socialism" is dead; long live socialism!



Anti-semitic graffiti in Warsaw

Junk food and nourishing fare

CINEMA

Belinda Weaver reviews
'Look who's talking' and
'The Fabulous Baker Boys'

Films like 'Look who's talking' should carry health warnings; they're cinematic junk food. There's nothing new, nothing innovative about this comedy, but it has the cosy familiarity of TV sitcoms. You know what's expected of you — sit back, suspend belief, laugh on cue. It promises instant gratification.

Mollie (Kirstie Alley) is an unwed accountant who's been dumped by the natural father of her baby, Mikey. The film follows her search for a perfect father.

Mikey is determined that taxi driver James (John Travolta) get the nod, but Mommy's not so sure. She's torn. James is sexy but is he solid enough, responsible enough to be a father?

The movie's running gag is that baby knows best, and Mikey (in the voice of Bruce Willis) comments on every stage of the search, even delivering the climactic words that clinch the outcome.

The film is psychologically askew. If children could choose their fathers, would they necessarily choose the sexiest contender? What about the Oedipus complex? Freud must be turning in his grave.

Can we really credit a foetus that starts planning and thinking from the very second of conception? This must seem like a gift to the 'pro-life' lobby.

Because 'Look who's talking' is a comedy, stereotypes and stale jokes will get by yet again. It's already taken \$125 million in the States, so it looks unstoppable.

The Fabulous Baker Boys' is more nourishing fare. Far fabulous, the Baker Boys are a piano lounge duo on the downward slide.

Real life brothers Jeff and Beau Bridges play the Baker boys, Frank



Jeff Bridges and Michelle Pfeiffer in 'The Fabulous Baker Boys'

and Jack, and the casting pays off. Between the film brothers lurk undercurrents fed by their real life relationship.

Frank is the duo's manager and organiser, the worrier, the family man who sees their act as a job, nothing more. He's proud of, but slightly in awe of, little brother Jack's greater musical talent.

Jack is a prickly loner, a womaniser who can't settle down, bitter about the waste of his gifts and the compromises, the kowtowing to pettiness and the second rate, that their act entails.

The film shows us the dependency behind their worn-in-the-groove roles. Jack's superior, above-it-all attitude can only work with Frank there to do the hustling; Jack is helpless on his own.

Frank is happier, less complicated. He knows what he's doing

and why; his family need support. But Jack lives daily with failure. His real dream is to leave the act and play serious jazz, but he's afraid to take the plunge, and he knows he's afraid, and despises himself for it.

To punish himself, he deprives himself of warmth and love. Tellingly, the only creatures he lets get close to him are a neglected child living nearby, and an ageing Labrador, now symbolically toothless. Jack can only love the damaged, creature whose utter dependence on him presents no threat.

To stop the slide in their fortunes, the brother acquire a singer, the hard-headed Susie Diamond (Michelle Pfeiffer).

Exuding high wattage sexuality, Susie boosts their act and soon all three are living in clover, playing classy resorts and raking in the

dough. But she's also a catalyst, bringing change to the stale air around the brothers.

Jack can't keep his hands off her; she can't resist his desperation. But Jack is too far gone for any woman's help; he can only push her away.

All three actors are at their peak here. Pfeiffer has never been more brassily tough, more achingly vulnerable. Jeff Bridge's Jack is all too familiar, the cold hearted desperado women so often can't resist. And Beau Bridge's Frank is no less good as the long suffering ordinary guy, though his role is less showy than his brother's.

The performance of all three do what Susie Diamond does for the Baker Boys — transform something pretty mediocre into high class entertainment.



Lol Duffy

And who will they witch-hunt?

TV

By Mick Ackersley

Frank Field sat in front of the *Newsnight* camera, looking as always like the cat that has cornered the market in cream.

Field, the right-wing Labour MP who is fighting against deselection in Birkenhead, was being asked about the 1987 general election, during which, with much local press publicity, he pointedly refused to endorse his fellow candidate, Lol Duffy, standing in nearby Wallasey. Duffy lost by just 279 votes.

The reporter, Peter Marshall, put it to Field that his refusal to support the Labour candidate had given Wallasey to the Tories. Did Field deny it? Try to soften it?

Not at all. With exquisite mandarin smugness he said yes, and he looked forward to the day when one could endorse all Labour candidates!

What will the Labour Party National Executive, which has let Field and his "dossier" full of silly and trivial gossip stampee it into "investigations" in Birkenhead and Wallasey, make of this admission by Field that he lost Labour a seat in the 1987 general election?

Nothing, probably. They know the facts already. But the blatant admission, and the implied claim that he knew what he was doing, won't have done Field any good at all with the members of the Labour Party who saw his performance.

It was part of *Newsnight's* long report (4 April) on Frank Field's witch-hunt in the Wirral, which also included a brief account of Socialist Organiser.

It should have been obvious from the report — which included film of our editorial office and brief excerpts from an interview with the editor — that Socialist Organiser is no conspiracy, but an open labour movement newspaper.

Labour Party Socialists Conference

Saturday-Sunday 19-20 May, at Sheffield Poly Student Union, Pond Street. Registration from 10am Saturday.

Credentials £10 (delegates from organisations), £6 (waged individuals), or £3 (unwaged), from PO Box 118, Chesterfield, Derbyshire S44 5UD.

DNA fingerprint faults

LES HEARN'S SCIENCE COLUMN

Suppose you were wrongly accused of a crime. Suppose the evidence against you were purely circumstantial but the police wanted to 'fingerprint' your DNA to match it with samples taken from the scene of the crime. You'd be happy to because it would clear your name — but would it?

So far, there have been no criticism of genetic fingerprinting evidence in Britain but in the US several cases have been thrown out of court on the grounds that DNA tests that are carried out by the commercial forensic DNA labs that have sprung up are not reliable. This raises a general problem of scientific evidence. However impeccable the theory behind a test, its results are only as reliable as the techniques used to obtain them. A case in point is that of the Birm-

ingham 6 where the only 'hard' evidence against them was that some of them appeared to have been handling certain types of explosive. But the test can give 'false positives' — it reacts to several common and innocent chemicals such as the varnish on playing cards. To avoid this possibility, the conditions of the test must be exactly right and this turns out to be part of the problem with the American DNA tests.

As we know, the discrediting of the forensic evidence against the Birmingham 6 has not resulted in their release. This is an aspect of another problem associated with scientific evidence. Quite often juries and judges are incapable of understanding the arguments about such evidence. Faced with a disagreement among 'experts' about the scientific evidence, they may therefore fall back on their prejudices, all too often in favour of the prosecution.

So what's wrong with DNA testing? Each person's DNA is unique to them (apart for identical twins). Analysing their DNA and comparing it with that found in a sample will definitely answer the

question 'Did the sample come from the suspect?' Unfortunately, complete analysis of their DNA would take decades (and is in fact the goal of the Human Genome Project, a billion dollar international collaborative effort to find out what exactly DNA contains). Obviously current DNA fingerprinting involves some short cuts.

The present technique consists of 'cutting' the DNA at certain points and separating the fragments on the basis of their size. The 'scissors' are types of enzyme made by bacteria as defence against infection by viruses. Called 'restriction enzymes' these break the DNA at specific points.

Since everyone's DNA is different, the restriction enzymes will cut at different points, making fragments of different sizes.

The resulting mixture of fragments is then put on one end of a length of gel. An electric field is applied and the fragments migrate towards the other end, the lighter ones going faster (the technique is called gel electrophoresis). Finally, a pattern of bands in the gel is obtained which is unique to that individual (with an uncertain perhaps

one part in ten billion).

So far, so good but the above represents the optimum case, with the carefully collected sample, with the restriction enzymes given the right temperatures, acidity and same strength each time. But some of the bands are very close together and can be confused if the electric field is slightly different. And sometimes the enzymes may not work as fast as usual, producing fewer bands. And what about using samples that have decayed or degraded in strong sunlight or are contaminated with bacteria or chemicals?

In a separate test of the reliability of the three US forensic DNA labs, two came up with false positives (ie samples were said to come from the same person when they didn't). The other lab was unable to decide in over a quarter of the samples sent in. These were hardly a striking vindication of the power of DNA fingerprinting.

It is a powerful and potentially very useful technique, particularly in establishing family relationships where these have been disputed but there is plenty of scope for tightening up procedure.

Labour activists plan poll tax conference



The police run riot

This is an edited version of a statement issued by 3D — the open, independent anti-poll tax newsletter issued by activists in the All Britain Federation — following the police riot on the demonstration on 31 March

March 31st's anti-poll tax demonstration and rally attended by nearly 200,000 people, illustrated the enormous breadth of support the anti-poll tax movement commands and the enormous strength of feeling against the tax.

A peaceful, good-natured demonstration which had for the most part been policed in a low-key manner was disrupted by a completely unwarranted and provocative police attack, using horses and riot squads, up Whitehall and along Northumberland Avenue.

Many ordinary police officers who had lined the route seemed as shocked and surprised by the waves of horsemen as the demonstrators.

However, the fact that Thatcher's speech condemning the violence was reported before the last section of the demonstration had left Kennington raises speculation.

Many people believe that the police attack was agreed at the

highest level in order to provoke a riot and discredit the anti-poll tax campaign at a time of unprecedented government unpopularity.

That the police ran riot amongst the crowd was serious enough, but the situation was made worse by inadequate stewarding; too few stewards were present and their lines of communication seemed poor.

The stewards seemed to be concentrated around the platform in Trafalgar Square. After the trouble began there was a marked absence of stewards in the disturbed area and the platform seemed unaware of the police attacks that had occurred.

The stewarding was not the only weakness of the march's organisation.

There had been no obvious provision of legal assistance through the publication and distribution of emergency phone numbers. There were extremely few NCCL and Haldane Society legal observers for a demonstration of this size.

Prior to the demonstration 3D supporters on the All Britain Federation national committee had raised concern over the route of the march; the relatively small size of the assembly point; the fact that the march would go past Downing Street; and the organisers' underestimation of the possible size of the march.

In the light of what really happened on Saturday 31 March — an unprovoked, possibly pre-planned police attack on a peaceful demonstration — we completely reject the initial media comments of Federation officers Tommy Sheridan and Steve Nally which pinned the blame on a minority of demonstrators rather than on the police.

We also reject any idea of an 'internal inquiry' within the anti-poll tax movement to root out the so-called trouble makers — what is needed is an independent, public inquiry into the policing of the event.

This demand should be supported across the anti-poll tax movement and at all levels of the labour movement.

Constituency Labour Party activists are planning a conference, focused on organising against the poll tax and against witch-hunts within the Labour Party, for 23 June in London.

The date was set by a meeting of the Organising Committee of the Constituency Labour Parties Conference on 7 April in Wakefield. A full CLPs Conference was due to take place on that day, but had to be cancelled after the booking fee for Wakefield Town Hall was mysteriously, and at short notice, raised from nil to £400.

The CLPs Conference was launched from a fringe meeting at the Socialist Conference in 1988. It has held three delegate conferences, and fringe meetings at Labour Party Conference, aiming to give CLPs a voice within the increasingly leadership-dominated structure of the Labour Party.

Wallasey CLP, which initiated the CLPs Conference and has provided the secretarial base for it, is now under threat from Labour Party HQ as a result of a vendetta launched by right-wing Labour MP Frank Field following his deselection in the neighbouring constituency of Birkenhead. The fight against the Poll Tax is connected with the rise of intolerance within the Labour Party because the National Executive has been trying to stamp on any Labour councillors or council candidates advocating non-cooperation with the Tory tax, and indeed local Labour Party members' involvement in anti-poll tax unions was one of the items in Frank Field's denunciation of Wallasey.

All three previous CLPs Conferences have been in the North — in Manchester, in Birkenhead and in Sheffield. The fifth Conference — a briefing conference on 8 or 15 September, prior to Labour's Annual Conference — has also been

scheduled for the North, in Wakefield, where local activists are confident of being able to sort out the problems on hall bookings given the extra time.

The Organising Committee was reluctant to break the tradition of meeting outside London, but recognised the force of other arguments. A venue was readily available in London, and following the forced cancellation of the Wakefield meeting, the CLPs Conference could not afford to wait or to take chances with new venues. London is a logical place for a conference focused on the poll tax, given the exceptionally high rates of poll tax there. And, to increase the range of CLPs involved with the CLPs Conference, it is necessary to meet sometimes in the South.

The Organising Committee also decided to give support to the Labour Party Socialists conference being held on 19-20 May in Sheffield. A planning meeting for the Labour Party Socialists conference held the following day (8 April) decided to invite a speaker on 19-20 May from the CLPs Conference and to give reciprocal support to the CLPs Conference meetings.

Contact: CLPs Conference, c/o 11 Egremont Promenade, Wallasey, Merseyside L44 8BG.

NUJ back non-payment

• At its annual conference last week the NUJ adopted a policy of support for mass non-payment, and pledged to support any industrial action as a response of non-cooperation with the poll tax. A full report appears next week.

Ambulance activists meet

By Stan Crooke

Ambulance crew members from Merseyside, London, Northern Ireland and South Yorkshire met in Liverpool last Saturday, 7 April, to discuss the lessons, and the outcome, of the recent pay dispute.

A number of other areas sent apologies for non-attendance at the

meeting.

The meeting went ahead despite a last-minute intervention by a local NUPE official, who unsuccessfully attempted to persuade the Merseyside Trades Union Centre (the venue for the meeting) not to allow its premises to be used for the event.

In discussing the conduct of the 6 month long pay dispute, crew members pointed to the fragmental nature of the action being taken in different parts of the country and the lack of coordination between different areas.

An all-out strike across the country would have been necessary to unify the action and win the full pay claim. But, as one of the crew members at the meeting put it: "We effectively imposed a no-strike clause on ourselves."

A contrast was drawn with the firefighters' dispute of the mid-1970s, in which the firefighters had taken all-out action and achieved a pay formula.

However, all-out strike action needed to have been organised in conjunction with the provision of an alternative emergency service. Whatever the precise form of that alternative service (the taking over of ambulance stations by crew members themselves or the running of an alternative service in co-operation with local councils) it needed to be completely under the control of the ambulance crews themselves.

The union leaders were criticised for their role in the dispute. They had kept the action fragmented, and opposed calls for a national ballot on all-out action. No national shop stewards conference was called until the eve of the end of the dispute.

Union officials had been out of touch with their members, and did not necessarily have the right experience to do their jobs properly. But, as one ambulance worker pointed out, it was not just a question of the individuals concerned, but also of his/her accountability (or lack of it) to the membership.

Those attending the meeting also recognised the weaknesses of the level of organisation at a rank and file level.

"We allowed ourselves to be talked out of demands such as all-out strike action. People have been conditioned to accept the role of leaders to lead, and it's hard to break away from that habit. We have to blame ourselves as well, for allowing ourselves to be talked out of the things we were calling for," said one ambulance worker.

In discussing the implementation of

the pay settlement which ended the dispute, the situation was different in different parts of the country. For example:

• Some areas had already received the £850 lump sum back pay which they were due under the terms of the settlement, others were still waiting for it.

• In London, all crew members were being offered the extra 2% local pay rise allowed for by the pay settlement, whilst in Merseyside it was being offered only to accident and emergency staff; in South Yorkshire ambulance workers were even facing pay cuts as recognition of their qualifications was being withdrawn.

The meeting opposed local elements in pay deals (save for the London Weighting Allowance and also with the possible exception of Northern Ireland, given the special situation there) as divisive and a step backwards in the direction of worse pay, conditions and standards.

As a follow-up to the meeting a regular national newsletter for ambulance crews is to be produced and a further meeting will be held at the NUPE national conference being held in Blackpool next month.

One shop steward at the conference summed it up by saying:

"We were not disappointed at the turn-out, though we would have preferred more. We never considered the meeting to be a delegates conference, but rather a get-together for staff to talk about the dispute and its results."

Mistakes were made in the dispute by the leadership and by rank and file activists, so the calling of such a meeting was valid. We made contacts with one another, and agreed to production of a national newsletter.

It was a constructive debate, and not a slanging match against Poole. There were certain criticisms but it was constructive criticism.

Jordan's bluff

By Pat Markey, AEU steward, British Timkin, Northants

About 300 engineering shop stewards met in London on 5 April to discuss the next stage in the campaign for a shorter working week. The delegates were looking for some lead from the Confed leadership.

Fresh in the minds of delegates was the deal reached at British Aerospace at Preston and Chester; a phased reduction in hours to 37 in return for some nasty 'strings'. (The original campaign, the 'Drive for 35', was for a 35-hour

week and no strings). Fresh also, the fact that after eight months the collection of the levy to pay to those members in factories targeted for strike action is falling rapidly.

Anyway, in referring to the strings in the BAe deals, Jordan uttered the memorable line: "Words are words, what we're interested in is deeds." It appears that the good initiative to target 50 smaller companies for strike action (one from each Confed district) is only words also. There's a dwindling supply of strike money in the kitty. Jordan's answer was to go on about chickens and eggs, eggs and chickens. "Go back and redouble your efforts to collect the levy" was the message. Presumably otherwise we'll only have ourselves to blame.

The official strategy now seems to be more one of bluff. Target a local company for indefinite strike action and

hope it will concede a reduction in hours. The obvious danger is that the employers might cotton on to this bluff. "Words are words, what we're interested in is deeds".

Some delegates expressed concern about the lack of a national agreement with the Engineering Employers Federation (EEF). Others pointed out we had lost sight of the campaign being one for 35 hours. Overall, we're in a bit of stalemate. The Confed leadership is calling the shots, and although there is an increasing number of agreements on a shorter working week, there is still no sign of a national agreement.

We need more meetings of Confed stewards to map out the way forward and gain control of the campaign and there is a need to escalate the action to involve all our members and to show the employers we are serious. Quite right, Bill. deeds not words.

SOCIALIST

ORGANISER

DEFEND ABORTION RIGHTS!

On 24 April the House of Commons will debate — and vote on — proposals to lower the upper time limit for abortions. We are facing the real threat of our — already limited — abortion rights being restricted even further.

The government has set aside the entire day, and will ensure a guillotine and vote at the end of it, for discussion of amendments on abortion tabled to its Embryology Bill.

The main proposal comes from Geoffrey Howe, and will be presented as a clause of the Embryology Bill. Obviously, it has government backing, and will take priority in the debate.

Originally, Howe's clause was modelled on the Bill Lord Houghton successfully moved in the House of Lords. This would lower the time limit for abortions to 24 weeks, but allow later abortions on grounds of foetal abnormality or risk to the mother's health. There was to be no upper time limit for such abortions.

In addition, the Houghton Bill would have removed the threat of prosecution that doctors who perform an abortion on a foetus deemed "viable" currently face under the 1967 Act. Fear of this prosecution threat makes doctors play safe and, in the main, refuse even under the present limit of 28 weeks, to perform abortions after 24 weeks.

The Houghton Bill would also change the way the time limit is calculated, reckoning from two weeks after a woman's last period, rather than, as present, reckoning from the last period, thus effectively extending the time limit by two weeks.

Anti-abortionists in the Tory Party were in uproar over Howe's introduction of a clause that they

saw as a progression on the 1967 Act. In the face of pressure from their own "pro-lifers", in particular the anti-abortion campaigner Bernard Braine, Howe and the government capitulated.

Howe's original clause was replaced by one which will amend the 1967 Act, lowering the time limit to 24 weeks (in practice 22 or 20 weeks); strengthen the Infant Life Preservation Act (under which doctors can be prosecuted for aborting 'viable' foetuses); and increase the restrictions on when a woman can seek abortion.

Kenneth Clarke has also tabled a whole series of amendments to Howe's clause, which reflect virtually every option — from 'no time limits' to '18 weeks'.

The government has decided on a pendulum procedure for voting on these amendments: ie. a vote on 18 weeks followed by one on 28 weeks; 20 weeks then 26 weeks, etc. The option of 24 week will thus be the final vote.

Such a procedure — agreed, apparently, by a back-room deal with Labour's front bench, without reference to the Parliamentary Labour Party — has delighted the anti-abortionists, who believe it gives them a better chance of voting through a much lower time limit.

Undoubtedly many Tory MPs will, at best, vote for the 24 week limit, as they see Howe's proposal as the government 'line'. Many Labour MPs, too, will opt for a 24 week limit in defiance of party policy.

Unquestionably the debate on 24 April poses the most serious threat to our abortion rights yet.

The sudden move by the government to take the abortion debate on 24 April instead of following the usual procedure and letting the committee stage take place first, has given the pro-choice lobby little time to mobilise.

For a national conference of trade unionists against the poll tax

An appeal from Tony Benn MP

"The campaign against the poll tax is by far the biggest public

demonstration that we have seen in this country for 50 years and it involves everybody over the whole political spectrum.

Trade unionists are involved, both because those who work in local government depend for their living on raising revenue to pay for the services they provide, and because they and many others are being required to implement a grossly unfair system of taxation which will hit the poorest hardest.

The importance of solidarity which has always been the key to trade union strength, has now acquired a new meaning in the community and trade union leadership in this campaign is essential.

Trade unionists across the country may well find that the poll tax is deducted from their pay.

Trade unionists in local government face compulsory redundancies as councils make cuts in local services

This is a matter for all trade unionists and the TUC."

Sponsor the conference, called by the Socialist Movement Trade Union Committee. For more details contact 53 Geere Road, London E15.

OUR BODIES OUR CHOICE



But mobilise we must: it is important that there is a huge demonstration of opposition to any attempt to lower the time limit for abortions. Stop the Amendment Campaign has organised a march on Monday evening, 23 April, and a lobby of Parliament on Tuesday 24 April. It is important that support is organised for these throughout the labour, student and women's movements.

We must not forget the other issues that will also be discussed under the Embryology Bill: on Monday 23 April parliament will take the vote on whether to ban em-

bryo research outright, or allow it up to 14 days. Lets put pressure on to make sure that the 14 day limit is supported in preference to a total ban.

And there are still the amendments which would seek to ban lesbian and single women from access to Donor Insemination and other fertility treatments. We must continue to campaign in support of the right of all women to have such treatments, and against the bigots. Support the Campaign for Access to Donor Insemination.

Why prisoners took to the roofs

WHETTON'S WEEK

A miner's diary

Taking men, banging them away, and treating them as sub-human is bound to bring about the sort of prison revolts we're seeing now.

It seems as though society wants to take things out on these people, and is not bothered about rehabilitation or bringing them back into society. If you treat them like animals, they'll react like animals. There has got to be a great deal more thought put into what we do with offenders.

Besides, lots of people in prison aren't criminals. People tend to forget that. Quite a lot of people on remand, who haven't been tried or pronounced guilty, are subjected to degrading treatment.

I can well understand them taking to the rooftops when they're absolutely at

rock bottom.

The arguments with Neil Kinnock about his attitude to the poll tax have got to be emphasised.

Kinnock's line seems to be that when we elect the next Labour government, we're going to get pretty much the same medicine as the Tories.

I know that Kinnock's going to have a lot of problems on his hands. He's got to pull this country out of the mess the Tories have got it in. But it seems that though the people are going to be told to tighten their belt again. It's a very old story: "Sorry, you can't have jam today. It's jam tomorrow". It's the story I've heard every time we've had a Labour government.

Really we ought to be looking at a fundamental shift in society to change the system. Otherwise we're going to spend forever and a day getting rid of one government and putting another one in, without really altering the system.

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

Sheffield workers fight the poll tax

On Friday 6 April 36 housing staff in Sheffield walked out indefinitely after having been threatened with disciplinary action for not attending training on poll tax that is outside of current job descriptions and union agreement.

Today (Tuesday 10th) housing staff all over Sheffield walked out following the threat of disciplinary action against area managers who refused to tell staff to attend poll tax training events.

The present all-out strike is the latest development in a long dispute over the introduction of poll tax work into the housing department. The major issues are over regrading of staff for massive extra burdens in workload; staffing levels; accommodation in area offices; confidentiality of claimants' details; rejection of "flexible working practices" and opposition to attempt to introduce "mixed tenure management" through the back door.

Management in the shape of Sheffield City Council have behaved scandalously throughout this dispute, actively seeking to smash NALGO. For the last two weeks shop stewards have been disallowed to organise meetings in work time on the poll tax, effectively gagging discussion on the current dispute.

Management have also sought to undermine national pay agreements by seeking to link the present dispute over re-grading into the annual pay award negotiated nationally.

This would not only set a precedent within the department but also undermine the role of unions in national collective bargaining.

At present most area housing offices are out and awaiting to see if management are willing to address any of our demands.

• March

Monday 23 April
6.30pm, ULU, Malet St,
London WC1. Nearest
Tube: Goodge St

• Lobby of Parliament

Tuesday 24 April

Mass lobby of MPs — 2pm
onwards, House of
Commons. Meeting in
Grand Committee Room

Defend women's
abortion rights

No reduction in time
limits