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ORGANISER

Unite the left

Time to regroup and fightback

STOP

THE

RETREAT



Dear Tony Benn,

You know that the Tories fought a dirty, unscrupulous, unfair, General Election.

Scaremongering, misrepresentation, tabloid propaganda, on top of the

wretched quality of Labour's front bench leaders corabined to allow them to win the election, albeit with a minority of the votes cast. They are probably secure for four or five years.

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An Open Letter to Tony Benn from the AWL

Behind the Mandela scandal

By Tom Rigby

Many opponents of apartheid are still unwilling to look too closely into what has become known as "the Winnie Mandela" affair.

That is a mistake. The episode tells us much about the ANC, its methods, and the prospects for democracy in the new South Africa. To refuse to examine the evidence against Mrs Mandela and her followers amounts to nothing less than a refusal to come to terms with the recent history of the liberation movement. It is the politics of faith rather than facts.

What are the facts?

• Mrs Mandela has been found guilty of being an "accessory" to kidnapping and assaulting four youths. That happened after Nelson Mandela had called for a trial so that his wife could clear her name.

• The court record, agreed by both defence and prosecution, states that "A decision was made by Mrs Winnie Mandela and the 'Football Club' to kill" two ex-members of the 'club', Sibusiso Chili and Lerothodi Ikaneng. The same court record states that Mrs Mandela's house was used for hiding a murder weapon, that the killers set off from and returned to her house in her car, that her daughter Zinzi was involved in exchanging the murder weapon, and that the killers continued as members of the 'Football Club' and the household.

• Mrs Mandela has consistently lied in court about her whereabouts at key times in the case of Stompie, the 14 year old allegedly murdered by members of her 'Football Club'.

• Mrs Mandela slandered an anti-apartheid priest as a "gay child molester", when in fact he was sheltering terrified young men from her. Outside the court, Mrs Mandela's supporters held up placards with the slogan, "Homo sex is not in black culture".

• The doctor to whom Mrs Mandela took the boys she kidnapped in an attempt to produce physical evidence of abuse provided no such evidence. Instead, he was brutally murdered. The visitors' book for the last day of his life includes a record of a visit by Jerry Richardson, captain of the 'Football Club', and the words, written in red, "Sent by Winnie".

• When the story first broke, a "Mandela Crisis Committee" was set up in Soweto, featuring prominent pro-ANC activists. It released the following statement:

"We have now reached the state where we have no option but to speak publicly on what is a very sensitive and painful matter. In recent years Mrs Mandela's action have led her into conflict with various sections of the oppressed people... In particular we are outraged by the reign of terror that the [Mandela United Football] team has been associated with. Not only is Mrs Mandela associated with the team, in fact the team is her own creation. We are outraged at Mrs Mandela's complicity in the recent abductions and assault on Herman... The Mass Democratic Move-



The tip of an iceberg

The Winnie Mandela scandal is just the tip of the iceberg. Much of the real history of the township rebellion of 1984-6 has been buried. For instance, how many people know that the murderous vigilantes who drove the ANC and its supporters out of the Crossroads and KTC squatter camps were led by a former favourite of the ANC, Nxgobongwana? Picture shows ANC supporter fleeing from the vigilantes.

ment hereby distances itself from Mrs Mandela and her actions".

• A year earlier outraged Soweto high school students had tried to burn down the Mandela home at Diepkloof Extension after beatings and an alleged rape connected with the 'football team'.

• Despite all protestations to the contrary, Nelson Mandela knew about the abduction of the four youths. It was his intervention from jail, via his lawyer Ismail Ayob, that probably saved the lives of Stompie's three friends, by making it clear to Mrs Mandela that she had to release her captives.

• Key witnesses in the Stompie case disappeared, "Sicilian" style. It is now known that Mekgwe and Lebukulu are both being held in ANC security installations in Zambia "for their own protection". The ANC's security staff were all trained by the KGB or the Stasi.

Those are the facts, as far as they are known to us today. What can we make of them?

Firstly, the Stompie case was no isolated incident, but part of a broader pattern.

Secondly, the broader pattern was known about for

some time, but nobody in the ANC did anything about it. That is the only interpretation to put on the phrase "in recent years" in the Mandela Crisis Committee's initial statement of February 1989 (quoted above).



Winnie Mandela

Thirdly, the people who benefitted from the violence, particularly the violence directed against other groups in the liberation movement such as Azapo (the political successor to Black Consciousness), did nothing to stop it.

As Paul Trehwela points out in *Searchlight South*

Africa no.7:

"A murderous campaign was launched against Azapo in 1985, after it had dared to humiliate the UDF through its strident campaign against the visit of Senator Edward Kennedy in January of that year. The cycle of township violence of this period requires its own detailed investigation. In his acclaimed book, *My Traitor's Heart*, the South African journalist Rian Malan has described in chilling detail the murder-hunt against Azapo members in Soweto by supporters of the UDF in Soweto in 1985. He quotes George Wauchope, an Azapo leader and former close colleague of Steve Biko, as stating that Morobe, Albertina Sisulu, and Patrick 'Terror' Lekota, the leaders of the UDF, 'didn't see anything... they never ever acknowledged that there was this internecine warfare. They never ever tried to stop it'. (*My Traitor's Heart*, Vintage 1991)".

This pattern was repeated in the Western Cape in 1986. UDF (pro-ANC) affiliates refused to support a trade union initiative to "Stop the Killings". Rev. Boesak, who was at that time a leading spokesperson for the UDF, would have nothing to do with the campaign. He preferred to snuggle up to Johnson Nxgobongwana, a "tough man" in the Cape Town squatter camps, who

was made chair of the Western Cape UDF, only to change sides and become the leading anti-ANC vigilante.

The inescapable conclusion from all this is that the top leadership of the ANC were aware of the violence perpetrated in their name, did little or nothing to stop it, and hoped to rise to power on the backs of destruction and disruption of other forces by lumpen, impoverished township youth.

In the mid '80s they sought a short-cut to revolution by way of the "comtsotsis" (half "comrade", half "tsotsi" or street gangster). That failed, and now the violence of "ungovernability" is being turned against the people themselves by the "hidden hand" of the State.

What now? Winnie and her "boys" are cases for therapy and re-education, not revenge. The best ending to all this would be for the ANC to disband and make way for democratic working-class politics.

Unfortunately, that will not happen. Instead, we will see those who rose to international prominence on the backs of the "comtsotsi" army take their share of power.

They should get on well with De Klerk.

Gould and Smith offer no choice

By Martin Thomas

Since the Labour leadership contest was announced, the pages of the *Guardian* have seen a weird Dutch auction, with supporters of Bryan Gould and of John Smith each claiming that the other man is not right wing enough.

"Both want to break Labour's link with the trade unions..."

Gould supporters say that Smith is in hock to the unions, he is too keen on redistributing income from rich to poor, and he has not been aggressive enough in purging Militant supporters and other socialists. Smith's backers reply that their man was a hardline right-winger when the Gould camp were all flirting with the left.

In fact there is nothing to choose between Gould and Smith.

Both want to break Labour's link with the trade unions, and thus cut its

working-class roots.

Both want to continue Neil Kinnock's line of purging and tightening up the Labour Party, transforming it into a intolerant sect with a small

passive membership "campaigning" only through the media.

Both want to keep on pushing Labour policy towards a pale-pink Toryism.

Both, while hedging their bets, are leaving doors clearly open for a deal with the Liberal Democrats.

The political differences announced so far are that Gould is more anti-European and more upfront about breaking with the unions, and he criticises the tax rises for the well-off in John Smith's Shadow Budget.

Since Gould certainly does not propose slashing military spending, expropriating profitable industry, or seizing the banks, it is not clear how he proposes that a Labour Government should find resources for anything at all.

Labour and trade union activists should protest at the way the leadership election has been stitched up to shut out debate and a serious choice of candidates, and call for reopening of nominations.

The Campaign Group of left MPs met on Tuesday 14 April, but was unable to reach a decision about the leadership contest. It adjourned its debate to Tuesday 21st.

On Thursday 23rd, Ken Livingstone jumped in and declared himself a candidate. The TV news that evening, presumably briefed by Livingstone, described him as "backed by the Campaign Group", though no such decision had been taken.

Several Campaign Group members were unhappy, but on 21 April the group, faced with the accomplished fact, endorsed Livingstone.

The group also decided to back Bernie Grant MP for deputy leader.

In his statement Livingstone said that the work of coordinating the left "will start with a conference on Labour economic policy which is being called by the Labour and the Economy Group for June" and proposed a "total realignment" around left politics, in the party. Livingstone and the Economy Group are represented by Ken Livingstone with

Socialist Action and the *Morning Star*. "Broad realignment" looks like a code-word for Livingstone's long-standing project to replace or marginalise the Campaign Group by a lash-up with parts of the "soft left".

• Our comment on Ken Livingstone's candidacy: see page 4.



Bernie Grant shown above at an anti-Gulf war meeting can rally the left with his campaign for deputy leader.

The lie machine

KEEP THATCHERISM MRS T BEGS MAJOR

Maggie claims election glory

MRS Thatcher amazed even her political friends last night by claiming much of the credit for the Tory election triumph.

I MADE BRITAIN GREAT NOT MAJOR CLAIMS THATCHER

Smith union bid to supplant Gould

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Now you know (if you ever doubted) why the Tories packed Mrs Thatcher off to the US during the election campaign. (Imagine the screaming headlines if Labour had exiled Michael Foot!) Despite their victory, the Tories have their tensions, conflicts, and difficulties. Thatcher has declared that Major is "not his own man", and he must be "jolly careful not to undo what I've done". Of the tabloids, only *Today* reported this political sensation at all fully; the *Mail* and the *Sun* ran brief, partial and bland reports, and the *Express* and the *Star* (and the *Mirror*) ran no report at all. All the front pages were given over to the death of comedian Benny Hill.

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Open letter to Tony Benn:

Stop the retreat

From page 1

They are now planning to reap the fruits of their victory.

- They will continue their attack on the Health Service; the least we can expect is that they will complete the process of creating a two-tier Health Service, with the NHS on the bottom tier, stigmatised and starved of funds, like social housing now. The official Labour campaign was not exaggerating when it said that the election was the last chance to save the NHS as we have known it.

- A new round of anti-union legislation is ready for presentation to Parliament in the Queen's Speech. Britain already has the most illiberal and undemocratic labour laws in Europe — naked and unashamed class legislation put on the statute book by the workers' enemies to hamstring the unions. But that, the result of repeated rounds of anti-union legislation over a dozen years, is not enough for the Tories.

They want to ban check-off agreements for union dues, ban the TUC from regulating inter-union disputes over membership, enable users of services like the railways and the Post Office to sue the unions if there are strikes, and ban all strikes without a postal ballot followed by seven days' notice to the boss.

- The coal mines are to be privatised, and probably only ten or so will be left open. Thus the Tories plan to reap the final fruits of their brutal victory over the miners in 1984-5.

- The railway system is to be broken up and privatised.

- Tory plans for the schools will now go ahead at full throttle, undoing most of the reforms of the last 25 years, and putting middle-class privilege and working-class disadvantage brutally at the very centre of our children's education once again.

The National Union of Teachers is now set for a close and, so to speak, hand-to-hand struggle with the Government over education and over teachers' wages and standards.

- The Tories will open a new assault on council housing. They are dead set on reviving private landlords — with little or no protection for their

tenants — however much it costs in homelessness and misery.

That is only a partial list of what the Tories will now proceed to do with the victory they unfairly won on 9 April.

And what is the labour movement to do? The mood of "waiting for Labour" was strong throughout the labour movement in the months and years leading up to the election. And now? Electorally, we can do nothing for five years. *We cannot "wait for Labour"*.

What we need now is to bring together those whom the Tories are picking off one-by-one for a centralised fight back. The Tories are not invulnerable. If Kinnock, Smith and their friends had had a bit more go about them in the months before the election, the Tories could have been defeated on 9 April. If Labour had acted like a serious opposition, then issues like the Poll Tax could have been used to drive the Tories from office.

Because Labour's leaders chose to be docile and "respectable", the initiative was left with the Tories, even when it came to dismantling and replacing their "flagship" tax after it had proved unworkable. It was Kinnock's ship that sank, not Major's.

"We should organise a national convention of the class-struggle labour movement, Labour Party rank and file and trade unions, to coordinate the fight back"

The Tories only seem invulnerable because of the weaknesses of those who oppose them. To adapt a truism of the old socialist movement: the Tories have loomed so great over the last dozen years only because the Labour leaders have been on their knees before them.

What we need now is for the official labour movement, the National Executive of the Labour Party and the General Council of the TUC, to organise the fight back against the Tories, coordinating the different groups of workers in the areas now faced with Tory onslaughts. Do that, and we can hope to turn the tide.

That is what *needs* to be done. But you know as we know that neither the TUC leaders nor the munchkins and lilliputians of Labour's front bench will do anything of the sort. You know as we know that the Labour front bench will vie with the Tories in denouncing any group of workers who dare to fight back, as they have denounced striking miners and anti-poll-tax demonstrators.

So nothing is possible? Much is possible, with initiative and determination. It is possible for the socialists and the honest trade unionists to begin now to *organise themselves* for a campaign of coordinated resistance to the programme of the new Tory Government.

Many of those in the labour movement who have been "waiting for Labour" will now, in the cold light of another lost election, feel



"You may have won the battle, but you won't win the war". This message, from the aftermath of the miners' defeat in 1985, is still valid today.

Photo: John Harris.

the need to *start from where we are* and begin step by step to repair the ravages that 13 years of Tory rule have inflicted on the labour movement. The new wave of Tory attacks now getting under way poses freshly, for millions of workers, the reality of the class struggle — and in conditions in which our enemies have political power.

Faced with those attacks, many workers will be forced to begin to make their own evaluation of capitalism and thus to drink from the fountain of socialist knowledge.

Such people need a lead in struggle, and help in drawing the true socialist conclusions from the experience of conflict with the arch-capitalist Tory Government.

The tragedy of the British labour movement now is that there is no organising centre for such activities. Beyond the official movement, the Left is fragmented and divided. Sectarians who are so confused that they think they gain ground when Labour's right wing succeeds in suppressing those on Labour's left whom the sectarians see as rivals; middle-class cliques and coteries who have lost their bottle and look to Scottish Nationalists, sectarian stunts, and panaceas like "proportional representation" instead of to the working class and its move-

ment; the ex Communist Party and a whole spectrum of erstwhile socialists and Marxists who were on the *right* of Neil Kinnock in the election, because they advocated votes for the Liberal Democrats — that is the 'left' now.

There is no centre to the existing left, no group or organisation big and representative enough to give direction and purpose to a fight back. If such a centre existed now, much could be done that now seems impossible.

It is not merely objective conditions, such as the economic slump, that paralyse us. In the past such conditions have not entirely paralysed socialist activity. It was in 1922, during the depths of the depression immediately after World War 1, that the foundations were laid for the great left-wing rank-and-file movement in the trade unions — the so-called "Minority Movement" — which won the affiliation of one quarter of all organised trade unionists in the early and middle 1920s.

It was the Communist Party — the real Communist Party and not the Stalinist entity which has now evolved beyond the right wing of the Labour Party — which made that possible. Such things would be

possible now, as would such crying necessities as a unionisation drive in the 'New Technology' industries, if there were an alternative left wing centre able to do the job despite the wretched character of the official labour movement, Labour Party and trade unions alike.

Why the left is now in such a state is beyond the scope of this letter, as is the 'crisis of socialism' of which it

Turn to page 4

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

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Stop the retreat



John Edmonds had been plotting for Smith since before the 1987 election. Photo: Stefano Cagnoni.

The brains behind the stitch-up

The GMB's General Secretary, John Edmonds, likes being known as the "brains" of the trade union movement.

And he has never made much secret of the fact that he regards Neil Kinnock as an intellectual lightweight whose only saving grace was his vigour in purging the Labour Party of undesirable left-wingers.

Even before the 1987 General Election, Edmonds was busy constructing an alliance of right-wing general secretaries (notably Bill Jordan of the AEU and Eric Hammond of the EETPU) to oust Kinnock and replace him with John Smith. Edmonds' plan was scuppered by Ron Todd of the TGWU, who stayed loyal to Kinnock (he is a T&G member, after all) and by Smith himself, who had a badly timed heart attack. "Brains" Edmonds was forced to abort his coup and stick with Kinnock for the duration.

But this year's election was Kinnock's last chance, as far as the towering intellect of the trade union movement was concerned. Even before the election was called, Edmonds began reassembling his "Smith for leader" alliance and let it be known that in the event of a Labour defeat, the GMB-sponsored Smith would make his bid, even if it meant standing against Kinnock.

Laird and Jordan naturally agreed, but the TGWU remained a problem. Edmonds' sweetener for Bill Morris was the proposal that Margaret Beckett, a T&G-sponsored MP, should be Smith's running-mate as deputy leader.

Morris denies that he made any deal: "The TGWU doesn't do deals like that under my leadership — and if I was doing a deal I should want the bigger half in any case". This may or may not be the case, but the facts are that Beckett was persuaded to stay in the race by pressure from Morris and the entire trade union hierarchy is now lined up behind the Smith-Beckett ticket.

The great irony of all this is that Edmonds, together with Jordan and Laird, has been to the fore in moves to dismantle the union block vote within the Labour Party and to replace the electoral college with one-person-one-vote. Yet, in their haste to install Smith, they claim that they cannot even ballot their members because it would cost too much money.

Not that most union members would be very excited by a ballot on the Labour leadership: Smith the machine man versus Gould who clearly wants a deal with the Liberals and Livingstone backed by the *Sun* and opposed even to Smith's modest redistributionist tax proposals. Still, it goes to show that Labour remains the party of the trade unions, and the trade union connection is not going to disappear — just become less open and less democratic.

One piece of relatively good news in these depressing times: Rover's proposals for a "Japanese"-style deal with its workforce was carried by a wafer-thin majority of 168 (out of a total workforce of 26,000) in a ballot.

That was despite the backing of all the shop-floor unions, including "left-wing" TGWU officials.

Up until now, "Japanese" work methods have been introduced gradually and by stealthy into the existing British motor industry. The Rover deal is the first example of a wholesale "package" being presented as a "take it or leave it" proposal to the workforce.

The sweeteners for accepting the scrapping of all job demarcations and the introduction of "production teams" (otherwise known as "quality circles") are single-status with white-collar employees, "jobs for life" for existing employees, and the end of clocking-on.

The strength of the opposition to the deal — despite unanimous union backing — has forced Rover management to issue a statement stressing that it would "proceed slowly". In other words, the class struggle continues despite its lack of leadership just at the moment.

INSIDE THE UNIONS

By Sleeper

From page 3

is part. The question is what are we to do? We put it to you, Comrade Benn, that socialists should not resign themselves passively to just doing nothing for 5 years as the Tory juggernaut rumbles through the Welfare State once more looking for things to flatten. We must not let the Tories continue to fight their enemies one by one, front by front.

We must organise. We must begin to fight back! Yes, you may say, but what can we do?

What we can do is to organise a national convention of the class struggle labour movement, Labour Party rank and file, Trade Unions, Trades Councils, minority groups, to coordinate the fight back against the Tories and, immediately, against the new Tory offensive. The official labour movement will not do this; no existing left wing entity is within a respectable distance of being able to do it. The convention of the left, which could discuss what to do and begin to create unofficial networks, could begin to do this work.

Such a thing would not counterpose itself to the existing official movements, Labour Party or Trade Union; on the contrary, one of its central jobs would be to

begin organising the rank and file to fight *within* the Labour Party and the various trade unions.

The different trade union branches, stewards' committees, trade union district committees and so on could be brought together, would begin to create the feel and texture of a movement, and then begin to generate that confidence the divided and atomised sections of the labour movement, deserted by the official structures of the labour movement, rarely now feel.

There have been a number of such gatherings in the history of our movement, and at crucial turning points in its history. The famous Leeds convention of July 1917 comes to mind, but there are others.

But who could call such a gathering, Comrade Benn? Not us in the Alliance for Workers' Liberty — we lack sufficient numbers and we lack the necessary authority. Not any of the existing 'revolutionary' groups, for similar reasons, and for other reasons too, not least, the narrow-minded sectarianism which dominates most of them. Not any of the middle class 'socialist' groups.

You, Comrade Benn, could do it! Together with the Campaign Group of MPs and labour movement bodies like — perhaps — the

Yorkshire NUM and others which would be likely to respond to your initiative, you, Comrade Benn, could act as the catalyst to bring such a movement together.

In the first place, it would be a matter of bringing together an organising committee to build for the convention. Such a committee would try to coordinate the efforts of the existing left wing groups, building something bigger and more representative than any of them could build singlehandedly.

In 1980, the Rank and File Mobilising Committee for Labour Democracy did what the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy was doing but — with the central participation of the CLPD — did it on a vastly greater scale. You will recall, Comrade Benn, that, for a period of about a year, we succeeded in creating comprehensive unity of all the forces of the British left, unity greater than anything which has existed in many decades.

That is what we should try to do again now. We can do it! The cry: 'Stop the Retreat!' backed up by an organising drive — that is now what the labour movement needs. It is what the left, scattered, divided and in many respects simply demoralised, needs.

No-one else, Comrade

Benn, but yourself and those you can influence, could hope to initiate this work on the scale that is required. For ourselves, we would, of course, put our resources into such work. So would many others on the left.

There are millions of British workers — many of whom did not vote on April 9 either because the struggle against the Poll Tax cost them their vote or because Kinnock's mimicry of the Tories made voting seem pointless to them: they need a lead from the labour movement; the labour movement needs them. A regenerated labour movement would be able to draw them around itself.

You are, Comrade Benn, and you have been since the '70s, the single most influential figure on the British left. The responsibility as well as the opportunity to take this initiative is yours.

We urge you, Comrade Benn, to help us set up an organising committee to build a rank and file convention sometime in the early autumn.

Now is the time to stop the retreat!

John O'Mahony for the Alliance for Workers' Liberty

PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA

"Sun" backs Ken Livingstone for Labour leader

The "left" pantomime candidate

THE POLITICAL FRONT

By Sean Matgamna

Easter, it seems, is this year's season of pantomime, not Christmas.

In pantomime, you will recall, everything is turned upside down and inside out. The "principal boy" is a woman, the Dame a man.

Events are larger than life, and sometimes an arch comment on life. Characters are stereotyped, wear colourful costumes, and have funny names. Animals, and sometimes inanimate objects, talk. Actors wink at the audience, mug for them, and talk to them out of the sides of their mouths. The audience, which is assumed to be childlike and innocent, is expected to respond on cue with hisses and boos and choruses of "yes" or "no".

Where else but in a ridiculous political pantomime would the arch-Tory *Sun* throw its support behind the "left-wing" candidate for leader of the Labour Party?

This character has a trick moustache and a whining — obviously false — South London voice. (Privately, no doubt, he speaks with an Eton baritone). He is known variously as Red Ken, Red Leicester, Cheesy Red, the future Lord Redken, or just scumbag.

Where else but in a ridiculous pantomime would a candidate — right, left, or centre — for leadership of the Labour Party accept the support of the *Sun*?

The *Sun*, with its "support" for "Red Ken", is hitting not only the left, but the Labour Party too. It is playing its own game of putting the clown's red nose in place of the red rose, and giving the donkey's tail on Red Leicester. By its support for Livingstone, the *Sun* is jear-

ing at the Labour Party and the labour movement.

Labour's Establishment has stit-ched up this election.

They are holding it in an indecent rush, to forestall Labour Party and trade union discussion of their failure in the General Election.

After Tony Benn challenged Kinnock for the leadership in 1988, the Party leaders imposed a rule that to stand a candidate must first have the backing of 20% of Labour MPs, or 55 MPs.

Yet the left needs to contest the election and challenge the Establishment, whatever the difficulties.

Tony Benn is both the best and the obvious candidate. He could probably — given reasonable time — have got over the "55 MPs" barrier. He has been the standard-bearer of the Labour left for the last two decades. He is a man of political integrity. It is possible to respect him while disagreeing with him (as *SO* does on many issues), and he is widely respected.

No other left-wing candidate would be likely to do as well as Benn.

The task for all those who want to see the left throw off its paralysis is to organise for Benn, that is, to organise enough grass-roots support to persuade Benn to stand. The timetable laid down by Labour's Establishment is brutally short; but that, as we argued in last week's *SO*, is what we need to do.

Into this situation bounds Red Leicester Livingstone, winking and grimacing for the audience and the media, proclaiming himself the left candidate for Labour leader, play-acting rather as he did when he dressed up in a cardboard crown and sceptre.

In fact he is not really a candidate, since he has not got and is unlikely to get the support of

55 MPs (unless one of the Establishment candidates sees a tactical advantage in having Livingstone in the contest).

His is a pseudo-candidacy, all wind and publicity — in fact, come to think of it, all you would expect a *Sun* candidate to be.

He uses *Sun* tactics, too. He told a well-attended meeting of the London Labour Left last Wednesday, 15th — lyingly, I believe — that Benn had seriously urged him to stand. His friends in the audience attacked Jeremy Corbyn, a possible left-wing candidate and one with better claim to the "left" colours than Livingstone could have. At the end of the meeting, after the chair's summing-up, Livingstone's manipulating sycophant John Ross was allowed to push through a snap vote for the meeting to endorse Livingstone.

Instead of helping to prepare the way for a serious candidacy, Ken Livingstone and his friends rushed to occupy the space a serious candidate would need, and settled in to enjoy the publicity of a pseudo-campaign. The effect of the Livingstone nonsense is to diminish the chances of a serious left candidate standing.

And what is this left-winger's political platform for the contest?

He criticises Labour's election campaign for its tax proposals! He is the *Sun* candidate here, too.

Labour's leaders were ineffective in combatting the Tory campaign that Labour would bring tax rises, but that was not because of the detail of the Shadow Budget, which, according to the Institute of Fiscal Studies, would have left those on between £400 and £499 a week a bit better off on average, and seriously hit only those on more than £1000 a week.

Livingstone's line — "you should not have threatened to



After he had sold the London left down the river as leader of the GLC, Ken Livingstone posed for the press in a cardboard crown and sceptre

raise the taxes of the rich" — as the platform of the left wing candidate is as daft as anything you could see in one of last Christmas's pantomimes.

All Livingstone is doing is recycling Tory propaganda. In fact he is just recycling the rubbish the *Sun* churned out during the election campaign!

In the early 1980s, when he led the Greater London Council, Livingstone relied entirely on a high tax-rate to keep him out of trouble and as an alternative response to Tory cuts, as against that advocated by the serious left: fight the Tories!

Livingstone will not be a candidate. And no real Left can develop around this Murdoch-sponsored pantomime campaign of the future Lord Redken, *Sun* columnist and *Sun* candidate on a *Sun* platform for leader of the Labour Party!

The Left needs Livingstone like it needs the *Sun*, or like we need the proverbial hole in the head.

More on Ken Livingstone's candidacy: page 12



Russian nationalism turns rabid

By Stan Crooke

"A government of national betrayal - over the past 400 years the history of Russia has not seen a government so hostile to the country's interests as the present one", is how a recent article in *Pravda* described the current Yeltsin-led government.

The article, by Valeri Smirnov, accused the government of "renunciation of its former allies, one-sided disarmament, and territorial concessions". By transforming "a great power into a new continent of the Third World", the government was bringing about the "hitherto unrealised dream of all enemies [of Russia] from Genghis Khan to Hitler".

Only six months ago the government had "separated off" from Russia the Baltic states, although they had been "part of Russia for the past half-century", and thereby "took the country back to the times of the Brest-Litovsk peace of 1918". In fact, Smirnov continued, the government "is prepared to throw us back to the fifteenth century, if not even earlier".

In order to put an end to the "new dictatorship" which was acting "contrary to all democratic norms", Smirnov - whose article was entitled "Revolution, Not Revolt" - advocated the creation of a "People's Front".

"As during the war, the threat hanging over the state as a whole renders of secondary importance the differences between Communists and monarchists, workers and factory-owners, believers and atheists, because only their joint activity can save the state from poverty and political chaos".

(Smirnov stressed that he was not endorsing the policies of Stalin on national boundaries: "A rejection of Stalinism means above all a liquidation of the network of fictitious borders which Stalin imposed upon a single country".)

There was hardly anything exceptional about the publication of Smirnov's article. Only three days earlier *Pravda* had carried an article by Viktor Linnik ("Ten 'Whys' After the Visit of James Baker")

claiming that the USA exercised more influence in the countries surrounding Russia than did Russia itself: "He has been more active in sorting out the ruins of the former USSR than we ourselves have been. He has obviously visited more capitals of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and visited them more frequently, than his Russian counterpart."

"Only six months ago the government had 'separated off' from Russia the Baltic states, and thereby 'took the country back to the times of the Brest-Litovsk peace of 1918'."

Baker's role, explained Linnik, was to draw the countries of the CIS "into the orbit of American policies, of the American view of the world". In doing so he was "inevitably separating them off from Russia, their immediate neighbour and natural ally".

Such extreme Russian nationalism is also the hallmark of Vladimir Zhirinovski, who polled six million votes in last year's Russian presidential elections and is leader of the Liberal-Democratic Party (covertly financed and illegally allowed to register as a political party by the Soviet Communist Party before the CP was banned by Yeltsin).

According to Zhirinovski the creation of the CIS was a "neo-Bolshevik betrayal which is directed against the Russians, because it will result in 50 separate republics within Russia".

The proclamation of independence by various former Soviet republics was similarly "a plot by the West which hands over Ukraine to Germany, makes the Far East a playground for Japan, and surrenders the whole of Central Asia to Iran and Afghanistan".

The borders of the new Russia envis-

aged by Zhirinovski would exclude territories in the Caucasus and the Asian republics of the former Soviet Union, but would include the Baltic states and Finland. At the same time, promises Zhirinovski, Germany would be reduced to the original territory of Prussia.

Alexander Rutskoi, Yeltsin's vice-president and now one of his leading opponents, has likewise appealed to Russian nationalism in order to strengthen his popular base: "Nobody will surrender even a foot of sacred Russian soil. For us, the thousand-year history of Russia is the greatest authority. The fixing of borders, and only the fixing of borders, will define Russia as a major power. And this will inevitably come about to the glory of Russia, however much the leaders may strive to drive Russia back into the borders of the 12th century".

Clearly, rabid Russian nationalism is no longer the exclusive property of fringe fascist and neo-fascist organisations such as Pamyat. Its resurgence is the product of the economic crisis in Russia and the political crisis within the CIS.

According to official Russian statistics, more than 30 million Russians are suffering from food shortages. Meat production, for example, fell by over 16% last year, and the massive price increases - in some cases 1,000% - introduced in January have impoverished entire layers of the population. Russia's Gross Domestic Product fell by 20% in 1991, and is calculated to fall by a further 20% in the first quarter of 1992.

Within the CIS the various governments fight for control over the remnants of the Soviet Union, especially the ex-Soviet armed forces, and are increasingly divided over national conflicts. The Russian nationalists regard such "squabbling" as symbolic of the decline of Russia as a major power.

As the economic and political crises deepen, the Russian nationalists hope that calls for strong leadership to restore Russia's national glory will attract ever greater support. Their mass mobilisation on the streets of Moscow on 9 February was one manifestation of their growing

self-confidence.

So too is their demand for the release of the leaders of the August coup. Russian elected deputies are calling for their release on the grounds that if "the last 'political prisoners', such as aeroplane hijackers, deserters and common traitors, are being released", then it is only fair that the coup leaders, "whose guilt has not been proven by any court", should be released as well.

An unofficial "commission of enquiry into the anti-popular and anti-state activities of M. Gorbachev" has also recently been established by self-proclaimed "representatives of different layers of the population, carrying out the people's will". The establishment of the commission has been "necessitated by the catastrophic situation of the mother-country and its suffering people".

"As the economic and political crises deepen, the Russian nationalists hope that calls for strong leadership to restore Russia's national glory will attract ever greater support."

Within sections of the Russian armed forces a creeping purge continues - of officers who opposed the August coup. According to Vladimir Dudnik, writing in the magazine *Ogonyok* in January: "At the highest levels those who supported the coup continue to keep their ranks, and even continue to be promoted... Precisely those who were the most zealous in carrying out the orders of Kryuchkov, Yazov and Pugo [leaders of the August coup] have launched a massive attack on those who refused to carry out the criminal orders".

With a new round of price increases on the way, and a still rising level of discontent in the armed forces, the appeal of Russian chauvinism in the months ahead looks set to attract growing support from an increasingly desperate population.

Stalinists fall on hard times

GRAFFITI

If you are unlucky enough to pick up a copy of the *New Times*, the paper of the now defunct Communist Party, aka Democratic Left, look at the pictures very carefully.

Back in the days of Stalin teams of artists would paint out "non-people" like Trotsky from old revolutionary photographs.

In the photograph on page 4 of the latest *New Times*, you might see some banners in the background. They used to be anti-poll tax, but now they've been altered.

The only departure from the old unreconstructed Stalinist past is this time the slogans have been scribbled out with a biro, not brushed out by a trained artist.

The Democratic Left, it seems, is so poor it is unable even to falsify photographs competently. Now that the Moscow gold has dried up they're having to raise funds - and so far this quarter they've raised the princely sum of £133 towards their £6,000 target.

Not too hot? Never mind, suggests the fundraiser. "We can supply neat folding boxes...placed on the mantelpiece during meetings. It's surprising how quickly the coins add up."

On the mantelpiece? The Democratic Left must have:

- (a) Very large front rooms, or;
- (b) Very small meetings, or;
- (c) "Meetings" which are really having a few old friends around for a coffee, or;
- (d) All of the above.

Answers on a postcard to the Democratic Left, c/o The Electoral Reform Society.

So the Labour Party needs to be "modernised"? What does this mean? Is Walworth Road to be fitted with computer controlled doors so that no-one to the left of Prying Gould will be admitted?

Or perhaps the policies will be electronically tagged to more accurately measure their rightward moving speed, although finding many of the policies first may prove difficult.

Perhaps the Labour Party staff will be replaced with a bunch of soulless androids designed to pander to the Tory press, although many believe this has already happened.

A grateful nation lets fly a cheer - Andrew Lloyd Webber, friend of the people, has saved "Old Horse Guards Parade" by Canaletto for the nation.

As the cheering crowds line the roads from the picture's current stately home, that of Lord Malmesbury, to Webber's 4,000 acre estate near Newbury, a great swell of national pride fills the air. The gathered masses tug their forelocks to a true gent, one who always has the nation's best interests at heart, proud to think that it will hang above the fireplace of a Brit, not a foreigner.

And the huddled masses know that if a Labour Government had been elected, the picture may not have been saved, and indeed Webber himself, the greatest living piece of national heritage, might have flown overseas.

The cost of the painting will be covered by the money that a heartless government would have extracted from Webber in its first 200 days to waste on schools and hospitals, which not only aren't as nice to look at as a Canaletto, but would not have been built in Webber's drawing room.

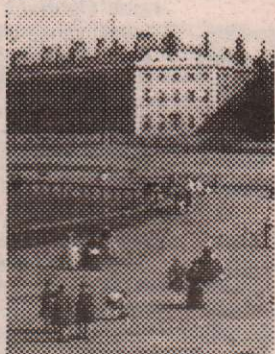
Andrew sits down to pen another of his original and stirring scores... "I'm in the money, I'm in the money..."

Just in case you'd forgotten that it doesn't take a general election to make the *Sun* reactionary, take a look at last Thursday's edition.

Commenting on a local AIDS group giving out leaflets at a QPR game, the *Sun* says "What a waste of time". AIDS, apparently, is a disease limited to "homosexuals and drug addicts" (who presumably don't like football).

It gives a whole new meaning to "man on" and "tackled from behind", the defender of public morals continues, and finishes with the suggestion that the team change its name to "Queer Park Rangers".

You have to hope that no *Sun* "journalist" has a sex life.



Shoot the messenger



PRESS GANG

By Jim Denham

According to at least one regular reader of this column, the election result has proved me wrong, wrong, wrong about the tabloids: their crude, unrelenting anti-Labour propaganda does have a real effect, after all.

And in this election it was decisive. Neil Kinnock said so, the *Sun* boasted of it, and many Labour activists believe they experienced it on the knocker. Call Lord McAlpine to the witness stand:

"The heroes of this campaign were Sir David English, Sir Nicholas Lloyd, Kelvin Mackenzie and the other editors of the popular Tory press. Never in the past nine elections have they come out so strongly in favour of the Conservatives. Never has their attack on the Labour Party been so comprehensive. They exposed, ridiculed and

humiliated that party, doing each day in their pages the job that the politicians failed to do from their bright new platforms." (*Sunday Telegraph*, 12 April).

Coming from the former Treasurer of the Tory Party, this testimony certainly carries weight: no wonder Neil Kinnock made bitter response to it in his resignation statement.

Then there is the Basildon Factor (aka the Essex Man effect): we are reliably informed that half the electors of Basildon read the *Sun*. Simon Hoggart of the *Observer* got his pocket calculator out and concluded that it took just one in 18 *Sun* readers to switch their vote as a result of believing their paper, to give the Tories victory in that key C2 marginal.

The evidence seems overwhelming: so why am I so resistant to the idea that the *Sun*, *Express*, *Mail* and *Star* are Wot Won It for the Tories? First of all, there is a considerable body of evidence, accumulated over many years, to show that tabloid readers have a healthy disregard and distrust of their papers' bias.

Secondly, the chief witnesses - Kinnock and McAlpine - both have their own reasons for wanting to boost the importance of the tabloids: Kinnock because he was the victim of a particularly nasty

personalised campaign and McAlpine because he's an unreconstructed Thatcherite who wants to downgrade the Major team who ran the official Tory campaign.

But, crucially, the "blame the tabloids" (or "credit the tabloids", if you're Lord McAlpine) explanation is a profoundly pessimistic conclusion for anyone who believes that the working class can change society: are the 10 million people who buy the Tory tabloids all gullible fools? Or even one in 18 of them? What price a "socialism" that takes so dim a view of the raw material it has to work with?

I have my own expert witnesses. Here is Tony Benn in Monday's *Guardian*: "It is no use blaming the media, the pollsters or the image-makers, for they are all responding, in their own way, to the clear and accurate perception that Labour had consciously decided to limit its appeal to those who wished to see the political, economic and social status quo better managed, but not fundamentally altered. In other words, don't shoot the messenger."

Of course, resisting the argument that the tabloids won it for the Tories is not to deny that the British press is overwhelmingly pro-Tory and that their bias was on display for all to see throughout the election campaign.



Tony Benn

And yet it seems that the Tories now regard the grotesquely biased press as the norm by which the broadcast media should be judged - and have, therefore, concluded that the BBC is a repository of pro-Labour propaganda.

On the Sunday before polling day the *Sunday Times* reported unnamed Tories fulminating against the BBC: "Just wait and see what they'll bloody get when we are re-elected", said one "leading figure".

No matter that the BBC cancelled the *Panorama* programme and systematically played down the polls in the run-up to the election; no matter that John Birt has spent the last five years attempting to appease the Tories by imposing a "neutrality" on television and radio news and current affairs that has made most of it pathetically bland: the Tories are out for blood. And, unlike Neil Kinnock, they have the bullets to shoot the messenger.

The morning after



WOMEN'S EYE

By Antonella Mancini

I awoke on Friday morning, 10 April, and heard my sister, who lives in the flat below me, cry out, "Oh no, not the Conservatives!"

I knew then that Labour had lost. I didn't want to get out of bed but had no choice. My 10 month old son, obli-

ous to the past few weeks of the election campaign, cried out to be fed. For him it was just another day.

For the first time since his birth I felt a great feeling of remorse - what kind of a world had I brought him into? I wanted to apologise to him.

As a single parent and a student, I have felt the effects of the Tory decade of cuts. Having to live on an absolute pittance, I find each day a balancing act between whether I can afford a few pounds for the electricity budget key or a bus ride to college, which, thanks to privatisation, now involves two bus journeys instead of one, and therefore extra costs.

I have exams in two months' time and have to juggle my work-load around my son's hours. I would love to be able to afford to send him to a nursery for a couple of hours each week, but instead have to rely on the goodwill of friends. His name is on a waiting list for a council-run nursery, but my local



"Labour would at least have addressed the issues that should matter - like education"

neighbourhood office told me that extreme cases get priority and I would be very lucky to get a place at all.

This is all small fry compared to those people who have lost their jobs, their homes, their will to fight.

I am fortunate to have a roof over my head and a good support network of friends, but I do despair of the future; the state of schooling, my job prospects after university - my degree subjects, sociology and anthropology have come under a lot of attack during

the past decade. A Labour government would at least have addressed some of the issues that should just be a matter of course in a decent society.

After the initial post-election blues I now feel, not dejection, but a great desire to do something - I'm not quite sure how or what I can possibly do. But certainly I hope that by the time my son starts full-time schooling people wake up to what Conservatism means for most of us and have the sense to boot the Tories out.

Student socialists "purged" from NUS Executive on snap vote:

Defeat this witch-hunt!

By Alice Sharp

After Left Unity had polled the highest vote for three candidates from one political faction since the present system of election for the part-time places on the National Union of Students executive was introduced, a witch-hunt came as no surprise on the final day of conference.

Mark Sandell and Kevin Sexton (part-time Executive members), Steve Mitchell (VP FEUD) and Liz Millward (Chair of Steering Committee), all Left Unity supporters, were accused of physically intimidating Sam Peters (NUS National Secretary, right-wing Labour). It was a complete frame-up, and the way the accusations were dealt with was a scandal.

The alleged incidents are supposed to have taken place in March this year, at the NUS Emergency Conference called unconstitutionally to try to ratify a decision the right wing had already cheated on – the abolition of Winter Conference.

Peters chaired the conference, and at the end it was loud and chaotic, as delegates protested at an attempted "fix". But she made no formal or informal charges of intimidation at the Emergency Conference against anyone in the weeks between the Emergency Conference in March and the Spring Conference in April.

Then, three charges were put in the form of emergency motions to condemn physical intimidat-



Left Unity has been at the forefront of organising student resistance to the Tories

tion and express "no confidence" in the accused. A "no confidence", if passed, means immediate removal from NUS office.

A rotten bloc of right-wing Labour, Liberals, so-called Independents, and the Union of Jewish Students, all helped by the SWP delegates strategically absenting themselves, voted to change the order of business and make sure the "no confidence" motions were taken.

The charges were put to a whipped-up, hysterical conference. There was no investigation, no inquiry, no questions to the

accused who had just 90 seconds in which to reply.

The "jury" was a thousand-plus people crammed into a hall,

"The charges were put to a whipped-up, hysterical conference. There was no investigation, no inquiry, no questions to the accused who had just 90 seconds in which to reply."

hyped up on three days and nights of factional warfare.

Left Unity supporters fought

hard to defend their comrades and to defend NUS democracy, arguing one-to-one with the delegates on conference floor.

The guillotine fell on the "debate" before the charges were proposed against Kevin Sexton and Liz Millward. Jim Murphy, the Stalinist president of NUS Scotland, then proposed the charges be voted on as a whole, without Kev and Liz having any chance to reply or even hear the case against them!

Jim Murphy's proposals fell, but the "no confidence" motions against Mark Sandell and Steve Mitchell were passed by around 100 votes.

During the count, dozens of delegates, revolted by what they were witnessing, rose to their feet to sing the Internationale in an act of defiance.

At the Left Unity caucus at the end of conference, a couple of hundred students, many of them not Left Unity supporters decided to fight the witch-hunt.

The Campaign for Democracy in NUS, launched to fight the corruption around the abolition of Winter Conference, is taking up the battle to clear Steve and Mark's names and to prevent this kind of witch-hunt taking place in the future.

Basic principles of fair trial, the right to reply, innocent until proven guilty and so on – not socialist principles, but good bourgeois, democratic principles

– are alien to the people who run NUS under the banner of Labour.

Left Unity is calling for a full investigation into the allegations. Steve and Mark are committed socialists. They have not intimidated women, physically or otherwise, and their names must be cleared.

"The guillotine fell on the "debate" before the charges were proposed against Kevin Sexton and Liz Millward. Jim Murphy, the Stalinist president of NUS Scotland, then proposed the charges be voted on as a whole, without Kev and Liz having any chance to reply or even hear the case against them!"

Student unions should pass motions condemning the frame-up. Left Unity will be calling for an investigating committee, to be made up of experienced and independent student movement activists.

Left Unity supporters have nothing to fear. We are winning the political arguments and this is good for the whole student movement. If the right wing can't handle it, they should step down. There is no place in our movement for corruption, witch-hunts and abuse of democracy.

Left Unity wins four executive places

By Steve Mitchell

Janine Booth, Left Unity candidate for NUS President came close to beating the Labour student (NOLS) candidate at the recent NUS Conference (April 13-16th) and continued to build up sup-

port as the largest group in NUS.

NOLS, Liberals and right-wing independents won the other full-time positions. Left Unity won three "executive members", Kevin Sexton, Elaine Jones and Jeni Bailey, adding to Alice Sharp's success as the new Women's Officer.

The right-wing bloc's majority at Conference ensured the defeat of left-wing positions in most of the debates, but there were some victories.

Wang Dan, the student leader of the Chinese revolt in 1989 was elected honorary Vice-President. Mark Sandell, moving his nomination, pointed out that support for Wang Dan signified a break with the support NUS had given to the Stalinist state unions.

Conference also backed a Left Unity motion calling for a unified, democratic anti-racist, anti-fascist movement. Affiliation to the Anti-Nazi League was defeated after Jewish delegates attacked it as an SWP front.

Conference also supported making links with all those genuinely fighting apartheid, including the Workers Organisation for Socialist Action (WOSA), whilst defeating calls for NUS to be critical of the present "peace process"

Delegates also gave overwhelming support for Left Unity proposals to continue the fight for abortion rights, and heard Kate Fearon from Ireland explaining the struggles of Irish women for access to abortion facilities.

SWP and Militant aid the right wing – again!

By Janine Booth

"The SWP principled socialists? Bullshit!" is how Jeni Bailey described the SWP's decision to shift votes to a right-winger in the election for Vice President Further Education Union Development.

Jeni, the Left Unity candidate, was beaten by right-wing "independent" Pamela Lucas, thanks to the SWP's votes.

The SWP also played a dis-

graceful role in the witch-hunt against Left Unity at the end of conference. When right-wingers were pushing the witch-hunt on to the agenda, the SWP blandly agreed that we should "have the debate". When the vote was taken on the "no confidence", several leading SWPers had left the conference floor.

Militant's "Marxist" analysis of events took the form of voting for NOLS against Left Unity.

The NUS conference passed a Steering Committee report which said that the attempt by NUS President, Stephen Twigg, to abolish NUS Winter Conference was invalid.

The abolition needs a two-thirds majority at two successive conferences. It failed to get two-thirds at Winter Conference 1991, but Twigg unconstitutionally called a "re-vote" to get two-thirds.

Then – also unconstitutionally – he called a rigged-up

"Emergency Conference" this March to get a second two-thirds majority. The card vote at "Emergency Conference" failed to get two-thirds, so Twigg, after the Conference, "ruled in" extra votes for abolition!

The 13-16 April conference passed a report declaring the "abolition" invalid. But Twigg says his ruling still stands! Unless he backs down, it looks as if the issue will go to court.

Czecho-Slovakia's new trade union

"We cannot allow people to slide into poverty"

By Vrata Votava

Unlike many earlier popular uprisings against the monopoly power of the party-state bureaucracy, notably the strike movement in Poland 1980, from which the independent and self-management Solidarity unions were formed, the demand for independent unions did not play any significant role in the Czechoslovak "Velvet Revolution".

The dissident intellectual, artist and student "velvet revolutionaries" gave workers only a walk-on part in the revolution. Their goal, the complete inversion of the old system, prevented them from seeing in the workers the fundamental social group, with its own interests.

Workers were very poorly represented in the Coordination Centre of Civic Forum. The few "spokesmen for the workers" were soon "kicked upstairs" into various state bodies. Engineering worker Peter Miller became Minister of Labour and Social Affairs in the Klaus government.

The old trade unions, the ROH, came under intense pressure, mainly over the close links between the union and the Communist Party leadership. The liquidation of the ROH at the all-union conference of March 1990 was the logical conclusion of this process.

Civic Forum leaders announced that new unions would be formed on the basis of local Civic Forums and workplace strike alert committees. The for-

mation of the Czechoslovak Trade Union Confederation (CSKOS) was supposed to be the culmination of that process. Unfortunately CSKOS was formed from the top down, and never managed to win support in the basic organisations.

The "non-political" policies of CSKOS are a result of the leadership's close links to the leadership of Civic Movement and, increasingly, the Social Democratic Party.

It is no coincidence that parliament chose this transitional

"Unfortunately, CSKOS was formed from the top down, and never managed to win support in the basic organisations. The 'non-political' policies of CSKOS are a result of the leadership's close links to the leadership of the Civic Movement and, increasingly, the Social Democratic Party."

period to approve the new law on state enterprises. This law removed all elements of enterprise self-management, like the work collective council, election of

managers, and so on.

The newly-forming state bureaucracy was thus able to move forward the "starting line" for its sell-off of industry according to its own desires and the demands of foreign capital.

Subsequent development showed that the government considered the unions as an unpleasant barrier to their "economic transformation". This is clearly shown by the way in which the new unions, just as they were forming, were forced to give up most of their decision-making and co-management rights. The new Labour Code and the Law on Collective Bargaining contained only 10 of 56 elements of trade union co-management.

Why is CSKOS so weak in negotiations with government? Why is it unable to stop the transformation of property relations by the organised state bureaucracy, against the interest of the working people? Apart from the weak relationship to the base, there is an even deeper reason: the one-sided orientation of the union leadership to the tripartite model, seeing this as the only areas of activity which can ensure "social harmony". CSKOS participation in the government-employer-union Council of Social and Economic Accord, which union bosses justify with Western union-style rhetoric of "social partnership" ignored Czechoslovak conditions, and is a failure.

The formation of OS CMS is a new chance for the trade union movement here. But the new union must be able to overcome the problems mentioned above.

Czecho-Slovak society needs genuinely independent and pro-self-management unions, springing from the self-defence and self-organisation of waged labour. They must be grass roots organisations, based at the factory level.

These unions cannot limit themselves to wage, or even general social demands, and yet stay neutral or passive concerning the transformation of property relations and erosion of workers' co-management rights. Just the opposite! Such passivity would leave wage labour at the mercy of the wishes of the state bureaucracy and new private owners, of domestic but mainly foreign origin.

The mechanisms of "social partnership" cannot solve much in our present conditions. Given the depth of economic decision-making at the current time, "social partnership" seems more like the corporatist system of fascist Italy, Spain or Portugal.

The most important task for independent and self-management unions is the struggle for democratic means of de-statisation of national property, and the establishment of ownership over it, using a wide range of self-management and employee-entrepreneur forms. Possible examples include the American ESOP system, or

"The mechanisms of 'social partnership' cannot solve much in our present conditions. Given the depth of economic decision-making at the current time, 'social partnership' seems more like the corporatist system of fascist Italy, Spain or Portugal."

the Mondragon co-operative network in Spain.

The demand for the widest possible co-management by workers at all levels of the economy gives the trade unions their specific character in our current conditions. Co-operation with those left political forces with self-management programmes will be to the advantage of both sides:

* Vrat'a Votava is president of Left Alternative (Leva alternativa), a coalition of small anarchist and Trotskyist groups, as well as militants from the Romany national minority. He is standing for election to the Czech Parliament on the Communist Party's Left Bloc list.

(Reprinted from Nase pracef, 20 March 1992; translated by Adam Novak)



The demand for independent union

**OSCMS:
in the lan**

Karel Hynes, President of the Trade Union Association of Bohemia, Moravia, and Slovakia (OS CMS) talked to Adam Novak

How did your union form?

We were founded in April 1991, ten months after the old federation (ROH) was dissolved. Trade union rights were more and more under attack. 56% of the 8 million original members had left the unions. The new federation (CSKOS) was not interested. 2,000 dissatisfied militants founded OS CMS to stop the erosion of trade union rights, to build up the unions, and to make them a real force in the land on social questions. We are a general union, because we don't want to further divide the union movement. By our first congress in October 1991 we had 120,000 members. We are growing slowly but steadily.

Leaders of the major federation, CSKOS, have dismissed you as "Red Unions", splitting the movement for political reasons...

I was, and am, a communist. But we have members from all political parties. Our union is not non-political; "non-political" doesn't mean anything, except maybe supporting the government.



CHCEME MU VRÁTIT LES - A VON HO NECHCE ZPÁTKY !

"We want to give him back the forest, but he doesn't seem to want it!" Cartoon by Vladimír Jiránek from Lidove noviny



did not play any significant role in the Czechoslovak "Velvet Revolution"

"We want to be a real force d on social questions"

We have policies on defending certain rights, but we are in no way a party union. We want the greatest possible union unity, and wherever possible a joint approach to management and the government. We have good relations with the Christian unions.

It's no secret that relations with the federation are worse. We have had one meeting with them, and will have another exchange of views soon. Ordinary people know unity is necessary, but some of the federation's union leaders are not interested.

How many staff do you have?
One staff member and one secretary. We don't want a large secretariat, we would rather create full-time posts for lawyers and other staff in the regions, at the source. The other trade unions have only industrial structures, and have abandoned the regions. This is a mistake. Regional organisation is very important for unemployment, education and other social questions.

One woman produces our newspaper *Nase prace* (*Our Labour*) as a part-time job. It has a print run of 10,000. We want to go weekly as soon as possible. We are glad to have a growing number of correspondents; we want it to be a paper of the union members, to which the leaders respond, and not a paper of the union leaders.

What is your view of the economic reform?
The economic reform is asocial,

it doesn't take social questions into account. None of the governing parties had the current reforms in their electoral programmes. We simply cannot allow people to slide into real poverty through no fault of their own.

And privatisation?
Privatisation, originally one of the means to achieve the economic transformation, has become the sole goal of the transformation. We want the original reform programmes — equality of property and enterprise forms. We want to see the development of worker shares, ESOP, co-operatives, etc. Privatisation is becoming increasingly political and its critics attacked more and more sharply.

What about the coupon privatisation?
This was supposed to be something for the people, but the investment funds are more and more important, and many of them have foreign capital behind them — so this is another back door way for foreign capital to buy up our industry cheaply.

And foreign investment?
We are not against foreign investment. The issue is the conditions under which investment comes. Foreigners must invest to produce, not to win markets or to speculate. A big problem is the government's policy of cheap labour to win investments. This is not good for us or for workers in the West, where it pushes down wages and weakens the struggle for

better conditions. This surely reinforces the need for us all to work together.

Why are there still virtually no strikes in Czechoslovakia?

Fear, pure and simple. Everybody expects further job losses, and does not want to be the first. Also, don't forget that people are not used to these new conditions. Before work moved to the people. Now they have no work.

What will OS CMS do about the elections?

The union as such won't stand in the election. But 11 of our members will stand as union candidates, with our programme, on the lists of parties of which they are members; five with the Left Bloc, and others with the Liberal Social Union (a social-democratic-type coalition of the Socialist, Green and Agrarian parties). Entering parliament wasn't our original goal; we've been pushed to it by developments. We want to be at the source of legislation, and influence it.

The economic situation will certainly worsen after the elections. Do you think workers will become more militant and left-wing?

I think this is happening now, before the elections. There is however a danger that people disillusioned with the reforms will simply not vote. It is the job of the left to make them participate, no matter which left party they will vote for.

Tragedy in Kabul

By Jack Cleary

The imminent victory of the Muslim mujahedin in Kabul is bringing to a close a long and tragic chapter in the struggle of the urban middle class, and sections of the embryonic working class, in Afghanistan against the forces of a barbaric countryside.

Afghanistan's rural world is one thousand and more years behind the main towns, which are oases of modern civilisation in a sea of tribal society. Large-scale massacres of their enemies are only too likely to be a part of the mujahedin victory.

Yet there is more to it. The Muslim fighters' conquest of the capital, Kabul, is also the final episode in a heroic battle waged by the people of Afghanistan — the people as they are, which is not what socialists would like them to be — to stop themselves being subdued by foreign invaders.

"The bloody failure in Afghanistan was one of the factors which undermined and then brought down the Stalinist system."

From 1979 to 1988, the Russian empire tried and failed to conquer Afghanistan, using the people who are now losing control of the towns as its allies and puppets. Against the people of Afghanistan they used all the terrible techniques of repression developed by the other great imperialist predators of the mid 20th century against colonial peoples.

They did what the Americans did in Vietnam, what the French did in Algeria and Indochina, and what the Nazis had done in those parts of the USSR they overran at the beginning of the Second World War.

They slaughtered civilians, burned crops to control the supply of food to the guerrillas fighting them, napalmed villages.

By the early '80s, one in four of Afghanistan's 20 million people — that is, about five million people — had been driven over the Pakistan and Iran borders as refugees.

The Russian empire could not generate enough energy and determination to win: to do that would have required more than double the 100,000 Russian soldiers continuously there, and

involved the massacre of immense numbers of Afghans. The faltering USSR never got more than a garrison control in Afghanistan's cities, and then it got bogged down. The bloody failure in Afghanistan was one of the factors which undermined and then brought down the Stalinist system.

For eight and a half years, the Russian occupation overshadowed everything else. The fact that the Afghan regime the Russians left behind them when they withdrew in 1988 did not collapse for over three years indicates that it was not only a creature of the Russians. A version of that regime had been in power before the Russian invasion. It came to power in a coup in April 1978 organised by the Afghan CP (the "People's Democratic Party", PDP), which was heavily middle-class and controlled the key segments of the officer corps of the air force and the army.

Many of those who made that PDP coup in 1978 had made an earlier coup, overthrowing the king, in 1973, only to see power slip from their hands. They turned to the PDP, as did the professional middle class.

That turn to Stalinism was prepared for by the fact that from the mid '50s onwards Afghanistan was in close military alliance with the USSR, confronting Pakistan which was allied to the USA. The officers and technicians of the air force, the tank crews, and so on, were trained in the USSR.

Over time they adopted the goal of creating a Stalinist state in Afghanistan to modernise the country.

But all those developments were happening in the towns. The PDP failed to raise the people of the countryside against the priests and landlords. Within months of the April 1978 coup, the landlords and the priests had roused the people against the "infidel" regime.

Civil war and brutal intra-Stalinist faction-fighting and purges within the airforce and the army brought the regime to the verge of disaster. To avert that, the USSR invaded over Christmas 1979.

Nine years later they left. Now the town-based armed forces and secularised professional classes who allied with the USSR, and thought they could modernise Afghanistan by Stalinist methods of state terror and forced-march industrialisation have come to the disaster they looked to the Russians to stave off in 1979.

Theirs is the tragedy of a class which took power in conditions where it could not realise its programme because of the backwardness of the society in which they live.



Afghan soldiers stand guard outside Kabul before the fall of Najibullah

Engels and Lenin on parliamentary democracy under capitalism

“Wealth has power indirectly,

In this, the second of a series of excerpts from *State and Revolution*, Lenin explains how, in even a full parliamentary democracy, without any monarchy or House of Lords, capitalist class rule continues behind the scenes of apparent equality. The worker has one vote, and the capitalist has one vote; but the capitalist also has power through the ability of his wealth to influence state officials, affect government finances, control the media, and so on.

None of this means that Lenin thought parliamentary democracy was irrelevant and unimportant. He was writing for a Marxist movement which had long focused much of its energy on fighting for and utilising parliamentary democracy, and “bending the stick” towards recognition of the *limits* of parliamentary democracy as long as capitalist power over the means of production remains. In contrast to later Stalinist distortions, Lenin takes it as obvious that “the political form” of socialism must be “the most complete democracy.”

3. THE STATE AS AN INSTRUMENT FOR THE EXPLOITATION OF THE OPPRESSED CLASS

For the maintenance of the special public power standing above society, taxes and state loans are needed.

“In possession of the public power and the right to levy taxes,” Engels writes, “the officials now stand, as organs of society, *above* society. The free, voluntary respect that was accorded to the organs of the gentile [clan] constitution does not satisfy them, even if they could gain it....” Special laws are enacted proclaiming the sanctity and inviolability of the officials. “The shabbiest police servant” has more “authority” than the representatives of the clan, but even the head of the military power of a civilised state may well envy the elder of a clan for the “unforced respect” of

society.

Here the problem of the privileged position of the officials as organs of state power is raised. The main question indicated is: What is it that places them *above* society? We shall see how this theoretical question was answered in practice by the Paris Commune in 1871 and how it was slurred over in a reactionary manner by Kautsky in 1912.

“Because the state arose from the need to hold class antagonisms in check, and because it arose, at the same time, in the midst of the conflict of these classes, it is, as a rule, the state of the most powerful, economically dominant class, which, through the medium of the state, becomes also the politically dominant class, and thus acquires new means of holding down and exploiting the oppressed class.” Not only were the ancient and feudal states organs for the exploitation of the slaves and serfs, but “the modern representative state is an instrument of exploita-

tion of wage labour by capital. By way of exception, however, periods occur in which the warring classes balance each other so nearly that the state power, as ostensible mediator, acquires, for the moment, a certain degree of independence of both.” Such were the absolute monarchies of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Bonapartism of the First and Second Empires in France, and the Bismarck regime in Germany.

Such, we may add, is the Kerensky government in republican Russia since the commencement of its persecution of the revolutionary proletariat, and at a moment when, owing to the leadership of the petty-bourgeois democrats, the Soviets have *already* become impotent, while the bourgeoisie is not yet strong enough simply to disperse them.

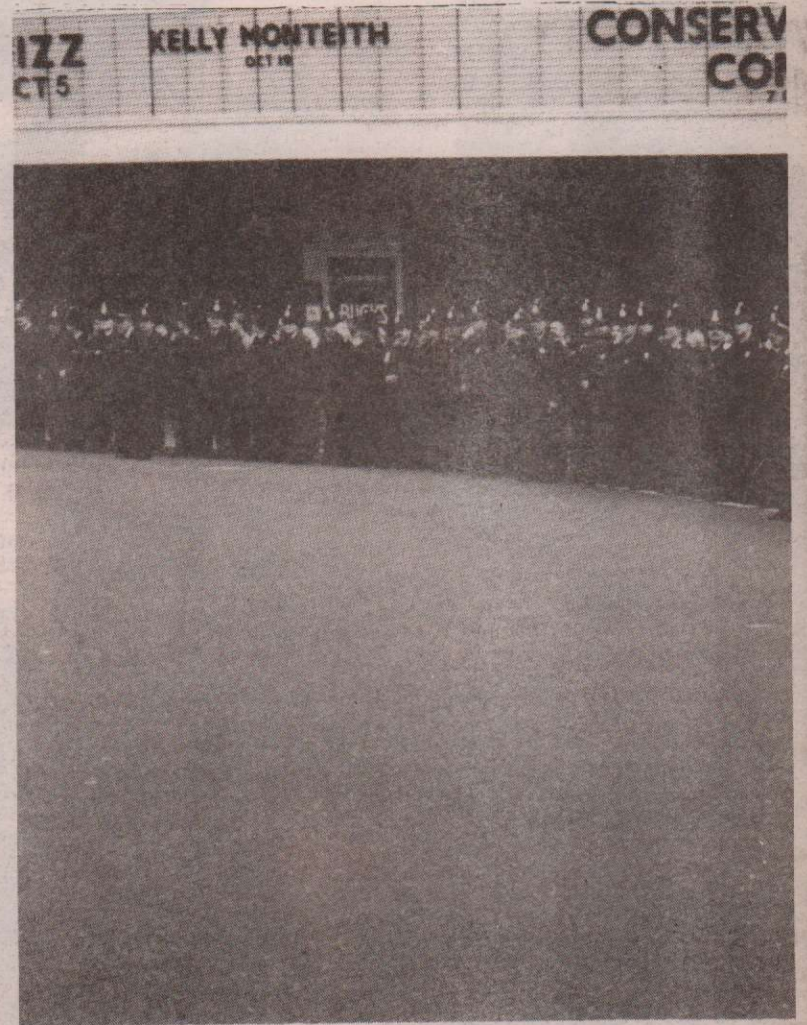
In a democratic republic, Engels continues, “wealth exercises its power indirectly, but all the more surely,” first, by means of the “direct corruption of officials” (America); second, by means of “an alliance between the government and the Stock Exchange” (France and America).

At the present time, imperialism and the domination of the banks have “developed” into an extraordinarily fine art both these methods of upholding and giving effect to the omnipotence of wealth in democratic republics of all descriptions. If, for instance, in the very first months of the Russian democratic republic, one might say during the honeymoon of the “socialist” S.R.’s and Mensheviks joined in wedlock to the bourgeoisie, Mr. Palchinsky, in the coalition government, sabotaged every measure intended for curbing the capitalists and their marauding practices, their plundering of the treasury by means of war contracts; and if later on Mr. Palchinsky, upon resigning from the cabinet (and being, of course, replaced by another quite similar Palchinsky), was “rewarded” by the capitalists with a lucrative job bringing in a salary of 120,000 rubles per annum, what would you call that? Direct or indirect bribery? An alliance between the government and the directors of syndicates, or “merely” friendly relations? What role do the Chernovs, Tseretelis, Avksentyevs and Skobelevs play? Are they the “direct” or only the indirect allies of the millionaire treasury-looters?

The reason why the omnipotence of “wealth” is *more sure* in a democratic republic is that it does not depend on a bad political shell of capitalism. A democratic republic is the best possible political shell for capitalism, and, therefore, once capital has grasped this very best shell (through the Palchinskys, Chernovs, Tseretelis and Co.), it establishes its power so securely, so surely, that *no* change, either of persons, of institutions, or of parties in the bourgeois democratic republic, can shake this power.

We must also note that Engels is most definite in calling universal suffrage an instrument of bourgeois rule. Universal suffrage, he says, obviously taking into account the long experience of German Social-Democracy, is “the gauge of the maturity of the working class. It cannot and never will be anything more in the present-day state....”

The petty-bourgeois democrats, such as our Socialist-Revolutionaries and Mensheviks, and also their blood



The police protect the bosses' party

brothers, all the social-chauvinists and opportunists of Western Europe, expect just this “more” from universal suffrage. They themselves share and instil into the minds of the people the false idea that universal suffrage “in the *present-day* state” is really capable of ascertaining the will of the majority of the working people and of securing its realisation.

Here we can only take note of this false idea, only point out that Engels’ perfectly clear, precise and concrete statement is distorted at every step in the propaganda and agitation of the “official” (i.e., opportunist) socialist parties. A detailed exposure of the utter falsity of this idea which Engels brushes aside here is given in our further account of the views of Marx and Engels on the “*present-day*” state.

“Universal suffrage, he says, obviously taking into account the long experience of German Social-Democracy, is ‘the gauge of the maturity of the working class. It cannot and never will be anything more in the present-day state’...”

Engels gives a general summary of his views in the most widely read of his works in the following words:

“The state, then, has not existed from all eternity. There have been societies that did without it, that had no idea of the state and state

power. At a certain stage of economic development, which was necessarily bound up with the split of society into classes, the state became a necessity owing to this split. We are now rapidly approaching a stage in the development of production at which the existence of these classes not only will have ceased to be a necessity, but will become a positive hindrance to production. They will fall as inevitably as they arose at an earlier stage. Along with them the state will inevitably fall. Society, which will reorganise production on the basis of a free and equal association of the producers, will put the whole machinery of state where it will then belong: into the museum of antiquities, by the side of the spinning-wheel and the bronze axe.”

We do not often come across this passage in the propaganda and agitational literature of present-day Social-Democracy. But even when we do come across it, it is mostly quoted in the same manner as one bows before an icon, i.e., it is done to show official respect for Engels, and no attempt is made to gauge the breadth and depth of the revolution that this relegating of “the whole state machine to the museum of antiquities” presupposes. In most cases we do not even find an understanding of what Engels calls the state machine.

4. THE “WITHERING AWAY” OF THE STATE AND VIOLENT REVOLUTION

Engels’ words regarding the “withering away” of the state are so widely known, they are so often quoted, and so clearly reveal the essence of the customary counterfeiting of Marxism into opportunism that we must deal



Bourgeois democracy in Chile was older than in most European countries, but when a left-wing government headed by Salvador Allende was elected in 1970 all hell broke loose. The middle classes followed the bourgeoisie into open revolt; the CIA deliberately set out to destabilise the government. Then in September 1973 Chile’s armed forces organised a coup. The labour movement was pulverised and tens of thousands of its militants were killed, tortured and imprisoned. The fear of such a coup paralysed the Labour Government of the mid-70s: the trade union leader Jack Jones admitted it publicly. In the early ‘80s, fear of what then Labour leader Michael Foot called “the stormtroopers” helped stop Labour fight back with direct action against Thatcherism.

but all the more surely”



experience of one of the greatest proletarian revolutions, the Paris Commune of 1871, of which we shall speak in greater detail in its proper place. As a matter of fact, Engels speaks here of the proletarian revolution “putting an end to” the *bourgeois* state, while the words “withering away” refer to the remnants of the *proletarian* state system after the socialist revolution. According to Engels, the bourgeois state does not “wither away,” but the proletariat “puts an end to” it in the course of the revolution. What withers away after this revolution is the proletarian state or semi-state. Secondly, the state is a “special repressive force.” Engels gives this splendid and extremely profound definition here with the utmost lucidity. And from it follows that the “special repressive force” for the suppression of the proletariat by the bourgeoisie, of millions of the working people by handfuls of the rich, must be replaced by a “special repressive force” for the suppression of the bourgeoisie by the proletariat (the dictatorship of the proletariat). This is precisely what is meant by “putting an end to the state as state.” This is precisely the “act” of taking possession of the means of production in the name of society. And it is self-evident that such a replacement of one (bourgeois) “special force” by another (proletarian) “special force” cannot possibly take place in the form of “withering away.” Thirdly, in speaking of “withering away,” and the even more graphic and colourful “dying away of itself,” Engels refers quite clearly and definitely to the period after “the state has taken possession of the means of production in the name of the whole of society,” that is, after the socialist revolution. We all know that the political form of the “state” at that time is the most complete democracy. But it never enters the head of any of the opportunists who shamelessly distort Marxism that Engels is consequently speaking here of democracy “dying away of itself,” or “withering away.” This seems very strange at first sight; but it is “incomprehensible” only to those who have not pondered over the fact that democracy is also a state and that, consequently, democracy will also disappear when the state disappears. Revolution alone can “put an end to” the bourgeois state. The state in general, i.e., the most complete democracy, can only “wither away.”

with them in detail.

We shall quote the whole argument from which they are taken.

“The proletariat seizes state power and to begin with transforms the means of production into state property. But it thus puts an end to itself as proletariat, it thus puts an end to all class differences and class antagonisms, and

“The state is an organisation of the exploiting class at each period for the maintenance of its external conditions of production, that is, particularly for the forcible holding down of the exploited class in the conditions of oppression (slavery, villeinage or serfdom, wage-labour) given by the existing mode of production.”

thus also to the state as state. Moving in class antagonisms, society up to now had need of the state, that is, an organisation of the exploiting class at each period for the maintenance of its external conditions of production, that is, particularly for the forcible holding down of the exploited class in the conditions of oppression (slavery, villeinage or serfdom, wage-labour) given by the existing mode of production. The state was the official representative of the whole of society, its concentration in a visible body, but it was so only in so far as it was the state of that class which in its time represented the whole of society: in antiquity, the state of

the slave-owning citizens, in the Middle Ages, of the feudal nobility, in our time, of the bourgeois. When ultimately it becomes the real representative of the whole of society, it renders itself superfluous. As soon as there is no social class to be held in subjection any longer, as soon as class domination and the struggle for individual existence based on the anarchy of production existing up to now are eliminated together with the collisions and excesses arising from them, there is nothing more to repress, nothing necessitating a special repressive force, a state. The first act in which the state really comes forward as the representative of the whole of society — the taking possession of the means of production in the name of society — is at the same time its last independent act as a state. The interference of the state power in social relations becomes superfluous in one sphere after another, and then dies away of itself. The government of persons is replaced by the administration of things and the direction of the processes of production. The state is not ‘abolished,’ it *withers away*. It is by this that one must evaluate the phrase ‘a free people’s state’ with respect both to its temporary agitational justification and to its ultimate scientific inadequacy, and it is by this that we must also evaluate the demand of the so-called anarchists that the state should be abolished overnight.” (*Anti-Duhring, Herr Eugen Duhring’s Revolution in Science*)

It may be said without fear of error that of this argument of Engels’ which is so remarkably rich in ideas, only one point has become an integral part of socialist thought among modern socialist parties, namely, that according to Marx the state “withering away” — as distinct from the anarchist doctrine of the “abolition” of the state. To

prune Marxism in such a manner is to reduce it to opportunism; for such an “interpretation” only leaves a vague notion of a slow, even, gradual change, of absence of leaps and storms, of absence of revolution. The current, widespread, mass, if one may say so, conception of the “withering away” of the state undoubtedly means slurring over, if not repudiating, revolution. Such an “interpretation,” however, is the crudest distortion of Marxism, advantageous only to the bourgeoisie; in point of theory, it is based on a disregard for the most important circumstances and considerations indicated, say, in Engels’ “summary” argument which we have just quoted in full. In the first place, at the very outset of his argument Engels says that, in seizing state power, the proletariat thereby “puts an end to the state as state.” It is “not good form” to ponder over the meaning of this.

Generally, it is either ignored altogether, or is considered to be

“After ‘the state has taken possession of the means of production in the name of the whole of society’, that is, after the socialist revolution, the political form of the ‘state’ at that time is the most complete democracy.”

something in the nature of a “Hegelian weakness” on Engels’ part. As a matter of fact, however, these words briefly express the

Glossary

The Paris Commune in 1871: When Prussia (the strongest state in then-divided Germany) invaded France in 1870-71, the French government scuttled and the workers took over Paris for nine weeks.

Kautsky: Leading writer of the Marxist movement before 1914.

Feudal state, serfs: The serf was a peasant of the Middle Ages, holding land under an overlord to whom he then had to pay tribute in labour or cash. The overlord himself might owe tribute to a higher lord. The whole structure was called “feudalism”.

Absolute monarchies: As

elements of capitalist industry and trade grew in the cities of feudal society, the kings (that is, the top feudal lords) strengthened their power and their state machines, playing off the emerging capitalist class against the lords who resisted central power.

Bonapartism; Bismarck: The dictatorial regimes of Bonaparte I and III in France (1799-1815 and 1851-70) and of Otto von Bismarck in Prussia/Germany (1862-1890). The state machine, while basically serving capitalism, gained a lot of leeway, playing off landlords and peasants and workers against the industrialists and merchants.

Kerensky: Russian politician who was a leading figure between February 1917 (when the Tsar, or king, was overthrown) and October 1917 (when the workers, led by Lenin

and the Bolsheviks, took power).

SRs and Mensheviks: Moderate socialist parties in Russia. Chernovs, etc: their leaders.

German Social-Democracy: When Lenin was writing, “Social Democrat” meant *Marxist*, not, as it does today, liberal-capitalist. The then-Marxist German Social Democratic Party had an impressive record of building up its score in General Elections.

Social-chauvinists: Chauvinists (that is, militant nationalists) who used socialist phrases, i.e. in this context, supposed socialists who supported their national governments in World War 1 instead of denouncing the whole war as a battle between thieves.

Proletariat: Class of wage-workers.

Villeinage: A variant of serfdom.

Joseph Cowan

The man who might have been.

Book

Gary Scott reviews *The Militant Democracy: Joseph Cowan and Victorian Radicalism*, by Nigel Todd

The story is set in Tyneside between 1840 and 1900. It was known as "Radical Tyneside", and Queen Victoria drew the blinds of her railway carriage in disdain at the anti-royalist attitudes of the Tyneside people.

Cowan was born into a wealthy family. His father, Joseph Cowan Senior, was a successful businessman, owning a colliery, a brickworks and land. Joseph Cowan Junior also acquired a lot of money through his brickmaking and gas-pipe manufacturing business; but he used his wealth to buy the Newcastle Chronicle, and he used the newspaper to support workers on strike and organise support for Polish and Italian nationalists. Nigel Todd suggests Cowan would have been influenced by his mother, Mary Cowan. While his father attended social functions organised by wealthy businessmen, his mother tended to distance herself from them. Cowan's mother came from a poor family near Claydon and took part in the early reform movements of the nineteenth century, leading a group of "Female Reformers" connected with the Northern Political Union in 1819.

The greatest influence on

Cowan may have been Winlaton, the village in which he spent the early part of his life.

In 1819 the mayor of Newcastle warned the government that 700 demonstrators concealing arms made at Winlaton had taken part in the local protests against the Peterloo Massacre. When Cowan was ten, Winlaton was virtually ruled by "physical force" Chartists (the more radical faction of the Chartist movement, a working class movement fighting for parliamentary reform). In July 1839 Chartists from the village took part in a pitched battle with the police

"Nigel Todd poses a number of 'what ifs', the most important of which is: what if Cowan had become the leader of what was to become the Labour Party?"

and army for control of Newcastle's streets.

From the late 1840s to the mid 1880s, Cowan was active in a wide variety of campaigns, reform movements, support committees for overseas revolutionaries and exiles, co-operatives and in supporting strikes. Between 1874 and 1886 he held a national



Traditions of radicalism continue: Durham Miners' Gala

platform as a Radical member of Parliament for Newcastle Upon Tyne. At his funeral in 1900 the mourners included: "miners' representatives, a lieutenant from the Garibaldian army, a delegation from the Irish Nationalist Party, whose telegram of condolence was the first to reach Newcastle after his death, delegates from the various co-operative societies, Mechanics Institutes and Temperance Organisations."

Like other nineteenth century middle class reformers, Cowan was

concerned with raising the working classes through education and "self help". He was more concerned with winning reforms for the working class within the existing economic system than with a revolutionary transformation of that system. He was much more of a reformer than a revolutionary. He was influenced more by Mazzini (a vague radical democrat) than Marx.

Towards the end of his life Cowan became, like many other middle class reformers, pro-

imperialist. Paradoxically, while cheering on the British Empire he advocated support for Irish Nationalism.

Joseph Cowan had very close links with the working class in the North East. He was President of the Northern Reform League, a movement for electoral reform based on trade unions in the North East. The secretary and treasurer of the Northern Reform League were workers, and more than a third of the council members were miners.

When asked by another radical

Livingstone offers quack radicalism

THE POLITICAL ECONOMY

By Colin Foster

"The one-time champion of far-left causes is now styling himself as the defender of middle-income earners", reported the *Evening Standard* in its article on Ken Livingstone's candidacy for the Labour leadership.

For once this Tory rag was fairly accurate. Ken Livingstone presents himself as a man with an economic miracle-cure. If Labour undertakes to carry out its Party conference policy of cutting military spending to the West European average, then, says Livingstone, it can find money for reforms without taxing "middle-income earners", and thus win back votes lost by the tax rises John Smith proposed in the Shadow Budget.

Livingstone is quite right to insist that Labour should cut military spending, and to point out that military cuts would free resources for reforms. 500 new hospitals could have been built for the cost of the Trident nuclear weapon programme.

Beyond that, however, Livingstone's pitch is charlatan demagoguery.

Firstly, military spending cuts would not be a miracle-cure. They would free resources, but only over time. Demobilisation, re-equipping of factories producing military goods, and re-training of workers, would cost - unless

Livingstone proposes just to throw all the workers from military production, and the soldiers, on the streets without dole or redundancy money!

Could a Labour government say: "Restoring the Health Service will have to wait three years, until we can cash in the military spending cuts"?

Even longer-term, the military spending cuts would release, at maximum, about 3 per cent of national output to add to the 40 per cent or so that currently goes through Government hands. The odd 3% would be very useful, but nowhere near an adequate lever for the reconstruction of industry and public services.

A cut in military spending to the West European average would permit, at best, "West European average" capitalism, not anything socialist.

Not without reason did Marx and Engels make their second demand in the *Communist Manifesto*: "A heavy progressive or graduated income tax". It is utter quackery to claim that any socialist policy is possible without seizing the wealth of the rich, confiscating the means of production, and taxing at least the richest 15% or 20% - and, as it happens, it was only that top 15-20% (currently taking some 40% of household income, or more than the bottom 60-odd per cent) that the Shadow Budget proposed to hit with tax rises. That Shadow Budget would have left people on £400 to £499 a week a bit better off on average, and seriously hit only those on more than £1,000 a week.

The nonsense appears even worse if you envisage a socialist policy on an international scale, which would have to include taxing the richer countries to finance rapid development programmes in other countries.

Livingstone's economic demagoguery amounts to an attempt to propose "radical" economics without class struggle. His miracle cure would allow progress without attacking the wealth or income of the top 15 or 20%. According to Livingstone at the "London Labour Left" meeting on 15 April, Britain's high military spending is dictated exclusively by American interests, and so Livingstone has managed to reduce the struggle for socialism into one against American influence, with no fight necessary between the classes in Britain!

Military spending cuts should be supported. To present them as the key to socialist advance is dishonest windbagery.

Secondly, Livingstone evades and diverts attention from the basic reasons for Labour's defeat.

The Tories, who have raised taxes for the average household, defeated Labour, who were proposing to cut taxes for most households. The reason for that must be something more than the tax rises Labour proposed for a minority!

The Tories used the slump to boost themselves. They warned that "you can't trust Labour". The Tories were the tried-and-tested "natural party of government" for capitalism. They said that each individual should hold on to their own, not experiment with Labour's expensive and unreliable plans for restoring public services.

Against that appeal to bedrock bourgeois selfishness and caution, Labour had little to offer, and did not look as if it could be trusted even on that little.

The Tories "coded" their message in a lying campaign about a Labour government costing everyone £1,250 a year in tax.

To reduce the problem of the Tories'

appeal to the basic prejudices instilled by capitalism to the detail of the Shadow Budget is to miss the point. To suppose that the answer is some clever economic gimmick - so many billion pounds gained from military cuts without offending anyone! - is to evade the problem of bringing the Labour Party to such a state of mind and body that it can counterpose a "political economy of the working class" (in Marx's phrase), of "social production controlled by social foresight", to "the blind rule of the supply and demand laws which form the

"Livingstone's economic demagoguery amounts to an attempt to propose 'radical' economics without class struggle... Livingstone has managed to reduce the struggle for socialism to one against American influence, with no fight necessary between the classes in Britain."

political economy of the middle class".

Thirdly, Livingstone looks to the wrong section of society. The so-called "middle-income" people who would be hit by the Shadow Budget were in fact the top 15-20%. The great majority on less than about £25,000 a year stood to gain.

Livingstone (like the Tories!) makes much of figures of £19,000 or £20,000 for "average male earnings" in the South-East. This "average" is misleading. If ten

people get £10,000 a year each, one gets £20,000, and one gets £120,000, the average for all twelve is £20,000, but the person on £20,000 is not an "average earner". In any case, the person on £20,000 would be better off from the Shadow Budget!

The Tory press, seeking sympathetic examples of people who would be hit by Labour's tax rises, cited doctors, head teachers, middle managers, and police inspectors. They could have added lawyers, accountants, City dealers, high-rank computer experts, maybe a few skilled manual workers doing exceptionally long hours, and small employers or self-employed tradesmen.

Labour can and should win over some of these people. But they cannot be central. In the first place Labour has to respond to and mobilise the other 80 per cent!

Fourthly, Livingstone's economics expose him as utterly inconsistent and unreliable.

Only a few years ago, when he was in local government, Livingstone was a keen supporter of high taxes, and not just for the top 20%! He argued that it was progressive for Labour councils to levy high rates (property taxes), because they would be squeezing middle-income people and businesses to provide services for the poor, who would be protected by rate rebates.

Jeering hostility to better-off workers and the middle-class ("more-miserable-than-thou") is as stupid and counterproductive for socialists as centring our policy on the interests and desires of those better-off people.

The common thread for Livingstone is that both policies - the high-tax policy of yesteryear and the low-tax policy of now - are attempts to seem radical while evading class struggle.

how he came to be so popular with the working class, Cowen replied: "Well, this is the explanation. While you have been sitting at home in the cold nights with your feet comfortable on the rug before your drawing room fire I have been for 20 years travelling about, in sunshine or storm, to every Tyneside place or distant colliery village, talking to the pitmen, assisting in establishing their humble institutions, and giving them what information was in my power; and it now comes to pass that they happen to remember it, and be grateful for it."

In 1859, Joseph Cowen took control of the Newcastle Daily Chronicle and transformed what had previously been a Whig paper into a radical newspaper that condemned the evictions of the miners and their families by pit owners and opened its pages to miners' leaders. Thomas Burt, secretary of the Northumberland Miners Association wrote a letter to the Newcastle Daily Chronicle arguing the miners' case. Burt was invited to the Chronicle's offices, where he was told, "the columns of the Chronicle are always open...for the defence of the miners and their right to combine."

The Chronicle was to play an important role in supporting the 1871 engineers' strike for the nine-hour day, one of the most important industrial disputes in nineteenth century Britain. From an early stage in the strike Cowen instructed the Newcastle Daily Chronicle's editorial staff to "keep a sharp look-out for news from the engineers. Tell Burnett [one of the strike leaders] we will print all he wants, printed in the way of news." Free copies of the newspaper were provided for circulation in other engineering centres.

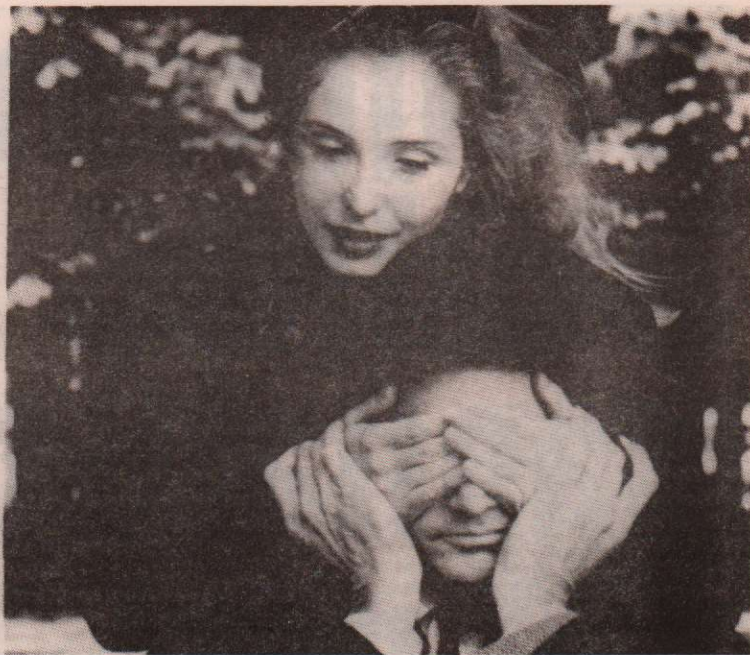
Engineers' mass meetings on the Town Moor ended with cheers for the Newcastle Daily Chronicle.

Todd poses a number of "what ifs", the most important of which is: "What if Cowen had become the leader of what was to become the Labour Party?" Engels is quoted as saying: "A proletarian radical party is now forming under the leadership of Joseph Cowen, an old Chartist, half, if not a whole Communist, and a very fine fellow..." This was said at a meeting held in London in 1891 to discuss the formation of "an independent working class party".

Unlike the "Marxists" of his day, Cowen had a healthy attitude towards the working class and had gained their respect. He had a long record of supporting strikes, movements for electoral reform and republican movements. While not a Marxist, he supported revolutionaries in other countries and was sympathetic towards the Paris Commune. He was one of only a handful of English MPs who condemned coercive measures carried out by the Gladstone government against the Irish Land League.

Nigel Todd, in *The Militant Democracy*, has succeeded in establishing Joseph Cowen as one of the most important nineteenth century radicals. The book should be read by anyone with an interest in the British labour movement.

**The Militant Democracy: Joseph Cowen and Victorian Radicalism*, by Nigel Todd, is published by Bewick Press, 132 Claremont Road, Whitley Bay, Tyne and Wear at £8.95.



Walter Faber (Sam Shepard) and Sabeth (Julie Delphy)

Alienation, Armani, sex and Sartre

Cinema

Belinda Weaver reviews *Voyager*

Voyager is a fortysomething director's wet dream. It's infuriating.

It's about a man, Walter Faber, forced by work to travel a lot, who doesn't care where he goes because his life doesn't mean anything. Faber's early voice-overs about chance and coincidence are trite, but they prepare us for the corny coincidences to come - that he'll fall for a young girl who will turn out to be his long lost daughter. (And you thought it only happened in *Dynasty*...)

The film opens with Faber feeling alienated in Athens airport. Faber is played by Sam Shepard in specs, and he's posed like Arthur Miller. It's as if director Volker Schlöndorff were trying to borrow Miller's integrity, the way that TV ads appropriate familiar images to sell us things.

What is Schlöndorff selling? His fantasies. The film shows Elizabeth, Faber's daughter, falling

in love with him, and casting herself into his arms. If this isn't wishful thinking, what is? Schlöndorff has turned the Lolita syndrome on its head, and used Shepard's handsomeness and deadpan cool to make it credible.

All through the film, women fling themselves at Faber. He doesn't have to try; he just is, and they want him. It's a male fantasy.

Schlöndorff's use of women as props for the Faber ego is not the film's only failing. The whole "philosophical" basis is shaky. Faber is meant to be an outsider, Camus's Outsider, no less, complete with alienation, and all the world weariness he can summon up.

All very well, except that hauling in the philosophers doesn't mean a thing. Schlöndorff may think he's up there with the philosophers, that he's putting their ideas on the screen. But he's not. He's just putting a fancy name to Faber's self-absorption.

The film's early scenes have some zip. In a plane crash, Faber stays totally cool and deadpan, while everyone around him is panicking.

But once Faber meets Elizabeth, cliché sets in. Their

romantic idyll is achingly predictable - shots of her fresh face, his musings about her zest for life, etc., etc.

"Schlöndorff has turned the Lolita syndrome on its head, and used Shepard's handsomeness and deadpan cool to make it credible... It's a male fantasy."

The film is nowhere near as kind to Elizabeth's mother, Hanna, the woman who saw Faber off in Athens at the start. She's presented to us through Faber's jaundiced eyes - this woman who's trying to

clip his wings by forcing him into marriage and parenthood - and she comes across as shrill and harsh and rigid. Schlöndorff doesn't even try to put how she feels on to the screen - presumably he doesn't know, and couldn't begin to guess - so all we get is Faber's reactions (and given his stunted emotions, all we see is evasiveness).

What is the excuse for this one-sidedness? Schlöndorff's failure of imagination? Faber treats Hanna cruelly, not just in the early days when he deserts her (hiding behind the fiction that it's her choice), but later, in Athens, when Elizabeth is ill in the hospital. He offers no words of comfort; he's too preoccupied with himself.

Faber is an emotional miser. When women ask him for anything, he hides behind his blankness. Schlöndorff poses this as a tragedy (for Faber) when it's really a tragedy for everybody but Faber, that the tragedy lies in the damage and hurt he causes other people.

Voyager is set in a male universe, where a man who loses a lover of a few days (even if she is his daughter) gets more sympathy than the woman who raised her from an infant.

Alienation is such a swanky, romantic affliction. European films of the fifties were full of it - world-weary men abounded, all moaning on about life's emptiness, etc., etc. Schlöndorff is obviously nostalgic - *Voyager* is set in the fifties. But can anyone really work up any sympathy for Faber? Even men? Even unreconstructed men? Isn't "incapacity to feel" just a little bit self-inflicted, like blocking your nose and then complaining you can't breathe?

Alienation doesn't stop Shepard from looking good or going places in Armani suits or even having love and sex. It serves as an alibi when he wants out of anywhere. A very convenient ailment!

I suspect *Voyager* will be a hit with all the Sam Shepard wannabes and all the pseuds who "love" European films and "hate" Hollywood. But Hollywood is more honest than *Voyager*. When it sells sex, it sells sex. It doesn't haul in Camus and Sartre and call it philosophy.

Mocking religion, but failing to be funny

Theatre

Mark Osborn reviews Dario Fo's play *The Pope and the Witch*, currently playing in London

I enjoy Dario Fo farces. *Can't Pay, Won't Pay* and the chaotic *Accidental Death of an*

Anarchist (about a murder in police custody) were good plays.

Now Fo's *The Pope and the Witch* is on at the Comedy Theatre in the West End.

The first act opens in the Vatican. The Pope is confronted with 100,000 children from the Third World - the unwanted products of his abortion and contraception policy.

During the next hour and a half the Pope is cured of a weird illness by a Healyite witch-doctor, Frances de la Tour, traffics heroin, takes the

piss out of the Church of England, and discovers his right-hand men are Freemasons and gangsters.

Not a bad plot! There's only one problem with this play: it's not funny - which seems a bit of a gaffe for a farce.

At only one point, when the Pope mimics the Archbishop of Canterbury to say the Church of England runs an absurd religion where adherents do not have to believe in Jesus, does the comment become sharp.

Give this a miss.

Stalinism was pre- capitalist, not post- capitalist

Harry Holland, from New Zealand, contributes to our debate on the nature of the Stalinist states

For a long time I accepted the formulation of Trotsky, that the USSR in the Stalinist era was a workers' state bureaucratically degenerated. The actual course of recent events makes it very unlikely that his description was correct.

The ruling group there has fallen over of its own inner rottenness, with scarcely any contribution in a direct way from the oppressed themselves. The Communist Party is banned and the old order, with its nomenklatura, defeated, even if it strives to reconstitute itself as an ordinary bourgeoisie.

In Trotsky's formulation, the position of the bureaucracy in society in the USSR was analogous to the position of the right-wing leadership of a trade union working within a capitalist society. Both take over and pervert "their" organisation for their own benefit, and operate it against the interests of the rank and file. It was implicit in his conception that the struggle in the USSR to restore a healthy functioning to the state and society would involve the conscious struggle of the masses to remove the commanding group.

Nothing remotely approaching the dynamic he envisaged seems to have occurred in the USSR in recent times. While to a very limited extent real trade unions reasserted themselves and some economic strikes took place in that country, in every other respect exploited working people over the last four years took on none of the consciously combative characteristics of the proletariat of Russia in 1917.

It seems today that a very large number of workers see the re-establishment of market capitalism as their salvation, and even those that do not seemingly have little faith in their class to act in its own interest. The vast majority of the people appear to have



become ensnared by nationalist delusions, and reject the notion of internationalism.

Even on the level of symbolism it is clear that anything that speaks of the October Revolution brings only feelings of hatred and loathing on the part of most of the "lower orders" in the USSR. They vote, for example, to restore the feudal name Yekaterinburg in place of Sverdlovsk, and St. Petersburg in place of Leningrad.

In terms of Trotsky's trade union analogy, the rank and file at present show every sign of wanting "their" union utterly destroyed and not just taken out of the hands of the perverters. The last thing on their minds is to revive and restore to health their own "workers'" state.

One is hard put to it to find any useful historical analogy for what is happening, but the closest would seem to be the political stance of the "sans-culotte" plebeians in France in the early 1790s. In all important respects this layer fell in behind the Jacobin petit bourgeois revolutionaries who sought to make a successful bourgeois democratic revolution. The uttermost limit of the political horizon of the "sans-culottes" was to support those Jacobins who tried, by means of the Law of Maximum, to control price rises.

In summary then, both the old "bureaucracy" and the oppressed workers have, to date, emerged as losers. There has been a dissolution of the old order without a revolutionary reconstitution of society. Such a position has come about before in history, and is indeed accounted for in classical Marxist theory.

The second paragraph of the *Communist Manifesto* specifically states: "Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman, in a word oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on a fight...that each time ended, either in a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large or, in the common ruin of the contending classes."

The working class revolution in October 1917 destroyed the remnants of feudalism, and the existing capitalist class with its specific state machine. Arguably the victorious working class of 1917 either did not create its own state machine at all, or did so for only a negligible period of time.

What flowed from the inability of the working class in the USSR to create an ongoing state to serve its own interests was a power vacuum. In this void Stalin's autocracy established a state machine to serve its own interests, and in any situation where its perceived interests ran counter to those of the workers and farmers, the autocracy prevailed.

If one were to characterise the



Stalin: a system backward compared to capitalism?

administrators of this ruling state machine as bureaucratic collectivists, then the unremitting class war nature of the rulers-ruled relationship is obscured by the terminology. I agree with Martin Thomas that the words "bureaucratic collectivist" convey a sense that the totality of the system was post-capitalist.

It is plain, however, that in spite of the monstrous deficiencies of capitalism, in developed countries its inner coherence and strength is far and away stronger and more self-regulating than the abomination Stalin created. It would be a bizarre outcome if this should come about in a social formation that stands on its shoulders in history.

Yet again, if for about seventy years what existed in the USSR was a sub-species of capitalism, viz "state capitalism", then certainly no ordinary capitalist state has in this period just fallen apart of its own inner rottenness, without a conscious effort on the part of its opponents to achieve this result. For the state capitalist theory to hold water, a fundamental revision of one of Marxism's most basic tenets is demanded.

In point of fact, the Stalinist autocracy was able to create only a command economy, without any of the self-correcting mechanisms of the market. Billions of decisions have to be made to operate a modern developed economy, and the commanders of the USSR were simply incapable of making the requisite number of quality decisions to enable the system to work, without delegating an unacceptably large part of their power to those that they oppressed.

At a certain point the rulers of the USSR were simply unable to continue to rule in the old way and they, with the Mafia, now seek to build a "normal" capitalist economy with a normal bourgeois state machine.

It comes to the conclusion that what existed in the USSR for about seventy years was, in all essential respects, a pre-capitalist formation. It involved the savage unremitting exploitation of a plebeian class by a master class, but it had few, if any, of the defining characteristics of feudalism. If it is felt necessary to find an analogy from the past, I think that the Asiatic mode of production comes closest to the reality of the Stalinist economic system, though the comparison is

far from exact and the cant phrase "sui generis" - of its own kind - is probably preferable.

The Asiatic mode of production was incompatible with private property in land, and it could not tolerate pluralistic centres of political power such as feudalism in its early and middle periods typically threw up. An autocracy served by an extensive corps of administrators was the necessary command structure over this economic formation, and became self-perpetuating over time.

Exploitation and oppression of the vast majority of the population (the rural producers) by state administrators was at the heart of the system. The novelty of the Stalinist formation was that it sought to develop, extend and exploit a class of industrial helots rather than simply suck surplus value from rural producers. Unlike the ruling group in the "Asiatic mode of production" system it felt compelled, for nearly the whole period, to develop and invest in ever more sophisticated science and technology. Its structures simply could not accommodate these developments, and it self-destructed.

If the above is correct, obviously part of Trotsky's theorising is impaired, but I am content that a careful reading of his writings proves beyond doubt that the essential logic behind his position was that the workers, inside and outside the USSR, should adopt a defencist attitude to that country when it came into hostile collisions with capitalist states. His degenerated workers' state description provided the underpinning for that stance.

Paradoxically, if a pre-capitalist characterisation is accepted, it too would make it imperative, from the standpoint of Marxist theory, to arrive at a defencist position. After all, Trotsky himself called for a defencist position from the workers, and other exploited people of feudal Abyssinia when that country came under attack from a fascist imperialism. Similarly, he called for workers' defencism for China, a colonial country under attack from Japanese imperialism.

I believe that Trotsky arrived at absolutely the correct practical position as regards defencism, and the USSR, even if by a route that was flawed.

Tubeworkers:

Vote yes for action!

By a Central Line guard

We all wanted Labour to get in - but they haven't. Would Labour have solved all our problems? No - a Labour government wouldn't have done what we needed, what the working class needs. It wouldn't have acted with the same loyalty to our class as the Tories show to theirs. But it would have given us more space to fight for what

we want and, through the unions, it would have been more vulnerable to pressure from workers. So what happens now? The Tories won so we can't do anything... Rubbish! In '89, Thatcher was at the height of her power with a majority of 100: we beat the company and the Tories then and we can do it again! We need to remind ourselves that we are enormously strong.

As tubeworkers, we have huge

economic power. London is the financial centre of Britain and we can shut it down if we stand together.

The Company Plan affects everyone of us. Whatever our grade! Every section is faced with its own productivity package. Each one tearing up agreements that we use every day - agreements that protect us, that make the job bearable. The details vary from grade to grade, but the bottom line is if

there are 25% fewer staff, the ones who are still "lucky to have a job" will be working 25% harder.

And that "lucky to have a job" arrogance sums up the arrogance of management. If we let them get away with the Company Plan, we'll be giving a free hand to every third-rate, tinpot dictator on LUL.

With seniority abolished, being forced to reapply and requalify for our own jobs, with perfor-

mance pay and personal contracts, management will have us over a barrel.

And management are implementing the Company Plan. They have insisted on continuing to implement the Plan while negotiations go on, and the only thing they are prepared to negotiate is "how to implement the Company Plan". The time for talking is past. Actions speak louder than words. We need to fight back now!

The first thing is to get a big Yes vote in the RMT ballot. A big majority will show management that we mean business and will give us all more confidence for the fight ahead.

ASLEF and TSSA must come off the sidelines. Their members must demand to be balloted as well. In any case, we must all respect the picket lines of any union.

We have a hard fight ahead of us, but it's one we can win as long as we remember: Unity is the key: if we don't stand together, we'll hang together! We need to throw out all of the Company Plan - nothing less!

The Tories will, no doubt, use the courts. We need to stop the Plan by any means necessary!

Since the miners' strike, assorted media pundits and new realists have written off the working class. The class struggle and the very existence of a working class have been derided as notions of an earlier and simpler age. Well, you can deny the existence of the class struggle, but it continues nevertheless!

For example, LUL personnel director, Straker, warned last week that if RMT took strike action, "there will be corpses".

The tube bosses are certainly in no doubt as to the existence



Shut down the system!

of the class struggle! They know what they want and they're clear about what they're prepared to do to get it. Is this an exception? Not at all. What's striking about what's happening on the tubes is its similarity to what's happening in many other parts of industry.

The Company Plan would mean the introduction of team-working, multiskilling, performance pay, personal contracts, contracting out and massive job cuts... to name but a few!

All of these would mean a huge increase in the rate of exploitation of workers. As workers we have to sell our labour power to live but, by selling our labour power, we are exploited. And it is that exploitation that gives rise to class struggle. This is the economic base on which modern capitalist society rests.

There are no two ways about it: as long as there is capitalism, there will be class struggle. Reports of its death have been greatly exaggerated!

Armthorpe miners fight on

By Rob Dawber and Mark Serwotka

Markham Main pit, in the mining village of Armthorpe, South Yorkshire, was deserted last Friday.

On arrival, a lonely security guard, plus three retired miners gathered outside the colliery shop were the only people in sight. The colliery shop, which sells goods to miners, raises money for charity.

"Last year we raised £30,000 for all sorts of charities," said Jim Gallacher, one of the retired miners. This shop, though, was one of the first casualties when industrial action began at Markham Main.

Management refused to continue the facility of deducting repayments from miners' wages for goods bought, "but they are taking money from the sick and the old", said another of the retired miners.

This attack by management was one of many; withdrawing facilities from the NUM offices was another.

All of this followed on from court action taken by management to declare the first ballot for action illegal due to a technical irregularity. This ballot produced a 75% majority for action against the introduction of private contractors into the pit, seen by the union as sneaking privatisation. The second (legal) ballot produced a majority of 81% for action.

Since then a series of one-day strikes has taken place, followed each time by further management intimidation. The three retired miners had no doubt what was at stake. "Your lot are next", they said, referring to the RMT, "that's for sure - coal, then the rail; it's bloody disgusting." One of them produced a map from his native Northumberland. 57 pits were shown on it; now only three remain. 54 have closed since

the 1950s; he moved to Yorkshire to work at Markham Main.

The lack of people at the pit was explained by a mass meeting which was going on at the local miners' welfare. As we arrived a packed meeting of 200-300 men was voting to return to work pending the outcome of the Yorkshire Area ballot for supportive action.

These men had been on strike since Wednesday April 15th. This was provoked by management intimidation; after each one-day strike they would send the shift turning up for work home, claiming there was no work.

This, added to the fact that wages per shift were dropped from £42.10 to £18.90 was a clear attempt to provoke further action. The men voted to strike and have now been out a week.

Steve Clarke, the NUM delegate, and Key Coates, the Branch Secretary, were in no doubt as to the importance of

the fight: "Yorkshire has reduced from 60,000 miners to 16,000 since the 1984-85 strike. They are out to break us ready for privatisation. The lads are angry and ready to fight."

Key Coates was optimistic that the Yorkshire Area would vote to support them. However, he recognised that the election result would make this more difficult. Later, on Friday, it was announced that the Yorkshire Area had indeed narrowly voted in favour of supportive selective action.

This dispute is vital. Unions should immediately send in donations and messages of support. The NUM seem once again to be at the forefront in defending trade union rights; we must ensure that they get all possible backing.

Donations and messages of support to Key Coates, NUM Branch Secretary, 98 Tranmoor Lane, Armthorpe, Doncaster, South Yorks.

Notts social services dispute

By Tim Cooper, Secretary, Nottinghamshire County NALGO

With a newly-elected Tory government pledged to attack the trade unions, workplace struggles will come increasingly to the forefront of politics in the coming months.

Notts NALGO won a series of small battles in the run-up to our present dispute over the restructuring of the Social Services Department. These changes will affect thousands of workers. New legislation (like the Children's Act, Mental Health Act, Care in the Community, etc) is bringing about enormous changes.

Giving children, the mentally ill and the disabled more safeguards and rights is welcome, except for one small problem. Cash.

The government has raised the expectations of the public while starving local authorities of cash. This is all part of their plan to turn Social Services into a rump of administrators for an essentially privatised sector.

We've already seen it happening with elderly people's homes where dozens of private homes get £200 per person while local authority homes get virtually nothing.

Add that to poll tax capping and homes have to shut.

But the Tories reckon without the power of organised workers. We fought back with a massive campaign, culminating in threatened strike action, which forced them largely to back down.

Now we are having to do the same over restructuring. After a lobby by hundreds of NALGO members of the Social Services Committee in March, management at last came to the negotiating table. We won an extension of the hundreds of temporary contracts until the end of June, and some reassurances, but that isn't enough.

The Director, David White, has seemed even keener than the Tories to push on with the restructuring which sets up the services for privatisation.

The officials in NALGO and NUPE colluded in not rocking the boat for the Labour Group and prevented strike action before the election, pointing to verbal assurances that no establishments would shut, a statement against privatisation, and promises of no involuntary moves.

Management have now clearly reneged on these "assurances", so we are again asking the officials for a ballot for strike action this month.

The issues for the NUJ

By Steven Holt, Vice-Chair, NUJ Book Branch

The long-running saga of sacked National Union of Journalists' General Secretary Steve Turner reached a watershed this month when he offered to drop his legal case for reinstatement in return for an out-of-court settlement of £67,000.

This offer was reluctantly accepted by the NUJ NEC (with one NEC member reportedly reduced to tears), although given the incompetent manner of Turner's sacking and hence the likelihood of Turner winning his case and costs being awarded against the union, not to have accepted Turner's offer could have cost the union around £200,000.

This doesn't mean that Turner and his right-wing friends have gone away. Turner has been elected as a delegate to the Annual Delegate Meeting at the beginning of May, and will be arguing for his reinstatement. Although the meeting is very unlikely to support reinstatement, Turner will be able to mount a strong campaign in the coming election for General Secretary.

The present incumbent, Deputy General Secretary Jake Ecclestone, has proved, in the opinion of many, to be even less concerned with the members' interests than was Turner. Despite his reputation of being

on the left (he spoke out against the Gulf War and resigned from the Labour Party in protest against Kinross's shameless attempt to outdo Major in gung-ho militarism), Ecclestone has consistently failed to give adequate support - even within the NUJ's financial constraints - to media workers in struggle against derecognition and effective pay cuts.

While Ecclestone voted to sack Turner for not following NEC instructions (regarding carrying out the ADM policy of working for a merger of media unions), Ecclestone himself blatantly ignored NEC instructions to reinstate the Finance Officer, Daniel Stafford, whose sacking by Ecclestone ACAS recently ruled as being unfair dismissal.

On the industrial front, many chapels (branches) are facing derecognition as managements use the threat of unemployment during a period of recession to intimidate workers. In March the Rotherham Advertiser chapel voted to return to work, ending their 15-week strike after being threatened with the sack.

The Pergamon strikers' campaign for reinstatement, now in its third year, continues against the new owners, Dutch multinational publisher Elsevier. So far Elsevier have offered to talk about financial compensation, but are refusing to negotiate on jobs.

The Pergamon strikers, three of whom are now based in Amsterdam, are continuing their

campaign to build pressure on Elsevier's management by getting solidarity from European trade unionists. The latest success is that Elsevier distribution in Belgium has been blacked.

At London magazine publisher Morgan Grampian, the NUJ chapel, in collaboration with the GPMU has been firmly pressing its wage claim and has forced management back to the negotiating table. A most successful strategy was occupation of the office of the most profitable magazine on press day by a mandatory meeting.

The Conservative election victory makes it even more urgent that links be established with other media unions to enable effective collective action rather

than the groups of workers being derecognised one by one. Once the leadership question in the NUJ has been settled, we must continue the moves towards a merged media union that were stalled by Turner.

ADM issues:

- Vote against proposals to decrease democracy by holding the delegate conference only once every two years!

- Vote for motions leading to merger of the NUJ into a larger media union!

- Vote for motions supporting continuation of the Pergamon dispute and defending the principles of industrial action!

Union rights please!

The result of a recent public opinion poll carried out by the NUJ-backed Press for Union Rights campaign was that 89 per cent of people in Britain believe that there should be a legal right for workers to be represented by their trade unions.

Even among Conservative voters, 86 per cent think that the right to union recognition should be restored.

The long series of anti-union laws of the past 13 years have removed this right, outlawed secondary action and limited

picketing and the right of unions to organise ballots and elections as they choose. Now this survey shows that, at least on the issue of union recognition, the government's bitterly anti-working class actions have very little support.

The message was summed up by the secretary of Press for Union Rights, NUJ National Newspapers organiser, John Foster: "The government says it wants to encourage freedom of choice, but working people have no freedom to choose a union voice at all."

SOCIALIST

ORGANISER

Angry mood at Teacher's conference

Teachers: unite against the Tories



By Liam Conway
Conference delegate,
(Central Notts NUT)

With the re-election of the Tories the right-wing leadership must have expected an easy ride at NUT conference with the delegates prepared to accept their do-nothing and self-congratulatory attitude. From day one they were in for a shock. The first item on the agenda was an attempt to split motions and hive off action to a short section at the end of conference. This cynical manoeuvre was soundly squashed.

Although this success did not lead to conference making many major commitments to action against the Tories, the mood was by no means pessimistic and the Executive only managed to stave off several defeats by strenuous overnight lobbying and blatant manipulation of conference business. Left motions and amendments passed by clear majorities on a show of hands were taken to a card vote by the President, Pat Hawkes, to waste conference time and facilitate behind-the-scenes arm twisting.

Nevertheless, conference came very close to adopting effective policies on several important fronts. On SATs, despite the rejection of a boycott last year in a ballot of members, and despite the so-called "education mandate" the Tories got in the election, a campaign leading to a boycott of SATs in 1993 was only very narrowly defeated on a card vote.

On Teacher Appraisal, the spurious arguments of the leadership claiming that boycotting unsatisfactory local schemes would mean throwing out satisfactory ones, only got through after the President cynically moved business to the following day.

The serious mood of conference and the recognition by many delegates that the Tories aim to launch a full-scale attack on teachers and the education service came even more clearly into focus on the question of cuts and redundancies. The Executive were forced to accept a left motion in the face of overwhelming support on the conference floor.

This atmosphere of determination was captured in the columns of the national press. Several right-wing newspapers launched attacks on so-called militant teachers who were characterised as being "young", "in dungarees" and "out of touch". Yet delegates from the floor were talking about their own experience in schools, whilst many of the leading "men in grey suits" on the platform probably spend more time in the Stoke Rochford jacuzzi than in the classroom.

Of course, what the leaders fail to understand is that the press attack reflects the establishment's fear of opposition to Tory policies, especially in public services, where trade unionism has, despite setbacks, remained intact and prepared to fight. The spirit of conference now needs a positive embodiment on the ground.

This will not be possible without the left in the union. The Socialist Teachers Alliance and the Campaign for a Democratic Fighting Union were behind all the successes at conference. But on occasion they were poorly coordinated, indecisive, and appeared unaware of the significance of joint interventions.

In attempting to stimulate action over class sizes, cuts and redundancies at a local and national level, this lack of joint work is a liability rank and file activists cannot afford.

It was clear at conference that some re-alignment of the left will be necessary in order to deliver action around basic demands on jobs, appraisal, SATs and the looming danger of Performance Related Pay. Such basic demands should unite wide layers of the left. To put this in jeopardy only weakens the response that is vital in the face of the Tory offensive.

Debating socialism

Workers' Liberty '92 - three days of socialist debate - is set for Friday 3-Sunday 5 July at Caxton House, Archway, North London.

The discussions at Workers' Liberty '92 will cover every major issue facing socialists - including our attitude to the Tory election victory.

● three courses will introduce various aspects of Marxism: Marxist economics; classic Marxist writings; questions of everyday life.

● questions of everyday life will examine: Does God exist? Is this the End of History? Their morality and ours; The Battle of Ideas - and how to win it.

● John O'Mahony, the editor of *Socialist*

Organiser, will examine the lessons from the rise of the Nazis during the 1930s.

● socialists from France and Germany will discuss the politics we need to defeat the Euro-fascists.

● the Israeli socialist, Michel Warshawsky, will speak about the crisis in the Middle East.

● Robert Service will debate Tom Rigby from the Alliance for Workers' Liberty on the relationship between Leninism and Stalinism.

● other head-to-head debates will take

place on: Scottish nationalism, pornography, the way to solve the environmental crisis, the nature of the Stalinist states.

For more details, 'phone Mark on 071-639 7965.

April ticket offer

Please send me..... tickets at the special April rates. I enclose a cheque/PO for £.....(waged/unwaged/low-waged/student) for whole weekend/Saturday and Sunday
Name.....

Address.....

Send to Workers' Liberty, PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA

Workers' Liberty '92 ticket offer

During April, tickets are cheaper

This month, the three day event costs:

£14 (waged); £10 (students and low-waged); £6 (unwaged). (Saturday-Sunday only: £12; £8; £5).

For your ticket, send cheque/Postal Order (payable to "Workers' Liberty") to: Workers' Liberty '92, Alliance for Workers' Liberty, PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA. Tickets are also available from your local AWL branch.