

SOCIALIST

ORGANISER

It will be socialism or barbarism!

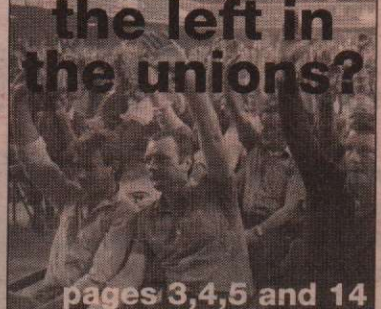
Inside this week



**Socialists
in Russia
today**
pages 10 and 11

**Report
from
Mexico**
page 12

**Which way
forward for
the left in
the unions?**



pages 3,4,5 and 14

Rover sell-off scandal

Tory Robbers!



**£2.2 billion handout
to Rover bosses while
they pick our pockets**

• Full story page 2 •

The Russian elections and Yeltsin

Alice Mahon MP below gives her view of the Russian elections and the state of the left. An alternative view is presented on the centre pages of this paper.



The left combined took more than 30 per cent of the vote in spite of all the obstacles that were placed in their way. That is quite an achievement if you bear in mind that the Communist Party and newspapers like Pravda, were banned at the beginning of the campaign.

Now, after the elections, there will be a contest between the left and Zhirinovskiy as to who will lead the opposition to Yeltsin.

The elections confirmed that the largest party on the left in Russia is the Communist Party — and they now have the legitimacy of a clear electoral mandate. We met the CP's leader, Ziganov, who described the CP as the party of the working class. He made clear that their policy was the protection of the working class from the cradle to the grave. He said the present government was humiliating Russia.

He was a very straightforward sort of person. He didn't duck any questions and gave lengthy, carefully prepared answers.

He definitely did not propose a return to the old regime. He said mistakes had been made. They wanted an open and free society.

Overall my view is that Yeltsin's days are numbered. Unless he turns to the army, and gets their support, I don't believe he will be able to control the situation.

Zhirinovskiy is a serious threat and Yeltsin's constitution would give him everything he needs if he were to win the presidency.

But the left is also a very powerful force in Russia. I think the left was right to reject an alliance with Gaidar because that would implicate them in the economic policies which have created the anger and despair shown in the elections. It would also allow Zhirinovskiy to pose himself as the only alternative.

I believe the left will be looking to alliances with the Agrarian Party, the women's party and with other parties like Civic Union.

Taken from Campaign Group News.

THE FREE market parties suffered a crushing defeat, winning less than 30 per cent of the vote. I came away with the firm impression that Boris Yeltsin's regime is weak, much weaker than it is portrayed in the British media. After attacking parliament, imprisoning the opposition and setting up a virtual presidential dictatorship, he still could not win the elections. Both Yeltsin and Gaidar are deeply unpopular and this was reflected in the vote. With everything going for them they have still been trounced.

"Yeltsin's days are numbered. Unless he turns to the army, and gets their support, I don't believe he will be able to control the situation."

Clearly the use of tanks to destroy the Russian parliament has backfired for Yeltsin. I think he is now finished as any kind of democratic force in Russia. The only way he will be able to hang on is by attacking democracy.

What lies behind that is the fact that you cannot go from the previous system to the free market with causing incredible poverty and suffering — and the Russian people are hurting. That was very, very sad. Elderly people were on the streets trying to sell their smallest possessions because the pensions won't pay for anything — it is like the Third World.

At one polling station two old women approached us to tell us about 'flat murders' — as a result of the privatisation of municipal housing people are being murdered to steal their flats.

Disillusion with the government was also reflected in the very low turn-out. At one of the polling stations we visited the turn-out had fallen from 86 per cent in the referendum in April to only 46 per cent.

The most hopeful thing about the situation is the strong support for the left.

The scandal of child poverty in Britain

IN THE years after World War 2, many people find it hard to understand how the horrors of child poverty could have been tolerated in Victorian England. They tolerated it exactly as we tolerate it!

A report from the charity NCH Action For Children on its 125th Anniversary shows that hundreds of thousands of today's children are hardly better off than children were when the charity was launched.

Three years ago a NCH survey found that one in ten children under five had gone without food through lack of money "Today things have become worse" Tom White, the head of NCH told the

Today newspaper. The charity estimates that every night at least 9,000 British children go to bed hungry.

On top of that thousands of parents go without to feed their kids.

Britain now has more children living in poverty than any other EC country except Portugal and Ireland.

The Tory offensive against the working class, mass unemployment, and the destruction of the welfare state have now created a gap between rich and poor as wide as it was in 1869.

Now every British city has its street people forced to find shelter in cardboard boxes and in doorways. Begging is now a common part of city life in a

Britain which is still one of the richest countries in the world.

The Tories have directly attacked the poorest people in Britain. They have barred 16-17 year-olds from benefits to save money and help them keep down — fiddle — the official unemployment figures. Thousands of youth are out on the streets as a result.

The current offensive on single mothers is being used to justify de-prioritising them for housing allocation by councils.

In the 1990's no one can honestly pretend that they do not regularly come across conspicuous poverty — yet the Tories, like their Victorian forebearers turn their backs

on the horror they have created.

The Today newspaper has exposed the astonishing fact that the cost of the recommended diet for children in the 1913 Poor Law comes to 70% more than income support provides, and that even the Diet in a workhouse in 1876 would cost £5.46 for a child under 11: — income support allows only £4.75!

The way a society treats its weakest members is a good measure of that society. The terrible poverty that many British children live in alongside the massive wealth of the British ruling class stands as one of the most striking condemnations of Tory rule.

Rover sell-off scandal

THE DEAL in which BMW has taken over Rover is an outright scandal! Even Britain's bosses know it.

"BAe flies away from Rover with a sackfull of cash" said the banner headline in the bosses' paper the Financial Times. They couldn't be more right.

When you add all the figures together and include the £550 million debt that BAe had written off by the government, the total money raked in by the aerospace giant amounts to £1.3 billion over 5 years.

That figure is based on the Tories claim that BAe invested £200 million per year adding a total contribution of \$1 billion to its value. However, a more realistic estimate is that the investment did no more than maintain the value of the business. Therefore, the real figure for what BAe made out of Rover is more like £2.2 billion!

That translates into the startling fact that each taxpayer put in around £100 to the BAe bank account.

That money could have been used to build houses for the homeless, as well as much needed schools and hospitals.

The Rover scandal is just one example of what the Tories have been doing to the industry and infrastructure of Britain over the last 15 years. We have witnessed asset stripping, social vandalism and downright plunder on a massive scale. Just think of the huge profits BT and all the other privatised utilities (water, electricity and gas) have been generating for the Tories friends the bosses.

All this at a time when taxes for ordinary people areas high as ever and the average family has just

had £10 put on their tax bill.

The labour and trade union leaders should be hammering the Tories on this issue, but instead they seem more interested in the nationality of Rovers' new owners.

This issue is of absolutely no importance to Rover workers. A boss is a boss whether they are English, German or Japanese!

In fact, if anything the BMW takeover should be seen as opening up the possibility of developing international co-operation between British and German BMW workers.

Bill Jordan and the other union leaders should stop their mindless Little Englander prattle about the "Betrayal of Britain" and instead link up with the German unions to fight the BMW bosses. They should demand a levelling up in terms and conditions so that the best that has been won in either of the two countries becomes the new standard.

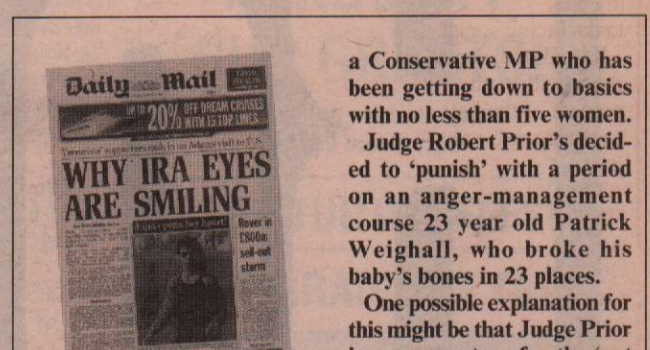
No British worker should shed a single tear for the loss of "The British Motor industry". Despite what some deluded people like Bill Jordan may think this was never "Ours" it was "Theirs". It belonged to the British capitalists, even when it was taken under majority state control and run by both Labour and Tory governments.

Labour and the unions should have nothing to do with this sentimental backward looking nationalist agenda.

Instead they should direct their fire at the hypocritical Tory robbers who are out to destroy the welfare state while giving a £2.2 billion handout to some of Britain's richest bosses.



29 January 1994. Thousands marched through Cheltenham on the 10th anniversary of the ban on trade union membership at GCHQ, the Government listening station. Photo: John Harris



The lie machine

The Daily Mail expresses the strong felling abroad in the British establishment that Gerry Adams has so far got the best of the political manoeuvres that make up the so-called Irish 'peace process'.

a Conservative MP who has been getting down to basics with no less than five women.

Judge Robert Prior's decided to 'punish' with a period on an anger-management course 23 year old Patrick Weighall, who broke his baby's bones in 23 places.

One possible explanation for this might be that Judge Prior is a provocateur for the 'get tough' with criminals lobby, deliberately whipping up support.

Or possibly he is just an unfeeling idiot who thinks 23 broken bones in an infant is nothing to get excited about.

We wonder how Judge Prior would have treated Weighall had he been charged with a serious crime against property.



The Sun is like the pig in the Tory muck, having found

Just out!
Socialism and Democracy
 Democracy, direct action and the class struggle
 £1.95 plus 34p postage

Unite for rank and file power!

EVERY PICTURE tells a story. The one on this page is no exception. It shows one of the thousands of miners who have lost their jobs in the last 18 months — sacked by the Tories and betrayed both by the TUC and the Labour Party. Yet, the miners' defeat was one that need not have happened.

In October 1992 hundreds of thousands of people came out on to the streets of central London to support the miners. The ranks of the labour movement started to muster in support. There was more than a glimpse of what a genuine, well-co-ordinated fightback could achieve.

But all that energy, hope and solidarity was wasted!

The central reason why it was wasted was that the existing multi-million-strong mass labour movement is led by people who do not really want to fight the Tories and their capitalist masters.

The TUC did not call any serious solidarity action for the miners, and the Labour leaders accepted the essence of the Tory case for pit closures.

Dislodging from power the people who did that and empowering in their own movement the rank and file of the mass organisations of the working class — that is one of the central tasks facing socialists today.

If we don't succeed in this task, then there will in the future be as many repeats of the betrayal of the miners as there were precedents for it in the past.

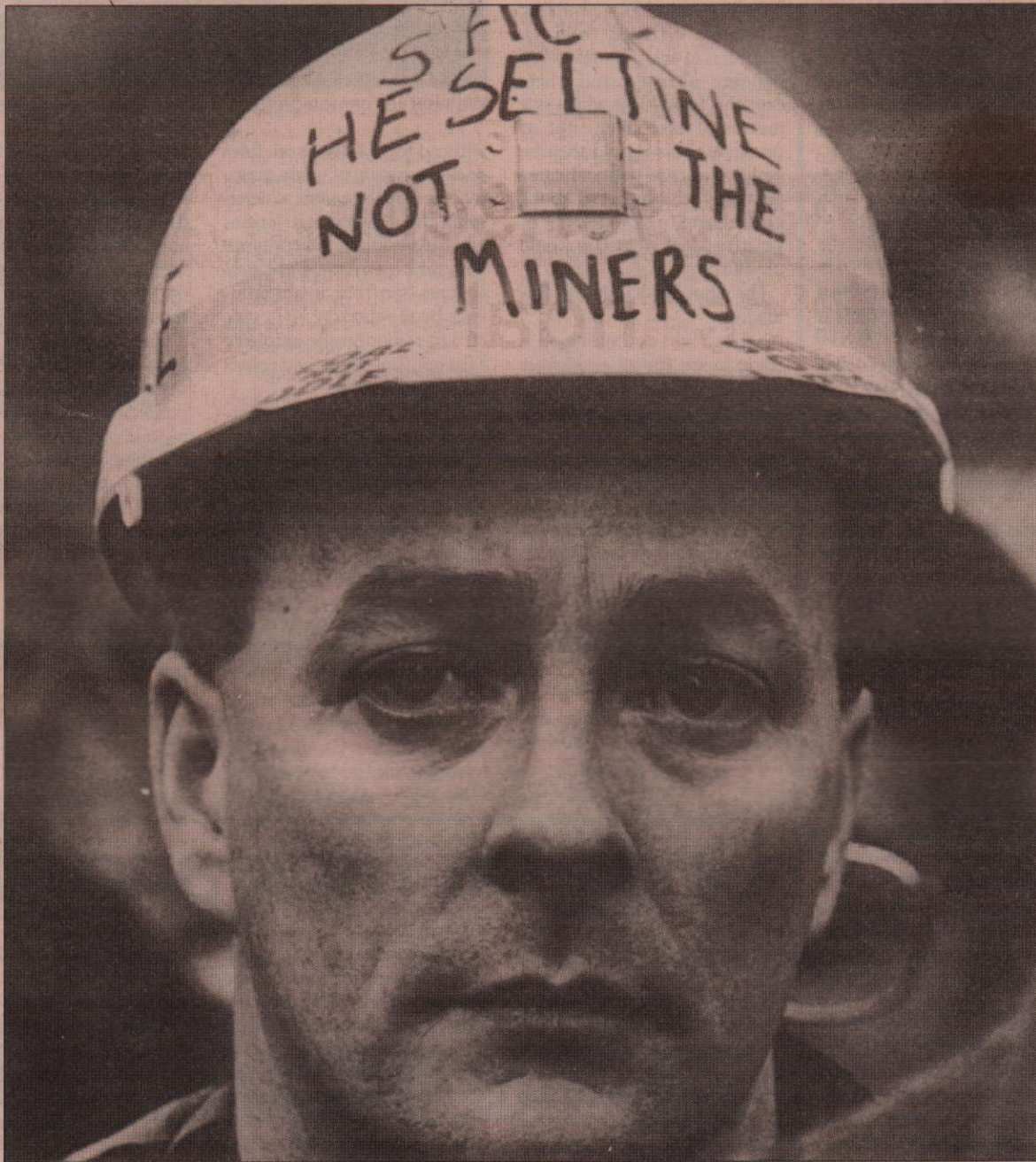
That's why the Alliance for Workers' Liberty and our predecessors have argued long and hard for the formation of an open, democratic and genuinely broad based, rank and file movement in the trade unions and across all the unions.

Such a movement would put a self-liberating instrument into the hands of ordinary workers: with such a rank and file movement we could force the union leaders to fight and where they refuse, replace them.

What is involved here is not a question of abstract sloganising but of putting forward an eminently sensible and practical policy.

In a workplace we may find one in a hundred (at present) who will accept completely the need for a socialist revolution and is prepared to devote a large part of his or her life to working for it. That is an important beginning — but it's not enough if we hope to do more than spend all our time patiently explaining and trying to convince people about basic socialist ideas.

Alongside the convinced socialists there will be many who may not be fully convinced socialists, but will agree to work with us on immediate



The miners' defeat need not have happened

issues like militant struggle over wages and conditions, and join us in a fight for union democracy, and against such things as racism and sexism. We need to organise these militants.

This is the familiar stuff of everyday local work for every socialist in the trade unions. But it needs to be more than local. Otherwise the national union leadership always has the advantages over the local groups of activists. We need a national organisation pulling together the militants across industry.

The best example history has yet provided of such an organisation is the Minority Movement of the 1920s, which at its peak led one million workers. It was formed in a period similar to today, after a series of setbacks for the working class.

The engineering workers had been heavily defeated in a lock-out in 1921-

2. Trade union membership was falling. But the then-revolutionary Communist Party did not give up and give in — they went out to organise the rank and file. They went out to prepare the future.

The same thing could be done today. Already the conditions exist for uniting the rank and file across the unions.

Several key unions already have fully formed and influential Broad Lefts and rank and file groups. They should be linked together through a single co-ordinating centre.

In the NCU (the British Telecom workers' union) the Broad Left is a major force and has a majority on the union's executive.

In USDAW (the shop workers' union) the Broad Left can mount a major challenge to the right wing. It regularly attracts several hundred to

its conference fringe meetings.

In CPSA, (the low paid civil servants' union) the left has recently come together to mount a united electoral challenge to the existing right-wing leadership. The left stands on a policy of mounting a campaign of industrial action to defeat Market Testing and privatisation. There are similar developments in the other main civil service union, NUCPS.

In the RMT, (the main rail union) the left, loosely grouped around the Campaign for a Fighting and Democratic Union, has made some gains in this year's executive elections. It could still regain its momentum after failing to challenge Jimmy Knapp in this year's General Secretary election.

In the NUT (the main teachers' union) a divided left is at last starting to see the burning need for unity.

Some initiatives and campaigns are being explored between the Socialist Teachers' Alliance and the Campaign for a Democratic and Fighting union.

In MSF, (the technicians' union), the left is also discussing the need for unity.

Elsewhere in the movement, there is cause for hope.

There are older Broad Lefts in the giant TGWU, in the builders' union UCATT, in the engineers' union, AEEU, and in the printers union, GPMU. They could be refocused towards an outgoing campaigning approach. They could be supplemented by specific campaigns over questions of union democracy and policy.

Even in the huge and bureaucratic GMB there are small signs of the ranks beginning to stir. For instance, Edmond's proposal to establish bi-annual conferences was defeated at the 1992 Conference.

Meanwhile in the UCW, the postal workers' union, where the organised left is very weak, it is still possible to defeat the executive on the conference floor — not only on industrial, but on political issues as well.

In UNISON a serious open and democratic rank and file movement could easily be built. There are two main obstacles: the sectarianism of the SWP and their blatant front, the NALGO Broad Left, and the traditional weakness of the hard left in the old NUPE and COHSE, which make up the rest of the union.

This brief survey of the movement reveals that the conditions do exist for pulling together and co-ordinating the activists of the different opposition groups across the unions.

Given the very serious class wide attacks that the Tories are now engaged in — like the three year public sector pay freeze — unity became an imperative necessity. If it is possible, and it is, then we must fight to win it! Class-wide attacks require a class wide response.

If the left itself can not and does not unite across the unions to press for a fightback, then what hope have we got of forcing the official leaders to unite and lead a fightback?

If the nature of the bosses' and the Tories' attacks are forcing people to think hard about the need for unity, then the collapse of the old Stalinist systems in Eastern Europe has opened up the possibility of new realignments on the left and the ending of old, outmoded, divisions.

Activists from the traditional, more bureaucratic Communist Party-dominated Broad Lefts are now much more open to discussion and to joint work and campaigning than ever before.

Continued on page 4

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

Karl Marx

Socialist Organiser,

PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA

Newsdesk 071-639 7965 (Latest reports Monday)

Editor: John O'Mahony

Sales Organiser: Jill Mountford

Published by: WL Publications Limited

Printed by: Eastway Offset (TU) London E9

Articles do not necessarily reflect the views of Socialist Organiser and are in a personal capacity unless otherwise stated
Registered as a newspaper at the Post Office

WE SAY

No 'lasting peace' through coercion

THE MUCH ANTICIPATED "Xmas Peace" never came to Northern Ireland. There is no Provisional IRA ceasefire; there is PIRA business as usual. There has not even been a clear PIRA or Sinn Fein response to the "peace proposals" that Dublin and London made public in mid-December. Yet, we are told, the "peace process" goes on.

Meanwhile we are stuck in a never-never land, of bizarre charades and Alice in Wonderland black is really white nonsense-talking.

Gerry Adams now parades around as if he is a sort of "peace candidate", advocating "lasting peace in Ireland" and calling on the Tory government to "go the last mile for peace."

What would "going the last mile for peace" mean? Britain not only declaring that it will not stand in the way of a united Ireland, but undertaking to "persuade" the Unionists to accept it.

And what if Britain can't "persuade" the Northern Irish Unionists, who, after all, have stood against British governments in the past in the General Strike of 1974, for example?

Behind "persuasion" looms the implied demand long central to a distinct strand of Catholic bourgeois nationalism — at least as far back as John Redmond's pre-1914 Home Rule Party — the demand for British coercion against those Irish who do not want Irish unity.

As we have said before in SO, the paradox that the PIRA says it wants a united Ireland and yet recklessly kills Irish Protestants, the consent of whose community is irreplaceable to winning a united Ireland can be explained only by this fact: the PIRA looks to the British government to push 1 million Irish Unionists into a united Ireland! Wolfe Tone had a better idea — a voluntary, self-sustaining, progressive unity, in political equality, of all the people of Ireland.

The British government could not, even if it wanted to, 'deliver' the Irish Unionists for a united Ireland against their will. Not without coercion on a far bigger scale than anything the Northern Irish Catholics have experienced in the last 25 years, and probably not even then.

Even if the Catholic-Protestant population ratio were reversed — it is now 60-40 in the Unionist favour — that would not alter the core of the situation: the distinct and strongly felt identity of the Unionists. Even were they to be reduced to a minority in the Six Counties, things could not be resolved by mere democratic head counting, because they would reject it in favour of something they believe to be higher, their distinct, British, identity.

So the majority Irish people once rejected democratic head counting within the old UK.

Irish unity, even on a federal or confederal basis — the only conceivable unity now — will be voluntary or it will not come into existence.

Gerry Adams does not stand for unity. His movement is one of the great forces for sectarian division in Northern Ireland. The demand that Britain "persuades" the Irish Unionists into a united Ireland is only one variant of the general drive towards all-out sectarian civil war of which Adams' movement is the unconscious bearer.

More than hypocrisy

STRANGE, BUT also very instructive, was the response of our contemporary Socialist Worker, to the affair of George Galloway, the "left" Labour MP who visited Saddam Hussein, the "strong", "courageous", "indefatigable" and butcherous Iraqi dictator, and delivered the awe-struck epithets in quotation marks straight to the anti-working class dictator's face.

What does Socialist Worker think? Like Socialist Organiser, Socialist Worker thinks that the Tories who denounced Galloway are a bunch of hypocrites. It reminds its readers that many of them had lucrative dealings with Iraq right up to the eve of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait.

Yes, of course, they are hypocrites. There is as much Tory hypocrisy in the air we breathe in Britain these days as there is oxygen! Everybody knows that.

And? What else does Socialist Worker say? What does it say about Galloway's performance? Nothing. Nothing at all!

A prominent "left" MP does what Galloway did in front of millions of Iraqi and British people, who saw the nauseating scene on TV, and this voice of International Socialism can see, hear and smell nothing but Tory hypocrisy!

It is another example of Socialist Worker's fundamental unscrupulousness of purpose where political ideas are concerned.

Scourge of the Labour Party and the "reformist" left, builders of "the Marxist revolutionary party" "by any means necessary", the true "Leninists" of our epoch, they yet have nothing at all to say about this latest example of the putrescence of the old, "official" left!

They are organisationally "hard" and "intransigent" against Labour and reformism, and against the reformist old left, but politically — where ideas, policy, programme and serious labour movement opposition to the reformists is concerned — they are as soft as the well-known substance that farmers use to help them grow crops. Just as soft, and a lot less useful.

On the other hand, they may have been inhibited by the fact that three years ago they applauded Saddam Hussein's gas bomb attacks on Israel and championed him as the new great hope of destroy-Israel "anti-Zionism".

THE LEFT IN THE UNIONS

Why we support positive legal rights for workers

By a central London British Telecom engineer

THE Socialist Movement Trade Union Committee has been quite right to focus on the anti-union laws as a certain concern for socialists active in the unions. Unfortunately it has been only half right in the way in which it has done this.

It is not enough just to call for defiance by the unions of the anti-union laws, on principle and then to plead for any government — Tory, Labour Lib-Lab — to repeal them.

What is needed is support for defiance whenever and wherever this is possible which is a matter of assessment not of principle. This should then be coupled with a political campaign to force the next Labour government to enact a series of positive legal rights for trade unionists.

This should include the following:

- (a) The right to belong to a trade union for all employees including those employed at GCHQ, the police and the armed services.
- (b) Legally enforceable rights for unions to gain access to workplaces to organise, for workers to join unions and for unions to gain recognition.
- (c) A legally recognised right to strike; to picket effectively and in whatever number is chosen, and to take other forms of industrial action.
- (d) The right to strike for all trade unionist, including secondary or solidarity action,



We need to campaign for positive trade union rights. Photo: Paul Herrmann (Profile)

without fear of dismissal, fines or sequestration of union assets.

(e) The right for unions to determine their own constitutions and rule books in accordance with their own democratic procedures free from any interference by the state.

(f) The right of trade unions to take political action and collect a political levy.

(g) The right to job security.

(h) The right to stop work whenever health and safety are threatened.

(i) The right to employment free from discrimination on grounds of gender, race, age, religion, sexual orientation or political persuasion.

(j) The rights of workers and their unions to be fully consulted and informed by employers on prospects, strategic investments, mergers, and takeovers.

(k) Full-time rights for part-time workers; rights for short-term contract workers.

(l) Rights for homeworkers in employment protection legislation and financial sanctions on those who illegally exploit them.

This charter is SMTUC policy. Unfortunately, the Committee's officers have not pushed it because some of them mistakenly believe that merely changing the law is not radical enough. In fact, changing the law is more politically advanced than empty demagogic calls for more militancy on its own. A moments thought should make this clear.

The reason why we want to change the law and introduce positive rights is simple. A return to the old system of immunities would only benefit those with a lot of economic

muscle who are already strong and well organised whereas a legally enforced right to join a union and strike would provide an important weapon in the battle to unionise the 60% or more of the working class — including some of its most oppressed sections, who are currently outside the labour movement. A change in the law therefore has much more far reaching class-wide implications.

By failing to campaign on the issue of the workers' charter of positive rights the SMTUC has missed important opportunities. But all is far from lost. Thanks to the activity of non-aligned trade union and Labour Party members, as well as that of the AWL, important elements of the Charter have now become official TUC and Labour Party policy.

Unite for rank and file power

From page 3

WITH THE fall of the old police state regimes in Eastern Europe, the views of these people are in flux. Their god Stalin, is dead once and for all.

The great majority will either drop out of the struggle, or become open right wingers, but a minority will be looking for serious socialist answers.

It will be easier to convince them of these if we can find a framework for common activity.

What this means is that the old division between the broadly "Trotskyist" trade union left and the "Stalinist" left are no longer justified. A new unified left wing movement can be created — but only if it is based on immediate class struggle unity for the fight against the bosses. If it is a matter of a cynical electoral stitch-ups involving some of the left in unprincipled diplomatic silences about central working class issues like trade union democracy it will fail (see page 14).

This weekend's Socialist Movement Trade Union Committee conference should look very seriously at the political openings we have described above.

It should seize the time and approach all the trade union Broad Lefts, rank and file groups and employer based combine committees as well as left unions like the Bakers and Miners with the aim of uniting the left in the unions to fight for rank and file power.

This approach should also be extended to the Liaison Committee for the Defence of Trade Unions (the old CP co-ordinating centre) and to Trade Union News, the popular cross-union rank and file bi-monthly.

Immediately, a co-ordinating committee could be set up that would help knit together the activists, share the experience and pool the resources of different left forces in the unions.

Just think about the important co-ordinating work such a body could do!

It could take industrial disputes seriously in a way that the TUC does not and by its bureaucratic nature can not.

It could provide information, organise collections and speaking tours for workers in struggle. Most important of all, it could provide a framework for organising solidarity strike action. Right now, it's central unifying initiative would be a

campaign for a one-day public sector-wide strike against the Tory attacks.

It could intervene into the policy debate inside the TUC and Labour Party. If the work were done properly, such a body could establish important proposals like a legal 35-hour week with no loss of pay and a massive expansion of public services as official Labour Party and TUC policy for full employment.

Last year's battle over the union link showed how effective even a little loosely organised pressure is if it is applied in the right place. Just imagine what a proper and permanent co-ordinating centre could achieve.

A cross-union co-ordinating centre could not, of course, avoid difficult political questions. It would have to provide answers to the burning political questions of the movement like, for instance, how to fight racism and fascism. But it would debate out these questions in a tolerant manner and give space to minority opinions.

It would not try to "inject" politics from the 'outside' but would try to draw out the political logic of the class struggle.

For instance, the fight for jobs implies all kinds of questions: who pays for a shorter working week? How do we plan a recovery and direct resources to social needs? How do we break capitalist resistance to measures which seriously challenge their power?

As we have said, this idea is not utopian at all. It is entirely practical. It is clearly an immediate priority for the left in the labour movement. People who oppose it can only do so for narrow factional and sectarian reasons.

For example, for fear that something on the scale proposed here could not be dominated by any one particular faction, clique or sect. People like that, who believe it is better to rule in a sect than be a citizen in a burgeoning democratic working class movement will never be of any use to the working class.

Big battles are looming on the trade union front, while the objective conditions are coming together to make serious left wing co-ordination possible. Let us ensure that it is not a lack of political will to fight for rank and file unity that let's our side down.

Far too much is at stake for that.

Trade unionists must make Labour fight!

Tom Rigby takes a look at one of the central debates on the trade union left

ON THE face of it the slogan "for political trade unionism" sounds harmless enough. It is to be one of the central themes of this weekend's Socialist Movement Trade Union Committee conference.

Unfortunately, a moment's examination reveals this catchphrase to be a piece of almost meaningless nonsense.

To simply say trade unions should be "political" doesn't tell you what sort of politics they should adopt.

You can find anarchist trade unions, social democratic trade unions, Stalinist trade unions, Christian Democratic trade unions and even fascist trade unions, all of which are equally political.

What's more, even explicitly "non-political" trade unions are, of course, political, precisely because defining yourself in such a way reflects a political attitude.

It means accepting that the powers-that-be have the right to rule society and that trade unions should only concern themselves with workplace matters.

Conversely, there is also a sense in which trade unions can never be fully political. Working-class politics require a socialist revolution and the abolition of the wages system whereas trade unions are, in their very nature, based on the existence of that system and bargaining over the rate of exploitation of workers within it.

So, whatever angle you look at it from, the slogan "for political trade unionism" doesn't look like much of a slogan at all. It clarifies nothing, and points no way forward for the movement.

It is therefore tempting to conclude that either:

(a) those attending the SMTUC conference are in for a rather dull discussion or

(b) the people who have drawn up the SMTUC agenda know nothing of the classical Marxist critique of the limitations of trade unionism or

(c) the banality of the slogan hasn't dawned on these master intellects or

(d) all of the above.

Seriously though, it is probably the internal differences amongst supporters of *Socialist Outlook*, some of whom run the SMTUC, that accounts for such an uninspiring and vague slogan gaining such prominence.

What *Outlook* are doing is an old factional bad habit known as "retreating up the

ladder of abstraction."

They don't like the difficult, concrete, real-life problems of fighting for working-class interests in the existing political wing of the mass labour movement i.e. the Labour Party. Some of them dislike it so much that they even pretend to themselves that the unions are actually on the verge — or at least not very far away from — disaffiliating from the party.

"To simply say trade unions should be 'political' doesn't tell you what sort of politics they should adopt."

Others don't share such fantasies, but don't care for the difficult task of fighting for socialist policies against the Walworth Road machine either and so practically abstain on this question.

Still others in the *Outlook* fold understand the importance of the Labour Party and still try to fight inside it, but they lack the will to fight inside *Outlook* for policies that actually reflect their own personal practice.

As a result, you get an old-

style trade union fudge. Except its purpose is to keep *Outlook* together rather than to cover up the antagonisms between bosses and workers.

All serious people at this weekend's event should reject this nonsense and instead focus on what concrete, real, working-class politics means here and now in the trade unions.

The SMTUC should launch a campaign around the theme of "Labour must fight".

The focus should be on:

- * a campaign of militant political and industrial action by the TUC and LP to force an immediate general election.

This should be linked to:

- * support for all workers in struggle;

- * support for a one-day public sector strike against the pay freeze, privatisation and CCT and in defence of jobs and services;

- * support for mass action and strikes in defence of the NHS;

- * for a 35-hour week with no loss of pay and a massive expansion of public services so as to reduce unemployment;

- * for the repeal of all the Tory anti-union laws and their replacement by a charter of positive legal rights for workers like the right to strike, take solidarity action, to picket effectively and join a union etc.

Practically, such a campaign from the SMTUC would have to combine activity at union conferences around model

motions, fringe meetings, petitions and stalls as well as local initiatives like trades council dayschools, branch and shop stewards committee discussions, and pro-Labour workplace canvassing. The SMTUC should provide special material for this job like camera-ready leaflets, broadsheets etc.

The campaign could also be given a sharp focus right now if the SMTUC concentrated on doing what it can to build up pressure for a one-day public sector-wide strike against the pay freeze, cuts, privatisation, contracting out and Market Testing.

This doesn't sound quite so "theoretical" and "profound" as pretentious chattering around the theme of "political trade unionism" but it does have the benefit of being concrete, practical and in the interests of the working class.

More on the trade unions New Problems, New Struggles

A handbook for trade unionists
Includes more on Labour and the unions, fighting for democracy in the movement, the history of rank and file movements
£1 plus 29p p&p

Wasted opportunities

By Trudy Saunders, SMTUC founder member since 1989

THE SMTUC has thrown away a lot of opportunities to campaign since it was formed in 1989.

The ambulance dispute 1989-90. A proposal to organise an ambulance workers' solidarity conference which had the support of the Camden and Liverpool strikers — groups that were both occupying their stations — was rejected. Nothing else was done. The proposal came from a *Socialist Organiser* supporter. Who was censured for talking to the strikers!

The poll tax. A proposal again from SO/AWL for a special SMTUC trade union conference on the issue was botched. *Socialist Outlook* did not want to upset Militant who were running the all Britain anti-poll tax Federation as

their narrow party front. *Militant* then stole the idea and gazumped the SMTUC.

Gulf war 1990-91. Nothing from the SMTUC despite the pretentious internationalism of some of its officers.

"The SMTUC was excruciatingly slow to act during the pit closure crisis."

The initiative for "Trade Unionists Against the War" which organised a successful lobby of the TUC came from non-aligned NUT leftwingers and AWL/SO.

The battle over the Labour union link 1992-3. The initiative for the "Keep the Link" campaign came from the

AWL's Labour Party fraction and comrades in the long established and influential Campaign for Labour Party Democracy.

Due to sectarian indifference from certain SMTUC officers this powerful trade union revolt totally passed the SMTUC by.

Pit closure crisis October 1992. The SMTUC was excruciatingly slow to act. The initiative to form the National Miners' Support Network originally came from AWL and Briefing people. The SMTUC leadership's involvement mainly consisted of transforming a working conference into a disastrous and very boring rally.

Despite this baleful record the burning need for co-ordination across the trade unions is too great to allow the SMTUC's present leaders to continue to waste opportunities and to completely ruin the committee's reputation.

How not to build a movement

BRITISH TRADE unionism is littered with the decayed remnants of various attempts to build unofficial left groupings within the official structures. There have been some important success stories in particular unions and industries but only one general opposition movement - the Minority Movement of the 1920's - achieved any significant national influence. The Minority Movement, at its height, was supported by tens of thousands of workers. But it was politically and organisationally a creature of the Communist Party whose political zig-zags crippled and finally killed it.

More recent attempts to build cross-union left movements have also failed because of the political instability and/or sectarianism of the organisations that took the leading role within them. The SLL/WRP had its "All Trades Union Alliance" (ATUA) and the IS/SWP set up the "National Rank and File Movement" (NRFM). Both could organise conferences involving hundreds of militants delegated from branches and shop stewards committees. But both initiatives soon became no more than fronts for their respective sects. The experience of Militants "Broad Left Organising Committee" of the 1980's is even more depressing.

BLOC (an appropriate acronym as it turned out) repeated all the sectarian errors of the ATUA and NRFM but with Militants unique brand of bureaucracy, complacency and inertia. At least the ATUA and NRFM held a few lively conferences and attempted to intervene into disputes: BLOC "conferences" (after the first two) were no more than Militant rallies. During the miners strike and the big print battles of the 1980's BLOC did nothing. Whether BLOC still officially exists or not remains something of a mystery.

The most recent attempt to set up a national cross-union left current, the Socialist Movement Trade Union Committee (SMTUC), got off to a more auspicious start. It was initiated by people grouped around the Socialist Movement, some of whom were members of left groups and some not. Its first conference (1989) was lively and open and attracted quite a reasonable turn out given the generally poor morale of the left by then. But from early on there were problems: although it was not a front for any particular organisation it was a front for a *faction* of one: *Socialist Outlook*! It soon became clear that certain individuals regarded it as their personal fiefdom. Anyone with the audacity to question the divine right of the SMTUC ruling elite would be met with a torrent of petulant abuse, often verging on hysteria. When one of the elite was involved in the RMT's capitulation to London Underground management's company plan in 1992, it was made very clear that no criticism of his role would be tolerated within the SMTUC (or anywhere else, come to that).

The elite's continued dominance has been facilitated by the SMTUC's loose and ill-defined structure. They have consistently resisted proposals to make the conference delegate based; genuine trade union delegates get the same votes as "Representatives" from SMTUC "Caucuses" which only meet at SMTUC conferences.

Finally, there is the small matter of what exactly the SMTUC exists to do. It has never been able to decide what it is and what it stands for. Is it a radical discussion circle, a support network for socialist trade unionists, a proto-rank and file movement...or what? A proposal to build for a national co-ordinating conference of all existing rank and file groups and broad lefts has been passed at all of the SMTUC's national conferences but SMTUC policy has in practice been opposed by the ruling elite.

The SMTUC is not beyond hope. It is still relatively open and democratic. It could become a national co-ordinating centre for the left in the unions. But if it carries on as it has over the last couple of years it will surely ossify and die. After all, a front organisation for a few self-important individuals is no better than a front organisation for a political group. If anything it's worse, at least a political group is first and foremost supposed to have some politics!

INSIDE THE UNIONS



By Sleeper

Dog-gone!

WITH John Patten's announcement that daily prayers in schools is to be compulsory, *Socialist Organiser* sent a team of crack undercover journalistic snoops to spy on him at prayer. One of the bugs our agents placed on his pajamas picked up what at first sounded like the Lord's Prayer. More attentive listening to the tapes showed that Patten had jumbled and confused the words. We print a full transcript below:

Our father, who should be at home
Unless Tim Yeo be his name.
Those tax forms come, you have been done,
With high taxes for the poor it's Tory heaven.
Sell them today their daily bread
And don't forgive them their trespasses
As we don't forgive those who sabotage our hunts.
And if we succumb to temptation
Deliver us from the media.
For ours is the kingdom,
The power and the glory,
Until the next election.
Oh Christ!

JOHAN Redwood, Secretary of State for Wales and well-known member of the Illegitimati, has found enough time off from doing nothing for the people of Wales to write a book. His *The Global Marketplace: Capitalism and its Future* hits the bookshops this week. You wouldn't expect *Socialist Organiser* to honour this book with a glowing review, so here's what the coffee-table weekly of the aspiring executive, and one-time Thatcher fanzine, the *Economist*, said:

"A book like this needs a big idea. *The Global Marketplace* offers lots of small ones — and none of them surprising. This denies the reader not only an intriguing picture of the future but even a coherent account of the forces which brought us here. What they do receive, in ample measure, is Redwood's flat, dull prose." With friends like this, who needs to be in the Cabinet?

WITH much that passed in the former USSR under the name of Socialism now buried, there is one more lie that must be laid to rest: *Truth*, or *Pravda* as the Russians call it.

Lenin founded the original paper in 1914 (although he appropriated a title Trotsky had published since 1908, much to the latter's annoyance). As the revolution degenerated *Truth* became a vehicle for Stalin's lies. As Lenin's embalmed corpse became a weapon to attack the real Lenin, *Pravda*, its masthead now changed to include the words "Founded by Lenin in 1914" became a weapon against the truth and genuine workers' democracy.

Since 1989, the end of state subsidies, and competition from other papers, *Pravda* has fallen on hard times. It kept publishing only because a 55% stake was bought by a Greek publisher, Yiannis Yannikos.

Now *Pravda* seems doomed: Yannikos has pulled out after editorial staff refused to put his name on the masthead along with Lenin as co-founder. On 25

GRAFFITI

VIVELA
REVOLUCION

By Cyclops

January *Pravda* did not appear — let's hope this lie has been laid to rest permanently.

CIVIL servants beware. 441 of your colleagues guarding Britain's prisons face death for no other reason than that they stand in the way of privatisation. With privatisation, those who cannot be redeployed will, in the words of the Director General of the prison service, "be destroyed".

Being doggedly loyal, ununionised, obedient to their bosses and working for nothing more than food and board has not saved them. Perhaps their biggest mistake was being Alsatian dogs. But if you belong to the two-legged variety of civil servant, be on your guard. Those would-be dog-killers do not have a reputation for being man's best friend, either.

EVEN mention of the miners' struggle of 1992-3 is now forbidden within the SWP! So reports the January '94 *Workers' Republic*, the publication of the Revolutionary Democratic Group (RDG), which considers itself to be an expelled faction of the SWP.

You will recall that the SWP went politically mad late in '92, frantically agitating for the TUC to call an immediate all-out general strike. They then dropped the demand after a few weeks. According to *WR*, a reference to the miners' struggle was cut from a recent internal bulletin article. Like so much else, that episode has now gone down the memory hole, and God help anyone who tries to pull it out.

Reporting on the expulsion of Andy Wilson, ex-full time organiser for Liverpool, *WR* gives this informal picture of life in the SWP now:

"Trouble began when a group of SWP members, including comrade Wilson, decided that they would like to publish a cultural magazine. Tony Cliff and the Central Committee decided to put a stop to it. Comrade Wilson was chosen as 'leader' of this cultural 'conspiracy', brought before comrades Stack, German and Cliff, and ordered to desist.

"Over the last two years Cliff seems to have flipped his lid. First we had the threat of expulsion against Lionel Simms over anthropology. Then we had the expulsions of Taylor and Watson in Glasgow for thinking wrong thoughts. Next we had the assault on members of *Socialist Organiser*. Then during the last pre-conference discussion period the Central Committee censored the *Internal Bulletin*..."

Trotsky called the revolutionary party the memory of the working class. The SWP is increasingly the hysterical amnesia of a petit-bourgeois cult!

One year's subscription to *Workers' Republic*, £5. RMB, PO Box 3140, London E17 5LJ.

Heads on the block

PRESS GANG

THE GUARDIAN TODAY
SUNDAY PRESS
THE WORLD

By Jim Denham

GILLIAN Taylforth and Jane Brown do not, on the face of it, have much in common. One is a well-known TV actress while the other is the headmistress of a primary school in one of London's poorest boroughs.

Both, however, have recently been subjected to highly intrusive and damaging press coverage from which their respective reputations may never recover. Both now know from bitter experience what it is like to have the reptiles of the Fourth Estate besieging your home, harassing your friends and trawling through every detail of your personal life.

Of course, it could also be argued that both of them brought it on themselves through behaviour of mind-boggling foolishness. Ms. Taylforth, in particular, really ought to have known better. As a star of *East Enders* she is no stranger to the ways of the tabloid press — indeed, it could be argued that the tabloids (which for years have covered soap operas with a meticulous attention to detail

rarely bestowed upon "real life") helped make her the star she is. She must surely have realised that by suing *The Sun* over allegations of a sex romp in a Range Rover she was

handing them the kind of story that Kelvin MacKenzie dreams about. Win or lose, *The Sun* and the rest of them would have a field-day. Jokes about sausages, "blow-jobs" (whatever they may be) and the head-room of a Range Rover would follow as surely as night follows day. And when *The Sun* hired Mr. George

"Killer" Carman QC, ("The Great Defender") at a modest £1,000 per second, Ms. Taylforth's fate was sealed. This kind of case is Mr. Carman's meat and drink and his act revolves around putting the plaintiff on trial and then

ripping her character to shreds. Such is the topsy-turvy world of modern PR hype, it was even suggested that Ms. Taylforth didn't much care what the outcome of the case would be, so long as it put her onto the front pages. Last week's pictures of her reaction to the verdict put paid to that theory.

Jane Brown, the head of Kingsmead primary school, behaved almost as foolishly as Ms. Taylforth but probably deserves more sympathy — especially as she now faces the

possibility of losing her job. Ms. Brown, you will recall, decided not to take her pupils to see *Romeo and Juliet* on the grounds that it was "entirely about heterosexual love". Now, were I the parent of a child at Kingsmead School that would worry me — especially as it is said that Ms. Brown had to make enquiries

about the story-line before reaching her decision. It was a heaven-sent opportunity for the tabloids (and most of the "serious" press as well) to disinter that old chestnut, the "loony left" — this time in trendy 1990s "Politically

Correct" garb. When it came to light that Ms. Brown is a lesbian, tabloid joy was complete.

Never mind the fact that Ms. Brown is credited with transforming morale at the previously "at risk" school to the point where last year the Government's inspectors commended the school for its "warm, caring environment". And never mind the somewhat embarrassing fact that Ms. Brown has the overwhelming support of parents and governors, while the Labour local authority seem determined to sack her. On second thoughts that unforeseen twist (with its attendant implications for the Government's Local Management of Schools policy) may be the reason that the story has disappeared as suddenly as it has.

Ms. Brown and her partner have suffered completely unwarranted intrusion and harassment. Whatever the outcome, their lives could well be ruined for years to come. Ms. Taylforth's suffering is probably just as bad, though her job is certainly not at risk. It all seems like yet another argument for statutory controls on press intrusion into the lives of private individuals, but (as I've argued before) it is quite impossible to think of any that wouldn't curtail genuine investigative journalism. It seems hard (and I'm sure it's no comfort to the victims) but the only lesson seems to be, don't give the bastards any excuse.

"Ms. Brown has the overwhelming support of parents... that may be the reason that the story has disappeared."

The return of the sexual dinosaurs

WOMEN'S EYE

By Rosalind Robson

THIS week journalists everywhere are earning their crust reviewing and debating author, Michael Crichton's *Disclosure*. This is a story of how a male employee is sexually harassed by the woman who beats him to promotion, and becomes his boss.

Crichton's last book was the completely unrelated and not as controversial, *Jurassic Park*. However, *Disclosure* looks set to equal his last book in the box office smash stakes — it has been sold to Warner Brothers for \$3.6 million. He also wrote *Rising Sun*, both the Japanese-bashing novel and the script for the recent Sean Connery movie based on it.

Crichton claims to have adopted a role reversal story for a serious purpose: "to examine aspects concealed by traditional responses." He is also on record as saying that he did not intend to deny the fact

that the great majority of harassment claims are brought by women. All very reasonable if you take it at face value.

Sexual harassment is, in major part, about the assertion of power. It is usually exerted over women either by their bosses or their "fellow" workers. Defined thus, it does not seem unlikely that women in a position of power can and do sexually harass men. This need not just be by women bosses.

For example, the bizarre and humiliating "initiation rites" that young men often undergo at the hands of their female workmates can be a form of sexual harassment.

None of this should contradict the fact that the vast bulk of sexual harassment does take place against women. Not only are men more likely to be sexual harassers, but, women, I would assert, are likely to be more traumatised and feel more threatened by it than men.

I repeat, admitting sexual harassment by women should not undermine the basic facts. However, call me a cynic, but Michael Crichton did not get

to be a best selling author by not jumping on cultural band-wagons. Which one is it this time? The backlash against feminism in the United States.

That is clear enough, but how it expresses itself is not at all straightforward.

Feminism in America (and to a lesser extent in Europe too) was always dominated by the aspirations and viewpoints of middle-class women. This has been especially so in the last decade. It relates to that thin strata of women who have made it as corporate managers, lawyers, professionals. This is the feminism Crichton and others want to have a pop at.

But Crichton is not an extremist. He has not apparently created a character so misogynistically-inspired as that played by Glenn Close in *Fatal Attraction*. His thesis is a bit more subtle.

He says "Look folks, men can suffer too. If you really believe in equality, you've got to recognise that. And honey, believe me I really really believe in the equality of the sexes."

I think this idea rests on the

assumption that feminism has been successful. Look at the number of women in top managerial posts... Therefore feminism is no longer necessary: we're all equal now!

In the background there is also an inference that being a feminist, pursuing so-called feminist causes, like sexual harassment purely from a woman's viewpoint, is a bit "batty" these days. Frankly, that's an idea the PC advocates, with their often maniacal linguistic censoriousness, have helped to foster.

The truth is, however, that only a small minority of women have benefited from progress towards sexual equality. Under capitalism the vast majority of women are still second class citizens. Rich gits like Crichton, Hollywood's mainstream, and all the other Establishment cultural-trend-setters in America couldn't possibly understand that.

Feminism — the fight for equality between men and women — is more relevant than ever. For this reason, whatever the rational, reasonable core of it, we should say Crichton's story stinks.

Interview with Marxman

Fighting Racism

WE'RE MEMBERS of the ANL, YRE, WAR and AFA basically we support most of the organisations.

We know that Workers Against Racism is the Revolutionary Communist Party, the ANL is basically the SWP, *Militant* run the YRE. But the divisions over action are ludicrous.

We marched down to the BNP headquarters four times last year. Marching down there shows support for people in the area, but, the place is still standing. They should ensure that it's not there... by any means necessary.

To have had two anti-racist demos on 16 October last year was ridiculous. Everyone should have united in one march on the BNP. We support anyone fighting racism and fascism, but we need unity. I don't see the point in there being more than one anti-nazi organisation in this country. All the left groups should be in one campaign.

It's about sectarian politics! Different left politicians trying to recruit. The real job is to mobilise working class people against fascism and racism.

Marxman?

WE CALLED the band Marxman because most people don't know what Marxism is. Most people have heard of it, but think it's something that went on years ago.

As a youngster, up till 16, I did not have a clue. We hope the band will inspire people to find out what Marxism is all about.

Stalinism

THE COLLAPSE of Eastern European regimes was inevitable. To have a socialist revolution and



Marxman: Phrase and Hollis

confine it to one section of the world, while the rest of the world is capitalist is impossible. There is only a certain amount of pressure it can take.

With the Stalinist betrayal, it was bound to collapse. The downfall of Stalinism was a good thing!

For 70 years the capitalists had said: "this is socialism" when it wasn't.

So now people will have to realise it was not. Hopefully people will find a new interest in fighting for real socialism. It's a good thing!

But now you have got a naked form of free market capitalism in places like Poland, creating terrible social conditions.

What the people of Eastern Europe are beginning to realise is

that a Stalinist workers state still guaranteed certain living conditions that have now gone. There is no point saying it was a good thing or a bad thing, it's happened. You've got to get on fighting for socialism.

Black Nationalism

THE GROWTH of interest in Black Nationalism and the Nation of Islam is contradictory. Religion — any religion is a dead end. The nationalism of the oppressed is progressive up to point. They are looking for answers. If people want to fight, it is a good thing.

Labour

THE LABOUR PARTY is not socialist, it never was. It was set up to reform the system. I would vote

Labour at an election, in the absence of another party, on a class basis. My family have always voted Labour.

People are disillusioned with Labour, but it is the biggest party of the working class.

I don't think there is any hope that it will fight; even left wing talk has long gone.

The Labour Party is becoming the SDP. It works with the world capitalist system. Revolutionary youth are not joining the Labour Party.

On Ireland

NORTHERN IRELAND was created by the British as an Imperial division. The British should get out. If you talk to a 15 year old on the streets of Belfast he will say that if



Youth Fightback is...

... the voice of revolutionary socialist youth.

This page is separately edited.

Editor: Mark Sandell

Phone: 071-639 7967 for details of our activity.

Letters and articles to Youth Fightback c/o PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA.

the British troops pull out there will be a bloody civil war, and he will be right. You've got to take sides in a civil war — which side will you be on?

Rap

THERE HAS been a lot of publicity about sexism in the rap scene. Bands like "Nigger with Attitude" came out with the line "Life ain't nothing but bitches and money", and on one level they are right. That's what capitalism in America is like.

The difference between them and bands like us is that we see, yes, that's what life is like, but we have got to fight to make it better.

That's why we won't use words like that.

The use of anti-gay and sexist language is a reflection of mainstream attitudes in society which these bands just repeat in a street talking fashion.

You foolish things

THIS LOT have won our fools of the week award. Fools of the year, would be more appropriate! They are some of the Labour Student leaders of the National Union of Students.

For years, they have argued that students and student unions must keep a low, respectable profile, if we were to stop the Tory attack on our right to have student unions.

They told NUS conferences that NUS must give up politics, and give up campaigning that it must instead become a charity. Only thus could it save itself from the wrath of the Tories.

They grovelled and wept to Tory back benches. Lorna the one in a suit, went to Tory Conference to win and dine back benches. She told those who wanted to fight the Tory attack that demonstrations were tactics "from the Stone Age."

What we needed, said Lorna, was a "charm offensive" on the government.

Of course John Patten ignored it all and tried to wipe out NUS.

What has now stopped his union-busting is the legal difficulty of interfering in Universities.

Those who argued that we should fight were right and this bunch of professional creeps now look pretty silly.

Have they learned anything? No! They are still



Ian Moss



Lorna Fitzsimons



Deremont Kehoe

trying to tear the campaigning heart out of NUS, still refusing to call a demo against the Tory government. These idiots — right wing Labour supporters all — are still making the Tory agenda for NUS!

Reform of NUS is top of this year's NUS Conference scheduled business.

This lot are in student politics to get a careers. Take Lorna what does she want to be when she leaves NUS? She wants — in her own words — to be a "jet setting venture capitalist". As second best

choice, she says, that she would not mind being a Labour MP!

Ian Moss (the one with the hair) told students on a thousand strong student lobby called by Save Our Student Unions as he walked passed them in the suit he wears to visit Tory MPs "if there is a national demo, it will be a gift from the National Executive."

The demo on the 23rd will be a huge national demo with or without the National Executive! These self-serving fools have had their day.

Sex, lies & the Tories

LAST WEEK 15 people attended a Youth Fightback meeting at Norton college. There was a lively debate about the Tories hypocrisy and the failures of Back to Basics.

All present realised that young people have to organise, in order to fight back.

We plan to meet regularly.

This week's meeting will focus on organising for the 'Hands Off Our Grants' national demo. We plan to write a leaflet and circulate a petition around the college.

For solidarity with

By Stan Crooke

Zhirinovskiy and the December elections

ONLY 53% of the electorate voted in the elections held in Russia on 12 December 1993. By contrast, 64% of the electorate voted in a referendum on confidence in Yeltsin, held in April 1993. The difference in the turnout was in itself a reflection of the growing despair in the country.

The voting took place against a background of economic collapse. Inflation is running at 20% a month, whilst industrial output is falling by 2% a month. 30% of the population now lives below the official poverty level.

In the party-bloc-based voting in the parliamentary poll the clear winner was Vladimir Zhirinovskiy's Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR) winning some 24% of the vote, compared with 14% for Russia's Choice (pro-Yeltsin and pro-market-reform), 12% for the Communist Party, and 10% and 8% respectively for the CP's close allies the Agrarian Party and Women of Russia.

Dissatisfaction with the "achievements" of capitalist market reforms undermined support for Russia's Choice.

The Communist Party and its allies could count on a base of support, especially amongst those layers of the old bureaucracy who had seen their perks and privileges destroyed by market reforms, but its record in power prevented it from attracting mass support from amongst those alienated by the market reforms of Gaidar and Yeltsin.

In the absence of a credible socialist alternative, the almost natural pole of attraction for the millions impoverished by opening Russia up to the "free market" was Zhirinovskiy's LDPR.

Zhirinovskiy's politics are essentially those of demagogic and extreme Russian nationalism, harking back to a mythical "golden age" rather than having a clear set of policies for immediate implementation (which, given the dominant position enjoyed by Yeltsin under the new constitution, he would not be able to implement anyway).

The results of last December's elections underline once again the need for socialists and the labour movement in this country to step up support for their counterparts in Russia. But the working class in the ex-USSR is still deeply marked by its experience under Stalinism.

Stalinism — never again!

The starting point for any genuine movement of solidarity with socialists and with the embryonic labour movements in the former Stalinist states must be outright condemnation of the police-state tyranny which made "socialism" such a dirty word in the ex-USSR and Eastern Europe.

The crimes committed in the name of "socialism" in the ex-USSR and the rest of Eastern Europe should never be forgotten especially by socialists. But just as pro-fascist revisionist historians seek to deny the Holocaust perpetrated by Nazi Germany, so too their Stalinist counterparts gloss over and cover up for the equally bloody crimes of Stalinism.

Stalinism in power meant an atomisation of the working class. All sections of society, apart from the ruling elite and its offspring, suffered under Stalinist repression. But it was the workers and peasants who fared worst of all in these "socialist" states.

The right to strike was non-existent in the Stalinist states. Where strikes did occur they were met with ferocious repression. In 1962 workers in the Soviet city of Novocherkassk were gunned down on the streets for the "crime" of striking.

The same fate befell Polish shipyard workers in Szczecin, Gdansk and Gdynia after a series of strikes in 1970. Six years later hundreds of Polish workers were arrested or sacked from their jobs for the "crime" of protesting against price increases.

In Rumania thousands of miners were sacked and exiled to remote parts of the country after they had taken strike action in 1977.

The right to form genuine trade unions was as non-existent as the right to strike. The official "unions" were effectively state-run prison camps for the workers. They defended the state against the workers, rather than the workers against the state. Attempts to form real trade unions were brutally suppressed.

There was no freedom of speech in the Stalinist states either. Criticism of the regime was deemed to be a criminal offence resulting in



Riot police chased by anti-Yeltsinites

prison sentences. Publications critical of the regime were automatically defined as "anti-socialist agitation and propaganda", rendering their authors liable to lengthy spells in prison.

Freedom of assembly was absent in the Stalinist states. Protests in Moscow's Red Square against the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 were violently broken up by the police. In East Germany unofficial commemorations of the deaths of Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg were attacked by the police and their organisers jailed.

The Stalinist regimes collapsed because they had to. Sheer terror had enabled the regimes to impose a programme of industrialisation. But sheer terror could achieve only so much. A modern society demands a free flow of information. Within the framework of the atomised societies ruled over by Stalinism this was an impossibility.

Stalinism in power was, by its very nature, incompatible with workers' self-organisation. Wherever workers attempted to organise inde-

"The Stalinist regimes collapsed because they had to. Sheer terror had enabled them to impose a programme of industrialisation. But sheer terror could achieve only so much."

pendently — on a small scale amongst Ukrainian miners, or in terms of a mass movement such as Poland's Solidarnosc — the government responded with bans and declarations of illegality. The leaders of the Ukrainian miners, Klebanov and Nikitin were locked up in lunatic asylums.

Mere lip-service was paid to the right of nations to self-determination. As in the Tsarist times, the area covered by the USSR was "a prison house of nations". The Eastern European countries were mere satellite-states of the USSR. Unrest in those countries — East Germany in 1953, Hungary in 1956, and Czechoslovakia in 1968 — was crushed by Soviet military forces.

But it was Russia itself which suffered Stalinist oppression the longest and the most intensely — the slave labour camps, the forced collectivisation, the purges of the 1930s, the medical "experiments" which had no parallel outside of Nazi concentration camps, and the total atomisation of the population.

These crimes were committed in the name of — "socialism"! Thereby the Stalinist regimes inflicted more damage on the cause of socialism than the Tories in Britain or their counterparts elsewhere could ever hope to inflict.

Without explicit condemnation of the crimes of Stalinism and of those who perpetrated them, any attempt to build solidarity with socialist organisations and the workers' movements in the former Stalinist states is a hollow charade, doomed to failure, and deserving to fail.

Economic collapse — or socialist reconstruction?

THE Russian economy is in a state of collapse. With every week that passes the economy lurches a step closer towards disintegration. Between the summer of 1991 and the summer of 1992 industrial output fell by 27%, investment in plant and machinery slumped by 55%, and prices rocketed by 1,560%. The real value of wages fell by 32%.

Within three months of the Russian government abandoning the prices of basic commodities to the forces of the "free market" in January 1992, 90% of workers in Russia were earning less than the official subsistence wage of 1,500 rubles a month.

By the beginning of 1993 the average per capita income was only 43% in real terms of what it had been two years earlier. Any savings which workers had managed to put aside had been destroyed by galloping inflation and the government's currency "reforms". Savage cut-backs in welfare benefits and social services have plunged millions into absolute poverty. The impoverished beg on the streets for money and scavenge on rubbish tips for food.

By the end of 1993 industrial output stood at 60% of its level in January 1990. Over the same period prices had risen by 2,600%. 60 million pensioners are at risk from cold and hunger this winter.

The intensity of the economic crisis in Russia is certainly a recent phenomenon. But the economic stagnation which has brought about the crisis has been a hallmark of the Russian economy for decades.

Under Stalin Russia (and the rest of the Soviet Union) underwent a process of forced industrialisation and forced collectivisation in agriculture.

Imported Western technology combined with large-scale forced labour — up to ten million people were enslaved in labour camps at any one time — created an industrial economy. But at a price of enormous human suffering, massive environmental damage, and an inbuilt low quality of output.

Forced collectivisation likewise demanded a heavy price. Agricultural output collapsed, millions of small farmers were physically liquidat-

ed, and famine, sometimes used as a political weapon to break popular resistance to the government, claimed millions of lives.

The economy created under Stalin lacked an efficient economic regulator. There was neither the market of capitalism nor the democratic planning of a socialist society. By the late 1950s economic growth had slowed down.

Stagnation became established as the hallmark of the Russian economy, despite repeated attempts at reform from above by Krushchev and his successors. Even before the onset of the current crisis, industrial productivity in the ex-USSR was 60% lower than in the USA, and agricultural productivity was 75% lower.

It is that decades-long economic stagnation which has paved the way for the economic crisis of today. The current economic crisis is not the product of abandoning traditional "socialist" policies. On the contrary, it is the inevitable outcome of the economic structures created under Stalin.

The policies pursued first by Gorbachev and now by Yeltsin have intensified the nature of the crisis. Their "solution" was and is firmly in the tradition of Margaret Thatcher: attack workers' living standards, slash the social services, and let unemployment rip.

Hand-in-hand with the monetarist policies goes a profoundly reactionary ideological offensive. Women are being driven back into the home. "Blacks" (migrants to Russia from the ex-Soviet Asiatic republics) are deported out of the big cities. And, in the literature of fascists and Russian nationalists, Jews and



In Campaign Group News, an honest left, Ken Livingstone, both identify the Russia with the "Communist Party" and a bureaucracy. The truth about the "left" excerpts from Alice Mahon's article.

The real Russian left!



Pro-Communist demonstrators

Freemasons are scapegoated for the economic crisis.

A Stalinoid fascism

The success of Zhirinovskiy's Liberal Democratic Party in last December's election has provoked heated debate as to whether or not Zhirinovskiy should be defined as a fascist. He says he "is not a fascist".

Nevertheless Zhirinovskiy poses a mortal threat to the Russian workers' movement. But he is not yet the immediate danger. Yeltsin is still the likeliest candidate to play the role of dictator, unleashing a wave of full-scale repression against the workers' movement with the aim of clearing the way for market capitalism.

Though there is not yet a fully developed mass fascist movement in Russia there is plenty of raw material out of which one could be built. There is certainly no shortage of unambiguously Hitlerite organisations in Russia. Organisations such as the Front of National Revolutionary Action, the Radical Right Party, and the Popular Social Party are open admirers of Adolf Hitler and the Nazi regime.

They are rabidly anti-semitic and peddle the "theory" of the world Jewish conspiracy. They campaign for a reversal of the verdicts of the Nuremberg trials, compulsory euthanasia for children born with mental or physical "defects", and compulsory sterilisation of alcoholics and drug-takers.

Closely linked, both organisationally and politically, with such fascist groupings are Stalinist organisations which regard themselves as "communist". This is reflected in recent additions to Russian political vocabulary such as "communo-fascist" and "communo-patriot".

According to the Russian anti-fascist magazine *Barrier*, for example, there have been joint rallies of the Russian Communist Workers' Party and "Workers' Leningrad" on the one hand, and the Russian National Sobor and the National Republican Party (plus also its paramilitary wing, the Russian Legion) on the other. At such rallies the Red Flag is flown alongside of the white-yellow-and-black banners of the "national patriots", and papers on sale include *People's Pravda*, *Soviet Russia*, *The*

Nationalist and The Fatherland.

That such co-operation between overtly Hitlerite organisations and various Stalinist splinter groups, based upon a shared nationalism, anti-semitism, and hostility to democratic rights, should be so easily achieved is in itself a revealing commentary on the true nature of Stalinism.

Various nationalist organisations, of both a "patriotic" and Stalinist variety were approached by Zhirinovskiy's Liberal Democratic Party when it was first formed with a view to the possible creation of an alliance.

The alliance never came off. Whereas Zhirinovskiy's demagogic nationalism finds expression in the call for the re-creation of a Russian Empire stretching as far as Central Asia and the Middle East, the nationalism of other nationalist organisations seeks the creation of a strong Russia rid of what they regard as its parasitic colonies.

Zhirinovskiy and the KGB

Even though the attempts to create a nationalist alliance proved unsuccessful, the ultra-nationalism at the heart of Zhirinovskiy's politics is clearly visible. Not so visible are the links between Zhirinovskiy and Stalinism's secret police, the KGB. There can be no doubt, however, they exist.

According to one foreign affairs academic in Moscow who met Zhirinovskiy in 1990, "the order went out from the Kremlin (in 1990) to form parties, so they looked around for people to lead them." Zhirinovskiy was, according to the academic, one of the people selected by the KGB.

His opinion is shared by Alexander Smukler, who worked for the Jewish organisation Shalom, and knew Zhirinovskiy. "That party was the first political party to be formed outside the Communist Party, and it was close to the KGB at the time."

Support in high places would explain the amount of media coverage given to the founding of the Liberal Democratic Party. It was reported on the front page of *Pravda* (the Communist Party paper at that time) and on the state-controlled television news bulletin.

The Liberal Democratic Party is also committed to restoring the KGB to its former strength and has pledged that, if it gains power, it would re-instate KGB officers who had been forced to leave the security service for "political reasons".

The fascists, Stalinist hardliners, and Zhirinovskiy's party all share a commitment to the creation of a strong and centralised authoritarian government in Russia. But the individual who is doing the most to achieve such a goal is Yeltsin himself.

He has likewise accommodated to the demands of the ultra-nationalist and Stalinist hardliners on specific policy issues.

The question of Caucasian migrants to Russia poses particularly clearly the way in which a continuous political spectrum embraces fascists, Stalinists, Zhirinovskiy and Yeltsin.

Anti-Caucasian racism is a popular cause in Russia. 80% of the population of St. Petersburg, and nearly the same proportion of Moscow's population voiced support for the statement "things would be better without the Caucasians" in opinion polls.

Fascists and Stalinist hardliners have sought to cash in on this hostility to Caucasians. The Russian Party has raised the slogan "Down with the Zionist-Caucasian Mafia". In St. Petersburg fascist and Stalinist organisations have jointly set up a "Social Staff Command for the Struggle Against Crime". (The racist stereotype of a Caucasian is that of a criminal.)

Zhirinovskiy likewise shares this overt hostility towards Caucasian migrants. In his autobiography he has written that Caucasians should be prevented from "seeping into central Russia and the Urals."

But it is Yeltsin himself who has done the most to "ethnically cleanse" Russian cities of Caucasians. After last October's fighting round the White House nearly 15,000 people, mostly

outspoken critics of anti-working-class oppression in Russia.

When Stalinism held sway in Russia and other Eastern European countries these were the very people who supported the fake official "trade unions" and opposed any and every attempt at workers' self-organisation.

Today's generation of Stalinists show few signs of remorse about the track record of their political tradition.

In the fighting around the White House in Moscow in September and October 1993 the *Morning Star* scarcely concealed its admiration for the Stalinists, Russian nationalists, and outright fascists who challenged Yeltsin's coup.

This united front of reactionaries was described by the *Morning Star* as "jubilant protesters" and "a surprisingly disciplined crowd". Front-page headlines such as "Deputies defy Yeltsin diktat" and "MPs vow to stand firm" likewise betrayed where the sympathies of the *Morning Star* really lay.

The paper remains loyal to its Stalinist heritage, just as its editor — publicly — remains unrepentant about the crushing of the Hungarian Revolution and the attempted suppression of Solidarnosc.

The solidarity on offer from the *Morning Star* and its supporters is not solidarity with the workers but solidarity with yesterday's oppressors of the workers who are now being driven out of all positions of power by Yeltsin.

Socialists can have no truck with this version of "solidarity". We must stand for solidarity with Russian workers and their organisations in their struggle against the old-time Stalinists, and in their struggle to bring these enemies of the working class to account.

The "solidarity" on offer from the *Morning Star* is not the road to building links with Russian workers. It is an obstacle and a diversion away from this task.

"Solidarity on offer from the Morning Star is not solidarity with workers but solidarity with yesterday's oppressors of the workers, now driven out of all positions of power by Yeltsin."

For real solidarity!

The collapse of Stalinism has brought with it, for the first time in decades, an opportunity for workers to establish their own organisations and for socialists to fight for the libertarian goals of socialism.

As yet, it remains an opportunity rather than a reality. Stalinist repression destroyed any tradition of working-class solidarity. And the experience of Stalinism has likewise debased the ideas and the very name of socialism.

Against all odds socialists and working-class activists in Russia and other ex-Stalinist states are fighting to rehabilitate the old ideas which the labour movement in Britain takes for granted, the unfalsified ideas of socialism.

The working class in Russia must challenge the economic and ideological offensive of the "free marketeers". Only the creation of a workers' movement committed to the struggle for socialism can prevent mass impoverishment from becoming a permanent feature of Russian society.

While old-time Stalinists in the West hanker after a mythical golden age of "socialism" in the ex-USSR and plead for a return to the politically, morally and economically bankrupt system of yesteryear, socialists in the West must link up with and support the forces in Russia committed to both anti-Stalinism and anti-capitalism.

This article is based on *In defence of the Russian left* which is available from the Committee to Defend Russian Socialists and Labour Movement (CDRS), for £1 + 19p p&p. Write to: Mark Osborn c/o AWL, PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA. Cheques to "CDRS".

For more information about CDRS activities please phone 071-639 7965.

Beware of Stalinists bearing solidarity!

Russian workers suffering under the increasingly authoritarian regime of Boris Yeltsin have recently discovered that they have "allies" in the most unexpected of quarters. The self-same Stalinists in Britain and elsewhere in Western Europe, who yesterday endorsed the lie that Stalinist police-state tyranny was "socialism" and supported the Stalinist regimes in their brutal oppression of the working class are today amongst the most

Solidarity price £1.00

In Defence of the Russian Left

By Stan Crooke

published by
The Committee to Defend Russian Socialists
and Labour Movement (CDRS)
243 Bellenden Road, London SE15

70th anniversary of Lenin's death

"All power to the soviets"!

We continue our series on Lenin and his ideas with an account of the revolutions in Russia in 1917. By Cathy Nugent.

THE FIRST Russian revolution began in February 1917, sparked off by a series of workers' demonstrations in "the capital of the Tsars", Petrograd. By 25 February there was a general strike in the city.

On the 26 February the Tsar dissolved the Duma. The following day the Tsar's Ministry guards mutinied. A Provisional Government was formed.

It was called "Provisional" because it claimed it would hold power only until a Constituent Assembly had been convened and a new Government elected. In fact the Government kept putting off the date for elections to the Assembly. In the event, these took place in the winter of 1917-18, after the second — workers' — revolution!

On 28 February the Tsar's ministers were arrested. Two days later the Tsar abdicated.

At first the Provisional Government was dominated by a bourgeois party, the Kadets, headed by Prince Lvov. Soon Kerensky — who claimed to be a socialist — took over as head of state. At the same time a soviet of workers' and soldiers' deputies was

set up in Petrograd.

The power struggle between the Petrograd soviet and the bourgeois Provisional Government was to shape events right up until October. There were now two sources of power and authority in the land — dual power — a situation that was so inherently unstable it could not continue indefinitely.

The Petrograd soviet was to be the motor of the revolution: defending the gains of the February revolution (freedom of association, press, and so forth) against counter-revolution; demanding an end to the war, organising the workers' fight against the bosses. Finally, the soviet organised the successful insurrection that brought the workers to power in October.

The Petrograd soviet was also an effective barometer of the political consciousness of the masses. Right up until August and September it was dominated by forces other than Lenin's party: the right-wing Mensheviks and the Social Revolutionaries who were at best passive in their opposition to the Kadet-led government and, later in the year, would finally become participants in the Government, pitting themselves against the workers.

Soviets were set up in all the other major cities and towns (the Moscow soviet was particularly important), and all over the country.

In the first months of the revolution, the Petrograd soviet sponsored and organised factory committees in the area. These campaigned in the first place for a legalised 8-hour day, and then went on to demand greater workers' control in the factories. The Bolsheviks were able to build up support by their work in these committees.

At this time Lenin was still exiled in Zurich. Eventually he was able to get away by utilising the German government's desire to do anything to destabilise the Russian war effort: they provided a sealed train to take Lenin through Germany, to Petrograd.

When he arrived on 3 April Lenin found a Bolshevik party disoriented by the events of the past five weeks.

Lenin was in no doubt that the February revolution was only the beginning. Before returning to Russia he had partially accepted the possibility of immediately going over from the bourgeois revolution to the socialist revolution.

Immediately on his return — much to the consternation of his comrades — he expanded on this view, outlining it in speeches over the next few days which expounded what became known as Lenin's April Theses.

Lenin started by rejecting his previous formula, "the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry". It was, he said, already behind the times. Lenin was now virtually in accord with the ideas Trotsky had held since the beginning of the 1905 revolution, although he had arrived at his views independently and by his own route: the perspective of "permanent revolution". He remained an implacable opponent even against the new "revolutionary" government.

He demanded of the Bolsheviks a policy of no support for the war effort, agitation against the Provisional Government, opposition to Bolshevik and Menshevik unity, the advocacy of the passing of power from the Provisional Government to the Soviets. The Soviet government would nationalise the land; it would bring social production under the control of the new workers' state.

But the Bolshevik leaders held onto the old ideas. What Lenin was now saying was "Trotskyism".

On the Central Committee he was out-voted by 13 to 2 (Molotov was Lenin's only supporter)! However in mid-April Lenin won a majority for his position at the all-Russian party congress.

The policy was codified and expressed in the Bolshevik slogans: "Down with the Provisional Government" and "All Power to the Soviets!"

In May Trotsky came back from exile in the United States having been interned on route for some weeks by the British in Halifax, Nova Scotia. He did not join the Bolshevik Party immediately but continued to work with a small socialist group, Mezhrayontsy (the 'inter-district' group) mainly based in Petrograd. Trotsky joined the Bolsheviks and

brought most of this group with him, in July.

At the beginning of May the first ministry of the Provisional Government fell apart. A new administration was formed which included some Mensheviks and Social-Revolutionaries. The revolution had reached a very critical stage, Lenin argued. As long as the war went on the conditions for the workers' revolution would continue to ripen.

But, paradoxically, Lenin was at first, very cautious. Essentially he was looking for a peaceful transition of power from the Provisional Government to the soviets but that became more unlikely as time went on.

It was important not to provoke the Government, not to grow impatient and resort to terroristic attacks. It would be wrong to try to circumvent the maturation of the struggle. The Bolshevik Party's job was to agitate, organise and above all, patiently explain wherever they could what the Bolsheviks stood for. Thus Lenin argued, thus he steered his party.

Lenin's reading of the situation was very accurate. In the following month, Kerensky's government



Lenin, January 1918

ping the war.

Winning over the rank and file soldiers was one of the key strategic goals of the Bolshevik leadership. In this they were aided by the spontaneous democratisation of the regiments and garrisons and the formation of rank and file soldiers' committees. The support of key sections of the armed forces based in and around Petrograd would be decisive in October.

In June, the Bolsheviks decided to try and put themselves at the head of a demonstration called by soldiers in the capital. The Executive Committee of the Petrograd Soviet, run by Mensheviks and Social-Revolutionaries, banned the demonstration. The All-Russian Congress of Soviets then meeting added its own ban. How should the Bolsheviks take this? The various positions in the party, displayed all its different moods and tendencies. Similar tendencies were displayed at the most critical point of the revolution on the eve of the October insurrection.

Kamenev and Zinoviev were opposed to the demonstration. Lenin and others wanted the party to organise it. Others in the party wanted the demonstration to be armed, in order to be "more impressive".

After the ban Kamenev and Zinoviev were still hostile, the "left-wing", especially Smilga were in favour of going ahead and preparing to meet all confrontations with armed resistance. Lenin, interestingly, abstained on the question.

Lenin was again being cautious, trying to feel his way in new conditions. He was now increasingly of the view that the Government would respond to the workers' struggles and demands with repression. As those demands became more advanced, the struggles would become more intense.

While it was necessary — in the light of the ban from the Congress of Soviets — to call off the demonstration, that was not satisfactory. He commented afterwards: "today the revolution has entered a new phase of its development... The workers' must clearly realise that there can now be no question of a peaceful demonstration... the proletariat must reply by showing the maximum calmness, caution, restraint and organisation and must remember that peaceful processions are a thing of the past."

A week later the Mensheviks of the



Fraternalisation between Kornilov's troops and those loyal to the revolution. This was decisive in defeating the coup-attempt.



Kerensky became more and more dependant on conservative officers.

"Lenin was now virtually in accord with the ideas Trotsky had held since the beginning of the 1905 revolution, although he had arrived at his views independently and by his own route: the perspective of 'permanent revolution'."

resumed a would-be victorious pursuit of the war against Germany. Since the beginning of the year there had been a virtual armistice on the Eastern Front. It was to prove a disastrous campaign. The Russian soldiers were desperate, war weary, disillusioned with the Government. By October 1917 there had been nearly 2 million desertions.

The Bolsheviks related to the soldiers through the medium of *Soldatskaya Pravda*. Again, patient explanation was their watchword. They had to be very careful how they presented their attacks on the Provisional Government. A loss of confidence in the army did not necessarily translate into the idea of stop-

OUR HISTORY



The Bolshevik headquarters at the Smolny Institute, Petrograd

Executive Committee organised their own 'peaceful' demonstration. The Bolsheviks won the day: their slogans and banners were most prominent on the demonstration!

THIS demonstration marked the beginning of a summer of discontent. At the beginning of July the factory workers and the Kronstadt sailors took to the streets of Petrograd once more. They were armed, and they wanted to try to occupy the key centres of Governmental power. Lenin, in Finland recuperating from illness and fatigue, had to rush back to Petrograd.

Lenin, repeated his view that the time was not yet right for the kind of insurrectionary actions many of the demonstrators wanted to take: the working-class party and its policy of overthrowing the Government did not yet command a majority. As Trotsky said: "the workers could have seized power, but could not have held it."

Lenin, contrary to the lies told by his enemies, was never a "Blanquist", simply concerned with the technical or "conspiratorial" side of making a revolution. An insurrection — in Russia — had to have the majority support of the workers and at least the passive support of the majority of the people (i.e. the poor peasantry).

Lenin got the Bolsheviks to participate in the July demonstrations where they tried to channel them in a constructive direction, explaining that the workers would take power but not now: the time had not yet come to settle accounts with the Government.

As Lenin expected, the Government extracted revenge on the Bolsheviks alone. In the aftermath of the July days *Pravda* was closed down, many leading Bolsheviks were arrested and Lenin was forced to go into hiding.

To Lenin, now, the fate of the revolution hung in a precarious balance. Kerensky had grown to rely on conservative officers, and his Government had once again postponed the Constituent Assembly. The future would be either military dictatorship or a workers' seizure of power. Lenin applied himself to preparing for the insurrection.

While the Executive Committee of the Petrograd Soviet continued to support the government, Lenin now argued the Bolsheviks should drop the slogan of "All Power to the Soviets". As ever, Lenin was utterly concrete and utterly flexible, taking his cue from the direction and mood of the workers. This slogan was now too ambiguous, he said, it could be

taken to mean "support the government".

Everything was subordinate to the question of the struggle for power. To this end, Lenin toyed with the possibility of circumventing the Soviet altogether and trying to organise through the Petrograd factory committees. But the Bolsheviks would soon gain a majority in the soviets.

During August, while in hiding, Lenin worked on his handbook for proletarian revolution: *State and Revolution*. He summarised Marx's and Engels' theory on the state, analysed the revolutions of 1905 and thus far 1917. He showed how experience proved the necessity of smashing the bourgeois state; he examined the nature of the state after the workers' revolution. Fundamentally *State*

"We dare not wait, to make the insurrection we dare not delay' Lenin repeated over and over. Arguably he overestimated the strength of the Government, but he was right to be impatient."

and Revolution was an explanation and restoration of the real teaching of Marx and Engels on the state, which had for decades been hidden or bawled. It took the form of a polemic against Kautsky and a critique of the Second International. Lenin was also looking forward to the Russian workers' revolution and trying to define its forms.

During August, living standards deteriorated terribly. Inflation rose rapidly and unemployment increased. In the rural areas poor peasants and landless labourers seized the land. The Government defended the capitalists' and landlords' interests and was powerless to even mitigate the situation.

At the end of August the Military Commander-in-Chief, General Kornilov attempted a coup. The workers of Petrograd, led by the Bolsheviks and aided by the Kronstadt sailors, organised the

defence of the soviet and the gains of the February revolution.

The Kronstadt sailors wanted to go further, but Trotsky managed to persuade them that the most urgent task was to prevent a right-wing coup. We'll settle accounts with the bosses' Government later he said.

The coup failed not least because Kornilov's troops were won over! The Petrograd Soviet set up the Committee for Struggle against Counter-Revolution to organise defence. This was later to become the Military Revolutionary Committee, the central organising body of the October revolution.

Thereafter the Mensheviks and SRs rapidly lost support and the Bolsheviks gained strength in the soviets. Kerensky was more and more isolated ruling now through a small committee he called the Directorate. Local soviets were taking over control of the countryside.

WANTING to take full advantage of the defeat of Kornilov, Lenin argued for the revival of the slogan "All Power to the Soviets". This time the slogan was tied to a demand on the Left Mensheviks and SRs that they move against Kerensky and form a left coalition-government. Such a government, they demanded, should allow the Bolsheviks full freedom to criticise.

Lenin envisaged this as a transitory stage. It would be a workers' government, subject and accountable to the democratic organisations of the working class, the soviets.

Lenin was serious about the proposal, but he also wanted to put the maximum pressure on the Left Mensheviks and SRs in the soviet itself. It was a means of escalating the struggle against Kerensky. The proposal was rejected by the reformist left.

At the same time Lenin argued for confronting Kerensky himself with partial demands: "arm the Petrograd workers! Summon the Kronstadt troops to Petrograd! Dissolve the Duma! Legalise the transfer of land!"

By 13 September Lenin was arguing for the party and the soviet to make immediate preparations for an armed uprising.

Again, Lenin was in advance of many of his comrades. At every point over the year Lenin had been right. He alone had got the party to understand the possibility of workers' power. He had successfully channelled the impatience of the Petrograd vanguard during the July Days. He now had to urge his party to organise the insurrection.

It was not just a question of the material conditions being right, he argued. If the workers did not seize power now then they were doomed. Kerensky would let the military step in, to organise a decisive strike against the workers' movement with whatever troops that were still loyal to the Government. "We dare not wait, we dare not delay," he repeated over and over again. Arguably he overestimated the strength of the Government (which did not organise resistance in the form of a "Public Safety Committee" until the day before the revolution). Lenin also wanted to set the date far earlier than most of his comrades. But essentially he was absolutely right to be impatient.

In the end a proposal — from Trotsky — that the date be set to coincide with the start of the Congress of Soviets and the insurrection be effected in the name of the soviets was accepted as a strong tactical move. Trotsky felt that the revolution should not take place behind the back of the soviets whereas Lenin was prepared to see it be organised in the name of the Bolshevik Party only — if it was necessary — in order to not delay thus warding off the possibility of a counter-revolution.

But there was resistance in the party to the whole idea of insurrection. Some Bolsheviks thought the transference of power would happen after the Bolsheviks had won support in a Constituent Assembly — an Assembly the Government had no intention of convening! Lenin had to threaten to resign and went over the head of the Central Committee in order to win people over.

Once he had persuaded the major-

ity of the party committees of the necessity of insurrection, Lenin then proceeded to instruct party activists in the field on the details of the insurrection: occupying the railway stations and telegraph offices, taking over the bridges in the capital etc. Lenin was not the best expert in the technical aspects of insurrection but his concern was to push the party on, to get them to the point where they were leading and organising the insurrection.

Lenin's impatience was directed mostly against those in the party who were against the insurrection.

Leading Party members, Kamenev and Zinoviev (overestimating the residual support for the Government and strength of the military) did everything in their power to organise against the idea of an immediate insurrection, circulating a letter of protest to all the party bodies, publishing letters of protest advertising the date of the insurrection in *Novy Mir* (a reformist leftist journal published by Maxim Gorky). Lenin called for their expulsion.

Tellingly Stalin persuaded the Central Committee not to expel them on the "grounds of preserving party unity" and he criticised the sharpness of Lenin's attacks in the party press.

As Trotsky later pointed out this was early evidence of Stalin's vacillation under pressure. Stalin was actually playing both sides, in case Kamenev and Zinoviev's views became a majority.

Eventually, after much debating, hesitations and much confusion a date was set — 25 October. It coincided with the Congress of Soviets.

As the Congress opened Petrograd workers occupied key positions in the city. The delegates discussed the events as they took place. The Bolsheviks had a majority at the Congress. The right wing Mensheviks stormed out demanding a new "constitutional" coalition government. No the Bolsheviks said, the Soviets must take power!

Later in the afternoon the Winter Palace, symbol of reactionary Tsarist rule for centuries was taken.

The party that Lenin built had succeeded in leading the workers to victory. At each crucial stage in the revolution Lenin had steered the party, sometimes making bold moves, sometimes cautious moves, each time reading the mood of the masses, analysing the strength of the forces of counter-revolution. Lenin's contribution was to build a party, the Bolshevik Party and to prepare that party through years of tumultuous struggles to play the role it played on 25 October 1917.

Without Lenin's perspective from April onwards, without Lenin's ability to win the party to a new understanding, the revolution may well have been lost. As Trotsky was to put it many years later: Lenin was "a great link" in a chain of objective historic forces: "the party could fulfil its mission only after understanding it. For that Lenin was needed."

Next week: Lenin's last struggle



Workers' demonstration in Petrograd December 1917, against those trying to 'sabotage' the revolution.

Report from Mexico

The uprising in Chiapas

By Pablo Velasco

THE YEAR 1994 is likely to go down as a turning point for Mexico. The peasant uprising in Chiapas, involving more than 2,000 rebels and 14,000 troops, has changed the political situation, sharply bringing into focus the failure of the Salinas government's market austerity and its decrepit one-party rule.

What caused the uprising? Chiapas is the poorest state in a country where at least 40% of the population live in abject poverty, and local bosses (caciques) terrorise the peasants (campesinos). Although the government has spent M\$750 million in the region this money never goes to the people who need it, and instead ends up with the local corruption machine.

The region of Lacandon, where the rising originated, has seen a population explosion in the last generation, often from people fleeing from neighbouring repressive regimes. In 1960, 12,000 people lived there, today it is 300,000.

On top of this, since 1989 the world coffee market has slumped, slashing an important source of income for many campesinos. The coffee, which retails at \$4-5 per pound, only brings 40 cents per pound for the farmers — the rest is creamed off by profiteers.

The role of local bosses is insidious. In the 1988 Presidential election — the next is due next August — Salinas got 90% of the vote in Chiapas, in what was obvious vote rigging.

Between 1981-87, 55 members of one group of campesino activists were murdered, and it is not difficult to see why today's rebels, the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) have taken up arms. But the rebuff to the government that this uprising represents is therefore clear. The 60 year rule of the PRI has been decisively rejected, and in particular the neo-liberal project that Salinas and his chosen successor Colosio represent.

Who are the EZLN?

Two thousand rebels took part in the uprising, from a group that has been training for 10 years. The group



Zapatista guerrillas

claimed that it was fighting against "The repressive government", against NAFTA (which it called "a death warrant for indigenous ethnic ground"), for land rights and for socialism. Whatever one can say about the group's tactics, and it is true that the uprising has not significantly mobilised other workers and peasants in other parts of Mexico, it is clear that their action has won widespread sympathy and proven a turning point for Mexican politics.

It is clear that a division of labour has operated, in which the army has pursued a headline repressive policy towards the EZLN, whilst Salinas has tried to play the benevolent role of peacemaker. Whilst fighting raged from 1-12 January, Salinas called for a truce, appointed a special envoy — Manuel Camacho — on the 10th, declared a unilateral ceasefire on the 12th and pushed through an Amnesty Law on the 21st. At the same time he was able to move against hardliners such as Patricio Gonzalez, the Interior Minister and former Chiapas Governor in his own party, who had denounced the EZLN as "a front for international terror-

ists".

At the same time, from the 2-12 January, the army launched an offensive against the EZLN, which went beyond driving them out of the towns and villages they occupied, and which, after 7 January, involved sealing off the state highways and the countryside, and conducting a vicious campaign of aerial bombings, torture and summary executions.

It is a measure of the force used that Clinton publicly rebuked the Mexican army for using US loaned anti-drugs helicopters, and even the ultra-conservative Televisa, the main TV network reported the abuses. Although initially some human rights groups claimed the army has shown moderation, it is clear that this was not an accurate picture. Amnesty International reported that 70 rebel suspects showed signs of torture, whilst more than 100 people are listed as "missing" by the government's human rights agency (CNDN).

What role has the left played?

IN PART, the backtracking by the government can be explained by its international position, but the role of

the left has also been important.

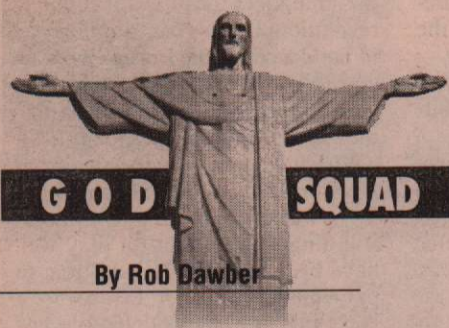
The EZLN initially demanded ceasefire, troop withdrawal and recognition as a political and military force. These demands have been partly met because of the mass mobilisations in Mexico. Support has come from tenants' groups and opposition forces within the unions.

On 12 January (a Wednesday) 500,000 people marched through the capital under the banner of "Halt the Massacre". A number of small local demonstrations have taken place across the country.

The campaigns have recently focused on the abuse of human rights, and this is set to continue as more information comes out. The call for free elections, involving all the parties, including the EZLN, both in Chiapas and in the rest of Mexico, has also been a rallying cry, and should ensure that in this big election year, the pressure is kept up on the government.

The biggest weakness now is the lack of a national working-class political focus in which to organise the discontent, even though great opportunities exist at the moment.

Who was Jesus Christ?



By Rob Dawber

THIS IS NO ordinary question. The Christian religion hangs crucially on the idea that a unique individual walked the land of Palestine 2,000 years ago. It matters whether or not this individual espoused ideas that were novel and the basis of an entirely new religion. It is important whether or not dead people were brought back to life and whether water was transformed into wine by way of demonstrating the power of this individual. It is crucial whether or not this person was God Incarnate. If this figure, by name of Jesus Christ, did not exist, did not say or do these things or was not unique, then Christianity loses much, if not all, of its reason-to-be.

So what is the evidence? What is there that allows us to answer the question of who was Jesus Christ?

Gibbon, in his work *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* sums it up as follows:

"But how shall we excuse the supine inattention of the pagan and philosophic world to those evidences which were presented by the hand of Omnipotence, not to their reason, but to their senses? During the age of Christ, of his apostles, and of their first disciples, the doctrine which

they preached was confirmed by innumerable prodigies. The lame walked, the blind saw, the sick were healed, the dead were raised, demons were expelled, and the laws of Nature were frequently suspended for the benefit of the church. But the sages of Greece and Rome turned aside from the awful spectacle, and, pursuing the ordinary occupations of life and study, appeared unconscious of any alteration in the moral or physical government of the world."

The evidence for this, apart from the Christian Gospels, is the extant writings of various Roman officials, the Jewish writings of the Talmud, and the works of Flavius Josephus.

About 100AD Tacitus, a Roman Senator, writes the following concerning the burning of Rome under Nero:

"In order to counteract the report (which laid the blame for the conflagration on Nero) he accused persons who were called Christians by the people, and who were hated for their misdeeds, of the guilt, and visited the most excruciating penalties upon them. He from whom they had taken their name, Christ, had been executed in the reign of Tiberius by the Procurator Pontius Pilate; but though this superstition was for a moment put down, it arose again not only in Judea, the original home of this plague, but even in Rome itself, in which city every outrage and every shame finds a home and wide dissemination. First a few were seized who confessed, and then on their denunciation a great number of others, who were not, however, accused of the crime of incendiarism, but of that of hating humanity. Their execution was made a public amusement; they were covered with the skins of wild beasts and then torn by dogs or crucified, or prepared for the pyre, and then burned as soon as night came, to illuminate the city. For this spectacle Nero lent his gardens, and he even arranged circus games in which he mingled with

the people in the costume of a charioteer, or mounted a racing chariot. Although these men were criminals deserving of the severest punishment, there was some public sympathy for them, as it seemed they were being sacrificed not to the general weal, but to the cruelty of a single man."

Apart from the account of terrible cruelties inflicted on Christians this passage tells us very little about the actual figure of Christ. It appears to confirm the existence of such a person and that this person was crucified by Pontius Pilate, but no more than that. Can this much be relied upon? It has been suggested that this is no other than a repeat of what the Christians themselves said about their figurehead which Tacitus offers by way of explanation of their sect. And of course "Christ" is not a name but a title — the Greek rendering of the Hebrew word Messiah or "the anointed one". So no actual name is passed on for this individual. On the other hand it can be argued that Tacitus would have had no need to rely on the Christians themselves for his information; he was born under Nero, entered public life under Vespasian and held high office under Domitian, Nerva and Trajan. He would have had access to government records during the last quarter of the first Century for an official account of Christianity without going to followers of what was to him a criminal and subversive movement. Based on what he has picked up in government circles and on official records he does appear to not question the existence at one time of some figurehead for this movement.

Seutonius, writing shortly after Tacitus, reports a persecution of Christians as "people who have embraced a new and evil superstition". Of Jesus nothing at all.

The only other pagan sources offer the elder Pliny who recorded natural phenomena. Of interest here is the fact that Christian tradition

claims that after the death of Jesus the whole world, or at least Palestine, was thrown into darkness by an eclipse. The elder Pliny makes no record of any such eclipse. And the younger Pliny, Governor of Bythnia and Pontus from 111 to 113AD reports that Christians in his province sang hymns "to Christ as to a god". This only tells us what the Christians thought of their figurehead not that Pliny agreed with it.

The Roman satirist, Lucian, writing 50 years after the Younger Pliny, in *The Death of Peregrinus* refers to Jesus as a "crucified sophist". Celsus, a Platonic philosopher, wrote a work against Christianity about 178AD in which he calls Jesus a "ringleader of sedition". And finally Hierocles, an imperial governor writing at the end of the third century describes Jesus as a bandit leader with 900 followers. Readers will be familiar with enemies of an imperial power being described as 'bandits'.

Thus the only existing Pagan sources confirm the existence of Christians and that these people believed themselves to be followers of someone crucified in Palestine under Pontius Pilate. The someone is vague. In the earliest writings no name is recorded other than Christ, a greek word. Thus Christians might just as usefully be called "Messianists" or "Followers of the Anointed One" in Hebrew. The name "Jesus" does not appear until the few fragments we have from after 160AD.

It should be pointed out however that whatever these writers have to say about this figure none of them, so far as we know, actually questions the existence of such a person — and the same is true of the Jewish sources. So far as we know because anti-Christian writings were systematically destroyed after Christianity became the official state religion of the Roman Empire.

Next week: what do the Jewish sources say about who was Jesus Christ?

Nice dress, no personality



Matt Cooper
reviews *The Age
of Innocence*

Directed by
Martin Scorsese

MARTIN Scorsese's much hyped foray into costume drama has a lot to commend it. It has a sumptuous feel; it drips with the opulence of the 1870s New York ruling class it portrays.

It is almost as if Scorsese is in love with the wealth that he depicts. The film focuses again and again on the food, the decor, the fabric, the sheer wealth.

Scorsese has chosen a difficult story to tell in film, because these characters are almost incapable of expressing themselves directly. The Victorian manners of the New World high bourgeoisie act as an asphyxiating visor behind which their true desires are hidden, and ossify.

The main character, Newland Archer (Daniel Day-Lewis) is betrothed to the beautiful but seemingly shallow Mary Welland (Winona Ryder). This is not to be a marriage of individuals but of two great New York families. Yet, despite Newland's dark and brooding menace and Mary's fluffy airheadedness, they seem pleasantly content with the match.

Trouble comes in the shape of Mary's wayward cousin, the Countess Olenska (Michelle Pfeiffer). She, we are told, is a dangerous and unconventional temptress, a non-conformist and a "scarlet woman".

We are, literally, *told* this. A narrator fills in what Scorsese and his cast cannot communicate through action and dialogue.

Newland falls for the Countess, yet — though a "free spirit" himself — can not free himself from the constraints of the mannered society in which he is trapped — the Countess is married and separated, he is promised — or from the grip of Mary. This picture of bourgeois inanity proves to have a Machiavellian streak to her wider even than her fixed grin.

What unfolds is a rather drab story of their struggle to find "true love" in a world where individualism is crushed by tradition (and a fake tradition at that).

A weak script and poorly developed characters are not reinforced but



Newland Archer (Daniel Day-Lewis)

overwhelmed by the sumptuous look of this film. We are left with nothing but an animated back number of *Harpers and Queen* magazine.

The camerawork is dynamic and

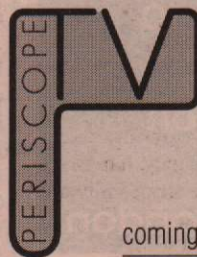
innovative. The film is extremely good to look at, but Scorsese's basic problem — which he never solves — is that he has no method of opening out for us characters who, emotion-

ally constipated and living in an age of self-repression, are gripped by deeper drives and desires than they can express without incurring social disaster. Only Daniel Day-Lewis comes near to giving any depth to his character.

The ploy of having a narrator repeatedly tell us what people *really* want and what people are *really* thinking is a hopeless cop-out. It makes the film a pretty but dull picture book.

The surface is never scratched. All we get is a very glossy surface: and Scorsese seems, like a rabbit in a car's headlamps, to be fixated and mesmerised by the glare. Occasional flashes of warm emotion break through like sudden rays of sunshine from a dull and leaden sky, and then disappear, obscured by the clouds once more.

In a film which is interior, dealing with emotions, the director should not sacrifice the exposition of character to the imperatives and "production values" of a glossy-surfaced costume drama. But this is exactly what Scorsese has done.



Paddy Dollard
previews the

coming week's television

Tomorrow's socialism Sat 5 Feb, BBC2, 7.35pm

CURIOSITY value at least should be found in the spectacle of Neil Kinnock telling us about *Tomorrow's socialism*. In the first of two programmes Kinnock looks at how "his form of ethical socialism can confront and solve the problems of the 21st century" as the *Radio Times* puts it: a case of those who can, do — those who can't promise that they will, one day?

Nightfighters Tue 8 Feb, ITV, 10.40pm
Network First's *Nightfighters* tells the story of the US airforce's first black fliers, a segregated black fighter squadron during WW2. Until 1941 they had categorised black people constitutionally unfit to fly a plane!

The politics of life on the street



Geoff Ward
reviews
*Homicide: life
on the streets*

Channel 4
Mondays 10pm

CHANNEL 4's *Homicide: life on the street* deserves to have a much wider audience. This cop show about Baltimore doesn't rely on a lot of wham-bam action to grab your attention. It uses great scripts, interesting characters and good storylines.

It is also highly political. In between solving murders, the cops are arguing continually about all sort of issues.

Should drugs be legalised? Can euthanasia be justified? If it is, should they involve themselves in covering it up?

Is a white man who refuses to use a freeway after it is renamed Martin Luther King Freeway acting as a racist?

In last week's episode the only woman detective (Melissa Leo) reinvestigated a mugging in which a woman tourist died.

The "good" kid confessed to the

shooting. It turned out that he *did* pull the trigger — he had taken control of the gun with the intention of ensuring that *no-one* got shot...

This episode made a strong case for punishment aimed to bring about reform rather than punishment designed mainly to exact retribution.

The tragic and understandable, but misguided, attempt by the parents of James Bulger to have his child killers locked up for life gave that episode contemporary resonance for me.

Altogether a watchable American cop show.

Alliance for WORKERS' LIBERTY Meetings

"Ireland in crisis
— what should
socialists say?"

GLASGOW

Thursday 3 February

Speaker at both these meetings:
John O'Mahony (editor, Socialist
Organiser)

1.00 pm, Glasgow University,
Queen Margaret's Union

7.30 pm, Partick Burgh Halls

BELFAST

Saturday 5 February

12.00pm - 5.00pm.

Dayschool at Central Hall,
Rosemary Street

NOTTINGHAM

Thursday 3 February

Speaker: Tony Dale

8.00pm, ICC, Mansfield Road

OXFORD

Wednesday 9 February

7.30pm, East Oxford Community
Centre

SHEFFIELD

Friday 11 February

12.00pm, Norton College

Thursday 17 February

12.00pm, Standbrooke College

BOLTON

Thursday 17 February

1.00, Chadwick Site, Bolton
Institute

BIRMINGHAM

Monday 21 February

8.00, Queen's Tavern, Essex Road

Workers' Liberty '94

Will take
place
Friday 8 to
Sunday 10
July
At Caxton
House,
North London

Meeting

Stop racial harassment!

Loughborough
Community Centre
8.00, Thursday 10
February
Speakers include
Clara Buckley
Organised by Brixton
United Against Racism

Fight for union democracy!

SUPPORT FOR the cause of trade union democracy can never be merely an optional extra for socialists.

On the contrary it has to be an integral part of the drive to transform the trade unions into amalgamation that can really fight for working class interests.

The reason why trade union democracy is so important is straightforward. Socialism is about working class self-emancipation. As Marx said: "the liberation of the working class is the act of the working class itself."

The only weapons the workers have for this are their numbers, their class organisations and a clear ideological conception of the tasks before them.

Our numbers make up the raw material and clear ideas provide a map of the land ahead, but it is only our mass organisations that can function as the vehicle for working-class self-liberation.

Therefore, if these organisations are not democratic — that is not under the active control of the majority of the members — they will hardly be capable of carrying out this function.

The working class cannot carry out the most thorough-going democratic revolution in human history without democratic organisations!

And we cannot democratise those organisations without carrying out our own "inter-

nal" revolution inside the labour movement to overthrow the power of the bureaucrats and timeservers who help keep the movement wedded to capitalism.

It follows that those on the left who belittle the cause of trade union democracy, who blame the passive membership for defeats and setbacks and who talk of the need to use "any means necessary" to beat the right wing, are actually belittling socialism. For them, socialism has become not "the movement of the immense majority in the interests of the immense majority" but a kind of benevolent and elitist bureaucratic charity to be dispensed to the ignorant but deserving poor. Such a view is not just wrong in principle it is ineffective even at a day-to-day trade union level.

A passive membership can be mobilised. Trade union democracy is an important tool for this purpose. A right-wing leadership — even an extremely corrupt and venal one — can be ousted, if the left goes out and campaigns patiently, consistently and systematically amongst the membership.

Undemocratic and manipulative practices only lead to defeat. This can be seen very clearly if you look at the history of the British trade union movement.

The clearest example, of course, was the scandal of "Communist" ballot rigging in the electricians' union which opened the way for that union



Without internal democracy, workers' organisations will never be able to make an effective fight against capitalism

to be taken over (and run for 30-odd years) by the most right-wing leadership in the British labour movement.

Therefore, socialists who are sharp about this question are not being "sectarian" but eminently practical.

It is those people who are neutral about the undemocratic methods and special privileges of various "left-wing" bureaucratic cliques who are the real sectarians.

To put the defence of the undemocratic procedures and bureaucratic practices above a fight for consistent working-class democracy is truly sectarian. For it means placing the narrow interests of a little

clique above the broad goals of the general class movement.

In general, on issues in the British class struggle, a *Morning Star*-supporting trade union bureaucrat is better than a hard right wing example of the same species. But the left in the unions cannot be politically regenerated and renewed by refusing to fight against these same left bureaucrats on the question of union democracy.

We should be tactically flexible and seek agreements with these people where we can on issues where we can pursue a common fighting policy. But we should not sell our souls to them.

That is why those of us in the

Alliance for Workers' Liberty who have successfully pressed hard for the SMTUC to have a clear commitment to trade union democracy will continue to do so.

Below we print the AWL's basic programme on this question. Our trade union comrades have fought for this policy and specific elements of it across unions in rail, post, Telecom, engineering, transport, the NHS, local government, the Civil Service and many other areas.

We think the SMTUC should actually campaign on this question too. Paper policies are what trade union bureaucrats have!

A programme for union democracy

Union officials and committees: All officials should be elected for definite terms (no more than two years) and subject to recall at any time. Full-time officials should be paid the average wage in their industry.

Union policy-making bodies should be made up of elected lay members only. The same should go for Standing Orders Committees and Appeals Committees.

Full minutes and voting records of policy-making bodies should be circulated.

National delegate conferences should have supreme policy-making power.

Elections: Voting should be at workplace meetings or by workplace ballot. It should not be by postal ballot. We want informed, collective working class decision-making, not ballots manipulated by Fleet Street lie-machines. Election addresses must be circulated unaltered, and candidates and their supporters must have unrestricted rights to circulate literature.

Strikes: Strikes should be automatically official until declared unofficial. All strikes for trade union principles, work conditions or wages should be made official. Strike committees must be elected from (and subject to recall by) mass meetings. Through mass meetings and strike bulletins, they must keep the membership fully informed throughout the strike.

There should be no secret negotiations. Every stage of negotiations should be subject to rank and file ratification at mass meetings. Mass meetings should never be presented with package deals unless each part of the deal has been voted on separately by the meeting beforehand.

Workplace organisation: Shop stewards must be elected at mass meetings held in the workplace, in company time if possible. They

should hold regular report-back meetings, also if possible in company time. Joint Shop Stewards' Committees should be set up on a plant, combine and international basis. Technical and clerical workers should also be represented on these committees.

Despite the general need for unity, there will be cases where shop stewards disagree strongly with the majority of the stewards' committee and want to put their minority views to the membership. They should have the right to do so, after notifying the committee of their intention, so long as they also make it clear to the membership what the stewards' majority view is.

Union branches should have the right to meet at the workplace and in work time if possible. If not, crèche facilities must be proved to ensure women workers can attend. Labour Party workplace branches should be set up with all the rights of ordinary ward branches.

Closed shop: We must campaign for 100% trade unionism; for the right of trade unionists to enforce closed shops; for the right of trade unionists to discipline fellow workers who scab or flout democratic decisions; against the check-off system; and against employer-policed 'agency shops'.

Women's rights: Implement the TUC Charter for Women Within Trade Unions.

Proportional representation for women on national executives, conference delegations (including TUC and Labour Party conference, regional, district and divisional, sectional or rules revision conferences) and where applicable, local branch committees.

The right of all women's committees, caucuses and conferences to bring resolutions to the policy making bodies of the union at that level.

Recognition that sexual harassment is a trade union issue and that an offence against women is an offence against trade unionism.

Support for positive discrimination as a way of compensating for the extra barriers women face at work in the trade unions and in politics. Broad Lefts should lead the way by practising it in their own structures.

Black and immigrant workers: No discrimination against black or immigrant workers in the unions (including in social clubs). Positive discrimination to ensure real equality. Support for the right to form black caucuses.

Campaigns to recruit immigrant workers to trade unions (using leaflets in the immigrants' own language).

A purge of open racists from all positions in the labour movement. Expulsion of fascist activists from the unions.

A vigorous and sustained trade union fight against racist and sexist job discrimination. Automatic endorsement of all strikes against discrimination. -

Youth: Full trade union rights for young workers, including the right to strike. Formation of youth committees.

The unemployed: Unionisation of the unemployed with full rights within the unions.

Individual rights: Right of members to criticise union policy; to meet unofficially and visit other branches; to write, circulate and/or sell political literature. Right of appeal direct to union Appeals Court.

All education or other special qualifications for union office to be abolished. No member to be disqualified from holding union office on political grounds, other than fascist or racist

activity.

Rights of branches and district committees: Defend the rights of trade union branches and district committees against the central union bureaucracy. For the right of branches to take or approve industrial action.

Developing solidarity: Develop links between unions. Expand trades councils to include representation from the unemployed, tenants and students and, most important, direct representation from factory committees and other shop floor organisations.

Affiliate trade unions to the Labour Party and local trade union branches to the local CLPs. TUC and Labour Party conference delegations should be bound to follow union policy where it exists. There should be democratic control of the block vote cast at Labour Party conference; delegations should be elected and consist of lay members. Members of all working class parties and tendencies should be eligible for inclusion in the delegation.

Trade union branch delegates to Trades Councils and Labour Parties must report back regularly.

Trade union independence: the unions should fight for full independence from the bosses' state. They should be free to write their own rulebooks. We support legal rights for trade unionist vis à vis the employing class, such as the right to strike, picket, join a union without fear of dismissal or victimisation etc.

In general, we oppose interference by the bosses' courts in the internal affairs of the labour movement. Even when an appeal to the courts is motivated by a desire to thwart the right wing bureaucrats, it tends to run counter to the principle of working class democracy.

How to defend rail jobs

RAIL

By a RMT member

WHILE THE Tories reel from crisis to crisis one of their latest acts of vandalism is allowed to run its course. Not so long ago they forced through parliament the privatisation of British Rail. Now, while they squabble, the latest of their exercises in greed is allowed to run its course.

Left alone the train they have set in course will result in a smashing of the railway system; the pieces are hopefully to be profitable for

someone. But even if they are not Tory dogma dictates that it is better to have tried to privatise than not to have tried at all.

But in all this, amidst all the talk of the likelihood of fare rises for South East commuters and problems of getting private rail companies on five to ten year leases to finance railway investment, the fundamental drive of privatisation remains what it always was, an attack on the jobs wages, and conditions of the workers themselves.

Railway privatisation has been left till this late, along with coal, because these have been least profitable of state owned industries

and, from a capitalist point of view, needed more preparation. They are also the industries with some of the best examples of union organisation and gains for the workers within them. This is no coincidence. This is why they needed more "preparation".

Typically the RMT, largest of the rail unions, along with ASLEF and TSSA, has responded to the drive to privatise in a piecemeal fashion accepting BR management's drive for restructuring with the occasional complaint and grumble while giving no impression of understanding what is going on. They have signed away bar-

gaining rights, jobs, and conditions. They have accepted the changes necessary for privatisation and offered no practical resistance.

But they haven't yet signed away the P.T and R.! The Promotion, Transfer, Redundancy and resettlement arrangement has been described as the greatest achievement of post-war trade unionism. Perhaps. For sure what they do is tie the hands of the management of the railways as to who can be required to which jobs where; who can be told to move to another job; when and under what circumstances; when a job can be moved and how much the individual must

be paid to go and do it; or whether they must be paid to remain where they are even when there is no work.

Not surprisingly management do not like this agreement and would like to be rid of it. They see privatisation as their chance. They are not wrong; it is incompatible with privatisation. Their aim is to use the legal situation that allows every part of BR sold off under privatisation to become separate companies to mean that the P.T. and R. does not apply to them. By that they mean erode it.

Left to their own devices they will succeed. We can't afford that.

We must defend these agreements as a part of the general fight to resist privatisation.

The rail unions must raise their eyes; privatisation is not inevitable — especially not now when the Tories are in so much trouble. We should demand an agency something to safe guard the rights and conditions that railworkers currently have. An agency to oversee the P.T. and R. would be at odds with the drive towards privatisation just as much as a fight for it, a strike were it to happen, would be illegal. That should not stop us. We would be mad to lie down in the face of a runaway train.

Unity essential on the Underground

UNDERGROUND

By a RMT member.

"THOSE WHO DO not learn from history are likely to repeat it"

That saying should be written in ten feet fall letters outside the rail union RMT's headquarters Unity House. It would serve as a reminder to union activists on the Underground that they should not repeat the mistakes of the past. The central lesson of recent history that must be learnt is this. There is one primary reason, why tube bosses have been able to put through their "Company Plan" which entailed 5,000 job losses: disunity. Right now, if more job losses are to be stopped then unity between the RMT and the drivers union ASLEF is essential.

The central fact of life on the Underground is that combine wide action is only really likely to succeed if it involves the drivers' union ASLEF who have the

big majority of drivers on the newer One-Person-Operated lines. A strike without them would only paralyse part of the system.

There are only two possible ways of dealing with this reality: either RMT activists base their strategy on trying to establish fighting unity with ASLEF at all levels or, RMT activists attack ASLEF in words (talking about "exposing" their leadership and maybe recruiting a handful of ASLEF rank and filers) while in practice discovering that having support from ASLEF is essential.

It is this latter course that has been adopted by the leadership of RMT on the Underground.

Time after time, we have heard fighting talk from the District Council top table along the lines of "Let's not hear anything else about the ASLEF" when fighting unity is proposed from the floor, and then, as strike day approaches, the tune changes. All the top table want to talk and hear about is ASLEF and unity.

You see reality has a tendency to

make itself felt. It can get through to even the thickest skulls.

As the grim prospect of trying to hold together combine-wide action without ASLEF looms larger and larger then two things happen. First, the strike gets called off — with or without the fig leaf of meaningless concessions from LUL. Second, ASLEF suddenly become the most important thing on the Underground. If not the entire world!

Ordinary tubeworkers are getting sick of this silly show. The RMT should take the initiative and really fight for unity with ASLEF.

That means appealing to the rank and file, trying to get joint depot meetings etc. But it also means proposing unity to the existing ASLEF leadership. The Association is still a genuine trade union. Even scum like Kevin Rose can not just do what they like irrespective of it affects our rank and file. They can be forced, kicking and screaming, but forced nonetheless in to unity.

Rank and file must organise across the unions

AS ANY TUBEWORKER will tell you the continuing collapse of the Underground is nothing if not eventful. Recent weeks certainly have been! First, ASLEF's new General Secretary Lar Adams breathlessly tells a press conference that ASLEF is to ballot for "some form of action" over LUL's refusal to implement their 5 day week for traincrew for reasons of safety and cost. (Most tubeworkers currently work an 11 day fortnight). This is reported by the Evening Standard as "All out strike threat!". In fact it is apparently for a series of one day strikes. Now LUL going back on their deal with ASLEF is undoubtedly a slap in the face for Kevin Rose (their district secretary for the Underground). Rose got the ASLEF ballot over the Company Plan, with its 5000 job losses, called off just on the promise of a 5 day week! LUL's current turnaround clearly casts doubts on his self proclaimed abilities as a master tactician and smart arse.

This 5 day week deal has been given a damning repeat by LUL's own hired safety consultants because of the lengths of shifts and continuous driving times involved in the deal. Also the deal is scarcely popular with traincrew despite it getting a big yes vote in an ASLEF referendum. A contradiction here? Only in appearance. In essence the deal means an increase in produc-

tivity which would push many drivers up to and beyond breaking point. The reason people reluctantly voted for it is because work is so bad now that lots of people are desperate for anything that appears to relieve the pressure. The extra rest day per fortnight provides the illusion of doing this but at the real expense of turning five and a half days of bad turns into five days of terrible turns. The only real solution to the pressure and stress is a reduction in the number of hours worked. Train and station staff currently work a 38 1/2 hour week. What is desperately needed is a united fight by the Underground unions for a 35 hour week with no loss of pay. This is needed sooner rather than later or else many tubeworkers will end up facing the pressure and stress not of shiftwork but at the dole queue. Why? Well this is the real threat that is now looming for the Underground. LUL's money for next year was drastically cut in the budget. LUL management are now planning compulsory redundancies for the many hundreds of workers made "surplus to requirement" by the Company Plan. To these can be added the victims of the upcoming round of savage cuts and the 100s of guards on the Central line where OPO is imminent. The introduction of a 35 hour week across LUL would create more than enough jobs to mop up any "excess staff". There is an

unanswerable case for it from the point of view of safety, health and as a positive answer to the threat of compulsory redundancies. LUL will say there is no money. Rubbish. The money is there if enough pressure is exerted on them and through them on the Tories — the party of family values! We saw on the Central line a few months ago how quickly they caved in to action with a one day traincrew strike winning reinstatement for the two victimised Central line guards Ray Stelgner and Pat Sikorski.

This would obviously be a fight that is qualitatively harder. But so is the threat we are faced with. We have paid the price of disunity often enough in the past. Inter union rivalry must not be allowed to prevent or disrupt a united fight. And the answer to that is to build up rank and file cross union unity and activity in the depots and stations around a fight for a 35 hour week with no loss of pay. We are a massively powerful group of workers, if as rank and file tubeworkers we can unite in common cause. The tube bosses can be toppled and so can their bosses the Tories.

What we need is for ASLEF to ballot, not to save Kevin Rose's face (or is it his arse?), but for a clearly shorter working week. That means a 35 hours 5 day working week. This could provide a serious basis for fighting unity across all the trade unions.

Contractors threat to London BT jobs

By a central London BT engineer

BT MANAGEMENT are bringing in 150 external engineer contractors at a time when BT has declared hundreds of staff surplus to requirements in the London Engineering division. This confrontational decision has been made

in the background of a compromise deal "The Identification of Redeployees" hammered out nationally between the NCU and BT before Christmas. Under the compromise deal, BT were meant to be redeploying surplus staff into areas where contractors were present, in order to phase out the 16,000 (ft equivalent) contractor posts in

BT overall.

They are saying one thing and doing another. Reps from London branches passed a motion calling on national support to organise an industrial action ballot of all BT engineers in London. NEC members will be meeting within the next couple of weeks to hopefully endorse the London Branches decision.

STOP PRESS:

NCU members in Giro bank PLC have voted — yes — in an industrial action ballot on pay. An overtime ban starts next week.

Sheffield council: One step forward, two steps back

UNISON

Chris Croome, UNISON No2 Branch Shop Stewards Organiser.

SHEFFIELD'S Labour council are trying to get the unions to do their dirty work in balancing their budget by proposing cuts in members terms and conditions. Stupidly the leadership of most of the unions are going along with this.

Last December the councils management team came up with a shopping list to achieve £9m of cuts in terms and conditions. All the unions agreed to reject it. However, in negotiations this year that approach began to fall apart. Within a few weeks the unions had agreed to departmental negotiations around reducing sickness rates and increasing productivity. As a result the management are going to try for a whole lot more — pay cuts and other condition cuts. The unions have therefore gone from a position of rejecting corporate negotiations around cuts to risking departmental ones, they know that some departments are not at all well organised and when departmental pay cuts might seem attractive in departments where a lot of compulsory redundancies are threatened. This whole approach needs to be totally reject-

ed — all departments should throw out any proposals for cuts in conditions and it should be made clear that the unions have responsibility at a corporate level not to pass on cuts to be negotiated in departments.

The overall situation with the councils budget is still fluid and there is no indication that if the unions did some stupid rerun of the last two years pay cut deals that it would prevent compulsory redundancies. The councils proposal for £9m of cuts in conditions is in addition to £18m in service cuts and £4m in management and organisation. In response to a threatened 1,000 redundancies several departments have voted to be balloted for all out indefinite strike action. This is in addition to the membership of all the UNISON branches voting for a 24 hour strike if any member receives a notice and for a strike on the date the council meets to set its budget — March 10th. However all the ballots will take at least four weeks and possibly more, to run and notices are almost definitely going to go out before then. Just as it is no good leaving negotiations on cuts to a departmental level it is vital that strike action against redundancies takes place across the whole branch. When the first notice goes out — all unions should strike until they are withdrawn.

Anti-racists unite in Nottingham

ACTIVISTS in Nottingham are uniting in a broad campaign to build for the TUC anti-racist demo. on 19th March.

The launch meeting of Nottingham United Against Racism — called by the Trades Council and backed by local Labour M.P.s Alan Simpson and John Hepple — attracted about 80 people.

Activists from anti-racist and anti-fascist campaigns, trade unions, the student movement, black community organisations, Labour Party wards and the Green Party agreed to work together to publicise and organise transport for the TUC demo.

The meeting also agreed to promote a local demonstration on 26th February, in response to the attack by 32 fascists on Mushroom Bookshop and racist attacks on local black and Asian people.

The initiative will be holding a town centre stall every Saturday until March 19th and plans further open meetings.

Nottingham Demonstration
Defend Our Communities
Defend Our People
Defend Our Bookshops

10.30am Meet at Forest Recreation Ground (Marshfield Rd. Entrance) March to Market Square for 12.00 rally.

MUSIC SPEAKERS
POETRY
UNITE AGAINST RACISM
Contact P.O. Box 179, Nottingham NG1 3AQ

Build the Fightback Unshackle the unions!

Socialist Movement Trade Union Committee

Conference

5/6 February 1994 Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London

Registration and sponsorship

The conference is open to delegates from bona fide trade union and labour movement organisations and to individual activists. Full weekend £10, one day £6 low/unwaged £3

Send registration and/or sponsorship details including name, address, union or organisation to Carolyn Sikorski, 53a Geere Road, London E15

SOCIALIST

Nazis will stand in May

ORGANISER

Students beat the Tories!



Over 3,000 students from across the West Midlands demonstrated in Birmingham last week. Kevin Sexton, Vice-President Welfare of the National Union of Students (NUS), got a huge cheer from the rally when he called on NUS to back the 23 February demonstration. Mick Duncan, an executive member at the University of Central England, commented: "after today's demo people are really fired up. There will be loads of people coming down to the demo on the 23rd. Students are fighting back. It's about time NUS joined us!" Photo: Mark Salmon

By Elaine Jones, NUS NEC (in a personal capacity)

JOHN Patten is being forced to retreat from his attack on student unions and the National Union of Students (NUS) according to reports in the press.

The proposal to outlaw many of the things student unions do now is being removed from the Education Bill.

This is a victory for all those who fought the Tories on this question. It is a victory especially for those who continued to argue and demonstrate against what the Tories planned long after it seemed a foregone conclusion that they would have their way.

Those who said "No surrender" have proved that there was no need to surrender — as the leaders of the NUS, for example, surrendered.

Even so, if the attack on student unions and NUS is called off by the Tories it will be a very important victory for students.

But students will not feel we have won a victory unless student unions and national

NUS learn the lessons that the Tories can be stopped, and act to defend students on burning questions such as grants.

Student grants are already far too small to live on and students continue to be excluded from the benefits system. Now the Tories intend to cut more than 30% off grants in the next three years.

The announcement of grant cuts in the budget has been met by a wave of protests. From Aberdeen to Kent students have marched and demonstrated. Yet the NUS leadership has said little and done nothing to tap into this anger.

With no lead coming from NUS, Left Unity has created an alliance to call a national demonstration on 23 February in central London. Our office has been inundated with requests for publicity and details of the march.

The 23 February march has become the national focus for the campaign against grant cuts.

Every student activist should work flat out to build the demo. The campaign against

grant cuts should be student unions' and NUS's top priority.

The student movement has, in the past, built campaigns. Its unions created the National Union by way of actions such as these. It is through mass action involving tens and hundreds and thousands of students that NUS can effectively fight against the Tory cuts.

It is only by way of campaigns that involve ordinary students that NUS can win back that bedrock support from students that is the very life-blood of our unions.

The Tory back-down should become the signal to student union activists and to the whole NUS to start a fight-back now.

We must build an effective movement and defeat the Tories all across the board.

Student activists must tell the national leaders of the NUS that the Tory back-down proves that their roll-over-and-play-dead response to Patten's attack was as cowardly, as stupid, as unnecessary as the left said it was. They must say to the NUS leaders in a loud voice: "off your knees, careerists!"

By Hannah Wood

AST May seven candidates of the fascist British National Party (BNP) stood in the local government elections.

This May, in the wake of the BNP's by-election victory, Tony Robson of the anti-fascist magazine *Searchlight*, expects two dozen BNP candidates.

Tony told *Socialist Organiser* that the fascists will concentrate on the East End of London — in the Isle of Dogs and Dagenham and, perhaps, Newham.

Other areas where candidates are possible include Dewsbury, parts of West Yorkshire, and around Manchester and Newcastle. In "white" areas around the edge of London other candidates are possible.

The smaller National Front will also field 6-10 candidates — perhaps in the Birmingham and Hemel Hempstead areas.

Aside from the area immediately around the Isle of Dogs these will be "token" candidates. The BNP will look to the local press to run campaigns for them.

The main point is that the labour movement must begin its campaign now. We must tie the work for the TUC's March 19 demonstration to the election campaign in May.

Anti-fascist activists must see part of their role as helping Labour campaigns in wards where the fascists will be standing.

Anti-fascist and anti-racist organisations such as the Anti-Racist Alliance (ARA) and the SWP's front organisation, the Anti-Nazi League (ANL) must work for Labour.

In Millwall the ANL gave out "don't vote BNP" — these "revolutionaries" couldn't even bring themselves to say "vote Labour".

Anti-fascism which avoids vote Labour in the May elections is utterly bankrupt.

HANDS OFF OUR GRANTS!

£70 a week minimum grant and full benefit rights

STOP TUITION FEES!

STOP GRADUATE TAX!

NATIONAL STUDENT MARCH

WEDNESDAY 23 FEBRUARY

1pm, ULU, Malet Street, London WC1

More details on 071-639 7967

Socialism and democracy

Direct action and Parliament

A debate between

Michael Foot and **John O'Mahony**

Conway Hall • 7.30pm

Wednesday 9 March 1994

Subscribe to Socialist Organiser

Name

Address

Enclosed (tick as appropriate):

- £5 for 10 issues
- £13 for six months
- £25 for a year
- £ extra donation

Cheques/postal orders payable to "WL Publications" Return to: Socialist Organiser, PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA

Australia: \$70 for a year, from WL, PO Box 313, Leichhardt 2040. Cheques payable to "Socialist Fight" USA: \$90 for a year, from Barry Finger, 153 Henderson Place, East Windsor, NJ 08520. Cheques payable to "Barry Finger"

