

SOCIALIST ORGANISER

FOR WORKERS' LIBERTY EAST AND WEST

Kick out the Tories in '87!



1917: when the workers took power

See centre pages



Rosie Barnes: victorious closet Tory. Photo Jez Coulson, IFL.



Photomontage Cath Tate

Labour needs clear policies

By Eric Heffer MP

"There can be no disguising the fact that the loss of Greenwich is a setback for Labour. We should have held it and, with the unpopularity of Mrs Thatcher and the government, Labour should have won the seat with an increased majority.

All of us in the Party must feel very sorry for Deirdre Wood and for all those who worked so hard in the campaign. Deirdre was the victim of a real dirty tricks campaign and did not deserve such treatment. She stood by her beliefs and in no way is responsible for losing the seat.

It must be understood that despite the campaign against her, Labour's vote did not collapse. We actually lost 1,685 votes from the General Election figures. The Tories were the real losers. They lost 8,298, and the SDP gained 9,504. It is obvious that the bulk of their gains were from the Tories.

Policies

Having said that, Labour should have won and therefore there are lessons to be learned. We must have clear distinctive socialist policies. If we seek to appear little different from the SDP, then it is they who gain, not Labour.

Dr. Owen has said that Labour suffers from its deep ideological nature. He is wrong. It is precisely clear bold socialist policies that are needed, which in real terms are the only ones which can begin to deal with Britain's crisis due to the present economic system, aggravated by Thatcher's policies.

If Labour appears to be backtracking and is not forthright, clear and bold — if we sound a cracked note by pussy-footing around — then voters begin to believe that we are purely opportunist rather than determined to change things on their behalf.

It is not the left-wing candidates that lose elections. It should be recalled that when Tony Benn fought Chesterfield, it was said then that a left-wing candidate would lose, yet Tony put up Labour's vote, winning back votes lost in the 1983 General Election.

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SDP: Tories Mark II

The SDP/Liberal Alliance are on the crest of a wave, winning support with the claim that they represent something new in politics. But they are no alternative to the Tories. In fact, in some ways they are worse.

David Owen denounced Thatcher as *too soft* on the NUM during the miners' strike. Last week the SDP told the Tories that they were introducing their new anti-union laws too late.

The SDP are as committed to nuclear weapons as the Tories.

The Liberals are an old fashioned bosses' party. Their record when they have had power — for example in Liverpool before the present Labour administration — proves it.

Careerists

The SDP are a bunch of careerists who fled the Labour Party in 1981 because they didn't like rank-and-file democracy.

David Owen, when he was Labour Foreign Minister, supplied arms to the savage Shah of Iran —

By Gerry Bates

and defended it to the hilt. Since leaving the Labour Party, he has tried to outdo the Tories as most outspoken opponent of trade union and workers' rights.

The SDP and the Liberals are *bosses'* parties, like the Tories. No one should be fooled into voting for them. Or fooled into 'tactical voting'.

Labour votes surrendered to the SDP will not be repaid. 'Tactical voting' will do Labour no good.

Neil Kinnock is not



Photo: Andrew Wiarid, Report.

fighting for socialist policies. But despite Kinnock, the Labour Party is the party of the trade unions. A majority Labour government will be easier to put pressure on from below

than a Labour government hamstrung by the SDP and Liberals.

We need a big push to get Labour into office, and a campaign to fight for working class interests.

P R E S S G A N G

The tactical voting gang

TODAY's jolly poster, "Would Britain be better off with a hung parliament?", showed Thatcher, Kinnock and Owen strung up as though by a lynch mob of outraged electors. It did not go down very well with the Advertising Standards Authority.

They decided that it offended against "standards of decency and propriety that are generally accepted". David Steel was, apparently, most put out — perhaps because a close inspection of the poster revealed a pocket-sized Liberal leader hanging from Dr Owen's necktie.

Steel should not have been upset, though: after all, this particular lynch-mob would have been led by Alliance supporters. And if, in their enthusiasm to mete out summary justice, the boys had mistakenly strung up the two Davids, you could be sure that a voice from the crowd would shout: "Hold on a minute — those two are on our side. Cut them down!"

Yes, the Tactical Voting gang are in town, and *Today* aims to mosey on down to the corral and kinda muscle in as their mouthpiece.

On Saturday, following the Greenwich by-election, *Today* left its readers in no doubt as to where it stands: "The message of Greenwich sounds loud and clear. Tactical voting can work. Voters can think for themselves. The rusting tentacles of the Tory and Labour Parties can be prised away from the levers of governmental power."

The editorial went on to enthuse about "a bright new range of prospects for Britain's politics", and "a new mood in the air, a new willingness to get away from the bleak and stultifying alternatives of the old politics".

By Jim Denham

In a friendly crescendo of pork-barrelled tub-thumping, the editorial continued: "That must be the aim now. To keep up the momentum of Greenwich. To let the sparks jump from there to the Truro by-election next month and to fan the flame of new political thinking and the potential of tactical voting all the way to the general election".

The *Guardian*, of course, wouldn't want to be part of no lynching. But we share your feelin's. Though maybe we should cut down the Kinnock boy as well: "A Conservative defeat requires two things."

"First, and most important, a revived Labour Party... Second, it needs a revived Alliance, which we did not have before Greenwich."

"He who wills the end must also will the means. If Greenwich is the means, then that will do nicely."

Sunday's *Observer* took a similar line: "Those... who wish above all to see an end to Thatcherism still have one chance of deliverance left. It is that the Labour Party contrives to hold on to some 36 per cent of the national vote, that the Alliance manages to advance to some 28-29 per cent — leaving the Conservatives out in the cold".

Oh yes, the Kinnock boy: he should be cut down and saved for a fair trial in front of the electorate, before "making way for Mr John Smith".

The funny thing about this mob is that they don't seem to be in favour of anything — just *opposed* both to the continuation of the Thatcher regime and to a majority Labour government. They want people to vote against a party rather than for one. Well, I guess they're like all lynch mobs. Just frightened little folk gettin' all riled up and lashin' out on all sides.

Police charge their victim

STEVEN Shaw, a former Manchester University student who has been beaten up several times by the police, is now being charged with 'attempting to pervert the course of justice'.

This is an extremely serious charge. There is no maximum sentence. The Police Complaints Authority report comes to 45,000 pages, but its

findings are not to be made public. Three police officers are to face criminal charges — two for perjury, one for assault. These charges are presumably connected to the original 'Battle of Brittan' rather than the subsequent harassment of Steven Shaw.

In 1985, when Leon Brittan (then Tory Home Secretary) visited Manchester University, the police violent-

ly broke up a student demonstration. Steven Shaw, who at the time was researching into the police for his course, has suffered harassment ever since.

Last year he was brutally beaten up and forced to leave the country.

His case became national news. Now the police are attempting to silence him. If Steven is found guilty, it will make it almost impossible for

anyone to dare complain about the police in future.

500 demonstrated in Manchester against the frame-up on Monday 2 March. We need to keep up the pressure.

Contact the Justice for Steven Shaw Campaign, c/o Manchester University Student Union, Oxford Road, Manchester 13.

Capitalism



War on Want deliver a protest letter to Lloyds Bank in the City pointing out that the £700 million profits announced by Lloyds last Friday, 27th, have been reaped at the expense of poor people in Latin America. Photo: Stefano Cagnoni.

Debt crisis gets worse

Late in February Brazil's government told all Brazilian oil tankers in foreign ports to take to the high seas so that they could not be seized. Shortly afterwards Brazil stopped all interest payments on its medium term and long term foreign debt.

Brazil owes over \$100 billion to foreign banks, out of Latin America's total of \$380 billion. Since the onset of the 'debt crisis' in the

early 1980s, Western bankers and governments have been afraid of the possible effects of a revolt by a big debtor country. When Mexico defaulted on its debt in 1982, the international banking system rushed to bail it out.

Brazil's decision will mean that the banks do without \$500 a month in interest. But the biggest problems in the short term are those facing Brazil itself.

The government of Jose Sarney faces growing opposition. Last November, the government party

won a landslide election victory. But almost immediately big price increases provoked massive opposition.

Strikes and demonstrations swept the country, forcing a climbdown.

So Sarney's government has little room for manoeuvre: it wants to make the workers pay for the economic crisis, but the workers won't let it.

Peru has already put a unilateral ceiling on its interest payments, and Ecuador says it will not pay any interest until June. So the Third World debt crisis is still on the boil.

The international banks want to push the Third World governments as hard as they can without payments stopping for good. If interest payments stop for 90 days, then under US regulations banks have to write off their loans as losses — and several big US banks can't afford to do that.

On the other side, the Third World governments want to get the best bargain they can, but without spoiling their chances of getting credit in future.

Nuclear war

Gorbachev's new offer

Is Gorbachev serious about peace? Now he has proposed arms reductions without demanding an end to 'Star Wars', or the Strategic Defence Initiative — which proved the sticking point in the Reykjavik talks last October.

The bureaucratic leaders of the USSR would like to reduce the money they spend on arms. And Gorbachev would like better relations with the West — less nukes and more

trade.

Gorbachev's offer is probably in part a propaganda bluff. He must know that Reagan will look for some excuse to back out. If not, however, Gorbachev's new proposals may lead to some more arms talks, and perhaps even to a few bombs being cut.

But a real end to the arms race won't come from Gorbachev any more than it will come from the low-grade crooks in the White House. The workers need to overthrow their rulers, East as well as West, to put an end to war and the weapons of war.

Israel

Police attack the left

On 16 February Israeli police raided the offices of the radical Alternative Information Centre in Jerusalem. The centre produces a bulletin, *News from Within*, which gives information on the Israeli occupied territories.

The office was shut for six months, and four people arrested. One of those is Michael Warschawsky, the Centre's director, who is leader of the

Revolutionary Communist League — Matzpen, the Israeli sister-group to Socialist Action and International in Britain.

They have been charged with links with "terrorist organisations" — in particular the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. It is the first such move against an Israeli (as opposed to a Palestinian Arab) news agency.

Labour after Greenwich

From front page

What does Greenwich therefore mean to Labour?

*That the campaign, unfortunately influencing some in the Party, suggesting that the Party is riddled with so-called "hard-left loonies" was a gift to a hostile press and to our political opponents. It has caused uncertainty amongst the Labour electorate. What is really required is the unity around policies to overcome what Thatcher has done.

*We cannot win by TV packaging and by being afraid of our shadows, with our candidates put on the defensive. Our candidates need to be free to get out amongst the people, to be seen on the streets with them speaking and canvassing, and we must stop being mesmerised by the TV and the press.

Our candidates are inhibited if they are packaged like soap powder. As free human spirits they should express themselves amongst the people without so-called "minders".

In simple terms, Labour must say what it stands for and what we intend to do.

We must expose and attack the vicious nature of this capitalist, selfish, Thatcherite society and say

clearly how we intend to change it! Labour must not be ashamed of its socialist past and policies. It was clear socialist policies which gave us victories in 1945, 1964 and 1974.

We must not turn in on ourselves. That could be disastrous. We must go forward to win the next election, with firm, bold, positive policies and be outward-looking.

It is the only way to win.

Eric Heffer was speaking at a Campaign Group meeting in Bristol on 27 February.

SDP	18,287 (1983: 8,783)
Lab*	11,676 (1983: 13,361)
Con	3,864 (1983: 12,150)

According to a poll published in 'The Independent', of those who initially considered voting Labour and switched to the Alliance, 16% said it was because they thought Labour had no chance of winning.

29% of those who said they had voted Labour in 1983 went Alliance this time, and 62% of those who said they had voted Tory.

When voters were asked how they would vote in a General Election Labour came out top. 35% said they would vote Labour, 31% Alliance and 25% Tory.

“When it was written, we could not have called it a *Socialist Manifesto*. By Socialists, in 1847, were understood...the most multifarious social quacks, who by all manners of tinkering, professed to redress...all sorts of social grievances...Whatever portion of the working class had become convinced of the insufficiency of mere political revolutions, and had proclaimed the necessity of a total social change, called itself Communist...”

“Thus Socialism was a middle-class movement, Communism a working class movement. Socialism was, on the continent at least, ‘respectable’; Communism was the very opposite. And as our notion, from the very beginning, was that ‘the emancipation of the working class must be the act of the working class itself’, there could be no doubt as to which of the two names we would take...”

Frederick Engels’ foreword to the 1888 edition of the Communist Manifesto sums up the bedrock idea of working class politics. Yet quite different notions are current on the left in Britain today (and ‘communism’ is taken as meaning a police state like the USSR).

When it was abolished by the Tories, the Labour Greater London Council produced a booklet describing what it had done since being elected in 1981. It detailed many measures, often valuable, that the council had carried out for women, for ethnic minorities, for gays and lesbians, for the disabled and so on. The words ‘working class’ did not appear at all. Yet the GLC is seen by many not only as something to defend against the Tories, but as a positive model for radical socialism.

A ‘rainbow coalition’ of different oppressed groups, together with peace, ecology and other movements, is presented as a modern replacement for old-fashioned ‘class reductionism’.

The working class

The working class is an oppressed group in capitalist society. It is also more. It is the basic exploited class: the whole system lives from what is squeezed out of the working class.

The working class is brought together, organised, disciplined and pushed towards unity by capitalism itself. The central economic mechanism of the system, the exploitation of labour by capital, drives workers into a class struggle which even at routine levels is powerful enough to dominate social and political life in a country like Britain.

Only occasionally does that class struggle reach its full height, with mass strike movements mobilising the whole working class. But even sectional strikes often spread and generate solidarity. Even in normal times, when the working class is battered into inertia and ideological conformity by the relentless pressure of the ruling class, the organisations based on the working class, trade unions and workers’ parties, exceed all other opposition and protest



No substitute for building support for socialist ideas in the workplace

Turn to the working class

movements in scope and activity. The working class has the power to overthrow capitalism, and the potential to make a new society. The working class is not only manual workers — it includes all those who are deprived of ownership and control of the means of production and have to sell their labour-power for a wage. Thus the working class *already* does all the technical and physical work of producing the wealth of society — only it does so under the command of capitalists seeking profits.

The working class can organise production itself, according to its own rules, the rules of cooperation and solidarity. The working class has no class below it to oppress. In fighting to free itself it must also fight to abolish *all* class divisions.

It can free itself only by turning society upside down.

In turning society upside down, the working class can and must lead the fight against all special oppressions. No women have a greater interest in women’s liberation than working class women; no black people have a greater interest in racial equality than black workers.

Autonomous movements

Most of the time the working class is bowed down and disunited by the pressure of capitalist power. The labour movement is dominated by bureaucrats and better-off workers.

Women, black people, and other oppressed groups cannot *wait* until the whole working class moves. So they develop autonomous movements which fight their own struggles at their own tempos while also trying to win over the labour movement.

Socialists must support these autonomous movements: not to do so is effectively to support the sectionalism of the bureaucrats and better-off workers who dominate the labour movement in quiet times. An uncompromising struggle for the rights of the most oppressed is necessary if the working class is to become confident and bold enough to free itself.

All that, however, is very different from encouraging sectionalism and autonomy as positive aims in themselves, or saying that women and black people and other groups necessarily have ‘autonomous’ perceptions and programmes which cannot be integrated into a class-against-class programme.

That sort of autonomy leaves the socialist movement as nothing better than a coalition held together by horse-trading and agreements on spheres of influence. How could such a coalition overthrow centralised capitalist power? And if it could, what sort of socialism could it create? There could be no economic plan integrating the interests of all workers, but only a patchwork compromise — in other words, a reproduction of liberal-capitalist pressure-group

politics.

We must fight for the unity of the working class in a way that does not stifle the struggles of the most oppressed; and wage the struggles of the most oppressed in a way that does not obstruct working-class unity.

Recent years

The miners’ strike of 1984-5 was living proof of some basic Marxist ideas. The miners’ struggle for an ‘economics’ based on human need, not profit, inspired thousands of workers. Women, black communities, and lesbian and gay groups mobilised; and the strike transformed the thinking of many miners on every aspect of life. And that was only one per cent of the working class in all-out confrontation with capitalism!

But the miners were defeated; and from that defeat has come the drift of the left away from class politics. No Marxist group, however good its strategy, can revive mass workers’ struggle at will. But we can prepare, learn lessons, educate, sink roots: that is what we must do.

From the late 1950s and well into the ’70s, Britain had one of the most powerful and confident trade union movements in the world. The question of how to deal with the unions dogged successive governments.

But after crippling the Tory government in 1972-4 the labour movement could find no political alternative but the Wilson/Callaghan Labour government. Increasingly,

localised shop-floor militancy was not enough to deal with the growing economic impasse of British capitalism and the Labour leaders’ efforts to manage the system.

Strikes declined after mid-1975. However, there was not a simple switch from militant trade-unionism to pressure-group politics.

In the late ’70s and early ’80s a movement arose trying to ‘re-found’ the Labour Party. It failed — and fragmented. Cut adrift from a political anchor, and without a coherent strategy for socialism, its component parts floated away. From a relatively cohesive, confident, outward-looking movement, the Labour left turned towards internal pressure-group politics.

The feminist slogan ‘The personal is political’ has been readapted. It used to mean that ‘personal’ issues were not just personal, but needed to be dealt with by political action. Now it is turned around: the political is the personal. Your politics, and the *status* of those politics, are defined by your personal identity as female, black, lesbian or whatever.

Such an approach destroys any possibility of scientific theory. It also produces not-very-radical politics: in the end it reproduces the ideas of orthodox sociology, with a kaleidoscope of power and status relations, all expressed at individual level, obscuring the *class* struggle.

The ‘vertical mosaic’

A. Sivanandan makes the point in ‘Race Awareness Training and the disintegration of the black struggle’, commenting on recent official ‘ethnic’ policy. “The ensuing scramble for government favours and government grants on the basis of specific ethnic needs and problems served on the one hand to deepen ethnic differences and foster ethnic rivalry, and on the other to widen the definition of ethnicity to include a variety of national and religious groups — Chinese, Cypriots, Greeks, Turks, Irish, Italians, Jews, Muslims, Sikhs, until the term became meaningless (except as a means of getting funds).

“This ‘vertical mosaic’ of ethnic groups, so distinct from the horizontal of class politics, then becomes even more removed by the politics of the left councils who, lacking the race/class perspective which would have allowed them to dismantle the institutionalised racism of their own structures, insititutionalised ethnicity instead.”

The trend here is towards the Americanisation of British politics. In the US, ethnic identities have long been a powerful counterweight to *class* identities. Radical impulses can readily be directed away from class channels towards community, citizens’, or pressure-group politics. The result: a weak labour movement, little political culture, no workers’ party even of a reformist and bureaucratic type, little questioning of the fundamental institutions of private property. Yet Americanisation is, in effect, *promoted* by some on the left in Britain as the radical new wave of socialist politics.

Turn to the working class

Socialist Action preaches the ‘rainbow coalition’, saying tht the working class in Western Europe has not been even a potentially revolutionary force for many decades and will not be for a long time to come. Socialist Worker and Militant increasingly build themselves as sects, distant both from rank-and-file workers and from autonomous movements. A large part of the left has abandoned the working class.

Yet there are no short cuts. No regroupment or campaign in the Labour Party can substitute for the hard, slow work of building support for socialist ideas in the workplace.

Those who preach other strategies are not following an easier or newer path to the same goal of working class socialism. They are substituting a different goal.

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My two years in prison — by jailed miner Terry French

WOMAN'S EYE

Women, sex and AIDS

By Jean Lane

What does the AIDS threat mean for women?

Last Friday's TV programme, First Aids, suggested that it means a return to Victorian morality and a strengthening of male dominance and of the myths relating to sexual relationships — not least the myth being that they are all heterosexual. (How many gay women have contracted the virus, I wonder?).

The programme was meant to be a frank, educational discussion for young people. It started off by telling us that you only have to sleep with one person who has the virus and you could be dead within 8 years. Yet the main lesson pushed was 'have fewer partners'.

The deputy-editor of Cosmopolitan magazine, who was on the panel of experts (expert in what?), backed up this piece of sound advice with the comforting notion that it would bring back romantic courtship.

Good old-fashioned stuff, eh? Women have become too promiscuous, apparently. Instead of (and this is herology) the hounds chasing the fox, these days, the fox walks into a room full of hounds and says, "here I am, take me".

When the only honest bloke in the audience said that he didn't get enough sex to cut down on he was treated by Mike Smith (the with-it compere) as if he had a problem! For me the bloke with a problem was the one interviewed who was too interested in how many "birds" he could "pull" to be bothered about AIDS.

Attitude

This attitude was backed up by an interview with a so-called expert who said that men are built in such a way that their sexual urges are greater than women's (why don't they get called nymphos, then?) and cannot be controlled.

An old boyfriend of mine told me that one when he was going away to university, leaving me at home. Clever bugger. It meant that he could, no, was impelled to, sleep around as much as he liked. But if I did, I would be cheap and unfaithful.

OK then, said the programme, if you must sleep around, use a condom. Now here, for me is where the really big myth comes in. The condom manufacturers must be rubbing their hands with glee.

It supposes that what women like best, in fact what sex is all about, is having their vaginas penetrated by penises. Says who?

The point of pleasure for women is the clitoris. You can penetrate the vagina all you like, but unless contact is made with the clitoris, the most you will get is a fake orgasm and a boost to the male ego.

Now, many people like penetration, and, yes, using a condom makes sense if that is what you are going to do. But that was all there was to sex according to the programme. Someone should tell the young "bird-puller" that he might as well stay at home and use a flower-vase.

Unfortunately, as with all other myths, women are also taken in by this commonly-held misconception. We are led to feel that if we don't enjoy penetration, there is something wrong with us. We are "frigid" or "cock teasers". And if we try to tell men what we'd rather have them do, then we're "ego-deflaters" as well.

But why should we be satisfied with sexual experiences as sensual as a slap in the face with a wet fish? Why should we pander to men's sexual misunderstandings?

Women and men, gay and heterosexual, have over the years been learning to get away from all that, trying to be freer and more honest with themselves and each other about what they want sexually. The AIDS campaign so far has done little more than destroy that freedom. And the ITV programme didn't help.

This week, two years since the end of the miners' strike, there are still over 400 miners locked out of their jobs. Terry French is one of those victimised miners. On this page he tells of how he spent the last two years in jail. His crime was fighting for a job

TO SAY I was naive when I went into prison would be an understatement. I went there believing that a majority of people were there because of their background — inner-city problems, the social problems.

Now there are those people in there because of the social problems, but again it comes back to education. None of them really understood that it was the social problems that got them there. They completely lost sight of that fact and just saw themselves as criminals.

In Maidstone I was with what you would call your top echelon of criminals — the bank robbers, the Bank of America people. They were aware, and what they said to me was basically: 'Yes, I'm a socialist, I believe in socialist principles, but I have been completely disillusioned'.

One of them, an electrician by trade, had been a shop steward with the EETPU, and he turned to bank robbery. What he said to me was: 'I tried to help them, but if they won't help themselves, then bugger them, I'm going to get my bit'. That was his attitude.

Then you got to the lower end of the scale. I now understand a lot more about the problems of drugs and alcohol.

One lad, a heroin addict, 23 years old, was on his sixth prison sentence. It had cost him £180 a day for his habit, and he paid for it by shoplifting. He went out on a day parole to go and look at a drug clinic — I helped talk him into it — where he might stay on his release, and he never came back. He just got 'jacked up', and he is now on the run.

The other prisoners' attitude to me was one of suspicion, in the main. I don't think many of them believed me when I told them about my principles. But I never stopped talking; and the papers that came in helped.

Most of the left-wing papers were sent to me, and I used to put them around, let people see and read them. I tried to educate as far as I could.

But this self-centred greed was too deep-rooted in many, many cases. I



Terry French got two years for defending jobs while the thug who did this is not considered a criminal. Photo: John Sturrock,

did get through to some and convince a few people to what I thought was the right way of doing things.

From day one I did not treat anybody — regional director, Governor, prison officer, welfare officer — as anything other than my equal. It caused problems, especially when I went to a new prison, but I took that stand and maintained it all the way through.

When you went to see the Governor it was 'Stand on the mat, name and number to the Governor'. What I used to do at a new prison was go in, look at him, and say: 'My name is Terence Steven French, and the

number you have given me is B733383'. That always used to start a row and I put my point of view.

But whichever prison I went to, the prison officers used to say about me, 'No matter what you say about Terry French, he is a man of principle, and if he says something he will do it, even if it is against the rules'. It came back to me through the other inmates.

Mistrust

I was respected, by the staff at least. The prisoners, as I've said, had a lot of mistrust towards me. They

just could not believe that people like me existed. If you shared anything with them, they would look at you as if to say: 'What's his angle? What does he want back?' They could never accept that you were just being a person.

After I spoke at the TUC meeting while on weekend leave and went on the Wapping picket line, I reported back to Forde Open Prison at the time stated. Nothing was said to me when I arrived back on the Monday afternoon.

Then on the Tuesday morning, when I went out on to the work parade as usual, they called my name out, and within 20 minutes I had my kit packed and I was on a bus to Wandsworth Jail. No reason given.

They would not tell me why I was being moved, or even where to. In Wandsworth, I put down straight away to see the Governor, and he said that all he had down on the file was that I was totally unsuitable for Forde Open Prison.

I kept hammering away, and they gradually changed their story, bit by bit. It culminated in my wife Liz and Tony Benn and Dennis Skinner seeing the Under-Secretary of State, Lord Caithness, who admitted to the three of them that it was nothing to do with my suitability for open conditions.

He would still not come clean and say it was because of the TUC conference, but I know it was, through different prison officers. You know, men who said, 'I can't be quoted on this, but this is why you were moved'.

I am 100% sure that was the reason they moved me from Forde Open Prison to Wandsworth Jail.



Lesbian and Gay rights

End legal discrimination campaign

A campaign has been launched to make the next Parliament end legal discrimination against lesbian and gay people.

Legal discrimination goes far beyond the gay male age of consent. It affects lesbians just as much as — or even more than — gays.

Did you know that:
*The law considers all lesbian and gay sexuality to be against 'public policy' and 'public morality'.

*Lesbian and gay people can legally be sacked merely for their sexuality.

*Courts often prevent lesbians and gay men and their children from living with each other.

*'Public morality' laws are used to harass and restrict lesbian and gay social organisations, information ser-

vices and publications, and to justify censorship.

*It is illegal for people of the same sex to show affection for each other in public.

This legal discrimination backs up the wider prejudice, discrimination and violence against us.

With a general election coming up, we think it's time to campaign for a change in the law!

The *Legislation for Lesbian and Gay Rights Campaign* was set up in October 1986 to combat legal discrimination against lesbian and gay people. It is open to everyone who supports this aim.

Our first goal is for lesbian and gay people to discuss the changes we want in the law. We are setting up different groups to organise this.

These discussions will come

together in a major open conference on 23 and 24 May 1987 at the Camden Centre, London. We hope that the conference will agree on the main changes in the law the lesbian and gay people want from the next Parliament.

We want to win support for our demands as widely as possible. We can do this by getting sponsorship and media publicity for the conference and by persuading as many organisations as possible to support the conference's demands.

Join the discussions. Join in the organisation. Join us in *laying down the law!*

Contact LLGRC, Room 221, 38 Mount Pleasant, London WC1X 0AP. Tel: 01-833 3860.

Revolution in

The Russian empire, ruled over by the Tsar, was regarded by all radicals and socialists in Europe as the citadel of the most brutal reaction.

A powerful and extremely bureaucratic state ruled over a society that was, for the most part, barely out of the Dark Ages. Millions of people lived in terribly backward conditions in the countryside, while the Tsar regarded himself as a representative of God on earth.

By the turn of the century there was a small industrial working class, grouped together in huge factories — many of which were owned by foreign firms, or funded by the State. A socialist movement was to develop among those workers.

But the early Marxists had to compete with other political movements. The most powerful of these was a movement called the 'narodniks' or 'populists', whose different groups came together at the beginning of the century as the Social Revolutionaries.

The populists were based upon the small class of intellectuals, but hoped to be able to inspire a revolt by the mass of the people against the Tsar. Although they spoke in terms of 'the people', in fact they looked mainly to the peasantry, hoping that the old system of rural 'communes' could form the basis for a new, socialist, society. They saw no special role, therefore, for the industrial workers.

Example

The basic approach of the populists in the second half of the 19th century was to try to mobilise the masses by example: they carried out daring assassinations of reactionary leaders. Tsar Alexander II was assassinated, and Lenin's elder brother was involved in an attempt to kill Alexander III. But the assassinations left the masses cold.

Marxists began to organise before the turn of the century, founding the Russian Social Democratic and Labour Party (RSDLP) in conditions of severe repression. The Marxists argued that Russian society was changing: the growth of industry, and the expansion of the market into the countryside, heralded a new form of society: modern capitalism. They argued that the Tsarist state and the Russian aristocracy were an obstacle to the development of capitalism, and that Russia was heading for a revolution which would destroy the Tsarist state, introduce West European-style democracy, and allow the free development of capitalism.

Within that framework, the Marxists put their resources into organis-

The Russian revolution, which began seventy years ago, in March 1917, transformed the modern world. It opened up the possibility of a completely new society, not just in Russia but across the world. In fact the opportunities were lost: the regime in Russia today, or in similar societies, is a far cry from the socialism fought for by Lenin and the other leaders of the revolution. But the degeneration of the

Russian revolution was not inevitable. And the revolution itself was a hope and inspiration to millions of workers across the world.

This week, Socialist Organiser begins a series of articles on the Russian revolution, describing events as they occurred, week by week. As an introduction, this week we look at the background to the revolution and the revolutionary socialist movement in Russia.

ing the young working class, so that it would play the maximum role in the democratic revolution while also preparing later to overthrow the new capitalist class, and bring about a socialist revolution. Following Marx, they believed that the working class could create a new society based on grass roots democracy and rational, democratic planning for human need, rather than profit. But first, an industrial capitalist society would have to develop.

There were disagreements among the Marxists, and in 1903 the RSDLP split into two wings, apparently about organisational structure. The majority (at the part of the conference that voted on the question — many delegates had already walked out) or 'Bolsheviks', were led by Lenin, one of the most gifted Marxist thinkers and organisers. The minority, or 'Mensheviks', were to harden out into the right wing over the years to come.

The point of conflict in 1903 was over whether to have a tightly organised party, as Lenin argued, or a looser grouping. But shortly the political differences were to get much bigger.

In 1905, a revolution broke out in Russia. It began when a crowd of starving workers, taking a petition to the Tsar, were mown down by troops. Thousands of workers, all over Russia, struck; by the autumn the movement was reaching general strike proportions.

A new form of democratic workers' organisation made its appearance: the council of workers' deputies, or *soviet*. This was a body composed of elected workers' representatives which took control of the workers' districts. It was like a workers' parliament — although far more democratic than any parliament that has ever existed.

The 1905 revolution was defeated: in December the Soviet Executive were arrested, and although strikes and demonstrations continued, the Tsar's regime survived. But the revolution was like a laboratory in which different revolutionary ideas were tested: after 1905, the political differences between various groups were clarified.

The main revolutionary force in 1905 was the working class. The great Polish socialist Rosa Luxemburg analysed the significance of the 'mass strike' as the dynamic force in the revolution, arguing that the powerful German labour movement should learn from the Russian experience.

Strategy

But this posed important questions for socialist strategy. The Marxists had thought that Russia was too backward, the working class too weak, for a revolution to do more than open the way to full-scale capitalism and capitalist-type democracy — yet the driving force for the revolution was not the capitalists who would benefit from it, but the exploited workers. How was this contradiction to be resolved? The answer to this question deepened divisions among the Marxists.

The Mensheviks stuck to the rigid view that the revolution was and would be capitalist, or bourgeois, and so the capitalists (or their political representatives, the liberal intelligentsia), would lead it. The revolution would result in a liberal government based on a British-style parliament. The Marxists should develop independent working class organisations like trade unions and defend workers' immediate interests, but it would be madness and utopianism to try to make the revolution more radical.

The Bolsheviks argued that the



Armed workers in Petrograd 1917

liberals were weak and feeble and had no revolutionary vitality — they were a pale echo of the bourgeois revolutionaries of the great French revolution. The whole capitalist class was utterly compromised with the Tsarist state, and could never lead a revolution to overthrow it.

The Marxists should ally not with them, but with the huge class of peasants. This alliance of workers and peasants would overthrow the Tsar and introduce a radical, democratic republic — what Lenin called the "revolutionary democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry". And that worker-peasant revolution in Russia could link up with international socialist revolution. The peasants — who were not socialists, but on the contrary wanted to have their own patches of land — so outnumbered the workers that they workers would not be able to win socialist measures. But the workers should fight to make the revolution as radical as possible.

Rosa Luxemburg had a view quite similar to this.

A third argument was put forward by Leon Trotsky. At that time a supporter neither of the Bolsheviks nor of the Mensheviks, he had been President of the St. Petersburg Soviet. Trotsky agreed with Lenin that the bourgeois liberals were feeble, and that the workers and poor

peasants provided the revolutionary dynamic to the revolution.

But the peasantry, although big in numbers, could not act as an independent political force. Within the alliance, the workers would lead — or there would be no alliance, and the peasants would follow the capitalists instead. The workers would be central to the revolution, and the workers' soviets would take on the responsibility of state power. The workers would "stand before the peasantry as the class which has emancipated it".

Power

Once in power, the workers could not stop at democratic measures alone, or give political power to the liberals. A workers' government, supported by the peasants, would have to take sides in class struggles — and nationalise industry under workers' control, for example. The workers would have to go beyond the bourgeois limits of the revolution and transform it into a socialist revolution.

Russia itself could not support a new socialist society, which requires a high level of industrialisation and economic development. But Russia was tied in with the international capitalist system.

1917

YEAR OF REVOLUTION

Russia



The seizure of power by the Russian workers would be just a part of an international socialist revolution. As part of an international socialist federation, working class power in Russia was possible.

Trotsky's position was called the theory of 'permanent revolution'. The Bolsheviks initially opposed it. But in the course of 1917 they came to a position more or less identical to Trotsky's — and on the basis of it, took power. At the same time Trotsky recognised that he had been wrong on the organisational issues, and joined the Bolsheviks.

After the defeat of the 1905 revolution there was a long period of severe repression in Russia. In 1914, the First World War broke out, shaking the whole of society. It was the rock upon which the international socialist labour movement dashed itself to bits.

After years of opposition to the coming war, most of the various socialist parties supported their 'own' capitalist governments when the war broke out. The Socialist International collapsed. Mighty workers' parties like the Social Democratic Party of Germany herded their supporters into armies to die for their 'fatherland' — that is, for the murderous, expansionist ambitions of their rulers.

A tiny minority fought against this

capitulation, keeping the flame of socialist internationalism alive. Lenin and Trotsky were prominent in that revolutionary minority.

The war dragged on, undermining the power of the old ruling classes. Russia did badly. By 1917, there was massive discontent at the front. Soldiers began to desert because of the appalling conditions in the trenches. Widespread opposition to the continuation of the war fuelled a growing revolutionary mood.

Strikes

Then at the end of February (March by modern calendars), on International Women's Day, the revolution broke out. Women textile workers went on strike — and strikes spread. Within a day, two hundred thousand workers were on strike in St. Petersburg (soon to be renamed Petrograd, and later Leningrad).

A new Soviet was formed. The Tsar's ministers were arrested, and after only a few days, the Tsar abdicated. A Provisional Government was formed.

According to Trotsky, the February revolution was led by "conscious and tempered workers educated for the most part by the party of Lenin." But the Bolsheviks remained a minority until later. In

fact at the beginning, *real* political power lay in the hands of the majority in the Soviets — who were Mensheviks — while *formal* power was in the hands of the liberals (or not-so-liberals) in the Provisional Government.

From February to October there was a contest between these two sides of the 'dual power' in Russia. Workers' power was eventually to triumph under Bolshevik leadership. But the Bolshevik leaders who were in Russia in February and March were initially hostile to the idea of workers' power: still tied to their old formulas they gave (critical) support to the Provisional Government — and to its continuation of the war.

Lenin returned from exile in April, urging a rapid change in the party's line. He called for revolutionary opposition to the Provisional Government, and for "all power to the soviets". He and Trotsky (who returned to Russia in May) were thus now in practical agreement; in July Trotsky brought his own group into the Bolsheviks.

At a conference in April, Lenin won the party majority to his argument. The stage was set for the revolution of October that was to overthrow the Provisional Government and put the working class, under Bolshevik leadership, into power.

Time to go on the offensive for women's rights

By Michele Carlisle

Last week the High Court and the Appeal Court both rejected a student's attempt to force his ex-girlfriend to have a child against her will. The man, a leading member of Oxford University Pro-Life Group, described the decision to allow the woman to have an abortion as 'a setback to the campaign'.

The £40,000 costs awarded against him will also, I hope, prove a setback to the Society for the Protection of the Unborn Child (SPUC), who were backing him.

Two issues were at stake. Firstly, is an abortion at 21 weeks of pregnancy still lawful; and, secondly, can a man bring a case on behalf of a foetus that he has made a small contribution to?

On both counts, the courts found against the man. The High Court and the Court of Appeal both ruled that at 21 weeks a foetus is not capable of being born alive, and the High Court also ruled that the foetus has no legal status and cannot have a case brought on its behalf by the prospective father.

The anti-abortion lobby has failed to convince the British public or even the Tory Party that abortion is murder and should be criminalised. Realising they are on a loser, they have shifted their emphasis, focusing on the extremely small number of women who need late abortions, and hoping to win-people to their cause by arguing merely for a reduction in the time limit.

They ignore all the reasons why some women need late abortions (waiting lists, anti-abortion doctors, ignorance about our bodies) and try to evoke images of babies being killed.

Of course, the anti-abortionists see no difference between an abortion at 28 weeks and one at 8 weeks, but they are prepared to be politically dishonest in order to make some ground.

Fortunately, victories for them have been few, despite their massive resources. Time and time again the anti-abortion groups have failed to get Parliament to reduce the time limit from 28 weeks (the age at which the foetus is capable of being born alive, according to the 1929 Infant Life Preservation Act). In 1979 when John Corrie tried to reduce the time limit and restrict access to abortion in other ways, the TUC called a demonstration against the Bill attracting 50,000 people and making it the largest women's rights march ever held in this country.

Time

SPUC and LIFE recognised that it would be hard to get Parliament to lower the time limit and so attempted to set a legal precedent in the courts.

The ruling stated that an abortion at 21 weeks is lawful because at that stage the foetus is not capable of being born alive. However, nobody wanted the foetus to be born at 21 weeks. The woman wanted an abortion and the man wanted her to take the pregnancy to term. The key issue is, can it ever be justified to take away the right of a woman to control her own body at any stage in her pregnancy?

The issue of the so-called rights of the father was not really dealt with by the courts, although the media focused on it. The High Court ruled that the father couldn't bring a case on behalf of the foetus at this stage of the pregnancy, but left wide open the question of foetal and paternal rights



Reactionary bilge

after 21 weeks of pregnancy.

We must fight to change the law to give the power of choice on abortion to the woman. She can decide which men she wants to take into account when making her decision.

A Norwegian man is taking this issue to the European Court of Human Rights, demanding the male right of veto over their partner's abortion. Giving men this sort of power and enshrining it in law would mean women would be even more trapped in the home, as mothers and carers, with no control over their bodies or their lives.

Some people, notably last week's gutter press, are interpreting the actions of these sort of men as some sort of move towards men taking responsibility for what happens to the seeds of their loins. But all they are trying to do is further confirm the role of women as baby-making machines, to be switched on and off by men.

All the major political parties kept very quiet throughout the whole Oxford student affair, despite the fact that the Labour Party and the Liberals have policy in support of abortion rights. Even the Tories, who are looking for any excuse to push women back into the home, are fairly quiet on the issue of abortion, knowing they could not hold an anti-abortion line even within their Parliamentary Party.

However, if they get a third term, we could well see a major concerted and overt attack on abortion rights rather than the slashing of resources and chipping away at the time limit we have experienced so far.

We have to force the Labour Party to argue for and carry out its conference policy on abortion rights. We should use this 20th anniversary year of the 1967 Abortion Act to raise our own demands about improved facilities, liberalisation of the law and the extension of the 1967 Act to Northern Ireland.

It is time to break from the traditional defensiveness of the pro-choice movement and go on the offensive.

Even in the jungle there's no escape

Belinda Weaver reviews 'The Mosquito Coast'.

What do you do if you think your father is trying to kill you? That is the problem facing young Charlie in the film 'The Mosquito Coast'.

Charlie's father, Allie Fox, is a genius inventor and visionary who tears his wife and four children away from the poison of American consumer life to find salvation in the jungles of the Mosquito Coast (Belize, in the film).

When Allie's drive becomes obsessive, and his actions begin to threaten the family's survival, Charlie agonises over what to do. It's tragic. Charlie has always idolised his genius father, and seen the world through Allie's eyes.

As Allie turns from an eccentric into an unbridled, half-mad tyrant, Charlie has to find his own vision. When he discovers Allie is a liar and dangerous, his world is turned upside down, and his only wish is to escape with the rest of the family from Allie's clutches.

Narrates

Charlie narrates the film, and it is the father-son relationship that drives the story forward. The wife, played by Helen Mirren, is left as a blank.

We get a sense of why she puts up with Allie's unpredictability when she gets excited by his enthusiasm for their new way of life, but we don't see her confidence in him leaking away as things turn out badly. The role doesn't develop, which is a waste of Helen Mirren's talents.

Allie wants to leave America, which has become a 'toilet', and bring civilisation to the natives of the Mosquito Coast. He buys a village up river, sight unseen, and sets off in a tiny boat with his family. The village is hardly functioning, but Allie soon gets everybody working.

Through hard work, gardens are dug and planted, and homes built, but Allie's ingenuity alone provides the finishing touches — irrigation, running water, fans, even an ice-making machine. It seems the Garden of Eden. Yet like the other Garden of Eden, it has a serpent — Allie



Harrison Ford plays Allie Fox, the eccentric missionary.

himself.

Allie isn't satisfied with the thriving community he has built. He is like a climber who conquers one peak only to pine for a taller one. He is driven on to seek out other more isolated peoples to whom he can bring his civilisation, his ice.

This indirectly causes the disaster that destroys Allie's paradise, pollutes the river, and drives the villagers into the arms of the missionary, Reverend Spellgood. Allie and his family are cast up on a beach, owning nothing but the flotsam washed up by the tide.

After this disaster, the family want a haven. But Allie feels freed by the loss of everything. He wants to start again from scratch. As before, he carries them with him by the sheer

force of his drive, but there are grumblings, and the beginnings of doubt. Allie turns away Haddy, the one friend they have had throughout.

Allie has become a despot. Everyone has to do things his way. He forces the family to live his way against their own wishes. Any want on their part is seen as treachery.

Obsessive

But the more obsessive he gets, the more his judgement is clouded, and the more at risk his family. Allie has lost the sense of danger. They have kept it.

At times, you find it hard to believe that the family would stick with him, you yearn for Helen Mirren to clout Allie over the ear, or pick

up the kids and go. But they are so cut off that you fear for them. Allie does know how to survive, even though he is mad. His conviction is stronger than their doubts.

Allie sees any return to America as death. Looking around before he left, Allie was disgusted by America, where 'we eat when we're not thirsty, buy what we don't want, and throw away everything that's useful'.

It is capitalist society that Allie hates, with its drive for expansion that fosters consumerism. He doesn't want to try to change it, though. His answer is to turn his back on it and start again from scratch.

Yet Allie's story could be an allegory for capitalism. In its drive to seek new markets, capitalism expands into hitherto undeveloped countries. It seeks to exploit those countries for gain. To make this palatable, capitalism calls this 'progress' or 'civilisation'.

The villagers in the jungle didn't ask visionary Allie to bring them his 'progress', yet he foists himself on them as if he were on a God-given mission. They have little choice but to knuckle under. Then their home is destroyed, the river polluted, and they are forced to flee where they can. Sounds familiar?

Industries which have exhausted an area, or have had severe accidents which make the region uninhabitable, can simply move on to greener pastures, and set about the same thing again, as Allie does in the film, having destroyed the lives of those he supposedly came to help.

Many people seek to turn their backs on society. Seeing the world threatened by nuclear war makes people frightened. Many people, like Allie Fox, loathe the deadening consumerism of capitalist society.

Yet even in the jungle there is no escape. The only answer is to stay and fight to overthrow the capitalist system.

on the Box

What we learn at school

By Tracy Williams

Last week I watched a programme called "Privileges" about a group of Oxford students preparing for their annual theatrical bash. If there's anything I can't bear it's watching the middle classes at play, but the programme stirred memories of my own education.

I went to a secondary modern. I imagine it was fairly typical. We had a French teacher who thought he was Hitler, a Mrs Harrop who delighted in catching people smoking, a five foot 2 Mr Foley who always wore platform shoes, and a curriculum to match.

Pythagoras

I can remember our maths teacher introducing us to Pythagoras and thinking who was this Pythagoras bloke sent here to complicate matters.

It was supposed to "develop one's logical stamina"! Actually, it meant that me and Karen White cheated because we couldn't understand the friffin' thing.

Our school was a bit like a job centre — overcrowded, and we usually went home thinking 'well, that was a waste of time'. Helen Smith was a real whizz-kid at science subjects — so the teachers suggested she got a job as a secretary in ICI. Such a waste.

My own particular forte was "home economics" or, how to be a good housewife. I wonder what Mrs Potts (apt name, eh?) would think of me being a revolutionary — she would probably ask you how long it took to microwave it.

The sorriest plight of all was that of a young woman in our VI form called Kay. Kay was a real swot, but nice with it. She got five A levels, four of which were grade A!

The teachers assumed that Cambridge was the natural choice.

Outcast

Although exceptionally bright and "well read" she was a social outcast. (I hate that term "well read" — I'd never come across it till I went to university. This seemingly harmless little phrase is much used by the Camilla's and Philippas during freshers' week — it's riddled with so much middle class snobbery).

Kay soon found that her Home Counties chums couldn't quite take to someone from Widnes.

I mean, Widnes of all places. Oh the stigma of it!

She got into huge debt trying to keep up with the social circle — she nearly had a nervous breakdown and had to leave after less than a year's study!

I don't think Kay is untypical. Many of us go through the education system either feeling out of place or that all this stuff about coffee from Brazil, Rasputin or Laurie Lee has little to do with our lives or "prospects".

Is Paul Simon a sell-out?

The cultural boycott of South Africa has been used in a bizarre way against Paul Simon.

Simon recorded his best-selling 'Graceland' album in South Africa, with the help of African musicians. Many people in Britain who have no previous experience of popular African music have widened their musical horizons.

However, Artists Against Apartheid claim that the act of recording the album in South Africa breaks their line of no performance/recording in South Africa, and thus Simon is now on the Artists Against Apartheid offenders' list.

Simon himself claims that he had prior approval from the ANC, but some ANC leaders are now for the 'boycotting' of Simon's music.

Two well-known South African anti-apartheid musicians, Hugh Maskela and Miriam Makeba, have

RACE AND CLASS

By Payman Rezaï

decided to tour with Simon. Within the popular 'left' press this has been portrayed as a great sell-out. It's likely that Artists Against Apartheid will picket any live performance by Simon.

'Isolate apartheid' has been a catch-phrase and a basic starting point for the Anti-Apartheid movement for many years.

Socialist Organiser, over the years, has criticised the way this position is

used to forbid links not only with the South African regime, but also with those fighting against it. We have argued for the positive policy of direct links — specially referring to those fostered with the young and militant trade union movement.

The same problem arises with the 'cultural boycott' of South Africa.

On one level, of course, every genuine anti-apartheid campaigner is for the picketing, boycotting, etc., of any group of people who are over here for the purpose of defending the racist apartheid regime. However the boycott has been used in an arbitrary manner.

The cultural level and the political level should mirror one another. In contrast to the general drift of the Anti-Apartheid Movement, we should be for the development of 'cultural links' of all sorts with anti-apartheid South Africans.

SOCIALIST ORGANISER



Reagan is stupid — it's official

The most powerful man on earth is an incompetent idiot — that is the conclusion of last week's

Tower Commission report.

Ronald Reagan, whose finger is on the trigger of enough nuclear weaponry to kill us all several times over, was at best 'Absent Without Leave' as gung-ho warriors like Oliver North channelled arms to Iran and to the Nicaraguan contras.

The report into the 'Irangate' scandal in the US provided a terrible indictment of the Reagan administration. It found among other things:

*That White House Chief of Staff Donald Regan should "bear primary responsibility" for the "chaos" resulting after news of US arms sales to Iran first surfaced.

*That former CIA head William Casey knew about the Iran operation but did not explain to Reagan that it was risky to have Lt-Colonel North running it.

*That Vice-Admiral John Poindexter "failed grievously" in not alerting Reagan to the risks in channeling profits from the Iran arms deal to the Nicaraguan contras.

Incapable

It might be added that an implicit finding is that Reagan is incapable of working these things out.

Tower says there is no evidence that the President knew of the illegal scheme to give the arms profits to the contras. But it says there was an attempted White House cover-up.

In some respects the Irangate scandal remains obscure. But for certain the Reagan administration have been caught red-handed breaking their own laws and their own policy on 'fighting terrorism'. They have been shown either to be liars or incompetent idiots.

We need to throw out the capitalist politicians and replace them by working-class rule — before they drag us all into World War III.

Defend union rights!

New anti-union laws will be central to the Tory manifesto for the next General Election.

The Tories published their proposals last week, on 24 February.

*Even when a strike is entirely legal, ballots and all, scabs will have legal protection against any disciplinary action by the union.

*The law requiring unions to ballot before strikes will be strengthened by giving union members the right to take the union to court to stop it striking and by imposing a legal duty on union trustees to stop union funds being spent illegally.

*A Commissioner for Trade Union Affairs will be appointed, to provide money to scabs wanting to take their unions to court.

*Union executives will have to be elected by postal rather than workplace ballots.

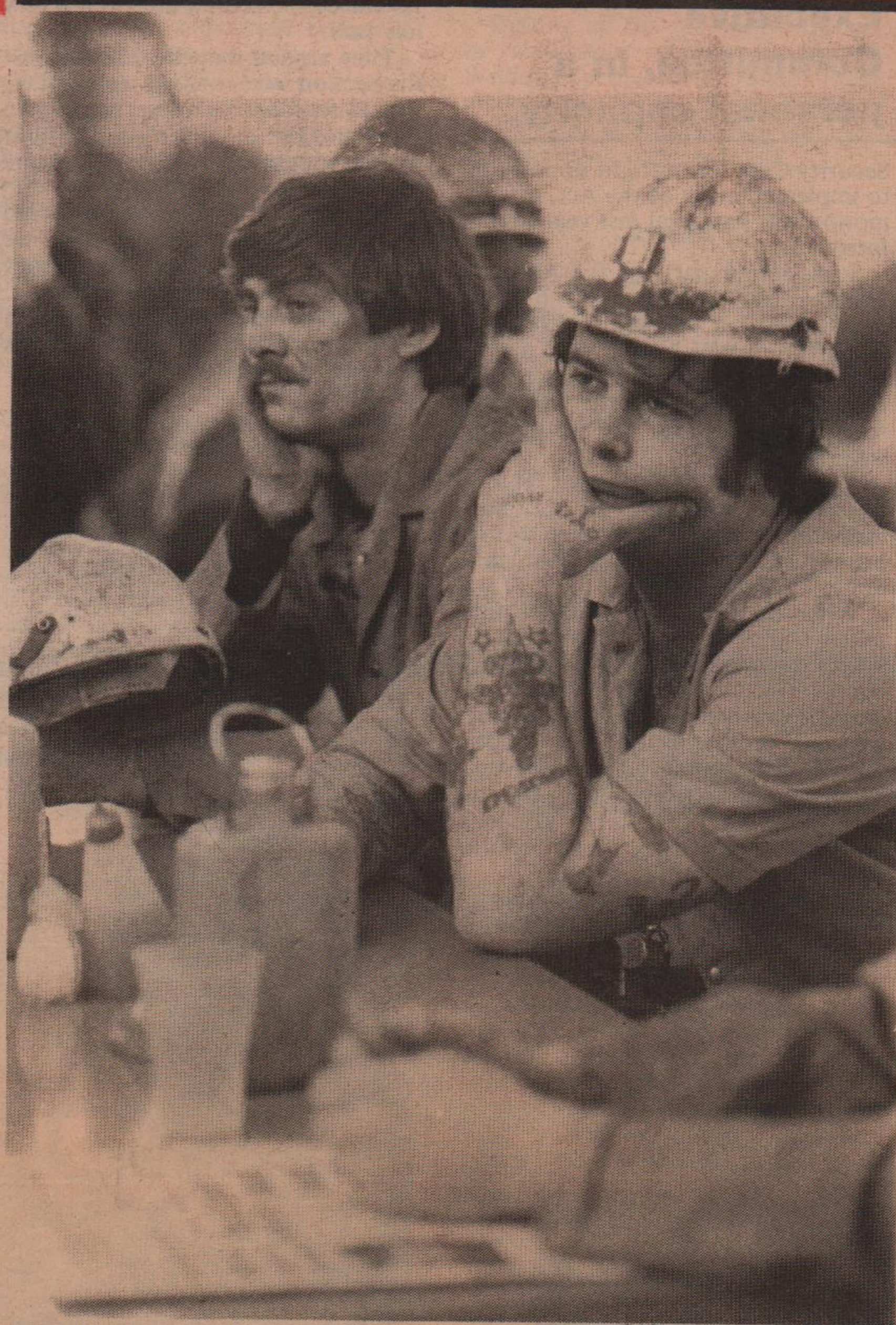
*The present limited conditions under which a closed shop can be legal will be scrapped.

The SDP/Liberal Alliance welcomed the proposals, asking only why the Tories had not done it earlier.

The call for postal rather than workplace ballots gives the lie to the Tories' claim to be legislating for democracy. The Tories' own document admits that in the unions' political fund ballots workplace voting was shown to produce a better turn-out.

But, of course, those ballots went against the Tories. Every union voted to keep its political fund.

Workplace ballots allow union members to hear the union point of view and discuss with each other at or around the time they vote. With postal ballots, members are isolated



Miners listen to the arguments at a workplace meeting. Photo: John Harris.

at home, hearing only what the media say.

It is also a strange sort of democracy which would deprive the unions of any means of enforcing their majority decisions. The Tories have a special outlook on democracy in which the 'rights' of scabs and

employers figure much larger than the collective rights of workers.

Only bad bureaucratic habits in the labour movement have allowed the Tories to seize the banner of democracy. The Tories, after all, are no consistent democrats by any reckoning: they run their own party as an oligarchy, and they support the House of Lords and the monarchy.

The labour movement must work out its own plans for making itself democratic without allowing the capitalist courts to interfere. The Labour leadership must be committed to full repeal of the Tory anti-union laws, and a positive charter of workers' rights in their place. And we must make sure that Labour wins the election.

Tribunal backs my case

I have now had the written verdict in my industrial tribunal case.

The tribunal decided unanimously that I was unfairly dismissed, and by a majority that the reason for my dismissal was that I "had taken part in the activities of an independent trade union".

The judgement is quite lengthy, running to ten pages, but it contains some interesting pieces of information.

Much to my surprise, past rulings from Lord Scarman and Lord Denning are quoted on the rights that workers should have.

These rights, according to them, should include: access to the list of employees; accommodation for meetings; and access to telephones and office facilities. Lord Denning went so far as to say "I cannot believe that he (the manager) can refuse any facilities whatsoever and forbid any activities whatever...for that would destroy the right Parliament says the workers should have."

The Coal Board could offer me my job back straight away, but I'm not expecting that; or they could appeal and draw the process out still further. But this decision could severely test Haslam's statement that he would



Paul Whetton is secretary of Bevercotes NUM, Notts.

look where reinstatement was possible and honour any tribunal decisions.

Six-day week

The NUM has published a Coal Board memorandum from 1973 proposing the same changes to work practices that they are trying to put through now. British Coal claims that the memo has no relevance to today, but it has every relevance.

In 1965 seven-day working was introduced at Bevercotes. After a struggle, we got it kicked out, and we were told then that this sort of agreement would never be entertained again.

We were given those assurances, and then in 1973, only a few years later, the Coal Board was privately saying something completely different. It underlines that you can never trust the Coal Board.

If South Wales vote in these

changes, with six-day working for Margam, it will split and isolate them and undermine national agreements. South Wales must reject these proposals at their special conference this weekend. They would be a disaster for them and the whole union.

Why we lost at Greenwich

On the Greenwich by-election, the media has been obsessed with the 'loony left' factor. But if Deirdre Wood is 'hard left', then God knows where that leaves the rest of the prospective Labour Party Parliamentary candidates.

Thousands of voters in the constituency seem to have been conned by this label, used by the Tories and the SDP/Liberal Alliance. But we may as well do away with the General Election altogether and appoint people on the basis of opinion polls if this tactic is going to be used.

In fact we need more hard left candidates, not runaway Tories and Liberals.

Kinnock should realise that what we need is not watered-down policies, but to state clearly what we stand for, stand up to the pressure and push forward on socialist policies.

Woman in a "man's job"

EXPERIENCES OF A WOMAN BUILDING WORKER

"Woman in a 'Man's Job' is the title of a new pamphlet just out by Socialist Organiser columnist Jean Lane. It describes Jean's experiences as a woman working on a demolition job and having to deal with the sexism of her male fellow-workers. 24 pages, price 50p plus 18p post from SO, PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA.