

# SOCIALIST ORGANISER

*For Workers' Liberty East and West*



Mark, Rita and daughter Nicola in their 10ft square room in the Mount Pleasant hotel, which is used by several London boroughs as a bed-and-breakfast refuge for homeless families

Photo Andrew Moore

# The WORST of times

**IT IS the best of times, it is the worst of times.**

Profits are heading for the skies, and poverty is plunging to the depths. City whizzkids are notching up £100,000 a year, and unemployment is four million.

Luxury houses go up, while the council estates go rotten for lack of money to renew them. Private hospitals boom, the Health Service decays.

Billions are handed out in tax cuts to the rich and cut-price sell-offs of public enterprises; billions are cut from social security.

The police have more powers, more numbers, and more pay than ever; the prisons are fuller than ever; and crime and racial harassment (including by the police) flourishes in the run-down inner cities. Civil liberties decline.

Free enterprise is freer than for decades; the

workers and our unions are more shackled and fettered by laws than we have been for 80 years.

That is Britain after 8 years of Tory rule: the best of times for the capitalist class, the worst of times for the working class. And if the Tories win on 11 June, they want to take us further down the same road.

Despite everything in its politics that ties it to the capitalist system, the Labour Party is the only alternative to the Tories created by the working class. We can get a better working-class alternative — a *workers' government*, accountable to the labour movement and striking boldly at capitalist privilege and power — only by mobilising, developing and changing the labour movement that actually exists.

We can make a step forward by winning this election. It is possible: a recent poll shows Labour 2% ahead of the Tories in 60 key marginals. Get out the votes for Labour on 11 June!

A tale of two classes

# The BEST of times



The filthy rich

Photo John Harris

## WORKERS' LIBERTY '87 SUMMER SCHOOL

Manchester

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SUNDAY 5 JULY**

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*What has happened to the Trotskyist movement since the death of its founder?*

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### The retreat from class

*The left in the 1980s has moved closer to an American-style 'Rainbow Coalition' politics. How has this come about? And is there an alternative?*

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# Northern Ireland: A different election and different issues

By Paddy Dollard

IN Great Britain the last general election was held in June 1983. In Northern Ireland, which makes up the rest of the 'United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland', it was in January 1986, less than 18 months ago.

It was not quite a general election because only 15 of the 17 Northern Ireland seats were fought over. The 15 Unionist MPs resigned their seats because they wanted to force a Northern Ireland 'general election' and have the voters express themselves on the Anglo-Irish Agreement which had been signed on 15 November 1985.

John Hume, the SDLP (constitutional nationalist) MP from Derry, declined to follow the Unionist lead, and so did Gerry Adams, Sinn Fein MP for West Belfast.

The 15-seat Northern Ireland 'general election' produced a predictably big Protestant majority against the Anglo-Irish agreement. It also lost the Unionists one seat, which was won by SDLP deputy leader Seamus Mallon.

The Unionists had hoped to repeat their success in 1974, when a massive Unionist vote against the then recently established power-sharing executive (a SDLP/liberal-Unionist coalition) undermined its authority. The Orange general strike of May 1974 destroyed that executive and initiated the period of British direct rule which lasted until the Anglo-Irish Agreement.

The Agreement modifies British direct rule by adding a weighty Dublin voice in the long-term and day-to-day running of Northern Ireland.

In this election the Anglo-Irish Agreement is still the central issue. All the major Unionists oppose it, and so does Sinn Fein. The Agreement is supported by the SDLP and the liberal-Unionist Alliance Party (which is distinct from the British SDP/Liberal Alliance, though links have been established recently).

There is no doubt that the Unionists will win the big majority of the vote, now as in 1986. But that will not have any direct effect on the Anglo-Irish Agreement.



The loyalists are mobilising. Photo: Derek Speirs, Report.

The Unionists learned in 1986 that whereas the 1974 general election could destroy the power-sharing executive by demonstrating its lack of Six-Counties support, the Anglo-Irish agreement does not depend on local support. It is an agreement between London and Dublin, and no amount of opposition in Northern Ireland will topple it — if the will to maintain it survives in London and in Dublin.

Charles Haughey, who won February's election in the 26 Counties, was very critical of the Anglo-Irish Agreement when in opposition. After the election, he declared himself in full support of it — fawningly, to President Reagan, who backs the Agreement.

The Unionists' hopes must be that the British election will produce a hung parliament in which they can bargain. Paradoxically, their hopes lie with Labour.

After all, it was a Labour government that allowed the power-sharing agreement to collapse in May 1974 and thereafter went in for full-scale repression of the Catholic community — a policy which culminated in the hunger strike of 1981, in which ten Republican prisoners of war died.

It was Labour which made deals with the Unionists in 1977-9, deals in which the Unionists voted for the hard-pressed Labour government in Parliament and in return got, among other things, the Northern Ireland representation at Westminster increased from 12 to 17 seats.

Labour's deputy spokesman on

Northern Ireland, Stuart Bell, was recently quoted in the press as saying that a hard-pressed Labour Party might do a deal with the Unionists after the election — a deal about the Anglo-Irish Agreement, and other things too.

He retracted and apologised. But a minority Labour government might well go for deals with the Unionists.

### Working-class

Neil Kinnock and the Labour leaders used the 1985 Anglo-Irish Agreement to ditch Labour Party conference policy on Ireland and restore Labour/Tory bipartisanship. That doesn't mean that they will stick to it.

The Unionists are probably right that their hopes lie in a hung Parliament with Labour just ahead of the Tories and Alliance.

From a working-class point of view, the election in Northern Ireland presents miserable choices. There is no working-class party worth speaking of.

Militant working-class Catholics will vote Sinn Fein, but it would be telling ourselves lies to think that Sinn Fein deserves the support of socialists. Whatever the good intentions of its members or even its leaders, Sinn Fein's operational policy — for the forcible incorporation of the one million Protestants of north-east Ulster into a Catholic-dominated unitary Ireland — defines it as a sectarian Catholic party.

Sinn Fein showed this blatantly in the 1986 election when they appealed to the SDLP, which supported the Anglo-Irish Agreement, to join Sinn Fein, which opposed it, in getting out the maximum Catholic vote.

Such unprincipled 'count the Catholics' politics are in the last analysis fundamental for the Provisionals, because their other nationalist, 'Republican' and 'socialist' politics are concerned exclusively with the Catholic community and are utterly antagonistic to the Protestant community.

### SDLP

Gerry Adams, the shogun of the Provisionals, won the West Belfast seat in 1983 because the sitting MP Gerry Fitt had been discredited in Catholic eyes by his refusal to support the hunger strikes of 1981, and because he had recently broken with the party he founded, the SDLP. This time round there is a good chance that the SDLP candidate will beat Adams.

Also considered to be at risk from the SDLP is Enoch Powell in Down South.

The basic truth though, is that under the Anglo-Irish Agreement the votes that will determine the future of Northern Ireland will be cast in Great Britain. The other votes that matter were cast in the 26 Counties in February.

## The Communist Party

# Tactical traitors

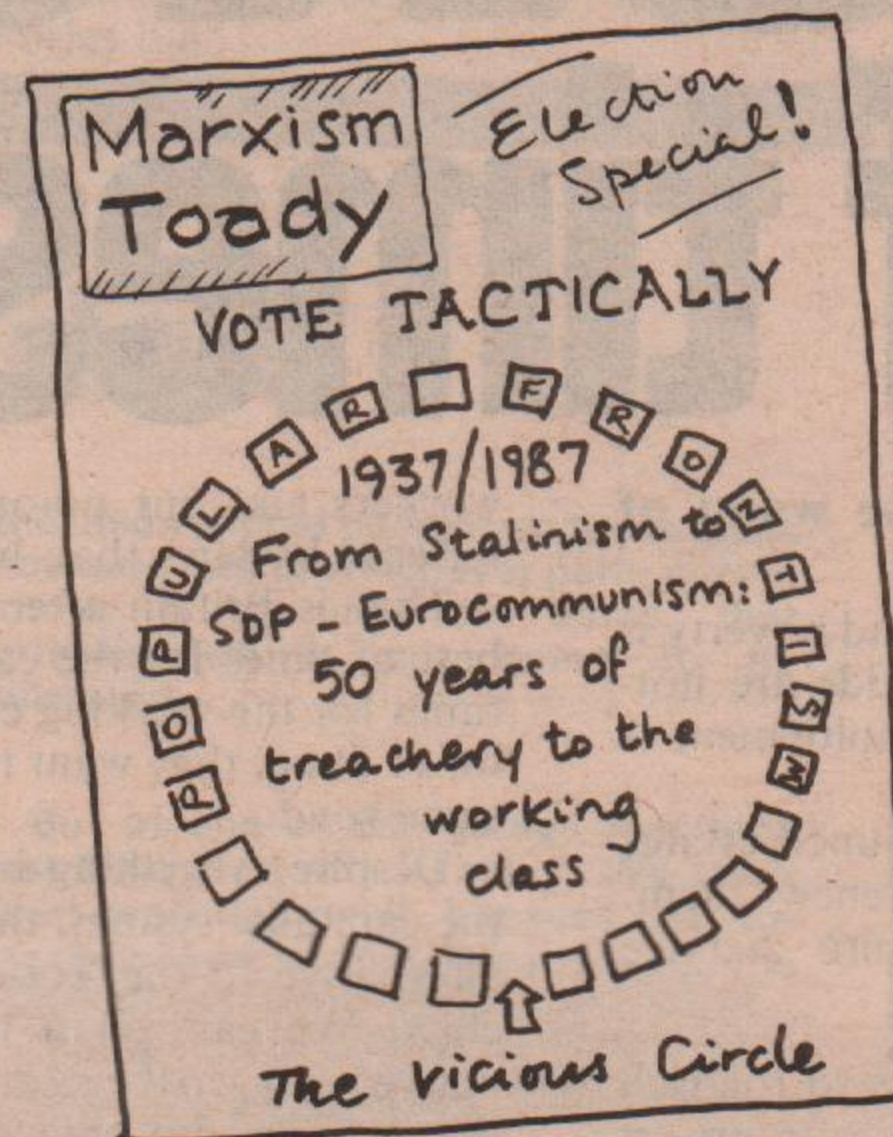
CONSIDERING the Communist Party, you experience a strong urge to turn away in embarrassment and revulsion at what that party has become.

After all, it set out to fight for socialism and for a while was the embodiment of revolutionary socialism. Even after it became Stalinist, and, later, Stalinist-reformist, it commanded the allegiance of some of the best working-class fighters in Britain.

Look at it now! It has allowed its theoretical journal to come out in favour of 'tactical voting' — that is, to urge Labour voters to vote SDP or Liberal in a number of constituencies.

At the same time it is standing a dozen or so candidates in the general election, including in key seats like Greenwich.

Not only does its journal advocate tactical voting, which in Greenwich logically might mean voting for SDP or Rosie Barnes as the best-placed candidate to keep out the Tories, but the party is offering those who cannot bear to vote for David Owen's party the further alternative



to a vote for Labour's Deirdre Wood of a vote for the utterly hopeless CP candidate!

These people are died-in-the-wool traitors to the working class. They are incoherent, probably irrelevant, and falling apart, but traitors nonetheless.

## Kinnock's cruel vendetta

By Jim Denham

NOW HERE'S a little-known fact: Neil Kinnock and his advisers don't trust the press, and are being especially wary of newspaper reporters just at the moment.

Astonishing, isn't it?

I found out about this latest Labour outrage from *Today*, whose industrial correspondent Tom Condon has been assigned to the campaign trail for the duration.

Mr Condon is most upset by the treatment he and his fellow-scribes are receiving at the hands of the Kinnock team: "For them, television comes first, second and third. The written press comes nowhere".

### "Theory"

Tom has a theory to explain why this should be: "The Labour leadership has long held the view that it can never win against the Tory bias in Fleet Street. So Neil Kinnock is attempting to bypass the newspapers. In doing so he will allow the press a walk-on role and nothing else. On his campaign plane, Red Rose I, he made only one stroll down the aisle this week to talk to the 40-odd journalists accompanying him".

But such shameful treatment of Britain's noblest profession is not the end of the matter: there is evidence to suggest that Kinnock's team have been indulging in cold-blooded, premeditated *planning!* You don't believe me? Call Tom Condon: "Selective visits to schools are planned to the last detail, leaving nothing to chance".

Do you realise the full implications of this? Kinnock is only visiting selected schools and factories! The visits are planned — probably in advance — and that planning is intended to *leave nothing to chance!*

The only conclusion that can be drawn is that Kinnock and his sinister press secretary Patricia Hewitt are guilty of a cruel, deliberate vendetta against the press.

Good old Michael Foot didn't behave like this in 1983. He gave journalists a fair crack of the whip. He didn't find a few harmless quips about his sartorial individuality or jocular comparisons being made between himself and Wurzel Gummidge.

### Manifesto

And he had a nice long manifesto as well. The *Sun*, which naturally places a premium on wordiness, has been most disappointed by Kinnock's mere 17 pages. "A political pygmy alongside the 77 pages produced by the Tories", declares the *Sun*.

But most what upsets the newspapers is Kinnock's betrayal of that most fundamental of Labour principles — muckiness. Jean Rook put it rather well in Saturday's *Express*: "In their once-great day in Labour's history, prettily-packaged politicians didn't stand on cliff-tops surrounded by TV crews telling them what to do. The mighty, long-fallen men in Labour's history stood in the pit muck on a soapbox, saying what they meant".

So there you have it, Neil boyo: cast off the packaging and the PR; be nice to newspaper journalists; get rid of the TV crews; stand on soapboxes in the muck... And you can be sure of an enthusiastic response from Britain's press.



Photo: John Harris

# Nuclear weapons are no defence

INCREASINGLY the Tories and the Alliance are centring their campaign on attacking Labour's policy for nuclear disarmament.

On 24 May the Tory *Sunday Telegraph* headlined: "US defence bombshell for Labour". It said that NATO commander Bernard Rogers had prepared a 'top secret' report advising President Reagan to withdraw all US forces from Britain within days of a Labour government taking office, thus creating "a political

crisis".

This story seems to have been completely fabricated, because the equally-Tory *Daily Mail* reported on 25 May that Rogers had "categorically denied" it. Nevertheless, this information was hidden in the small print of an article which led with Margaret Thatcher repeating the *Telegraph's* claim!

In truth, the quicker US forces get out, the better. They are far more likely to be a threat to a future working-class government in Britain than any defence for the ordinary people of this country.

We have no interest in providing the US with bases for operations such as its airstrike on Libya.

*Today*, and other anti-Labour papers on 25 May, denounced Neil Kinnock for saying that "A Labour Britain's only answer to Soviet nuclear blackmail would be the threat of guerilla warfare in the streets".

Now Kinnock didn't say that. But if he had, he wouldn't have been far off the mark. Nuclear weapons can never defend the lives and freedoms of working-class people.

### Four times

If someone attacks your home or your street, a gun or a knife may be of use to you. A nuclear missile wouldn't be! And the same principle

applies internationally.

Nuclear weapons in the US and in the USSR are a threat to us. Their huge mass of overkill could tip over into a nuclear war and the destruction of civilisation at any time, through an accident or through an unforeseeable political crisis.

And the US, at least, has made it plain that it keeps open the option of responding to a 'conventional' conflict by 'limited' nuclear war, in Europe or maybe in the Middle East. Former US president Richard Nixon has said that he seriously considered using nuclear weapons *four times* during his period of office.

But British nuclear weapons are no defence against these threats. Our only real defence against them is to help the workers of the US and of the USSR to replace their imperialist-minded governments with socialist democracy.

British nuclear weapons are no defence for us: you can't win a nuclear war! All they are is a threat in the hands of 'our' ruling class against the working classes of the USSR and Eastern Europe — a machinery of destruction that could reduce their cities to smouldering cemeteries — just as nuclear weapons in the hands of the Stalinist bureaucratic rulers of the USSR are a threat to annihilate the British and other working classes.

British workers have more, much

more, in common with the Russian and East European workers oppressed by the Kremlin than we could ever have with the military top brass and the ruling elite of this country. We owe it to those workers to get rid of Britain's nuclear weapons as soon as we can.

And doing so would be the best contribution the British labour movement could ever make to getting rid of nuclear weapons internationally.

### Foreign

It's not nuclear weapons in the hands of the Sandinistas that stop the US invading Nicaragua. The best defence the working-class people of Britain could have against a foreign oppressor would be a citizen army, a people's militia, organised democratically under the control of the labour movement.

Armed forces of that sort could never be used for aggression abroad — as Britain's present armed forces have been *without a break* since 1945, usually against colonial liberation movements. And they could never represent a danger of a military coup against a radical government — of the sort that was discussed by 'fairly senior officers' in Britain in 1974, and carried out in Chile in 1973.

Nuclear weapons are no defence for us. The sooner they are scrapped, the better.

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# Vote Labour, kick out the Tories!

## GRAFFITI

### Boomtime Britain?

Photo Nigel Clapp

THE Tories deny that their policies will lead to the consolidation of an 'underclass' of jobless, ill-housed, and demoralised people. They claim that a new boom is on its way, centred in the 'service economy'.

But recent studies cast great doubt on the idea of services happily booming while manufacture collapses.

A big part of the apparent growth of services relative to manufacturing in advanced capitalist countries has been caused not by a change in the work being done, but by contracting-out. A cleaner, or a computer programmer, directly employed by a factory, counts as an employee in manufacturing; if the same person doing the same work is employed by an outside contractor, they count as working in services.

Two separate estimates, by the OECD and by two US economists, reckon that about half of all 'services' jobs are fairly directly connected to manufacturing; they are the sort of jobs which could appear in the statistics as 'manufacturing' jobs if only the factory-owner chose to use his own staff for the work rather than contracting it out.

Obviously there is a limit to how far such jobs can boom while manufacture is slumping.

Some service jobs are highly-qualified, from



Life is not OK for some

computer work to teaching and nursing. But the bulk of the recent expansion in service jobs — especially in the US, where it has been fastest — is in low-paid, low-skill jobs, in fast-food places and the like.

Wages in these jobs are 38% below pay in manufacturing. The jobs

are also usually non-union and insecure.

This service sector is more a sign of economic rotteness and underdevelopment — like the vast 'service sector' in Third World cities — than of a new high-tech economy.

#### Office illness

MODERN offices make you ill, according to recent research. 4,000 of-

fice workers in London were questioned, and no less than 80% complained of feeling ill at work even though they were all right outside the office.

Lethargy, eye-strain, sore throats and headaches are most common.

These problems, the researchers suggest, are caused by air-conditioning; by stress created by large open-plan offices; and by tinted-glass windows combined with artificial lighting.

#### BUPA in Moscow

MOSCOW has just opened its first private hospital. Three weeks' treatment there will cost about the same as the average worker's monthly wage.

Soviet authorities justify the private hospital by saying that it only legalises what otherwise exists under the counter. Although the Soviet health service is theoretically free (apart from prescription charges), an official newspaper admits: "Till now, to get the medicine or treatment you wanted, you had to use family contacts, presents or bribes".



Photo: Ian Swindale

## The damage the Tories will do to education

NOT EVEN the smoothest Saatchi-and-Saatchi presentation can cover up the damage the Tories have in store for state schools under the guise of freedom of choice.

Looking uncharacteristically unsure of herself, Thatcher announced that state schools could opt out of local education authority and take up funding through charitable trusts. The Tories claim that no child will have to pay. But where will the money come from?

#### Funding

What charitable trust would take up the funding of inner-city schools?

Clearly the charitable-trust schools are private schools under another name. Only parents with money to pay will be able to send their children to them.

Thatcher even refused to deny speculations that teachers at these schools would get better wages than those left in the state sector.

And what would be left in the state sector? After stripping teachers of their negotiating rights, the Tories obviously feel confident enough to go on the offensive. The privileged schools will enjoy better resources, more teachers, and a curriculum controlled by industrialists. The majority will still have to rely on ever-decreasing public money.

By Liam Conway

Buildings will continue to decay, resources will be cut further, class sizes will increase. State schools will become ghettos for the worse-off, teachers and students alike.

The Tories will force teachers to abandon any initiatives connected with progressive education. A return to the 3 Rs, strict discipline, and corporal punishment will follow.

This is the freedom of choice the Tories have in mind. Freedom to choose — but only if you can afford to pay.

The Labour leaders must go on the offensive against these proposals. Instead of attacking the

striking teachers, education front-bencher Giles Radice should be putting forward a radical socialist alternative to the Tory onslaught.

Commitments should be made to end private schools, increase funding, reduce class sizes, and restore teachers' rights and conditions.

Tory billboard propaganda attacking local education authorities that have taken on racism, sexism, and anti-gay hysteria should be confronted openly. Why shouldn't young people be proud to be gay? Isn't that freedom of choice?

In reality, socialism offers much more choice than capitalism. The Tories offer choice for the few, and we offer choice for the many.

### THE CASE FOR LABOUR



and for a socialist alternative to Tory Britain

#### Socialist arguments for the election

Facts, figures and socialist arguments for the election campaign. A Socialist Campaign for a Labour Victory pamphlet. 15p.

Mayday hospital, Croydon, is featured as an illustration in the Conservative Party manifesto, under the heading 'A better Health Service'. They do not mention the empty wards and unused facilities at this hospital due to lack of money for day-to-day running.

Vote Labour, kick out the Tories!

# The Profumo scandal

## How the Establishment protects its own

**EVIDENCE** has recently come to light that the then Tory Home Secretary Henry Brooke instructed Scotland Yard to frame Stephen Ward, a Society osteopath, back in 1963.

Ward had worked for MI5, and had made himself useful to Britain's male upper crust by providing them with prostitutes and semi-prostitutes like Christine Keeler and Mandy Rice-Davies. But when a scandal blew up over Christine Keeler's connection with Tory Minister John Profumo, Ward was made the scapegoat.

Jim Denham tells the story of the scandal that brought down the Macmillan government, and the frame-up behind the scenes.

BACK IN 1963, a Tory government was very nearly brought down by a sex scandal involving a Cabinet Minister, John Profumo.

When, a short while later, the government did come to an end and Harold Macmillan was replaced by Alec Douglas-Home, it was at least in part because of the repercussions of that incident.

And it is probably not an exaggeration to say that Labour's 1964 elec-



John Profumo

tion victory under Harold Wilson was brought about to a large extent by the odour of decadence, dishonesty and incompetence that had attached itself to the Tories and was encapsulated in the Profumo affair.

24 years on, the idea of a government being seriously threatened by a sex scandal seems somewhat quaint: after all, Mrs Thatcher has survived the well-publicised indiscretions of both Cecil Parkinson and Jeffrey Archer without noticeable damage to the standing of her government.

In fact, Tory popularity in the opinion polls rose after the Parkinson scandal.

This, of course, has a lot to do with the 'sexual revolution' of the late '60s and the consequent changes in the standards by which the private lives of public figures are judged. But the Profumo affair really was a more serious matter — at least for the ruling class.

For a start, the Russians were involved.

John Profumo, Secretary of State for War, had an affair with a Society prostitute called Christine Keeler, who was also involved with a Russian spy, Yevgeny Ivanov. When the story came out, Profumo flatly denied it in the House of Commons, provoking the memorable response: "Well, he would, wouldn't he?" from Christine



Stephen Ward

Keeler.

Profumo's bare-faced lying in Parliament, a practice as old as Parliament itself, but one that had never before been so dramatically exposed, and the 'national security' aspect of the affair, brought the Macmillan administration to the verge of collapse.

### Secrets

It was variously suggested that Christine Keeler had used her relationship with Profumo to extract state secrets to pass on to Ivanov, or that she had set him up for blackmail by the Russians.

In fact there was no evidence of a plot against the 'national security' of Britain. But more recently evidence has surfaced of a quite different kind of plot.

Profumo never had to face a court of law, but Stephen Ward did. Ward was a successful Society doctor and artist, who moved among the rich and famous of the early 1960s. He

was also a strange and rather sad figure who found a sort of fulfilment in providing his big-shot 'friends' with the sexual services of young women.

Both Christine Keeler and Mandy Rice-Davies were 'Ward girls', and at the behest of Home Secretary Henry Brooke, Ward was charged with living off their 'immoral earnings'.

In fact, Ward was not a pimp; or not in the usual sense, anyway. He was a wealthy man who spent more on his 'girls' than they ever brought him. Christine Keeler and Mandy Rice-Davies were his keys to the high society world he revelled in, and their liaisons with the famous brought Ward a vicarious satisfaction that was an end in itself.

Ward also had links with MI5. According to two recent books (*Honey Trap*, by Summers and Dorril, and *An Affair of State*, by Knightley and Kennedy), he had actually been recruited to MI5 to help with a plot to entrap Ivanov, and when Profumo became involved with Keeler, it was Ward who warned MI5 of the danger

of a scandal.

The extent of MI5's involvement cannot be known for sure — certainly Ward did have extensive contact with the 'security services', and certainly MI5 were in on what happened next.

The government was determined to distract public attention from Profumo, and Home Secretary Brooke told Scotland Yard to find something to charge Ward with.

They failed at first to find anything, so the decision was made to frame Ward on sex charges. The police interviewed 140 people and (according to Wayland Kennet, writing in the *Guardian* recently) "quite clearly pressed some of them into giving false evidence".

Ward was charged with living off the immoral earnings of Christine Keeler and Mandy Rice-Davies. The trial itself was a charade, with the judge making it quite plain to the jury that he wanted a conviction, no matter what.

### Evidence

Evidence that Christine Keeler had recently committed perjury in another trial was deliberately kept from the jury by the Lord Chief Justice, despite (or, more likely, because of) the fact that her evidence was central to the case against Ward.

Seeing what was going on, and the inevitability of his conviction, Ward committed suicide before the end of the trial.

In attempt to stem the increasingly widespread accusation of a 'Establishment cover-up', the government appointed Lord Denning to hold a one-man inquiry, which even at the time was criticised for its inadequacy and lack of thoroughness.

Probably the full details of the Profumo affair will never be known. What is plain, however, is that the Tory government, the security services, the police and the judiciary closed ranks to protect Profumo and the government, using Stephen Ward as a convenient sacrificial lamb. It is now beyond reasonable doubt that the police framed Ward on the orders of the Home Secretary, and that the Lord Chief Justice, in the words of Wayland Kennet, "hurried to lend a hand".

The ruthlessness with which the Tory Establishment dealt with Ward (who was, remember, very much one of 'their own') should be borne in mind by all who step out to challenge that Establishment.

And if anyone thinks that nothing like the Profumo affair could happen today, they should compare it with the present government's handling of the Peter Wright case, and Mrs Thatcher's determination to suppress the truth about MI5 plotting against Harold Wilson in 1974.

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**Vote Labour, kick out the Tories!**

## Will Adams takes a look at Tower Hamlets

# LIFE UNDER THE ALLIANCE

**THE LABOUR-run council previous to the 1986 council elections was increasingly failing to meet the needs of the borough.**

Several attempts to cut services and reduce the council workforce were met with resistance from the council unions. Understaffing was 20% or more in some departments.

The housing service was in an appalling state, and this was made worse by the council's blind refusal to properly discuss arrangements for the transfer of 30,000 GLC flats and houses to the borough's control in 1985.

The Liberals, using their familiar 'Focus' tactics, were able to pick up on disgruntled Labour voters. In fact many (though not all) of the 'Liberal successes' claimed in the 'Focus' newsheets were won not by the local Liberals but by tenants' associations and council housing officers.

The Liberal campaign, based on the slogan of '50 years of Labour misrule', was effective in giving 25 Liberals and one SDP councillor control of the council over 24 Labour councillors. The Liberals then reorganised completely the running of the council, abolishing most central committees and establishing seven local 'neighbourhood committees', covering two or three wards each, with councillors for those wards (in theory) in charge of all decisions for the neighbourhood.

This left Labour in control of three of the seven neighbourhoods, but the powerful central Policy and Resources and Decentralisation committees are still Liberal-run. Labour councillors have used the limited powers available to them, and the even more limited budget, to campaign against the Liberals' anti-working-class, anti-tenant policies on housing, the London Docklands Development Corporation, and the voluntary sector.

**The comedian John Cleese recently offered on an SDP Political Broadcast to buy dinner for anyone who could point to an Alliance-run council following 'loony' policies. Mr Cleese should take some time to examine the policies followed by Tower Hamlets council in East London in the year since the Liberal Party took control.**

### Attacking the victims

**THE LIBERALS' manifesto promised no new council housing in the borough, despite a waiting list for transfer of over 9000 households, and 800 homeless families living in bed-and-breakfast hotels.**

They agree with Tory Housing Minister John Patten when he claims that boroughs like Tower Hamlets have 'too much' council housing.

The Liberals want to dispose of blocks and estates to private developers or to housing associations. The council claims that it can't afford to refurbish some of the worst blocks in the borough, like the Hadrian Estate in Bethnal Green or the Bacton tower. The only alternative is disposal to developers.

Tenants on the Hadrian Estate are convinced that the council deliberately overestimates the cost of doing up the estate to justify getting rid of it.

Disposal of council estates leads to further pressure on the remaining council stock. Tenants from blocks being sold are put at the top of the transfer list and the reduction of the overall number of flats available means even longer waits for the rest of the transfer list.

Leading Liberal councillors argue that some of the newly developed blocks will be sold at 'affordable' prices to local council tenants. But on the Waterlow Estate in Bethnal Green (which was sold to Barratts under the last right-wing Labour council), the special low prices start at £38,000 for a bedsitter — well beyond the pocket of local tenants.

Councillor Jeremy Shaw has refused to deny that the council would use the provisions of the Tories' 1986 Housing and Planning Act — which remove security of tenure from tenants in blocks the council wishes to sell, allowing the council to evict them.



Playing an old Tory tune

### No new houses

**TOWER Hamlets has a massive problem caused by government restrictions on council house-building.**

The Housing Investment limit for the present year is £15 million, when the council asked for £150 million.

The Liberal council is trying to shift the blame for the housing crisis in Tower Hamlets onto the homeless families. The council has decided that over 100 of the families, almost all Bangladeshi, have homes elsewhere (mostly family homes in Bangladesh), and are therefore *intentionally* homeless, so the council has no legal obligation to rehouse them.

Orders were given to stop paying for bed and breakfast, causing the eviction of some families.

This attack on Bangladeshi families has caused an angry reaction from the local Bangladeshi community. Recently about 1000 people marched to a Housing Sub-committee meeting to protest at the evictions.

The national Liberal Party, and many Liberal Party members with more 'liberal' views than council leader Eric Flounders and housing chief Jeremy Shaw, feel uneasy about this policy.

But Flounders and Shaw, the Alliance's candidates for the two parliamentary constituencies in the

borough, are unlikely to allow the rest of the Liberal Party to affect them. Tower Hamlets 'Focus' is proud of its reputation as the Liberal Party's 'Militant Tendency'.

They have ignored suggestions from the Homeless Families Campaign of ways to reduce the number of homeless families by bringing empty council houses and flats back into use.

The council's policy on homeless families is forming a major part of the Liberals' election campaign locally. They hope to boost their support among white voters who feel that Bangladeshis get favoured treatment in housing.

**"The Liberals promised no new council housing in the borough, despite a waiting list for transfer of over 9000 households, and 800 homeless families living in bed-and-breakfast hotels."**



# Anti-union and pro-cuts

**“NOW THE banks can sleep safely at night”, said David Steel after the Labour government formed an alliance with the Liberals in 1978.**

Unfortunately the bankers already had little cause to worry about threats to their privileges and power, but Steel defined accurately the basic interests that the Liberal/SDP Alliance defends.

Where they have had power locally — in Islington, which became the first SDP-controlled council after a majority of the Labour councillors defected, in Liverpool, or in Tower Hamlets — the Liberals and SDP have been anti-union and pro-cuts.

Their manifesto for the 11 June election proclaims all sorts of genteel reforming ambitions. They want all quangos to have 50% women members within a decade, for example, and they want special help for women to set up small businesses.

But in local election contests the Liberals and SDP have often been dirtier and more scurrilous than the Tories. They won Bermondsey on a wave of vile gay-baiting against the Labour candidate, Peter Tatchell. In Tower Hamlets they have been racist. For all its equal-opportunities talk, the Alliance manifesto says nothing about abortion rights, and their foremost woman leader, Shirley Williams, is vehemently against a woman's right to choose.

On the class issues, however, the Alliance defines itself most clearly. They support all the Tories' anti-union laws — only they think the Tories have not gone far enough.

They would make *all strikes illegal unless the dispute had first gone to arbitration. They would encourage no-strike deals* throughout the public services. Even after arbitration, they would make *postal ballots compulsory* before strikes in all but very exceptional circumstances. (The present laws demand a ballot, but it can be a workplace ballot — and even the Tories don't propose to change that, or not yet anyway).

## Miners

During the great miners' strike of 1984-5, the Alliance repeatedly *attacked the Tories for being too soft on the NUM* and not using the anti-union laws sufficiently against it. Just last September, the SDP's supreme body, the Council for Social Democracy, gave 'unequivocal'

backing to the UDM and attacked the Coal Board for not supporting the UDM enough!

The Alliance also want to reintroduce *wage controls* — enforced by a 'counter-inflation tax' on companies. Their purpose with such controls is shown clearly by their Budget proposals in past years, when they assumed that the controls would reduce wage rises by 1% below what they would be otherwise.

In their Manifesto the Alliance repeatedly claim to be above 'class struggle' or 'class conflict'. In fact — though most of big business continues to prefer the Tories — the Alliance gets its money mostly from the wealthy, with a fair sprinkling of business donations. And those are the interests the Alliance serves.

The Alliance is in favour of nuclear weapons — but, it claims, not *as much so* as the Tories. It puts more stress on international disarmament talks than the Tories.

Yet the differences are minor. Even the Alliance's commitment to cancelling Trident is not as firm as it seems in the Manifesto. They are committed to a replacement for Polaris — and statements by Owen since the Manifesto indicate that it could after all be Trident. If it is not, it will be something different only in detail.

On *privatisation*, too, the Alliance share common ground with the Tories.

## Sell off

They do not wish to reverse any of the selling-off done by the Thatcher government, and on top of that they want to sell off British Steel if it can be made profitable enough. Alliance leaders have indicated that they would also like to sell off the 49% share of British Telecom which the Tories have kept in public hands.

They support the Tories' deregulation of transport. They deplore the Tories' running-down of housing, health, and education, but are all in favour of more private provision and more free-market principles in all these sectors.

David Owen has made it clear that if the Alliance hold the balance in Parliament after the election, they will prefer to form a coalition with the Tories. And from the Alliance point of view, he is quite right. On the fundamental issues, the Alliance is at one with the Tories. It is another capitalist party. ■

## Cuts and rent rises

own 'mini Town Hall', which means new buildings for some of them.

Paying for this has meant a 12½% rent increase for council tenants (with no real increase in spending on housing repairs), closures of council services (such as two council-run seaside hotels, and all public toilets in the borough), and cuts in grants to voluntary groups.

This last cut, which would have been over 50% if some Liberal councillors hadn't rebelled, has meant redundancies for workers in many of the organisations offering advice and help to people in the borough.

Many arts groups are still unsure if they will be getting any money over the coming year.

**THE LIBERALS' rushed decentralisation — a total reorganisation of council services in a period that council unions believe is far too short — will cost something like £20 million.**

Each neighbourhood is to have its

move to get rid of a unionised workforce and recruit non-union labour.

Several London Labour politicians had cooperated with the LDDC — including the ex-Bermondsey MP Bob Mellish and the former leader of Tower Hamlets council, Paul Beasley. But Labour fought the last Tower Hamlets elections with a clear policy of opposition to the LDDC and a call to return control over the docklands to elected representatives.

The Alliance in Tower Hamlets have no intention of opposing the Docklands redevelopment, including the giant Canary Wharf office development. This would have 10 million square feet of office space, bringing enormous congestion from commuter traffic to the Isle of Dogs and the rest of the southern part of the borough, while the LDDC's own consultants predict that only about 1800 of the 50,000 jobs to be sited in the Canary Wharf development would go to people living in Tower Hamlets and Newham. Those would mostly be low-paid jobs such as office cleaning.

The Labour-run Isle of Dogs Neighbourhood Committee is campaigning against the development and against the building of a six-lane road from Beckton to Wapping to service it.

The Alliance council, whose sole SDP member is now a member of the board of the LDDC, refused to call for a public inquiry into the building of West Ferry Circus — a roundabout about the size of Trafalgar Square — and talks of the benefit to the local community of having a six-lane highway running yards from already crumbling council blocks.

**promise no housing in the late a waiting of over 9000 and 800 families living in fast hotels"**

## The developers move in

**THE CURRENT Tory government put a third of Tower Hamlets under the control of the London Dockland Development Corporation.**

This makes the unelected LDDC, not the council, responsible for planning in the south of the borough. A rate-free 'Enterprise Zone' was established on the Isle of Dogs.

This was supposed to attract new jobs and new investment to the area. In fact it has led to firms resiting their businesses there to take advantage of the rate-free period, and either bringing their own workforce or using the



THE CRY OF THE TACTICAL VOTER

# Vote Labour, kick out the Tories!

The Tories plan effectively to reintroduce grammar schools and the 11-plus.

Margaret Thatcher has tried to reassure people by saying that the secondary schools to be split off from local education authorities under the Tories' manifesto proposals will not have an entrance exam and will not charge fees. But the essence of the matter remains.

Better-off schools will be able to separate themselves from the general education system and set their own academic tests for entrance. Almost certainly there will be ways and means by which they can get more money than other schools.

Increasingly children will have their future decided at the age of 11. On one side there will be a path through elite schools to university or polytechnic and to well-paid jobs. On the other side, the road will lead through cash-starved schools with harassed teachers to minimal job training, with little general education, then compulsory cheap labour on schemes like YTS, and, probably, years on the dole.

The Tories are only proposing to continue what they have started since 1979. Arthur Bough looks at the issues.

"THEY give you the absolute minimum to work with and ask you to do the absolute maximum. There is one of you and thirty children.

Classes are too big, books and paper in short supply. You are always juggling with a set of priorities in trying to equip those kids with even a basic set of tools for thinking about the world and assessing what's happening to them", as one teacher told the researchers who produced the pamphlet *In and Against the State*.

With the introduction of TVEI (the Technical and Vocational Education Initiative) the Tories have tried to extend 'market discipline' in secondary and further education. TVEI is not only a privatisation of education, but an undermining of the principles of comprehensive education.

## Dominated

On the one hand, the Tories have cut back money for local authorities' spending on education, and on the other they have given money to the Manpower Services Commission so that it can organise TVEI with local employers. The whole basis of TVEI is not to provide students with a rounded education, but to train them for employment — to act like a sausage machine churning out young people for industry.

It is the other wing — beside the new quasi-grammar-schools-to-be — of the Tories' return to the days of the 11-plus, with kids classified at an early age as being academics, technicians, or fit only to become unskilled workers.

The cuts have hit the inner cities worst. These, of course, are the very areas which need more resources. So schools in working-class areas get worse, and even while higher education in Britain was expanding (now, with the Tories, it is declining), the proportion of students from better-off middle-class backgrounds in higher education remained high.

Senior positions in industry, the state, and, of course, education, are then filled by those students.

The educational Establishment is dominated by the better-off.

The effects of this in terms of the ideological framework in which teachers have to operate can be seen from teachers' comments quoted in

## *In and Against the State:*

"The model laid down for you is an authoritarian one, in which you are supposed to set out the tasks for the kids. If you don't believe in that, you totally screw up discipline for some time.

You have to take a lot of shit while the kids are being re-educated to the new kind of situation. Standards fall to pieces. According to any headmaster or Inspector you are just not doing your job".

The next constraint on the teacher is exams. The exam-oriented system trains students in the values of dog-eat-dog competition rather than cooperation, and it limits horizons through setting syllabuses and by suggesting that there is only one right answer to any question.

As unemployment grows, exam qualifications are increasingly important for getting a job. Conflicts grow between teachers who want to encourage a wider horizon, and the expectations of parents and students.

One teacher quoted in *In and Against the State* argued that socialist teachers must try to explain to working-class school students "why they are failing".

However, to the students this can seem to be adding insult to injury. One teacher showed a video to her O-level students aiming to prove that accents and idioms were not inferior to standard English. The students hated to hear what they were striving for analysed in such a way.

## Parents

Parents can be mobilised as a pressure-group against progressive experiments because of their fears that these experiments will mean their children not passing exams. "The first thing black parents ask is 'What can you do to stop our children under-achieving like it says in the newspapers?' They don't question the way achievement is measured", one teacher commented.

The so-called 'Great Debate', about whether the education system was effective in producing young people suited for jobs, was sparked off in 1976 by the then prime minister James Callaghan. It developed into a conflict between the 'progressives' wanting to retain teachers' professional autonomy, and the 'reactionaries' who wanted to gear education to jobs. Now the Tories are



# The crisis in education

pushing for greater centralisation of power, more government control over the curriculum, and participation by parents and 'the community'.

## Evaluation

The Tories' new demands for evaluation of teachers' performance represent an attempt to further restrict teachers' autonomy in the classroom, and to create conditions in which teachers are forced to gear their teaching to exam success. But in resisting central control, teachers must disentangle the cause of their own rights as workers, and of wider education for working-class children, from any narrow or elitist defence of professional privilege.

Just in case there are any holes in the ideological armoury, the state also has a back-up system. Unknown to the last Labour government, the Foreign Office made a grant of £500 to a NATO-backed political education project for 17 to 19 year olds. Details of the programme were given by its founder John Sewell in the NATO Review.

Sewell's framework was "the threat to Western democracies" from supporters of "authoritarian regimes". He proposed an organised state response to the "indoctrination of young people", by introducing "real politics (with necessary and adequate treatment given to defence)" into the school curriculum. In a written reply to Frank Allaun

MP on 12 July 1979, Douglas Hurd confirmed that six educational establishments were taking part in the project.

Some local authorities already have a close relationship with the police for vetting applicants' political views. In May 1978 *State Research* reported that Lothian Regional Council was vetting applicants without their knowledge for posts in education and social work. The vetting was done by Lothian and Borders police.

## Vetting

In March 1977 it was reported that Sussex Special Branch had visited two schools in Eastbourne and Boxhill, making inquiries about the political views and activities of teachers.

The current Tory scare campaign against 'Labour's idea of a comprehensive education' continues on the same tack. In an election poster, the Tories denounce the limited (if sometimes ham-handed) attempts by some Labour authorities to introduce more balanced sex education, especially about homosexuality, and condemn teachers in Hackney, East London, who through their local NUT union branch have tried to keep the police out of their schools.

However, state intervention in one form or another is inevitable in education, and therefore it is mean-

ingless to ask whether it is right or wrong.

As Marx put it in the *Communist Manifesto*, "The Communists have not invented the intervention of society in education; they do but seek to alter the character of that intervention, and to rescue education from the influence of the ruling class".

But the working class does not learn socialism in the classroom from enlightened teachers. It learns it in the class struggle. What must be challenged is the society whose ruling ideas are being transmitted.

In some ways, as the Italian socialist Antonio Gramsci argued, some 'progressive' education may be against the best interests of the working class by encouraging sloppiness and lack of discipline. Middle-class children, with books, encouragement, and quiet rooms to study at home, may do very well out of a free-and-easy system; but a desire not to be too 'academic' or 'rigid' in the schooling of working-class children can mean that they get none of the less 'practical' education which they should have.

Existing culture is, after all, bourgeois culture; but only after assimilating and absorbing that culture will the working class ever be able to go on to supersede it and create the classless culture of the future.

Does that mean that there is nothing that progressive teachers can do in the classroom other than just wait for the revolution? No. Social change is not achieved automatically or without pressure for change on a whole series of fronts.

Progressive teachers should encourage self-organisation among students, and the use of that organisation to strengthen the position of students through struggle. This is better than the individual teacher offering students a sham equality: students themselves have to demand a real equality, and a real say in their education.

Socialist teachers have to fight for their ideas among teachers, and throughout the labour movement, in order to challenge the 'ruling ideas' in education. Only in this way can trade unionists as parents be turned into a support for progressive education rather than (as can happen now) a reactionary pressure group.

## Campaign

Finally, a campaign is necessary to democratise the teachers' trade unions. And socialist teachers have to address themselves to the vehicle of any likely legislative reform — the Labour Party.

Unless progressive teachers are able to get their ideas taken up by the Labour Party, and to fight for the accountability required to ensure that a Labour government carries them out, even short-term reforms will be impossible.

As Terry Ellis — head of Walter Tyndale school in London, who was victimised for his progressive teaching methods in 1975 — put it, "In the end progressive education has got to have a political perspective, or else it becomes airy-fairy playing around with pretty things in the classroom".



Photo: John Harris



# The family that watches A-bombs together...

**Belinda Weaver reviews 'Desert Bloom'**

'DESERT Bloom' is ersatz nostalgia. This film is about the tribulations of a Nevada family in the 1950s — the time of A-bomb testing in the Nevada desert.

The family live in an almost unrecognisable 1950s Las Vegas — the neon signs are there, and the gambling places, but they're small and tatty, not the glittering high-rise palaces of today.

The film isn't certain what it is trying to be — social history or personal history — so it wobbles around with bits of humour and tragedy all jumbled up.

The humour is largely self-conscious — look at us quaint people getting all excited about the A-bomb! The film-makers haven't registered any kind of feeling about the bomb at all through the characters, so when a little girl says at the end 'It's beautiful!' about the mushroom cloud, we're not shocked or horrified. The moment passes — it's a nothing.

The film is narrated by the adult Rose, who's actually 13 years old at the start of the film. She's looking back on events, but her age has given her no perspective, no hindsight. She's telling it like it was, no more.

The device seems pointless since it adds absolutely nothing to the film, except to tidy up a few details of what happened to whom later on. They could have had an epilogue on the screen for that.

## War

Rose is the eldest of three sisters who live with their mother and stepfather in Vegas. The stepfather, Jack, played by Jon Voigt, is a crazy — haunted by memories of World War 2. He is paranoid, a drinker, and intensely moody.

He's also the kind of guy who doesn't know much but likes to think he knows more than other people. He goes on at great windbag length about the secrets he could tell, only of course his lips are sealed — classified information, you know.

He is also violent and unpredictable. He bullies the girls and their mother lets him do it. We can't understand why, since we get no insight much into what makes her tick.

Rose says her mother sees only what she wants to see, and that appears to be true, since she wouldn't put up with Jon Voigt for five minutes if she really had a good look. He's a dead loss.

But the mother wants to have the American dream, so she puts a good face on everything and backs up her man even against her own children. Previously deserted by one husband, she doesn't want to lose the shelter of this one.

She calls him Daddy, but he isn't much of a bulwark against the world. At the end, Jack tells Rose he just wanted to protect her and she snaps back 'From whom?' The point is well made — it's Jack who is a threat, even more so than the A-bomb.

He is closer to home, and more immediately likely to cause harm.

The A-bomb is just an incidental — something for the characters to talk about. The film is full of details about it — children in classes doing drills once the warning signal goes, blood tests, people getting issued dog tags — but it never becomes a reality in the lives of the characters.



The bomb is only a backdrop to a family story: Rose's aunt

The bomb has been used as a backdrop, but no more. The film would probably have been richer without it, since the family drama in the foreground would have had to take on more weight.

As it is, it's not much, and it's spoiled by the ending. The script-writers mustn't have known how to finish it, so they just plant the family, united once more, watching the mushroom cloud billow over the desert.

Documentaries like the 'Atomic Cafe' treated the same material, but

didn't clog it up with the fictional story. If fiction is to be made of the period, especially fiction with a character looking back on events, it needs to take in what has been learned about the bomb since then, and what people have done to fight against the spread of nuclear weapons.

## Backdrop

But the film cops out on that score.

And it shortchanges the drama too.

Many women stay with brutal husbands who terrorise them and their children because they either can't afford to leave, or because they fear being on their own to face a world hostile to women. But all this drama is tied up for the non-ending.

Once Rose and her stepfather seem to be getting on better, then that makes everything fine for Mum and the rest of the family as well. The family that watches A-bombs together stays together?

# Sorting out socialism and Stalinism

By Paddy Dollard

THE Half Moon Theatre in East London is staging 'Chicken Soup with Barley', by Arnold Wesker — an important socialist play.

The battle for socialism takes place on many fronts, but the battle of ideas is central. The Tory government does not rule by force alone. The Thatcherites have built up a formidable body of support.

They have a lot of support even in the working class. Their dog-eat-dog ideal of society corresponds to the daily experience of those who live in our capitalist society.

## Differently

People have difficulty thinking of a world organised differently, and Thatcher seems to make a brutal sort of sense of the world people know. Labour seems only to tinker with it and gum up its operation. So people go for Thatcher.

Socialists have consistently lost the battle of ideas. In any society, as Marx said nearly 150 years ago, the dominant ideas are those of the ruling class. But more than that now: the major events of the 20th century have helped the ruling class, with the worst tyrannies known to history, like that in the USSR, lyingly presenting themselves as socialist.

As an alternative to private ownership of the means of production, and the exploitation of the working class that goes with it, socialists have advocated socialised property. The Stalinist USSR is based on socialised property — with the bureaucracy owning the state and therefore the property.

So propagandists of the capitalist class have been able to justify the established order and glory in it, arguing that private ownership of the means of production, and the wage-slavery that goes with it, is natural, or at any rate better than the only alternative.

## Ideas

The battle with the ideas of the ruling class — the battle to define and redefine socialism — is therefore the to-be-or-not-to-be question for socialists. We must cherish every genuine contribution on the socialist side to this great battle of ideas.

That's why Arnold Wesker is important. In the late '50s and early '60s Wesker wrote three great socialist plays — *Chicken Soup with Barley*, *Talking About Jerusalem*, and *Roots*. They reflected and discussed the experience of working-class people who had been Stalinists because they believed Stalinism was socialism. They dealt with the crisis of the socialist conscience brought about by the public exposure of Stalin's tyranny by Stalin's heir Nikita Khrushchev in 1956.

Wesker's ideas are essentially 'utopian socialism'. *Chicken Soup with Barley*, however, deals with people who fight the class struggle.

It begins with the East End of London during the 'Battle of Cable Street' — the successful mobilisation of East End Jews and others to stop the fascists marching through their streets — and ends 20 years later at the time of the Russian suppression of the Hungarian revolution and the spiritual crisis that brought for socialists who had become aware of Stalinism.

• *Chicken Soup and Barley* is on at the Half Moon Theatre until 6 June.

# Ireland and the national question

**JOE CRAIG and I clearly disagree on many things. He has still made no attempt to explain why imperialism is the central problem in Ireland. His definition of imperialism would seem to be self-fulfilling, too: imperialism is whatever Britain does and has done in Ireland.**

His portrayal of Protestant politics reduces the source of all their power to their 'alliance' with Britain. That saves us from going any deeper into their history, their role in Ireland, and their attitudes.

"The demand for [class] unity", says Joe, "has never come from them". Well, the demand for class unity has never come from any religious side: it has come from socialists and trade unionists. Joe's history is Catholic history, and it is symptomatic of a general lapse into Irish nationalism throughout the British and Irish left.

In the early years of this century and in the 1930s unemployed struggles in Belfast, the Protestant militants had a proud record of involvement in and initiation of united class movements. In 1911 the Unionist leadership tried to break a powerful strike movement in Belfast by labelling its leader James Larkin as a Catholic Fenian. Larkin agreed to resign in favour of a Protestant, in the interests of unity, but the mainly Protestant strikers refused to allow it and he remained leader.

I don't want to overblow the episodic history of working class unity in Ireland. The truth is that there has been too little of it. But we don't do any service to our class by lying about its history — not for any purpose.

## Division

Joe Craig claims that "the most important division inside the Irish working class is between north and south, and the most important task, creating this unity". The most important division, in my opinion, is very obviously between Protestant and Catholic workers.

Workers north and south may be organisationally divided, or divided by being part of different economies, but they are not immediately divided along sectarian, religious, political, sexual or any other lines simply because they live in different states.

The only thing I can imagine Joe means when he talks of North-South unity as the key is unity between *nationalists*, not between workers as workers.

Southern workers, by and large, do not see the national question as central to their immediate concerns, though they do have sympathy with the Northern Catholics. For Northern Catholics the national question is the central issue. From the point of view of the Catholics and all those of us who support their just revolt it is important that the Southern working class take their struggle more seriously.

But let's call that what it is — pan-nationalist unity, albeit between workers. It won't solve the central

political divide affecting the Irish working class, the Protestant-Catholic divide, and no amount of left-wing gloss can hide that.

Before 1920 the Irish working class was organisationally united, very powerful, and involved large numbers of Northern Protestants. That alone was not enough to deal with the communal division in the North between Protestant and Catholic around the national question.

## Democracy

Joe Craig is not wrong to say that Protestant-Catholic unity is unlikely to occur simply through the dynamics of what happens in the North, nor to focus on the importance of the Southern workers. But what is crucial is not juggling with numbers or allocating different roles to different labour movements, but what *all* socialists in the Irish and British labour movements *say* about the national question.

Should we have a coherent, independent programme which stands above nationalism, loyalism and British chauvinism, or should we allow all these forces to beat out our programme for us? We have our own world view or we have nothing, Joe, and it tells us that in conflicts between nationalities we are for the fullest democracy, for a consistently democratic programme.

I think that such a programme for Ireland has to attempt to conciliate and accommodate the Protestants as a distinct community within a united Ireland. Of course, no democratic programme guarantees success, and nothing short of socialism can guarantee equality. But the Marxist programme is distinct because its starting point is the interests of the working class and the need to create the conditions whereby *class* politics can best develop. It does not start by choosing the least culpable nationalism.

My central argument, originally, was that Republicans and socialists currently have no alternative to Northern Ireland and the troops. That is an argument, Joe says, for strengthening the Republican struggle. However many times you repeat this to yourself, it just doesn't follow.

We think that the Republican strategy and the politics which inform it are wrong. At best, in my view, it will keep up the pressure for Britain to concede reforms to deliver goods to the Catholics.

## Military

As Joe said in his letter, what we need is a movement "strong enough to boot them [the British army] out". The Republican movement based narrowly on the nationalist community, with its primarily military struggle, can never do that.

If the Republican movement has no political alternative to Northern Ireland which makes Troops Out a realistic possibility, then one must be developed. To simply strengthen the Republican struggle or conduct it more militantly again evades the pro-

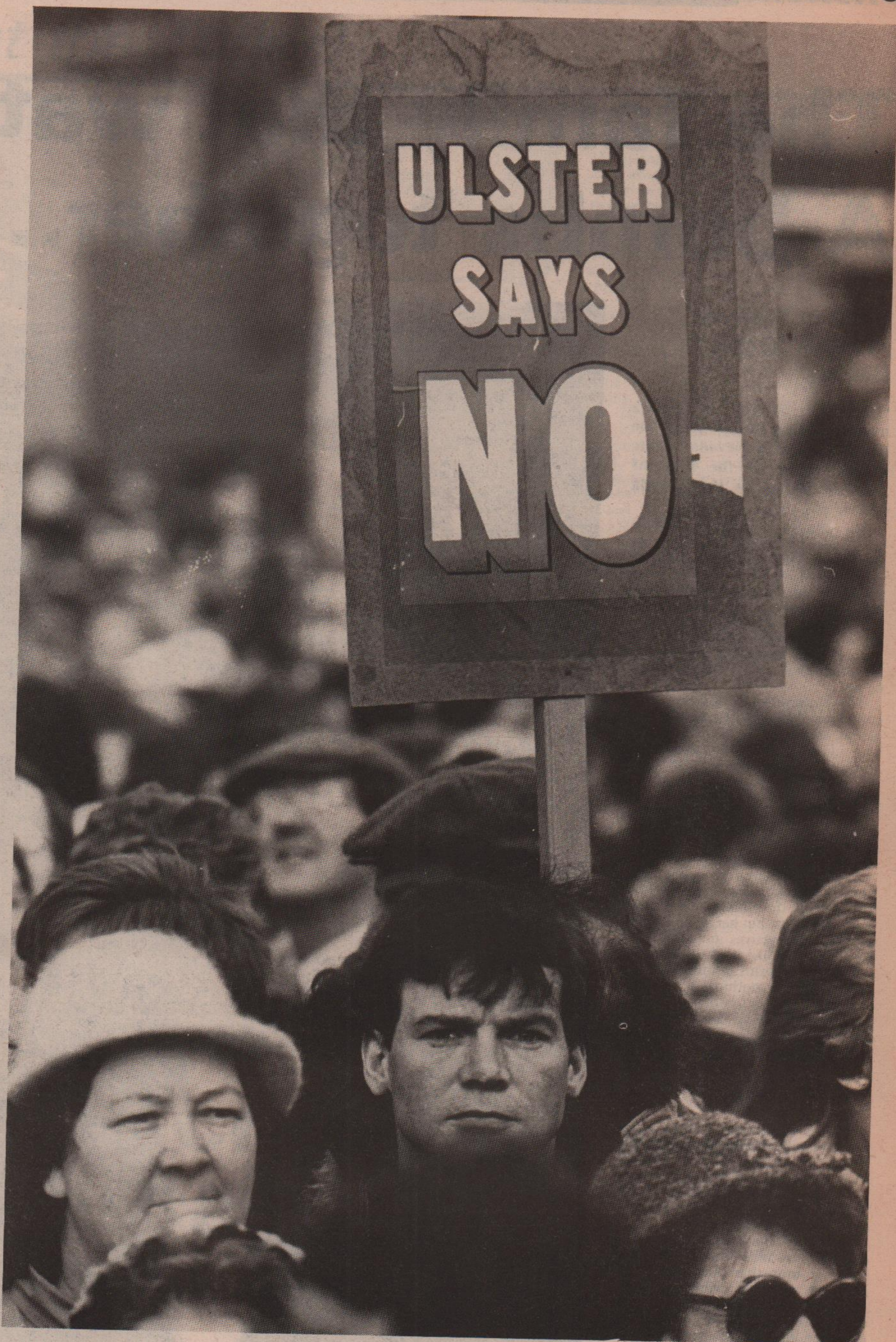


Photo: Derek Speirs (Report)

Most nationalists want, and have always wanted, reforms within Northern Ireland leading to a united Ireland.

I don't think that we, or any socialists, should be constrained by this Catholic position, or the attitudes of the Protestants, or the lack of interest of the Southern workers. But we should start from reality, not fantasy.

We start there not because we accept it as unchangeable, but because we know that the force which can change things will be made up of the ugly, unprepared, divided, working-class communities which actually live there, and not the heroic horn-handed sons of Erin who live only in a few socialist and Republican heads.

Whether those communities do change things or let stronger forces continue to shape them is something which socialists can influence. The record up until now is bad. In fact, to use Joe Craig's phrase, it is "a terrible mess".

It doesn't have to be, and our class can no longer afford it to be.

Patrick Murphy  
Leyton, East London.

blem. In short: why has the current Republican struggle, the longest continuous military campaign in Irish history, achieved so little?

It is time to start asking this question on the left and expecting sober and serious answers.

The fact is that the Republicans are only one part of the picture, and they take no real account of the major actor in the drama, the Protestants. This stubborn refusal to take Protestant politics at all seriously is one of the most unnecessary and debilitating weaknesses of non-reformist socialism in Ireland.

We have argued that Troops Out Now without any political programme for a united Ireland will mean civil war and repartition. Therefore the priority is a democratic programme which proposes an answer to a complex national question.

It is valid for socialists to disagree with the programme we propose, or to challenge it. But Joe Craig's assertion that we 'demand' that the British army stay until we achieve adequate class unity is just absurd. The British army *will* stay until a force which can

throw it out is created.

Like his rhetoric, "Will nationalists support a democratic solution which allows the British army to remain, etc", it is an attack on a position which we don't hold and have never argued. We have argued not that Troops Out is wrong, but that on its own it is inadequate, and that it is far less important than demands which actually point the way to self-determination.

## Reality

If there is no contradiction between Troops Out and self-determination, then convince us in argument, refute our claims! It is isn't enough simply to observe that self-determination isn't possible as long as the troops stay. We agree, and we are for British withdrawal, but will that lead automatically to Irish unity?

In any case most nationalists already *do* support a programme which doesn't call for British withdrawal, the SDLP's programme.

# Build a fighting left in NUPE

By Tony Dale

NUPE conference ended last Wednesday with a closing speech by Labour front-bencher John Prescott. The standing ovation for him showed how important delegates thought it was to get a Labour victory on 11 June.

Unfortunately the first part of Prescott's speech was a nationalist call to displace the Tories as a patriotic party. This was followed by a detailed examination of Tory policies and the damage they have done. Totally absent

from his speech was any mention of what Labour will do if elected.

The conference was united in condemnation of Tory rule, but it was Labour's response, and the policies NUPE should push, which sparked debate.

The debate on trade union law centred on the joint Labour/TUC document 'People at Work: New Rights, New Responsibilities'. NUPE originally opposed this document's acceptance of court interference in the unions, but general secretary Rodney Bickerstaffe successfully called on conference to accept the Labour Party policy in order not to rock the boat.

NUPE organises a large number of workers in Northern Ireland. A com-

posite calling for the immediate withdrawal of troops was heavily defeated. Relying as it did on the common wisdom of the left, it was torn apart in the debate and shown to be totally inadequate in dealing with the complexities of the situation. Another composite was remitted, and the Executive Council promised detailed discussions over the next year.

Too often in the conference the leadership backed composites 'with reservations'. These 'reservations' can later be used as an excuse for not following conference policies. In addition, the transfer to another area of a full-timer in Kent against the wishes of local branches re-raised the issue of the accountability and role of full-timers.

A composite calling for regular elections and accountability of full-timers was defeated.

The timing of the conference obviously led to the majority of delegates not wanting to criticise Labour, for fear that it might adversely affect the election. Nevertheless, a significant section was not prepared to turn the conference into a rally. While avoiding unnecessary embarrassment to the Labour leadership, they wanted to deal seriously with the issues facing NUPE.

This section is much wider than presently organised by the Broad Left. Organising them to democratise NUPE and to get NUPE to be more aggressive about the interests of the membership is the key task facing the left.

## UCW conference

# Campaign for a shorter working week!

"THE RESOLUTION we passed was a good one. But how can we make sure the Executive carries it out?"

That was the view expressed by many delegates at last week's UCW [Union of Communications Workers] conference, after the motion calling for industrial action for a three-hour cut in the working week had been carried.

The terms of the resolution make it difficult for the Executive to sell out. For a start, they have only got until 1 September to do it, which will no doubt spoil several summer holidays in exotic places.

They are also tied to calling a special conference on offer they may want to put to the membership. And the claim now applies to all UCW grades in the Post Office, instead of just those on 43 hours. That will make it harder to split us up.

Nevertheless, try to sell out they will. Most likely, little or nothing will be done between now and 1 September. Then some compromise deal will be put to us with a recommendation to accept on the grounds that nothing else can be done.

## Claim

The most important job for activists in the union in the next three months is to stop this happening. What we need is a campaign — 'Post Office Workers for the Full Claim' or whatever — which organises all those branches and individual members who are serious about fighting for the claim.

It will have to prepare the membership for a massive yes vote in any ballot on industrial action, and prevent any attempt by the Executive to sell out.

Time is short. We need that campaign now. The planning for it has to start right away, and after 11 June the campaign will have to begin in earnest.

If it is going to get off the ground, the left in the union will have to put other considerations and issues aside for one moment.

The vote on the shorter working week aside, there were several encouraging decisions taken by the conference. A motion to withdraw from trials and negotiations on revised provision procedure (RPP) was carried by almost three to one.

RPP is a new type of work study designed to get yet more out of us. When the Post Office attempted to force it in at Leeds last year, it led to strike action in several branches

before most of the proposals were withdrawn.

But the Executive were still prepared to go along with the Post Office on it. Now conference has decided that it wants nothing more to do with it, and has voted to take industrial action if the Post Office tries to implement it.

Conference also instructed the Executive to settle the 1988 postal pay claim on a flat-rate across-the-board basis. This is a demand the left has been pushing for years, and it has been voted at several previous conferences.

The Executive failed in their attempt to get conference to agree to what would have virtually been a no-strike agreement in Datapost. And in the ballot for the delegation to Labour Party conference, Billy Hayes, a prominent Broad Left, received the highest vote in the section for lay members.

Not everything went our way, though. Motions to force all full-time officers to stand for re-election every five years, and to allow candidates standing for election to the Executive Council to submit election addresses, were both heavily defeated.

But probably the biggest weakness at this year's conference was the state of the left. The left has never been particularly strong in the UCW, and this year there were only a handful of delegates from organised groups. The newly-reformed Broad Left did not produce a single leaflet, and barely a dozen people attended their meeting.

The campaign around the shorter working week claim should allow the left to reach a far wider audience in the union. If at next year's conference there are still only a handful of the Broad Left, we will only have ourselves to blame.

## Viraj Mendis

# Council backtracks

MANCHESTER City Council is backtracking on the appointment of Viraj Mendis, a Sri Lankan supporter of the Tamils' rights who is threatened with deportation, to the post of immigration and nationality officer.

## Sanctuary

Viraj was offered the job months ago, but has not been given a start date. He is at present taking sanctuary in a church in Hulme to avoid deportation. The City Council has now stated that he can only take up the post when he

can leave the church.

This is a scandalous stab in the back for Viraj. The council, when they appointed him, knew full well that he could not leave the sanctuary until the threat of deportation was removed.

The City Labour Party has called on the council to give Viraj a start date. The Labour group, who are supposed to be accountable to the City Party, are ignoring this decision.

Labour lost nine seats in the May local elections, and the council seems to want to blame this disaster on their support for Viraj. They would be better looking to their actions in putting up the rents by £1.50 a week and the rates by 20% as the cause of the decline in Labour's support.



Photo: Report

## London teachers

# All out 4 June!

By Cheung Siu Ming

NUT [National Union of Teachers] members will be voting on strike action on 1 June, the first day back after half-term.

This is not part of the campaign against the conditions imposed by the Tory government, but a dispute with the Labour-controlled Inner London Education Authority, over its continued refusal to negotiate on its 'TAAN' scheme.

When the TAAN scheme — for compulsorily redeploying teachers — was first announced, it provoked unprecedented widespread action throughout London. The NUT National Action Committee gave its support to the three demands of ILTA (the Inner London division of the NUT): no individual identification, no compulsory transfer, and no job losses.

But since the day of action on 2 April the ILEA has dragged its feet over a negotiating debate, and the NUT Executive has voted to expel and suspend the ILTA leadership (over a previous London strike, on 13 January, against

Baker).

This setback has demobilised the campaign, and some of the teachers identified as 'surplus' have 'volunteered' for retraining, severance, supply teaching and other schemes. In the past two months, traditionally the busiest time of year for school jobs, there has been virtually no advertising for secondary posts as ILEA attempts to pressurise teachers to move from one school to another to fill vacancies.

The ILEA finally agreed to meet ILTA and Gordon Green from the National Action Committee on 12 May. Although in the meantime ILEA leader Frances Morrell had been replaced by Neil Fletcher, we found there had been no real policy change.

ILTA council called on the NUT to back a one-day strike on 4 June as a first step in an escalating campaign of opposition, and asked schools to prepare and organise members for a fight. Already some 30 schools have voted to come out, irrespective of whether national backing is forthcoming.

This base line of about 1200 members can and must be built up on our first day back. The majority of schools will be meeting, and an all-London shop stewards' meeting has been called in the evening.

Trade unionists must support the London teachers. Educational standards as well as trade union organisation will suffer if ILEA manages to create a permanent reserve pool of demoralised teachers through the TAAN scheme.

We have maintained a solid position of no cover for absences, and London is virtually the only division on the country where union membership has increased in a period when the total teaching force has declined. Our record of defending the Labour-controlled ILEA against Tory attempts to break it up is second to none, so we reject those who argue that we should not 'rock the boat' before the election.

The ILEA councillors are now breaking constituency Labour Party mandates in going ahead with the TAAN scheme, and they must be called to account by the London Labour Parties.

# Never a miners' friend

I'M NOT AT all surprised about Don Concannon coming out against Labour.

It's just exposing the man for what he is and what he's always been. It's unfortunate that we've had to support him for all these years. A lot of people have done a lot of hard work and made a lot of sacrifices in order to keep somebody like that in a very cosy job in Parliament.

He's never been a friend of the miner — he's never been a friend of the working class. What he did in Ireland when he visited the dying Bobby Sands to tell him that Labour would never grant political status — it shows exactly what it is that we've been supporting all these years.

## Manifestos

The Tory manifesto for the general election is just what you'd expect. In the Labour manifesto, we see attempts to water down conference policy and any commitment from the leadership to really represent what working-class people want from the labour movement, and we see a hell of a lot of back-peddling — in spite of that, we still have to go out and work for a Labour victory.

I'm quite sure there will be a day of reckoning to come.

## Nuclear weapons

The press have been trying to present the Labour Party as paring Britain back down to what it was before the Second World War, so that we would be dependent on broomsticks in the event of an invasion.

But I think that's totally living in the past. Britain is no longer a world power, and we can't strut round the floor and pretend that we are.

I fear for Britain's safety as much or more from American nuclear arms than from the Soviet Union. In the event of any sort of flare-up, the American government would be prepared to obliterate this country rather than let it fall into Soviet hands.

## Education and jobs

The main argument I've heard on the doorstep is people worried about kids' education, and jobs. I've got my own particular argument: I say that the attack on the trade union movement is an attack on all fronts — education, health, housing, and all the rest of it.

The proposal effectively to restore grammar schools is typical Tory thinking. But I would argue that the Tories' determination to take away trade union rights at GCHQ and the teachers' rights to negotiate their own pay settlement has got far more sinister implications than people seem to think.

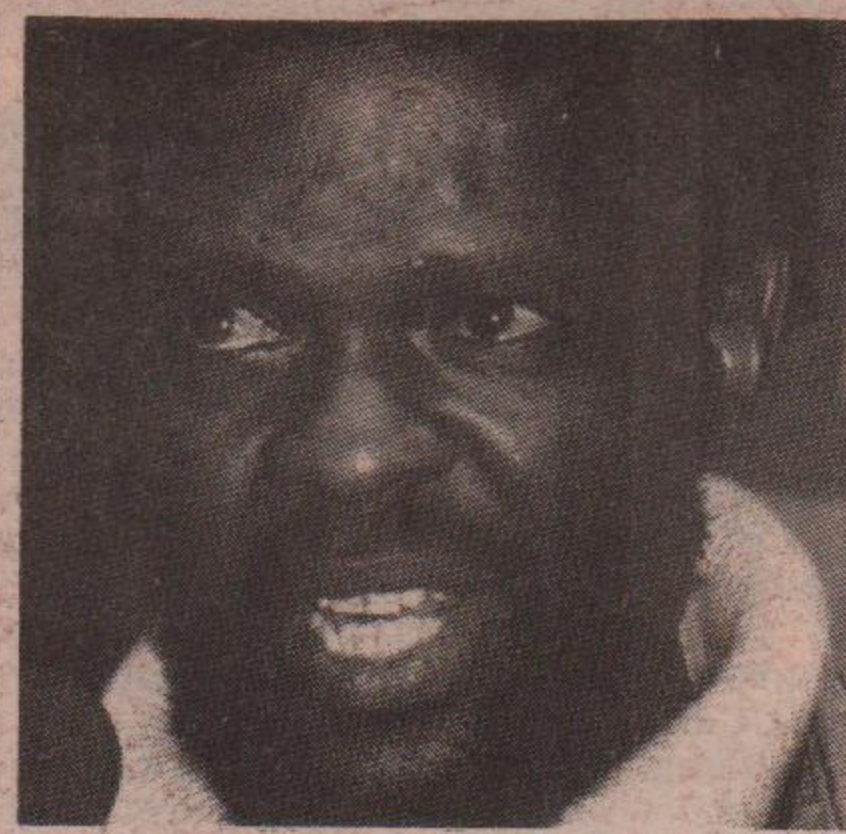
## UDM in the election

The UDM hasn't really started to roll their bandwagon yet, except to say: Don't vote Labour. And in an area like this, that can only mean one thing — that they are backing the Tories.

At the present time there is very little response from the UDM membership, but I'm sure that as we get nearer to election day the UDM leadership are going to feel a backlash from their own members.

Paul Whetton is secretary of Bevercotes NUM, Notts.

# SOCIALIST ORGANISER



Moses Mayekiso

## South Africa: giant metal union formed A big step forward for black workers

MOSES Mayekiso, the black workers' leader on trial for treason in South Africa, was elected general secretary of a new 150,000-strong trade union this week.

The National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) is the product of a merger between seven trade unions in the metal industries, including Moses' own former union, the Metal and Allied Workers' Union (MAWU).

The formation of NUMSA is a big step forward for a major section of the South African working class. The second largest affiliate of the giant federation, the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), NUMSA includes some of the best-known socialist militants in the country.

The merger centred on MAWU and the National Automobile and Allied Workers' Union (NAAWU), and involves smaller unions, including sections of former general unions. COSATU's policy of 'one industry, one union' calls for the breaking-up of general unions and their merger with industrial unions. NUMSA is the most successful example so far of this policy being put into practice.

The election of Moses as general secretary shows the new union's determination not to be cowed by the apartheid state's attempts to 'drive the unions out of politics'. Moses' 'crime' is to have helped organise democratic committees for running the black township of Alexandra.

# The tip of the Tory iceberg

THE TORY propaganda machine has put full-page ads in the press denouncing Labour's 'hidden agenda', the unseen part of the 'iceberg programme'. But what about the Tories' 'hidden agenda'?

It is no secret that if the Tories are elected they will:

- **Stop practically all new council housing**, and sell off as much as possible of the existing stock, leaving the council housing that remains as a ghetto for the poorest. They plan to revive private landlordism, cutting back tenants' rights.

- **Bash the unions still more.** They will impose *postal* ballots for election of officials (workplace ballots will become illegal). They will legislate so that even if strikers have balloted in the approved manner, it will be illegal for the union to penalise scabs.

Young people will be forced onto cheap-labour 'training' schemes on pain of otherwise having their dole cut off.

- **Abolish rates and bring in a poll tax**, affecting everyone equally, rich and poor alike. It is part of a plan to abolish local democracy.

- **Reinforce the two-tier system in education and health care.** They plan, in effect, to reintroduce grammar schools; and they will encourage private medicine.

- **Bring back censorship.** Many people are worried about the vile content of many TV programmes and movies, and rightly so. The money-mad wretches who produce this 'entertainment' exploit the basest instincts of the viewers.

To return to censorship is no



Photo John Harris

answer, however. It would give the ruling class power not only to ban the mindless violence but to stifle artistic creation too.

It is the search for the fast buck and pound that regulates the worst TV. But the Tories glorify and epitomise this commercialism. The answer is to end the commercialism, not to give the government which promotes it the power to deodorise it.

When there was censorship, it was women and gays and other oppressed people who were most denied a hear-

ing. Socialists do not believe in 'one nation'. We believe that the two main classes, the working class and the capitalist class, are irreconcilable in their interests. Talk of 'one nation' is usually a way of conning workers into accepting capitalist domination.

We want to split the sacred 'nation' of the capitalists and the reformists, and make the working class conscious of its own separate interests as the first step towards the

workers taking power.

The Tories talk of 'one nation', but they do not believe it either. Everything they plan to do is aimed at pushing the working class down further, and strengthening the ruling class.

For now, despite everything in its politics which ties it to the existing system, the Labour Party is the only alternative to the Tories based on the working class. Vote Labour! Kick the Tories out!

## London buses: all-out action needed

LAST Friday, 22 May, all London's buses were pulled in for two hours and union meetings were held in every garage. The purpose of the meetings was to inform members of what is going on.

The pull-in, like the 24-hour strike two weeks before it, was widely observed by the members — not surprisingly, since on 24 April 90% of the TGWU membership voted for industrial action over the tendering out of London Bus routes.

The busworkers of London appear to be in a strong mood to defend our jobs and conditions against plans to disintegrate the bus services, and have responded well to what little our union leadership has so far asked us to do.

But, instead of developing this mood for action and spreading the fight, the union has called it off while they take London Buses Limited (LBL) to court. "Strike action now would be seen as

By John Payne

trying to influence the judges' decision", is the excuse used.

The union has taken LBL to court over their plans for the Norbiton area. The bus network there was put out to tender, and every route but one was won by LBL. They won the routes by setting up two new subsidiary companies (Kingston Bus Company, to be run from Norbiton bus garage, and Stanwell Buses Ltd, to be run from the forecourt of the closed Kingston garage), and by cutting the wages and conditions of the workers in order to compete.

The workers at the two sites are offered different sets of conditions, thereby splitting them up. Both groups face wage cuts of up to £50 a week and longer working hours. At Norbiton it would mean a 45 hour week. Sick pay, relief times, and conditions for

spread-over duties have also been cut. It is clear that what is happening at Norbiton is on the cards for every other garage in London, if management wins, and in fact they already have similar plans for the Bexley and Harrow areas.

But they cannot be defeated in the courts — which, as the miners' strike and the print strike showed, are no lovers of the working class. All transport workers, including the rail and underground who face similar threats of privatisation, must be brought together by concerted industrial action against the destruction of the public transport system and the threat to transport workers' wages and conditions.

The union is also hiding behind the coming general election. "You are voting for your jobs", as one union official put it. While this is undoubtedly true — the Tories' plans for public transport will be even more drastic given another term in government —

the union should be fighting these plans now and letting whichever party gets in know, in no uncertain terms, that privatisation is not going to be tolerated.

But at one of the garage meetings last Friday, an official said: "We can't fight tendering itself, because LBL are legally bound to do it. What we want is that LBL get a fair crack of the whip". Norbiton has shown what that means for bus workers. Crack of the whip, yes, but it's fair only to those who are running a company for profit rather than as a service to the public.

After the 90% vote for industrial action, rank and file members must mandate their delegates to follow it through and argue for a fight (not in the courts) against any form of tendering at all (whichever company wins, the workers lose) and for improved conditions and an extended, safe public service.

## Support the Firefite strikers

BELOW is a letter from a trade union in South Africa whose members are on strike in Cape Town, requesting support from trade unionists in Britain. We urge all our readers to heed this call.

"We urgently need your assistance in providing humanitarian aid to 55 oppressed and exploited workers in the metal industry in Cape Town. These brave and courageous workers have been on strike since 13 April except for a few hours on 23 April. They briefly returned to work and went on strike again when management refused to bargain in good faith.

They are presently the only women workers in the metal industry in South Africa on strike, and their strike is only the second ever strike by women metal workers in Cape Town.

Given the state of emergency and the fact that the apartheid system regards their strike as unlawful, the constant threat of active security police intervention seems certain.

Our union is too poor to be able to sustain the strikers who are now in the 6th week of their strike. Their families are in a desperate situation with the wolves already at the door.

Help from other quarters has failed to materialise, and now we strongly appeal to you to urgently make an attempt to help the families of the oppressed and exploited workers.

What the workers need most of all is money to survive during the strike. So please send emergency aid to the account number below: S.A. Perm 3141599500104.

Brian Williams,  
Southern Areas Secretary, Electrical and Allied Workers' Union.