

SOCIALIST ORGANISER

For Workers' Liberty East and West

WOMEN'S FIGHTBACK

AFTER ALTON
A conference on Women's
Liberties and Equality was
held in 1987.

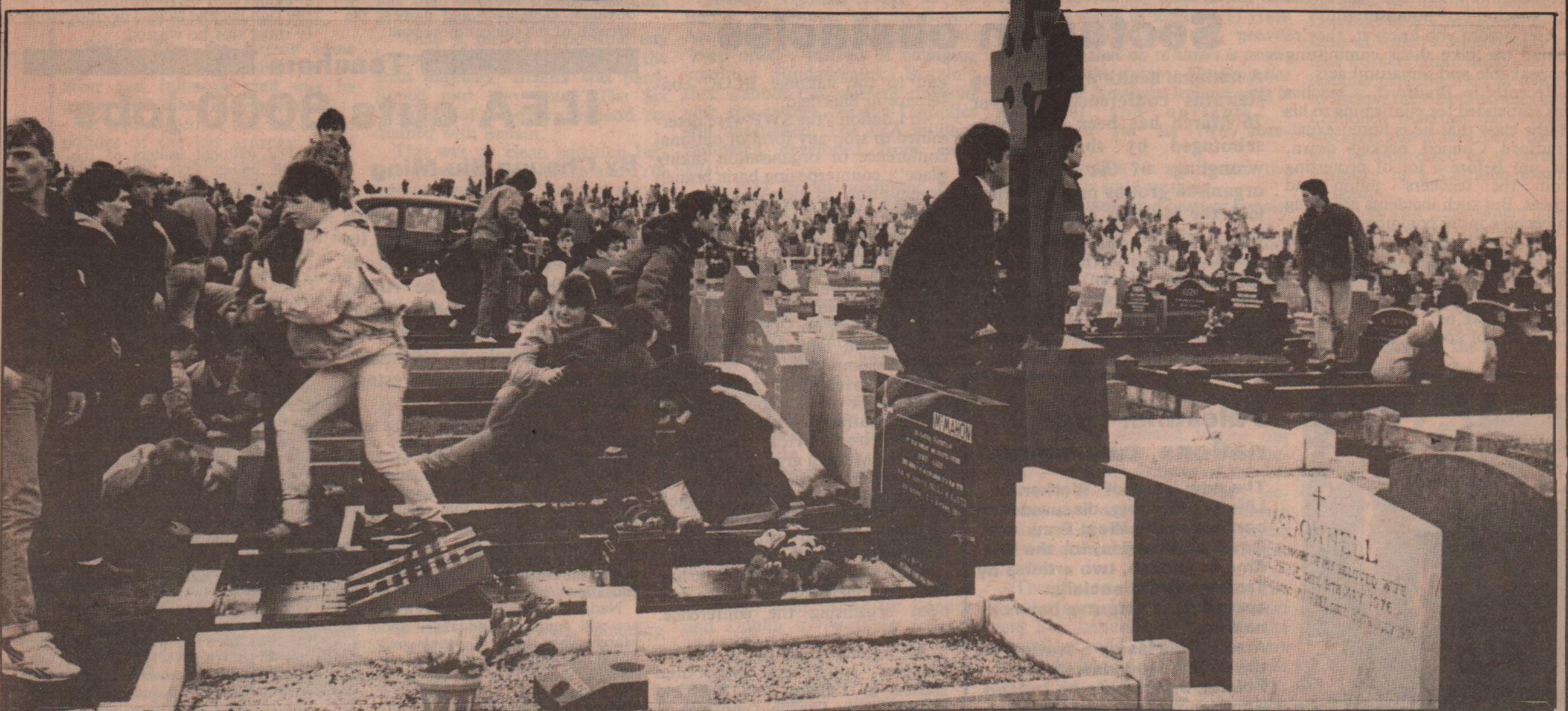
VICTORY TO
THE HEALTH
WORKERS!

NUPE
SUPPORT
YOUR
HOSPITALS



Women's
Fightback
pull-out:
centre
pages

IRELAND: WHAT'S THE ANSWER?



Mourners take cover as a Loyalist gunman attacks an IRA funeral. Photo: Stewart Smith, Reflex.

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Don't let News of the World grind you down

PRESS GANG

By Clive Bradley

Unity Hall is the grinning ghoul whose 'advice straight from the heart' must cause plenty of News of the World readers to go to bed with six bottles of aspirin.

Her Dear Unity column on 20 March was a good example of the Murdoch tabloids' current not-very-subtle anti-gay campaign. The News of the World and the Sun are getting ready for the real fun after Clause 28 is made law: the queers are going to be bashed so hard they will not know what it was they were bashed with.

A fifteen year old asks Unity if he's always going to be gay, since at the moment he (rather implausibly) "can't wait until he's 21 so he can go to gay clubs". For this ailment, Unity has sound advice:

"If you can, stop thinking about sex. Get yourself involved with sport, reading, studying... Avoid sexual encounters with other boys... Give yourself the opportunity to be heterosexual."

Advising a 15-year old to stop thinking about sex is, you might think, rather like advising a pig on flight schedules. But Dear Unity apparently believes that if it wasn't for this particular 15-year old's brother (who "started feeling him up" five years ago) he "might not be aroused by anybody yet".

Unity Hall, it would seem, hasn't got much of a clue when it comes to 15-year old boys. But the significance of this story is not just that the News of the World's paid problem-solver is about as apt for her job as Lucrecia Borgia.

It is necessary for the tabloids to talk about teenage youth as if they were almost completely asexual. Into this asexual void, you see, steps the "promotion" of homosexuality. Sweet, innocent 15-year old boys, who ordinarily might divide their time between a good game of rugger and a bottle or two of ginger beer, are swept off their feet by the "promotion" of homosexuality.

And before you know it, they're behind the bike sheds committing unspeakable and unnatural acts.

Recently in Bradford, a teacher was suspended for confirming to his Maths class that he is homosexual. Bradford Council backed down, but not before a lot of protesting from the teachers' union and others. But such incidents are going to become more common.

Tell school students that it's okay if they are homosexual, the theory runs, and no one will be left wanting to make babies. And then where will we be?

In fact, of course, kids at school

talk about homosexuality virtually without respite. Usually their discussions are based on almost total ignorance. Or worse. Unity Hall's 15-year old, for example, will probably at this moment be enduring in silence the queer jokes and the laughs, the hate and the scorn of his friends, or joining in to avoid embarrassment. Or he could be lying behind the bike sheds with his head kicked in by a gang who quite agree with the Tories that homosexuality shouldn't be encouraged.

And this obsession with homosexuality doesn't stop with adulthood, as a casual glance at the News of the World will confirm. Indeed the unearthing of 'a gay' is big news in Murdoch's book. The latest discovery is James Anderton (as in God's daughter, who it transpires, is a lesbian).

The News of the World's obviously got it in for Anderton for some reason, so any dirt will do. But isn't there a contradiction? How could someone brought up exclusively on fire and brimstone come to have such ungodly desires? Maybe clean living isn't everything?

Whether or not Ms. Anderton is "swimming around in a cesspit of her own making", as her father recently described all other homosexuals, or whether the Great Prophet will tone down his "hang 'em-flog-'em-remove their hormones" speeches, remains to be seen.

It is to resist James Anderton, Unity Hall and all the rest that we need to fight Clause 28. The Clause will ban the "promotion" of homosexuality. But the "promotion" of homosexuality is simply the insistence that everyone is equal, whosoever they love or lust after, and everyone has the right not to face discrimination or be bashed over the head with a bicycle chain.

Unity says: be heterosexual. "It does make life simpler in the long run." It certainly is harder to be lesbian or gay. Because of people like Unity Hall.

What we should have is a society that says: be who you are.

Don't let the Unity Halls of this world or any of the other bastards grind you down.



Millions for them, nothing for the NHS

Lawson's insult

Nigel Lawson's tax-cutting Budget was an insult to every low-paid worker, everyone living on benefits, every health worker, everyone who has ever needed the National Health Service, everyone who is poor in Britain.

A company boss on £100,000 a year will have an extra £20,000 a

year — or £400 or so a week — in his or her pocket.

For those on an average wage, it will mean only a slight improvement.

Tim Sainsbury (as in the supermarket chain), one of Britain's richest men, has complained that there aren't enough noughts on his pocket calculator to find out how much money he has saved as a result of the Budget!

And there are no real tax cuts for the poor, despite lowering the standard rate.

If you are on a low income and get a pay rise, you also lose on benefits you receive. For every extra pound, after taking loss of benefit into account, you will be only 3p better off.

And Lawson's tax cuts were about equal to the amount demanded to restore standards in the NHS.

Lawson's Budget will quickly be followed by the changes in the benefit system to be introduced on 1 April. The worst-off will still be worse off as many of their benefits are slashed.

Yet the Tories think we should be grateful. If the rich are richer, it will help the poor, they say, as it will encourage the rich to work harder.

Funny, isn't it, how the rich need huge financial encouragement to work hard, while too much money makes the poor lazy.

Labour MPs greeted the Budget with howls of 'Shame!' But protests in Parliament are not enough. Labour should call a series of demonstrations against Tory policy — against unemployment and benefit cuts, against poll tax, in defence of the NHS.

Labour should disrupt Parliament more often. There should be a campaign of Parliamentary obstruction to help build the extra-parliamentary campaign.

The Budget is proof — if proof were needed — of where the Tories' interests lie. The labour movement now has the opportunity to mobilise support against this government of the rich for the rich. The opportunity must not be wasted.

Students

Describe or fight?

By Jane Ashworth

As the hustings trail for the NUS Executive Elections continues, the political differences are becoming clearer. Every day there is at least one round of hustings usually only for the Presidential candidates, but sometimes for all the Sabbatical positions.

These hustings are poorly attended, with only a handful of people at them who are not already committed one way or another.

Throughout the hustings the National Organisation of Labour Students have been asked to defend their record as the leadership of NUS for the last 6 years and explain how they want to see NUS develop into the future.

Maeve Sherlock, the NOLS candidate for President, says that the record is

good and the way forward for NUS is to recognise the diversity of the membership. She then describes the membership — women students, black students, FE students, Jewish students, lesbian and gay students, and disabled students. Maeve never outlines the nature of campaigns and approach that NUS should be adopting.

Simon Pottinger the Socialist Students in NOLS candidate for President also recognises the diversity of the membership. But a description is not the final word on NUS campaigns!

Simon Pottinger argues for a campaigning union to combat the current threats on student unions' funding and their right even to exist, we have to rebuild students' confidence. This can be done through providing an integrated national framework for campaigns which are aimed not just at convincing students that we are right but more importantly at involving students in fighting for and winning our demands.

Such a national framework would be flexible to suit local needs, and could raise high the profile of the demands of the liberation campaigns. An integrated framework would put an end to disparate campaigns and harness the strength of the student movement.

Health

Sectarian obstacles

A national health workers' shop stewards' conference called for 26 March has been effectively sabotaged by the sectarian wranglings of the two largest organised groups on the British left: the Militant Tendency and the Socialist Workers' Party

Whittington COHSE passed a resolution from SO calling for a national conference which was taken both to the London-wide health workers' action committee

and to the national BLOC conference in Sheffield.

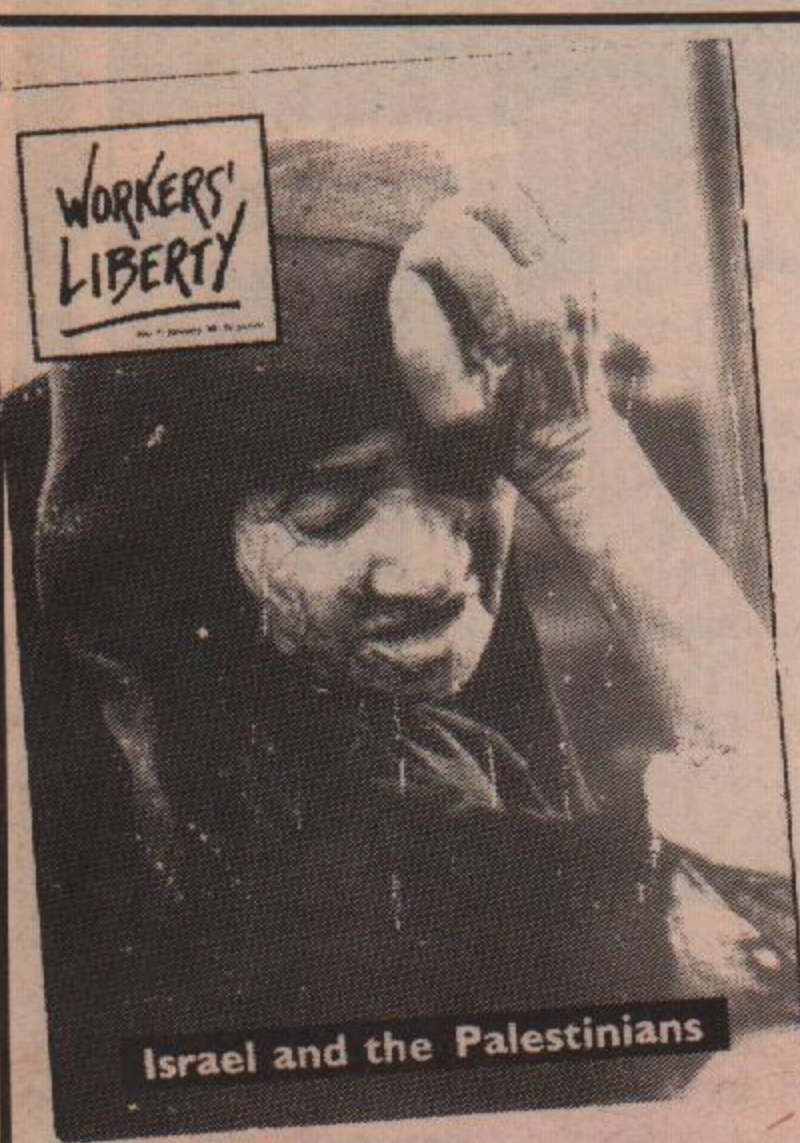
In London "the SWP were determined to stop any form of national conference or organisation taking place", counterposing basic branch organisation to developing a national perspective. And whereas the Militant supporters swung with the mood of the meeting and dropped in behind the call, neither they nor the SWP were willing to actively support and work for it.

So Whittington COHSE steward Mark Nevill initiated an organising sub-committee. He booked a venue, sorted out offices and facilities for the London group and drafted leaflets and agendas.

But then Mick Barwood from the Militant argued for a Sheffield conference and claimed a hall had already been booked by a Sheffield "strike committee" and leaflets produced. Using this argument he convinced the committee.

Mark was later to find out he had lied. No Sheffield committee had been organising the conference.

All became clear on 14 March. Militant supporters distributed leaflets in London and Sheffield calling for the Sheffield conference. Nobody else had access to the leaflets. Militant had taken control of organising the event — along the lines of their original BLOC proposals.



Palestine: two nations, two states!

The new issue of 'Workers' Liberty', out now, discusses the conflict in the West Bank and Gaza, and carries, for the first time in English, two articles by Trotsky on the socialist approach to disputes between nations.

Also in this issue: a feature on the Crash, Kowalewski on Poland, and debate on Ireland, Scottish nationalism, South Africa and the movies. 90p plus 30p postage from SO, PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA.

Ireland: what's the answer?

OVER THE last few weeks in Northern Ireland, we have had a small-scale demonstration of what Protestant-Catholic civil war would be like.

Catholic people attending a political funeral are attacked by a Protestant with a gun and grenades. Three die. 60 are injured.

That night, a Catholic crowd goes on the rampage, attacking some Protestants.

A week later, at another IRA funeral, two British soldiers are captured, beaten, stripped and lynched.

There have been a number of sectarian attacks, and Protestant paramilitary groups threaten more.

Imagine these events repeated across Northern Ireland where the Catholic and Protestant communities overlap, and you have a situation like Lebanon or Sri Lanka.

The tabloid press reacts to these events with typical irresponsibility. The *Sun's* front page quotes the understandable feelings of the grandmother of one of the soldiers stripped and killed — that the Republicans should be strung up — and makes this its slogan. The *Evening Standard* produces a racist cartoon by 'Jak'.

Last week they praised the bravery of unarmed Republican youths who tackled and captured the gunman who attacked the first funeral. One of those youths was killed. This week they talk of the 'savages' of West Belfast.

It is understandable why people who last week were bombed in Milltown Cemetery, Belfast, might attack and kill two armed men who drive a car, horn blazing, into the funeral cortege. Nevertheless it is undeniable that the killing of the soldiers was peculiarly horrible.

Where does the horror come from? Who is responsible for it? How can full-scale civil war be prevented? What is the solution?

In Ireland people talk about 'the politics of the last atrocity'. This means that public opinion shifts from one side to another after each horror. It shifted against the IRA after Enniskillen last November; it swung towards them after the Protestant attack on the funeral; it is swinging against the Republicans and the Catholics after the lynching of the two soldiers.

The capitalist press has seized on the latest horror to wipe from

EDITORIAL

public memory:

- The cold-blooded killing by the SAS, without charge or trial, of three unarmed Republicans in Gibraltar.

- The Stalker affair — the Government's protection of those in the Northern Ireland police force (the RUC) who ran a killer squad which murdered Republicans and a non-political 17 year old, Michael Teague.

- The proven collaboration between sections of the RUC and Protestant paramilitary killers like the man who attacked the mourners at Milltown Cemetery.

More than that, the labour movement needs to keep the basic facts of the case in mind. These are:

For centuries the Catholics of Ireland were oppressed by the British ruling class. For a hundred years in the 18th century they lived under a system of legal discrimination very similar to South Africa's discriminatory laws against blacks.

Majority

When the majority of the Irish people finally fought to win their freedom from British control, a minority in Ireland — the Protestants — were used by the British ruling class against the majority.

A democratic solution could have allowed the Irish majority and minority to sort out their affairs on the basis of minority rights for the natural Irish minority. But the British ruling class used the minority first as an argument against the idea that the Irish majority should have the independence it wanted, and then as shock troops with guns in their hands to oppose it.

When it proved impossible any longer to resist the demands of the Irish majority, Ireland was partitioned into two states. The Six Counties of Northern Ireland remained with Britain.

This was no clean partition between Catholic nationalists and Protestant Unionists. One in three of the people of the Six Counties were Catholics and nationalists who wanted an independent Ireland. In border areas — Fermanagh, South Tyrone, etc. — where they were the majority, they were kept in the Six Counties by force.

They were a bigger minority of the Six Counties' population than the Protestant-Unionists of all Ireland would have been in a 32-County state.

The Catholics in the Six County state were treated as second-class citizens. They were discriminated against in jobs, housing, and politics. The Protestant majority lived in very great fear of this Catholic minority, which owed allegiance to the other Irish state. A sectarian police force was used to keep Catholics down.

Special police powers, including the right of internment without trial, were used against Catholic nationalists.

In 1967-8, after nearly 50 years of this, the Catholics started a civil rights movement modelled on the movement of the US blacks. They



One of the two soldiers killed on Saturday

met police violence and a strong Orange-Unionist movement in opposition to their demands.

In August 1969 serious Catholic-Protestant fighting broke out in Belfast and Derry, and the British Army was moved onto the streets to 'keep order'. Instead of changing anything fundamental, Britain's then Labour Government tinkered with the system, leaving Catholics still unsatisfied. The IRA military campaign developed from early 1971.

In 1972 Britain abolished local majority rule — it had always been Protestant sectarian rule — in Belfast. Since then Northern Ireland has been ruled from London. Nothing fundamental has changed. The war between Britain and the IRA, and on the ground between the Catholic and Protestant communities, has gone on without interruption ever since.

Catholics feel oppressed, and they are. Protestants fear being an oppressed minority in an all-Ireland Catholic state.

In November 1985 the Dublin and London governments signed the Anglo-Irish Agreement. Dublin would share political responsibility for running Northern Ireland, in an advisory capacity.

In recent months things have increasingly gone wrong for London and Dublin in Northern Ireland. The Stalker affair, London's unresponsiveness to Dublin's demands for change in Northern Ireland's grossly unfair judicial system, and the Gibraltar killings, have generated tensions between the two Governments. Tensions bet-

ween the two communities have grown, and are still growing.

British policy continues to be one of 'holding the ring', and hoping things will one day calm down. But the latest series of killings, 17 years into the British-IRA war, proves once more that no solution is possible within the present Six Counties entity. The Northern Ireland state is artificial and unviable, a beargarden for its two communities.

The solution is to recast the British-Irish state system:

- Unite Ireland on a basis of consistent democracy
- Create autonomous regional government for the Protestant area (and for Catholic pockets within that Protestant-majority area)
- Create a closer link between Britain and Ireland, replacing the old forced links by voluntary and free cooperation
- On the basis of such a political solution, withdraw British troops.

To simply demand troops out now, even without a political solution — as some sections of the left do — is a recipe for bloody sectarian civil war on the Lebanese scale, out of which could only come two Irish states with a different border.

The greatest obscenity and horror of Northern Ireland under British and Irish capitalist rule is that the Protestant and Catholic workers who live in adjoining slums fight each other and fear each other. They suffer a common oppression at the hands of capitalism, but have been unable to unite as a class to do anything about it.

The democratic programme of a free united Ireland with regional autonomy within it is not something socialists offer as advice to the ruling class, in Dublin, in Belfast, or in London. It is a programme on the basis of which Catholic and Protestant workers could unite — the Protestants offering the Catholics help to escape their oppression, and the Catholics offering the Protestant workers guarantees that they will not be oppressed as a permanent minority in a Catholic-dominated Ireland.

The British government presents itself as a force for stability and 'law and order' in Northern Ireland. It is not. It is a force for propping up the unjust and unviable Partition settlement. British Government policy is maintaining and building up the conditions for sectarian civil war.

THE Sun LOTTO Today's lucky numbers Page 7

STRING 'EM UP

SOLDIER'S GRANNY SPEAKS
The whole IRA should be put on an island and have a bomb dropped on them. I can't believe I won't see Derek again

Hysteria

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GRAFFITI

Short supply

The Soviet daily Trud has produced a 'hit parade' of goods in short supply. Basic items such as toothpaste and batteries come at the top of the list, with men's clothing and shoes not far behind — with the textile industry producing just one shirt and 1.5 sets of underwear

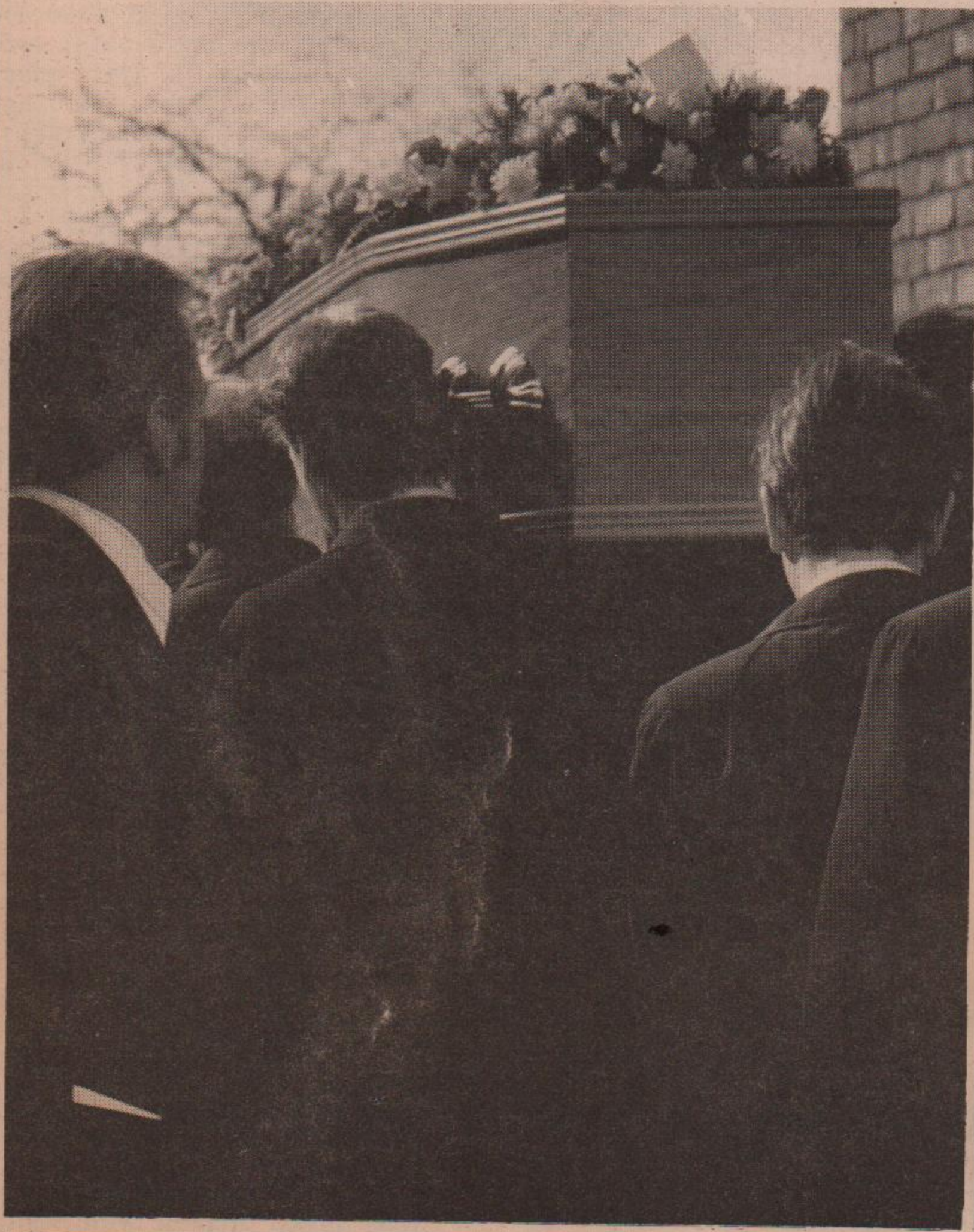
per man a year.

The paper reported: "If a pensioner decides to wait until the clothing industry produces 'his' or 'her' coat, then at current production rates the customer will be waiting for about 50 years."

It seems there is another story being behind

the shortages of toothpaste and sugar.

With Gorbachev's clampdown on vodka, alcoholics are looking for other ways to get their kicks. One is eating toothpaste by the tube. The other is using sugar to make illegal liquor.



Death on the dole

Derek Bainbridge's life on the dole was so intolerable that he killed himself. But he did so outside Downing St, to protest at Tory policies that cause unemployment. His death was symbolic of the fate of millions. His funeral took place in Worksop on 7 March. Photo: Peter Walsh.

Screening survey

Radio 4's "Women's Hour" has just completed a survey into women's opinions on cervical screening.

90% of women are unhappy with the present screening system, with four out of 10 women wanting screening every

year and nine out of ten wanting it at least every 2-3 years.

As many as 50% of all smear tests are inaccurate, but only one out of 100 women is aware of this.

There is still an ele-

ment of reluctance in some women to have smear tests. 50% of the women interviewed said they'd be more willing to have the test if counselling was provided if the test was positive. One quarter of women thought it would hurt.

Evidence points to cervical cancer being caused by a sexually transmitted virus but only one per cent of women questioned were aware of this.

Discrimination

Black applicants are twice as likely to be refused places at medical schools than white candidates. A

government study, to be published later in the year, suggests reforming selection procedures to give black candidates an equal chance.

At present many medical schools do not interview applicants, relying solely on information on application forms. Earlier this year it was discovered that at St. George's Hospital Medical School in London it was common practice for black candidates to be automatically rejected.

High

More on strange ways to get high. British Telecom claim that the main reason for telephone boxes being out of order is people burning the push-buttons to sniff the fumes!

Rolls

Labour-controlled St. Helens council has decided on some extra expenditure this year — £80,000 on a new Rolls Royce Silver Spur for the Lord Mayor. St Helen's council's slogan is "putting the community first."

Revolt in

The nationalist protests in Armenia and Azerbaijan, in the southern USSR, have centred round Armenian demands for a small and mountainous area inside Azerbaijan — Nagorny Karabakh — to be transferred from Azerbaijan and become part of Armenia.

Stan Crooke looks at the history. He finds that Karabakh is 80% Armenian, and its people have a clear history of resistance to Azerbaijani rule. This makes a strong case for supporting self-determination for the people in the area.

There is also, however, a long history of Armenian ill-treatment of the socially less developed Azerbaijanis, and we must be wary of endorsing Armenian chauvinism.

"In the Caucasus it is popularly said that it takes ten Jews to cheat an Armenian, just as in England it is said that it takes that many Jews to cheat a Scotsman," wrote Luigi Villari at the turn of the century. Other Western writers shared Villari's perception of anti-Armenian prejudices.

As one observed:

"The Armenians have two points in common with the Jews: their extreme dispersion, and their general superiority in education, industry and enterprise over the population among whom they live... They have been disliked and feared by their neighbours."

Although most Armenians in the Caucasus lived in poverty (at the close of the nineteenth century, 65% were poor peasants), the Armenian middle classes prospered. Armenians owned a disproportionately large share of the oil-fields, centred on Baku (in Azerbaijan), and also took over entire industries, such as wine-making, fish-processing and tobacco, driving their Azerbaijani competitors out of business.

Similar disproportions existed in the working class. 17.5% of workers in Baku were Armenians, but they held 25% of the skilled jobs.

Tensions erupted in the so-called "Tatar-Crimean War" of 1905. In the year that Russian workers rose up in revolt against the Tsarist autocracy, the Caucasus was rocked by a series of bloody anti-Armenian pogroms, with particularly violent clashes occurring in Baku, Erivan, Nakhichevan, Kazakh, Ganja and Tiflis.

Fighting also occurred in Shusha in Karabakh, in which town the population was evenly divided between Armenians and Tatars. Emboldened by recent blood-letting in Baku, the Tatars attacked the Armenians. But the latter occupied the higher parts of the town and were well-organised. By the end of the fighting, 300 lay dead, of whom two-thirds were Tatars.

Between 1895 and 1920 a million and a half Armenians — about a third of all Armenians in the world — were wiped out as a result of successive massacres in Turkey. After October 1917, many Armenians were prepared to go along with the new Bolshevik government. As the Constitutional Democrat Baikov wrote in his memoirs:



Protest in Armenia

"The Armenians would often say: the Bolsheviks are still Russians, therefore better than Turks."

But communal conflict continued in the Caucasus in the post-revolutionary years, not always helped by the policies pursued by some of the local leading Bolsheviks. In Baku, for example, the Bolsheviks allied with Dashnakists (Armenian nationalists) to defeat an Azerbaijani army (contrary to Lenin's advice that they should temper decisiveness with prudence and "learn diplomacy"). The clash between the Bolshevik forces and their Azerbaijani opponents quickly degenerated into communal conflict.

"Even if a Muslim happened to be a Bolshevik, no quarter was given. The Dashnakists would say: 'We do not recognise any Bolsheviks; once you are a Muslim, that is enough.' They killed whom they pleased... Under the banner of Bolshevism the Dashnakists committed all kinds of atrocities against the Muslims," wrote Marimanov, a Baku Bolshevik.

Conflict also broke out in the Karabakh region, which was under the control of the British forces then operating in the Caucasus. When the British appointed a notorious pan-Turkist landowner as governor of Karabakh, the local people — mostly Armenians — refused to recognise his authority and demanded self-determination. Once the British had defused the

opposition, the governor formed a force of 2,000 "irregulars" and massacred 600 Armenians.

Meanwhile, within Armenia itself (which had become an independent bourgeois republic in 1918) the Armenian government was harsh in its treatment of the Tatar minority. In 1920, after three years of independence during which an estimated 500,000 inhabitants who had fled from Turkey died in the famines, epidemics, and freezing cold, the Armenian Parliament accepted the creation of a Soviet Republic, as demanded by the Red Army, which had just rebuffed a new Turkish invasion.

In a fraternal gesture the already existing Soviet government of Azerbaijan — in which Armenian workers in Baku played a big role — agreed to transfer Karabakh, Nakhichevan and Zangezur to the new Soviet Armenian Republic. In the event, only Zangezur was transferred.

The new Soviet government in Armenia was insensitive towards the local population, expropriating, from rich and poor alike, everything from food and cattle to barbers' shops' appliances, beehives, and musical instruments. The Dashnakists (Armenian nationalists) led an armed uprising, but were defeated.

By the Moscow Treaty of March, 1921, (signed by the Soviet government and Turkey) and the virtually identical Kars Treaty of October 1921 (signed by Armenia, Georgia, Azerbaijan and Turkey), the borders of the new Armenian

Armenia



public were defined. Anxious to maintain the friendship of the Turkish Government (created by a recent revolution, and under pressure from Britain and France) the Soviet government made concessions, a number of which were at the expense of the Armenians.

The regions of Kars and Ardakan were ceded to Turkey. Nakhichevan a pocket of Azerbaijani population on the far side of Armenia — is attached as an administrative unit to the Azerbaijan Soviet Republic, whilst Karabakh was left an Armenian enclave within Soviet Azerbaijan.

The three republics of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia were soon merged into a single Transcaucasian Federation, though not without bitter disputes within the Communist Party. In the debates on the national question in the run-up to the 23rd conference of the Soviet Communist Party, the proposal to form such a federation was singled out as an example of Greater Russian Chauvinism masquerading as socialist opposition to nationalist deviations.

In the early 1920s Bolsheviks such as Narimanov had argued for the creation of autonomous republics in the Caucasus, federated with the rest of the Soviet Union. This position was shared by Lenin and a majority of the Bolshevik Central Committee. Most "veteran" Bolsheviks in the Caucasus, however, opposed such proposals as a repugnant ideological deviation in the direction of nationalism.

As the Stalinist elite emerged as the new rulers of the Soviet Union, the Transcaucasian Federation became the framework within which the local party leadership was purged by the usual methods of the firing squad and Siberian exile. Only after the Stalin constitution of 1936 did Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan again emerge as separate states.

Stalin made Armenia a showcase for the success of "socialist planning" and "enlightened" policies on the national question. The Armenians, unlike the other minority nations, were almost junior partners with the Great Russians in running the USSR.

From 1945 onwards Armenians living abroad were encouraged to return "home", and substantial immigration from Persia, Turkey and the Lebanon did indeed occur, with the Republic's population increasing from 1,320,000 in 1940 to 3,317,000 in 1985. The success of local economic policies (at least as compared with the rest of the Soviet Union) is reflected in the fact that the proportion of families in Armenia owning a motor car and a television is the highest in the Soviet Union.

The memory of the holocaust of 1915 and the continued oppression of Armenians in Turkey has ensured that hostility towards Turkey remains dominant in Armenian nationalism. On the 50th anniversary of the 1915 measures, mass demonstrations in Yerevan, the capital of Armenia, escaped the control of the bureaucracy, with

disturbances continuing into the night. The First Secretary of the local Communist Party was scapegoated and deposed.

The demand for the incorporation of Nakhichevan into Armenia has also remained a source of discontent. Hundreds of Armenians were massacred there in the period 1919-20 by local Azerbaijanis, acting under the orders of Turkish army officers. But today the Armenian population of Nakhichevan is well below 50%.

The more immediate source of contention is Karabakh, where (according to the "Minority Rights Group" report on the Armenians) Armenians are 80% of the population. (Walker, author of "Armenia — the survival of a nation" puts the figure at 85%).

As the Minority Rights Group report points out: "In (Karabakh) Armeno-Azeri inter-communal clashes and riots are not uncommon. The Armenian majority complain bitterly and quite openly about discrimination against them exercised by the Azerbaijan Tatar government in Baku."

The government's principal — and thoroughly inadequate — argument against transfer of Karabakh is that its mountains are used by Azeri shepherds as summer pastures for their flocks.

The more likely reason for refusal to transfer Karabakh from Azerbaijan to Armenia is the fear that this would unleash a series of similar, and more far-reaching, demands throughout the rest of the Soviet Union, possibly leading to its complete break-up.

That the Soviet Union might suffer such a fate as its oppressed nationalities struggle for their rights is of no concern to socialists. What is of concern to socialists is that the struggle for national rights should not result in the creation of new oppressed national minorities.

The Armenians are a people who saw one in three of their number wiped off the face of the earth in the course of a quarter of a century. Despite the relatively better conditions enjoyed by sections of the Armenian community in the Caucasus, under both Tsarism and Stalinism, they remain an oppressed nationality.

At the same time, the existence of Armenian-Azeri communal strife and antagonisms must be recognised, a product of the events of the last hundred years. The Armenians have been victim of communal persecution but have also paid back their opponents "in their own coin".

A regulation of such inter-communal antagonisms cannot be achieved "from above". The creation of the Transcaucasian Federation by a Communist Party which had not yet undergone a Stalinist degeneration is evidence of this. And in any case, what is today "above" the oppressed nationalities of the Soviet Union is the Stalinist bureaucracy, which is inherently incapable of resolving the national question on a democratic basis.

Socialists should therefore support transfer of Karabakh (but not Nakhichevan) to the Armenian Republic, whilst at the same time striving to ensure that this does not lead to any oppression of the minority Azeri population of Karabakh.

To win full democratic rights for all the oppressed peoples of the Soviet Union, and the replacement of communal antagonisms by peaceful mutual self-respect, the workers will have to overthrow the Stalinist rule which perpetuates such communal and national divisions and antagonisms.

Ford and the AEU

On Monday evening the TUC narrowly voted to support the AEU's attempt to get a single-union deal at the proposed new Ford plant in Dundee. This deal would break up the national union negotiating structure in Ford's UK plants, but the TUC was desperate to persuade Ford bosses in Detroit to reverse their decision to pull out.

The TUC decision came after days of public pressure from Tory ministers and from trade union and Labour leaders for the TGWU and MSF (TASS-ASTMS) to back down on their opposition to the deal.

Alex Glasgow explains the issues behind the row.

The recent decision by Ford Motor Company to drop plans to set up a plant in Dundee, allegedly due to inter-union wrangling involving the Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU) and the Amalgamated Engineering Union (AEU) has led to many bitter accusations mostly about the behaviour of the TGWU.

The plant would have created 450 jobs directly and another 500 jobs through a knock-on effect on the local economy. Trade unions are now under attack for supposedly being responsible for the loss of these jobs.

Scottish Secretary of State Malcolm Rifkind has talked of "extraordinary trade union neanderthal attitudes" while Scottish Industry minister Ian Laing has referred to trade union leaders as "bone-headed prehistoric monsters". Such insults are pretty cheap coming from Tories who have supported and implemented policies which have cost workers both in Scotland and elsewhere tens of thousands of jobs.

Attempts to scapegoat the TGWU for Ford's decision to pull-out of Dundee do not tally with the facts.

The TGWU was in dispute with the AEU both at the latter's attempt to stitch-up a single union no-strike deal with Ford in breach of the Blue Book national agreement (a multi-union agreement that governs pay and working conditions at Ford's 22 plants in Britain).

Ford and the AEU claimed that the Blue Book should not apply in Dundee as the plant was to be part of the Ford electrical and electronics division (EED) rather than part of Ford of Britain. But three of the existing Ford plants in Britain are in the EED and covered by the Blue Book. Why should Dundee be any different?

The reason is that if the Dundee plant was covered by the Blue Book, then it would have to have wages in line with the car industry rather than those prevalent in the electronics industry. The former are up to 50% higher than the latter.

Ford's announcement to pull-out of Dundee came only a week after the TUC General Secretary Norman Willis had met the Ford EED management in the USA and been told that there was no deadline for reaching an agreement with the unions and that no decisions would be taken without further consultations with the unions involved.

At the same time the TGWU had announced that it was prepared to make a number of concessions and the TUC had postponed proceedings with union complaints against the AEU. The Scottish TUC had also arranged a meeting to work out a "compromise" solution.

So why did Ford pull out just when the trade unions were on the verge of reaching agreement? The timing of the announcement strengthens the argument that Ford's real concern in the affair was to destabilise union agreements elsewhere in Britain through establishing a single-union low-pay bridgehead in Dundee.

A further fact behind the Ford decision was the recent strike by Ford workers in Britain. Although it could have won far more than it did the concessions forced out of Ford led the top Ford management to fear that the Dundee plant's workforce might not be as docile as had been hoped (courtesy of the AEU).

Even AEU officials accept this as a fact behind the Ford decision. Do those who now condemn the TGWU also condemn Ford workers for going on strike in defence of their living standards and working conditions?

The TGWU were trying to defend trade union rights, rates of pay and working conditions. As bureaucrats they inevitably attempted to do so in negotiations behind closed doors rather than through campaigning in public to clarify the issues involved. And as bureaucrats, they were prepared to make major concessions to fix up a deal.

The role of AEU leaders such as Gavin Laird in the affair is very different. Laird in a personal capacity is a member of the Scottish Development Agency (SDA) which won Ford over to setting up its plant in Dundee. Aware of Ford's plans through his membership of SDA, Laird struck his single-union no strike agreement with Ford before the project had even been publicly announced.

This is the trade union equivalent of 'insider-dealing' in the Stock Market. In reaching agreement with Ford Laird was prepared to trample basic trade union principles underfoot — poaching on other unions' territory, selling out the right to strike and undercutting rates of pay elsewhere in Ford's UK operations. Hardly surprisingly Laird is now the Tories' hero and the hero of every other enemy of the trade union movement — and rightly so.

At the end of the day, the basic question is whether trade unions should accept jobs at any price. The answer must be no. If Ford (with the assistance of the AEU leaders) had got its way, rates of pay in the combine would have been dragged down and trade union organisation weakened — and the ability of Ford management to axe jobs through work speed-ups would consequently have been strengthened.

The TGWU officials are certainly not beyond criticism. They too operated behind closed doors rather than explaining and winning support for their stand in public. They also seem to have been prepared to make far reaching concessions to management. Even so, in contrast to Laird, they still managed to retain a commitment to some basic trade union principles.

Workers' Liberty 88 will take place in London, 2-3 July

Special courses on:
• The national question

• Party and class
• Workers in Eastern Europe

There will also be an Introducing Marxism series for those new to socialism.

More details from Mark Osborn, PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA.

Workers' Liberty 88



summer school

A Communnard's tale

Belinda Weaver reviews 'Babette's Feast'.

'Babette's Feast' provides all the pleasures of a finely worked out story. Everything that happens forms an important piece of the tale; nothing is arbitrarily included. The camera focuses on the people who'll be central to the story, and lingers on them, so that we have time to get used to them.

The writer, Karen Blixen, perfected her stories over years of rewriting and retelling, and the film makers have done her justice. It's a polished, finished work of art with a positive message that radiates from the unfolding of the tale.

It concerns two beautiful sisters, Martina and Philippa, who grew up in remote rural Jutland in Denmark, in the middle of the last century. Their father is an austere preacher; he keeps his daughters close to his side. Both are loved by men who have come from the great world outside their tiny village but the sisters turn these admirers away.

Not without some struggle, both run from the emotions these men have stirred up, and turn their energies into good works and keeping their father's religious circle going after his death.

They live, as sheltered and as cloistered as nuns, doing good works, till the world breaks in again in 1871. In a flurry of rain and driving winds, Babette arrives from France, a refugee from the struggle of the Communnards to set up the world's first socialist regime. Babette has lost her husband and children; she is destitute.

The sisters take her in, and Babette serves them faithfully, and for nothing beyond her keep, for fourteen years. She waits on the sisters and their brethren but she never shares their faith.

Then Babette wins the lottery and decides to share her bounty with the sisters who took her in, and their brethren by preparing a dinner to commemorate the ceremony of the sisters' father's birth.

The sisters are appalled when the supplies for the feast begin to arrive from France. There are quails and a turtle, but worst of all — wine! The brethren miserably decide to sit through it all, all the while pretending there is nothing out of the way in it.

This could hardly be bearable for us, were we not provided with at least one keen appreciator of what turns out to be Babette's phenomenal art as a chef. Her strivings win one guest's surprised and delighted admiration.

As he dismisses his quail, he remembers eating the dish on one memorable night in Paris, with a General Gallifet, who so admired it that he swore he would no longer die for love of any woman, but would surely die for the work of the chef.

We know already that Gallifet was the tyrant who murdered Babette's husband and children, and who nearly took her life too. We realise also that Babette must have been that chef. So Gallifet's words meant nothing. When it came to suppressing the revolutionary workers of the Paris Commune, Gallifet showed no mercy — not even to so great an artist as Babette.

Babette's dinner has a great success. It reconciles the quarrels and resentments within the small group. Even the stars seem brighter after they have eaten Babette's cooking. The group leave happy, arm in arm, full of good feeling and brotherhood. Even the sisters, so long sheltered, seem alive to the possibilities in life. Life is no longer frightening or threatening, but beautiful and full of hope.

The sisters have had comfort in



The Paris Commune

their faith, but they have had little joy. Because they feared the flesh, they tried to suppress it in their lives and find happiness only through doing good. But the people they helped were different. They praised God for the sisters' good works, but they praised God too for sending Babette with her magical gifts.

For Babette, her joy is in giving happiness to those who helped her, and giving it the best way she knows — through her art. Babette's own life may be ever blighted by the loss of her loved ones, but she believes in life, and in the importance of happiness.

What she shows is that there is nothing to be gained from repressing the senses; rather that there is everything to be gained by not repressing them, by being open to life and life's gifts. Babette experiences poignant happiness in practising her art again. In sniffing her Clos de Vougeot, she is taking in all the fragrance of the life she left behind.

The art of a chef in a luxury restaurant is not very democratic. Karen Blixen did not address this question; but then she was an aristocratic rebel against capitalist society, not a socialist. It's a satisfactory film, full of small, telling details that build up a rich picture. It's nice to see a film that says that happiness is our birthright.

In fighting with the Communnards, Babette was fighting for a fair life for all, for the right of people to happiness. Though she was beaten, she didn't lose her faith, and she tried to pass it on.

TV

Place of safety

By Mick Ackersley

'Place of Safety' (ITV, Monday 14 March) was — almost openly — about the Cleveland child sexual abuse case.

According to the TV critic of the Guardian, it ended, maybe, with a faint hint of a possibility that the father might have assaulted his own two children. But that wasn't how it struck me at all.

The only time in the play when it seemed to me that you might be intended to think him guilty was when he seemed completely uninterested in finding out whether or not his second child had also been assaulted.

For the rest it was a powerful and straightforward story of a family whose children are taken into care after doctors decide that they have been assaulted, "probably" by their father.

The father at the end leaves home after a third child is born, telling his wife to tell the social services whatever they want to hear, so that they'll allow the mother and the children to be together again.

This was a polemic from the

Stuart Bell camp in the Cleveland case. Shuan Prendergast gave a very good and moving performance as the father who is wrongly accused. To be so accused must be horrible beyond belief.

The play underlined the need for better procedures than those which allow far-reaching decisions to be taken by social services workers on the presumption of a parent's "probable" guilt and with no right of appeal.

But it laid it on with a trowel. For example, the children are taken away in the middle of the night. Everything was presented in terms of a hostile and perhaps malevolent "them" picking on innocent people, almost as if there wasn't a massive problem of undetected child sexual abuse.

There is. And the Cleveland case called forth a storm of hostility against those who — too zealously and recklessly it seems — tried to do something about it.

That episode has probably set back by years the battle to end what is perhaps the greatest single outrage in British society — something going on all about us right now. This effective and moving play is unfortunately part of the backlash.

Les Hearn's
SCIENCE COLUMN

Old nuclear reactors for sale (one careless owner...)

What do you do with a redundant nuclear reactor? The hundreds of tonnes of concrete, steel, graphite, etc., are all radioactive, some very highly so, and need to be safely dismantled and disposed of.

But what is the safest way of dismantling a reactor? No radioactive materials must escape. And will these materials have been altered by 20 years or more of bombardment with radiation? No one knows at the moment but the Central Electricity Generating Board is funding research to find out.

This research is progressing well, but, nevertheless, the CEGB is to withdraw funding as a cost-cutting measure. This is a direct result of Tory minister Cecil Parkinson's demand that the CEGB increase its rate of return on investment, making it more attractive to buyers when it is privatised.

This apparently short-sighted move may be an attempt to sabotage electricity privatisation. The many Magnox and Advanced Gas-Cooled Reactors in Britain will eventually have to be decommissioned (shut down and dismantled). Estimates of the costs of this just for the older Magnox reactors range from £2 to £2½ billion.

At present, the sites of redundant reactors will have a negative value — they could not even be given away, as one energy consultant put it. He believes the government will have to underwrite the costs of decommissioning. Otherwise, it would be extremely difficult to attract investors.

In fact, despite their stated intention, the Tories might be forced to keep the nuclear industry in state hands. They have a political stake in nuclear power whereas private investors have an interest in making money. This latter point explains the abrupt halt in the growth of the US nuclear industry after the accident and near melt-down at Three Mile Island.

The CEGB's decision to drop decommissioning research will make its nuclear side even less attractive to investors. After all, the knowledge cannot just be bought from other countries. Britain's reactors are different from those abroad. Will the government now take on the nuclear industry, passing on the bill for the costly mistake of nuclear power to us?

Hotrocks on

Good news now about safe nuclear power. I refer to the experimental geothermal ('hot rocks') scheme in Cornwall. The principle of the scheme is this. There is a considerable amount of heat inside the Earth, generated by the decay of radioactive elements naturally present. This heat keeps the Earth's core molten and makes the rocks nearer the surface quite hot.

The Cornwall scheme is a way of tapping that heat. Holes are drilled 1-2 km deep and explosives detonated to crack the rocks. Water is pumped down one hole, heated as it percolates through the cracks, and then emerges through another hole.

At present, water at 60°C is being produced. This could be used for heating homes. Planned deeper holes could provide water at 200°C, enough to generate electricity.

The Cornish hot rocks are nearer the surface than average, so the heat is more easily obtained. But it should be possible to extract geothermal energy elsewhere in Britain, giving a virtually endless supply of energy.

The good news? The government has reversed a previous decision and will continue to fund the scheme, after all.

A victory for rank and file organisation

By Alan Fraser

On the 7-10 March, Basingstoke postal workers scored a clear victory in a four-day strike.

They walked out on Monday 7 March at midnight, in protest over management breaking a long-standing training agreement.

The 40-odd night crew picketed all night, and after a mass meeting in the morning were joined by the early crew. The strike call was initially for 24 hours. However, it soon escalated.

The training agreement broken by management was seen by the members as the thin end of the wedge of local and national attacks on workers' rights and conditions.

The agreement was made in the early 1980s to ensure new recruits received de-

cent training and said that recruits would be limited to six in every three weeks to ensure this.

On Monday 7th, management decided that they would disregard the agreement and recruit as many new entrants as they wished. New postal workers would be thrown in at the deep end without proper training.

The local leadership and rank and file dug their heels in and demanded that management stuck by the local agreement. The picket line was heavily supported, and mass meetings were organised on a daily basis.

The UCW Executive Committee responded by sending a regional official. On arrival with the usual brief — "it is my job to get you back to work, lads" — he cobbled a deal which would have meant giving in to management's demands with a few concessions. At the mass meeting the rank and file gave him

a torrid time, and after a verbal mauling he scuttled off, never to be seen again.

On Wednesday the members faced another official sent by the Executive. The strike was solid — 317 out, six scabbing. The new official adopted the same line.

By this time the members had decided to elect two rank-and-filers in rotation to accompany local and national negotiators in any further talks. They also stuck to their original demands.

The second Executive Committee official went the same way as the other. The rank and file were in no mood for compromise, and rejected the second deal.

The strike committee then began to lay plans to escalate the action — sending delegations to other offices in the region, and looking for local support from other trade unionists.

On the Thursday, the fourth day of the strike, management knew they were in for a fight and posted — yes, posted! — every striker a letter asking them to return to work. The response by late afternoon was 200 on the picket line.

By this time another executive committee official had arrived, with the same grey suit as the others and, of course, the usual line — "It's my job to get you back to work, lads". By 7.00 p.m. there were 317 on the picket line. When the mass meeting got under way it was clear that management had crumbled. The agreement was reinstated, and they gave a couple of other concessions.

A clear victory had been achieved. The members were jubilant. When the EC official tried to take the credit for striking up an agreement he was told to get back to London. The strikers had won a great victory in taking on both management and the EC.

The early initiative in strike organisation had helped consolidate the action. The two rank-and-filers on the negotiating team helped generate confidence and solidarity and put the bureaucrats under pressure.

The lessons are there. A determined, well-organised local leadership and a rank and file prepared to fight can beat off management's attacks.

This point should not be lost by the EC. But judging from their previous track record, UCW members cannot rely on them to fight. What is needed is a coordinated campaign of action by UCW militants right across the union.

The strike at Basingstoke shows the way forward. UCW members, despite the recent sell-out over the shorter working week, are still willing to fight back. The management and the bureaucracy can be beaten. The task is to organise and mobilise that fight now.

Rover

Full-time officials undermine dispute

By Jim Denham

AS THE Land Rover pay strike enters its fifth week, full-time union officials have emerged from talks at ACAS recommending a return to work.

The exact details of the deal are not known as we go to press, but it seems certain that it involves consolidation of existing bonus payments and no new money. If this deal is accepted by the strikers, it will not be a crushing defeat. But it will be a poor outcome after five weeks on strike, especially as the action remains 99% solid.

A series of management-inspired 'back to work' initiatives and inducements like free company cars for scabs have all failed miserably. Only about 60 out of 6000 hourly-paid workers have crossed the picket lines. The first back-to-work 'mass' attracted only 30 potential scabs, while the second, this Monday, 21st, was dispersed by police after the owners of the hotel car park it was being held on complained because no-one had asked their permission!

A member of the Land Rover strike committee spoke to SO about the present situation and some of the problems: "Some of us have

been arguing all along for regular mass meetings of strikers, but these have not been held so far. As a result, if we were to hold a mass meeting now, it could easily be portrayed as a climbdown and a first step towards a return to work.

I still think if the strike is to continue that we will need mass meetings to keep the membership involved, to counter management

propaganda, and to maximise rank and file involvement in picketing and so forth. But we would now have to think very carefully about how the meeting was called to make it clear that our aim was to build the strike and not call it off.

Also, the strike committee — which is a sort of sub-committee of the Joint Shop Stewards — must take a firmer line in running the

dispute. We allowed the full-time officials to go over our heads and publicly agree to limit the pickets to six per gate. In fact we have been able to get around this to some extent by describing extra pickets as 'demonstrators' who are 'supporting' the six official pickets, and we still had several hundred out this Monday.

But it would have been much better to have simply told the company to go hang, and openly call for mass picketing of the gates. If that had been done, I don't think we would have had even the small amount of scabbing we have had.

Management have been pulling out all the stops over the last couple of weeks to build a back-to-work movement. We have been so tied up in countering this and keeping the strike solid at Solihull — which obviously we had to do — that we have perhaps neglected other important activities, like going out to the docks.

Southampton dockers are blacking Land Rover products, which is brilliant. But that was the result of a phone call. To get a complete blacking at the docks, we need to send out delegations. There is no substitute for personal contact.

CPSA

Action against YTS

As part of its action against the imposition of YTS into the Department of Employment, Merseyside was targeted by the CPSA for one week's action last week.

Selected offices were balloted and the response was good.

The CPSA conference decision is to oppose YTS in the Civil Service, and quite rightly.

But the predominantly Militant-run national executive of the CPSA have now accepted the idea of YTS being introduced, albeit with the safeguards of wages top-up and guaranteed jobs at the end of the 'training' period.

Other Civil Service departments must be brought into this dispute now. YTS in the Department of Employment is only a part of a massive attack on the

Civil Service which is now taking place. We must link this struggle to the threat of privatisation, the London compulsory transfer dispute, recruitment of casuals and the loss of thousands of jobs in the DHSS.

WHEATON'S WEEK



UDM backs closure

Two weeks ago the Coal Board announced two more pit closures, South Kirkby in Yorkshire and Mansfield in Nottinghamshire. The Mansfield decision shook a lot of people because it was supposedly a safe pit. The UDM is strong at the colliery.

The thing was well illustrated by a Central TV programme my son described to me. They were interviewing miners coming out of Mansfield colliery, when one of the miners turned round and said: "If somebody had come and told us this four years ago we would not have believed them." My son yelled at the TV screen: "But somebody did tell you!"

The NUM did not take part in the ballot at Mansfield colliery which was overwhelmingly in favour of accepting closure. The UDM leadership were recommending that. It is not our policy to take part in shutting pits — we leave that to the UDM. It is one of our smaller pits, where the NUM membership is about 70. So even if we had voted it would have made no difference.

We are already preparing material aimed at the UDM members and appealing to them to rejoin the NUM. The message is simple — only if we are in one union will we be able in any way to fight against the attacks both now and in the future; to deal with the major battles coming up.

It is not only Mansfield colliery. At Cotgrave, where NUM and UDM members came out together 2 weeks ago, the pit manager has sent out a letter to each worker demanding they raise production to 27,000 tonnes a week or look for work elsewhere.

At Thoresby, there was a strike last week and one of the NUM branch officials was suspended. At Harworth, where the UDM struck, the manager has sent letters to every man saying toe the line or else.

With that kind of message coming through, and the UDM leadership telling its members not to strike, hopefully many more UDM members will start to come over to us. But that will also need a coordinated campaign from us.

Paul Whetton is a member of Bevercotes NUM, Notts.

CPSA

Strike in DE

By Ray Ferris

London members of the Civil and Public Services Association (CPSA) in the Department of Employment (DE) are balloting this week for all-out indefinite strike from Monday.

The dispute began 14 weeks ago at the Camden A Unemployment Benefit Office (UBO) and has massively escalated since.

Management sacked 18 casuals in four different Jobcentres and then tried to force workers in UBOs to transfer to the now chronically understaffed Jobcentres. Those who refused to go were threatened with the sack.

It spilled over into DHSS offices

when workers who refused strikers' work were threatened with suspension. 32 offices are out already, 25 UBOs and 7 DHSS offices.

Management are intransigent. They refuse to accept the strikers' demands of no compulsory transfers and no cuts in staff. Both sides are fully aware of the national implications of the dispute for civil service staffing.

While the Broad Left '84 section leadership play dead, initiatives are coming from the rank and file strikers who have formed a joint UBO/Jobcentre strike committee.

Messages of support and money should be sent c/o Phil John, 7 Fowler House, South Grove, London N15. Cheques to CPSA Fighting Fund, North London Dispute.

ACTIVISTS' DIARY

Wednesday 23 March.

Edinburgh SO meeting, 'Organise the Left!' 7.30, Windsor Buffet, Leith Walk.

Friday 25 March. University College London: 'The politics of Socialist Organiser'. Speaker: John O'Mahony. 1.30, UCL.

Tuesday 29 March. Northampton SO meeting.

'Ireland: what's the answer?' Speaker: Lynn Ferguson. 7.30, Guild Hall.

Monday 4 April. CND demonstration: 'Stop Trident, Encircle the Base'. From 12 noon at Aldermaston, Berkshire.

Saturday-Sunday 16-17 April. North London

Socialist Conference, at North London Polytechnic, Holloway Rd, London N7.

Friday 22 April. York SO meeting, 'The Labour Party'. Speaker: Mark Osborn. 7.30.

Wednesday 27 April. Preston SO meeting. 'How to unite Jewish and Arab workers'. 2pm, Lancs Poly.

Thursday 28 April. Colchester SO meeting. 'Socialists and the Labour Party'. Speaker: John O'Mahony. 7.30, Essex University.

Wednesday 4 May. Canterbury SO debate: 'Which way forward in Palestine?' Speakers from SO (Clive Bradley) and other tendencies. 2pm.

For further details of SO meetings, contact 01-639 7965.

Health

The way to win

From page 12

For instance, in Edinburgh the threat to withdraw emergency cover forced management to back down, send a privatisation efficiency team home, and withdraw all threats of dismissal made to pickets who had blockaded the efficiency team.

At a local level stewards and activists should push for the maximum possible action over the big issues in each hospital. That way we can keep up the momentum.

Unite the struggles

The experience of the Manchester nurses, the blood transfusion workers and Edinburgh Royal Infirmary all show that local small-scale battles can be won and that they do boost confidence.

For instance, in Edinburgh the threat to withdraw emergency cover forced management to back down, send a privatisation efficiency team home, and withdraw all threats of dismissal made to pickets who had blockaded the efficiency team.

At a local level stewards and activists should push for the maximum possible action over the big issues in each hospital. That way we can keep up the momentum.

Unite the struggles

The TUC and health union leaders are not even campaigning strongly for their own policies on the NHS. We need a clear set of demands to unite the struggles.

*Support the health unions' demand for a 20% wage increase for nurses.

*For a £70 across-the-board in-

crease in all health workers' wages and a minimum wage of £150 a week.

*Demand money to meet all pay increases. Wage increases must not be paid for with cuts in other areas of health service spending.

*Demand money to meet all costs increases, to deal with new diseases like AIDS and all new technological advances.

*Take the money from the rich! Trident will cost as much as building 550 new hospitals. Before last October's crash, shareholders were coining gains at twice the rate of the entire NHS budget. Tory tax cuts for the rich amount to more than the whole NHS hospitals budget.

*No privatisation. Renationalisation of all privatised ancillary services.

*No charges on glasses, drugs and dental care.

*No two-tier health service.

Labour must campaign

The "new realists" in the labour movement say strikes are outdated. They are wrong. A few days of NHS workers' strikes have brought the issue of NHS cuts forward as years of polite protests, carefully-researched reports and general propaganda could not.

But the strikes do need to be backed up by political campaigning and a drive to explain the issues — and the 'new realists' aren't even doing that.

The Labour Party leaders should organise a great campaign of protests — demonstrations, leafleting, pickets, lobbies, stunts — across the country in defence of the NHS.

SOCIALIST ORGANISER

Stop SAS death squads!



Striking on 14 March. Photo: Ian Swindale

NHS: THE WAY TO WIN

Last week's strikes by health workers and others have shown our anger over the cuts in the NHS and the Tories' budget handouts to the rich.

It is vital that the campaign to defend the NHS is not allowed to wind down after 15 March.

Thatcher has been hoping that the present wave of anger will disappear of its own accord and she will then be allowed to get on with the business of breaking up the NHS, smashing the health unions and creating a two-tier service.

By failing to build on the militancy shown on 14 March, the TUC and the health union leaders are helping Thatcher to weather the storm.

Neither the TUC nor the health union leaders have mapped out how we are going to take the campaign forward after the strike on the 14th and 15th and the great turnout for the TUC demonstration on the 5th. At best they talk about a campaign continuing through to the Autumn (or until the members get worn out?)

Socialists and rank and file health workers need to combine demands for a motion on the TUC and national officials with consistent and serious organising of the base.

The TUC must call a one-day general strike.

The response to the various days of action around the country shows quite clearly that other groups of workers are prepared to strike to defend the NHS. Even workers who lack the confidence to come out for

themselves will strike for the NHS.

The NHS is Thatcher's weakest point. The vast majority of working people need the NHS. They know the NHS is in crisis and they want to do something about it. A clear lead from the TUC could focus this anger.

But if the TUC ducks out of a fight, Thatcher will not only win, she will be immensely strengthened as well. It will be that much easier for the Tories to proceed with all their other attacks — the poll tax, Clause 28, abolition of ILEA, etc.

The labour movement will have surrendered on the one issue which has the greatest potential for uniting and mobilising our side and dividing and weakening the Tories.

The TUC should name the day for a one-day general strike in defence of the NHS and in support of the health workers.

A clear call from the leaders of the official movement would get an overwhelming response. For every worker who has so far been prepared to take solidarity action there would be hundreds.

Official TUC backing would also make the employers and the govern-

ment a lot less willing to use the anti-union laws against solidarity action.

For an indefinite strike with emergency cover.

The movement in defence of the NHS has been a movement from the bottom up. As a result it has both strengths and weaknesses.

There is a big gap between the most militant hospitals and areas and the less militant. That situation could be rapidly transformed if the national health service unions gave a decisive lead. The TUC health service committee should name a day to begin indefinite strike action in the NHS — with emergency cover.

A clear national call and a period of preparation, including mass meetings, to organise to make that call effective could mobilise those health workers who still lack confidence.

The alternative to coordinated, united all-out national action is to allow the dispute to fall apart with dribs and drabs of local, stop-go, days of action. There must be no repeat of 1982 when the militancy over the 12% claim was wasted by the union leaders who refused to

argue or campaign seriously for all-out action with emergency cover.

With the health workers out and committed to staying out it would make it that much easier to get over the arguments for solidarity to other workers.

For a national stewards' conference

Stewards up and down the country can see the need for a national shop stewards' conference to link together the activists and provide a forum to work out and debate the kind of strategy needed to make the dispute move forward.

The conference in Sheffield on 26 March must be built to help provide such a forum. It must be a working conference, not a rally, in which health workers can exchange experiences and plan action.

The aim of a stewards' conference is not magically to create an alternative leadership to that of the official health unions. Rather, a national shop stewards' conference would be a step along the road of building a national network of health shop stewards. Such a body would be able to exert real pressure on the union officials. It would also be able to form a realistic picture of what kind of action could be called without official backing.

Build the action

The experience of the Manchester nurses, the blood transfusion workers and Edinburgh Royal Infirmary all show that local small-scale battles can be won and that they do boost confidence.

Turn to page 11

By Eric Heffer MP

The press started off suggesting that I was on my own in protesting at the Gibraltar killings. I am not. There is a large body of opinion on this matter, and that is shown by the signatures on my early day motion in Parliament.

We are in no way endorsing terrorist bombing attacks. They are counter-productive to the cause of the Irish people anyway. But we have got to point out that if the SAS can be used in this way against the Irish Provisionals, they can be used against other people.

It is a first step towards the kind of death squads that were set up in Argentina and elsewhere in Latin America. It is a fundamental question. You can't agree to state terrorism of this kind.

In Uruguay they used state terrorism first against the Tupamaros, but they did not stop at that. The military took total power and established a dictatorship, though it had been one of the most democratic countries in Latin America.

It is difficult to say exactly how the establishment see the Gibraltar shootings. Perhaps they just see it in terms of dealing with the IRA. But it is the thin end of the wedge.

It fits in with the Stalker affair. People were shot dead without a trial. That is what the labour movement must focus on.

They claim to have followed the IRA team for months. If they did that, and allowed them to prepare and perhaps bring bombs in, then why did they not arrest them when they came across the border? It did not serve their purposes, that's all.

Constituency Labour Parties should send resolutions to the National Executive.

Our fighting fund

We need £969 in the last week of March to reach our target of £10,000.

Money raised since January stands at £9031.04. Several supporters have sent us the equivalent of one day's pay out of this month's wages, and Ross Catlin has sent £50 from Canada.

Many thanks to all those who have sent money. Rush the last £969 to SO, PO Box 823, London, SE15 4NA.

Apology

Sorry we didn't have an issue last week. We had a catastrophic series of breakdowns on our typesetting equipment, which forced us to abandon production at a late stage.

WOMEN'S FIGHTBACK

AFTER ALTON

A conference on Women's Liberation and Socialism into the 1990s.

VICTORY TO THE HEALTH WORKERS!

Two months ago 30 nurses began to turn the tide against Thatcher. They went on strike.

Other groups of health workers across the country followed suit.

The NHS is in crisis. Hospitals are functioning on a skeleton staff, with many nurses effectively working compulsory overtime. Wards lie empty because there is no money to run them while people are turned away from hospital. Doctors estimate that 8 people a day die as a result of the cuts.

The budget only confirmed what the Government had already made clear — it is more interested in tax cuts for the rich than in providing decent health care. The Tories have a deliberate policy of running down the NHS, encouraging people to take out private health insurance.

The health cuts affect us all. The health workers' fight is our fight. Busworkers, firefighters, local authority workers and civil servants have taken action in support of health workers.

The health workers must win. Our job is to commit our trade unions, and Labour Party branches to support the action. In particular, we should make our Labour Party women's sections central in building support, working with health workers in our own areas to fight hospital and ward closures.

The health workers can win — with solidarity. Support the health workers!



By Lynn Ferguson

It is ten years since the last ever conference of the women's liberation movement, ten years since the women's liberation movement disintegrated through demoralization and the strain of internal differences.

Women have continued to fight back. The NHS disputes, the campaign against Alton, Women Against Pit Closures, and hundreds of smaller more localised campaigns have shown that. But all these campaigns have been defensive, have been responding to attacks launched against women.

Needs

Women will soon make up half the workforce. But the labour movement is still on the whole unresponsive to the needs of women. Not only are "women's issues" still seen as marginal not "real" politics, but union structures still serve to exclude women from participation.

Inroads have been made. Women have been organising in some unions and in the Labour Party. Unions like the Transport and General Workers, and GMB have launched glossy campaigns in an attempt to win women members.

We need to regroup and reorganise. We need a new women's movement — but a movement of a different type.

Women have achieved a measure of formal equality under capitalism. For professional women, middle class women, women managers, real change has taken place. But working class women's lot is still the same — low paid, low status jobs, domestic drudgery, inadequate childcare provision.

Capitalism

Women's oppression is central to capitalism. Capitalism relies on women's unpaid labour in the home, women's cheap labour in the workplace. We need to fight not just for immediate demands but to change society. The women's movement we need is a working class women's movement. A movement like Women Against Pit Closures, but seeking to involve the mass of working class women, fighting on all the issues which affect us.

A conference 'After Alton' will take place on April 23rd to discuss the issues facing women today and how we can set about building such a movement — a movement which takes on not only the bosses and the state, but sexist prejudice in the labour movement. Come to the conference, join us in building a movement which can really fight for women's liberation!

Discussions include:

- Pornography: should it be banned?
- The fight against NHS cuts
- Sexual harassment at work
- How to build a campaigning women's section.

At Caxton House, 129 St John's Way, London N19.
On Saturday 23 April, from 10am to 4.30pm.
Tickets: £5 waged, £2 unwaged.
Food and crèche available.
Contact: Lynn Ferguson, c/o 12A Canonbury St, London N1 2TD.

Abortion: what to fight for

The Alton Bill is the biggest legislative attack on women's abortion rights since the 1967 Act came into force.

But in many parts of the country, women have never had the full benefit of the 1967 Act. Now, as the health cuts really begin to bite, the situation is worsening.

The 1967 Abortion Act did not put a statutory obligation on Area Health Authorities to provide abortion facilities. This has meant vast irregularities in provision between Areas. In Birmingham, for example, it is well nigh impossible to get an abortion on the NHS. It also means that abortion facilities are badly planned, and the first to be cut.

By Lynn Ferguson

Already 55 per cent of abortions are carried out in the profiteering private sector. An early abortion costs around £150, rising to as much as £300 for an abortion after 24 weeks. The health cuts mean that even more women are being forced into the private clinics.

In Hackney no NHS abortions are now performed after 12 weeks. Brent District Health Authority is considering ending a contract with the Pregnancy Advisory Service which provides a daycare abortion service in the NHS.

In Islington the only hospital in the area which provides a daycare

abortion centre is due to close in 1991.

After Alton, whether or not the Bill is defeated, we will have to fight for facilities in our own areas. That means:

*A statutory obligation on Area Health Authorities to provide beds and facilities for abortions.

*Abortion patients should not be put in wards with women who have just given birth, had miscarriages, or who are having fertility treatment.

*Proper counselling must be available for all women, before and after abortion, if they want it.

*All private clinics to be brought under the control of the NHS.

*A move towards daycare abortion provision, to provide earlier, safer abortion.

Labour Party

Defend Mandy Mudd!

Mandy Mudd is a member of Tottenham Labour Party. She has been charged with "a sustained course of conduct prejudicial to the party" — a charge which could lead to her expulsion from the Party.

Mandy's crime? Organising resistance to the cuts. Mandy is a prominent member of Haringey Fights Back — a group which co-ordinates opposition to local government cuts in Haringey.

The right wing in Haringey have used all the classic smear tactics against Mandy. She has been accused of threatening behaviour, disruption, and organising violence at a lobby of Haringey's Local Government Committee.

Mandy has not only be subjected to a witch-hunt in the party, but also in the press. Mandy's name was given to the press by the Labour Party as someone facing disciplinary action.

This gave license to right-wing local rags and the sexist hacks of the Sun to institute a smear campaign against Mandy, to muckrake about her past, and to personally harass her.

Mandy says of the Party's action "not only could the press categorise me as a 'loony left' but as a fat woman".

MODEL RESOLUTION

We condemn the decision of the NEC to refer the "case" of Mandy Mudd to the National Constitutional Committee. This is clearly part of a widespread and growing witch-hunt against socialists in the Party, and their right to hold views contrary to the leadership and to organise and campaign around those views.

Mandy Mudd has consistently spoken out against the cuts, job losses, and privatisation of local government services. She believes that in so doing she defends the interests of trades unionists and working people. We call for the immediate dropping of these charges and for the Labour Party nationally to get on with the job of fighting the Tories instead of witch-hunting its own members.

The campaign in the press against Mandy is reminiscent of the campaign against Peter Tatchell when he was a Parliamentary candidate for Bermondsey.

It is a disgrace that the Labour Party should license the bourgeois press to hound and harass party members, particularly women.

The Greater London Labour Party conference this year



Marching against Alton. Photos: Ian Swindale

Who are the sex offenders

Jean Lane reports on how widespread ideas of 'conquest sex' are.

A probation officer, Ray Wyre, used to work with sex-offenders and his work led him to question the attitudes of all men towards women and to sex.

One part of his programme with sex offenders involved getting them to look at their own attitudes about themselves, about women and children and hopefully to get them to accept responsibility for their behaviour.

So, for instance, he wrote the word "woman" on a blackboard and asked the men to shout the first things that came into their heads. These were their answers: Hate...bitches...fuck them...dominating...prick teasers...lovely...sly...parents...creators...pregnant...in control...bastards...contradictory...emotional...beautiful...manipulating...childish.

Other comments that have been made to him, specifically about women who are raped, include: "All attractive women are fucking cows", "Some women ask for it", "I think the woman is over-reacting to this attempted rape", "I can understand women getting raped the way they dress."

But these comments were not made by sex-offenders on proba-

tion, nor even your average bloke on the street. They were made by people in the caring professions, such as social workers.

A second part of Ray Wyre's programme was about victim awareness: exposing offenders to the impact — mentally, socially and physically — of their actions on their victim. He found that most offenders had distorted ideas about both their victim and about women in general which served to mask their own guilty feelings and make their behaviour seem normal. One offender, for example, said to him: "how could it be rape? She didn't even appear frightened and she told me afterwards, 'what's the point in going to the police, it's not that bad'." He had no understanding of the effect of fear on his victim or of her need to survive a life-threatening situation. But it's not just sex-offenders who have distorted ideas about women. Ray Wyre asked the offenders whether they agreed or disagreed with statements like: "Women who say no don't mean no", "If a woman comes home to your flat she's consenting to sex", "If a woman allows you to 'pet' her, she can't expect you to stop", "Women like a bit of force".

He said that the responses of the offenders were predictable. But he got similar responses from the community at large. The distortions that sex offenders use to justify their behaviour are in fact merely echoes of the attitudes held generally by society towards women, sex and also towards men's role in society.

1. We aim to build a mass campaign of action against the major attacks being mounted on women's rights, such as the right to control our own fertility, the right to health and childcare facilities, the right to work, the right to live in this country with the partner of our choice, the right to maternity leave and job security for mothers, the right to wages, benefits and legal status independent of a man, the right to organise as trade unionists and as women.
2. These rights and many other, many not yet won or consolidated, must be defended and extended in face of the onslaught against women by this government.
3. Such a mass campaign has to be part of a labour movement response to the Tory attacks. We aim to provide a focus for united action by women already organised in the labour movement and in campaigns and groups of the women's move-

Where we stand

ment, and to involve women who do not relate to these movements.

3. We aim to strengthen the position of women in the labour movement, and fight for it to take our needs as a priority. We will encourage and aid the organisation and consciousness of women as women in the labour movement, and fight for the aims and demands of the women's movement in the unions and labour organisations.

We fight to change the sexist atmosphere in the labour movement, and for positive discrimination and changes in arrangements and practices to enable women to play a full

part at all levels. We fight for the implementation of the TUC Charter of Women in the unions.

We fight against the labour movement's reflecting in any way the oppressive ideas about a woman's role, which can undermine women's ability to fight back, and dangerously divide the movement. We ally with all those fighting for rank and file control, democracy and accountability, against those who hold back and sell out our fight. Never again a 'Labour' government that ignores party decisions, serves the bosses and bankers, and beats down workers' living standards and struggles.

4. We aim to co-ordinate and assist those women in the Labour Party, and the trade unions, who are fighting for these aims.

5. We are for direct action, solidarity as women and as workers, and for maximum mobilisation for all actions against the capitalist system that exploits and oppresses us.

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Of the media, Ray Wyre says: "How is the average man to compete with the image of the heroes of the jeans and car ads — the macho, well adjusted, slim, suave, sexual conquistadores whom we are daily invited to envy and emulate?"

Women will meet those distorted ideas (and ignorance) not only in society at large — at work, in the pub, from husbands, friends, etc., — but also from the professional people they are expected to turn to for help. A solicitor said to Ray Wyre, "I will never believe that a woman can be raped if she does not want to be, it's difficult enough to obtain penetration with a willing partner". Ray Wyre just said to him, "Do what I fucking say or I will kill you". The solicitor's response was "I never thought of that."

Ray Wyre believes that the attitudes and distortions of the sex offenders he worked with and of men generally boil down to "conquest sex" where the main object is to have sex with women without a relationship. One offender said to him "No woman leaves my flat until she has opened her legs". This may be "conquest" in an extreme form but it is only a more extreme version of socially accepted attitudes towards women.

Ray Wyre did a course for social workers about his offenders' programme. Only, instead of telling them about it, he got them to participate in one. "They and I were amazed to find the degree to which their interaction of ideas, values and experience paralleled those of offender groups," he said.



Why 'Bimbettes' are bad

Heard of "Bimbettes"? They're the latest thing — at least in the tabloid press and on TV's equivalent of the oldest teenager in town — Top of the Pops.

From "wild child" Emma Ridley, who shot to national notoriety by taking her clothes off in trendy nightclubs and marrying at 15 a man over twice her age, through the now at 17 almost over the hill Mandy Smith (what on earth did she see in the verging-on-senile wreck Bill Wyman?) to the thoroughly nauseating Tiffany, bimbettes are everywhere.

Bimbettes make a profession out of being inane. They pout, bop or simper their way to fame, apparently unaware of the utter silliness of their goings on. What's their attraction? What do they represent?

Role-model

Tiffany, I would imagine, is every 13 year old girl's role model. She sings about the problems of getting to be alone with your boyfriend, bops around in a selection of average Chelsea Girl clothes, and sings like the average girl in the playground. A well-scrubbed all-American girl, I can't imagine her appealing to middle aged men's fantasies.

Similarly Kylie Minogue (Who? You know, Charlene from Neighbours). Kylie is an actress by profession and the video of I Should Be So Lucky has her skipping round her bedroom, camping it up about being in love with some unattainable bloke. Another teen obsession. Despite her penchant for backless T-shirts and splashing around in bubble baths, Kylie comes across as a "good sport". Good clean, harmless fun.

It's the European bimette image

By Katherine O'Leary

that has a seamier side. Number one at the moment is a fifteen year old French girl, Vanessa Paradis. Vanessa sings like a five year old and pouts like an aspiring Bardot. Despite her baggy jumpers and baby face, she's clearly meant to be sexy. Like Emma Ridley, who eagerly tells the tabloids how she takes her teddy to bed with her husband, Paradis merges childishness and a provocative sexuality. Her babyishness is, to men, part of her sexual appeal.

Women have made enormous advances over the past 30 or so years. Women go out to work, have become more confident, more sexually assertive. A lot of men can't handle this. They yearn for the days when women were soft, submissive and compliant. They're threatened by women's new found assertiveness and confidence.

Therein lies the appeal of the bimette, pouting and posing to please the boys. It's like the little girl who stands on a table and sings to please the grown-ups. They get approval — and they think it's clever.

That's what is sad about it really. These girls really do think they're being grown up and entering the adult world. Men, real men, not spotty adolescents, want to go out with them. They can earn lots of money.

Women in the 70s fought to be treated as full, adult, human beings. Bimbettes are little girls who think they're being grown up. What they're really doing is taking women backwards — "underneath we're all lovable". What women need isn't male approval, it's equality. And you don't get that by pouting.

Labour Party

De-select these MPs!

Year after year Labour Party conference has voted in favour of a woman's right to choose, and has demanded that Labour MPs should not be allowed to use the "conscience clause" on the issue.

Despite this, the Labour leadership has refused to put a 3 line whip on MPs to vote against the Alton Bill. 36 Labour MPs voted for the Alton Bill at its second reading. 19 abstained. The Bill passed its second reading with a majority of just 46. These Labour MPs refusal to abide by conference policy is the reason the Alton Bill isn't already history.

The Campaign Group of MPs opposed a 3 line whip on Alton. Indeed some Campaign Group MPs abstained on Alton — in craven fear of reprisals from their anti-abortion Constituency Parties.

The Labour Women's Action Committee has launched a campaign for a 3 line whip in future readings of the Alton Bill. We should support this campaign — Labour MPs should not be allowed to scab on conference policy. The Campaign Group should come out in support of a 3 line whip, if their claims to be in favour of party democracy are to be taken seriously.

WAC are also campaigning for the de-selection of those Labour MPs who refused to oppose Alton. Again, this campaign should be supported and we should make clear that when it comes to re-selection we'll be asking other questions too, like where does the MP stand on the NHS strike and on Clause 29.

Democracy and accountability were won after a major struggle by the rank and file of the Labour Party. We won't let a few arrogant MPs take it from us.

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Alexandra Kollontai

By Cathy Nugent

The Russian revolutionary, Alexandra Kollontai, is best known for her organisational work among Russian working class women prior to, and immediately after, the 1917 revolution and also for her writings on sexual morality and the family. She has become better known largely as the result of feminist interest in her life and career.

At the end of her life Kollontai made this comment: "Women and their fate occupied me all of my life and concern for their lot brought me to socialism."

Kollontai *did* see her "special mission" as fighting for the interests of working class women. However, when she wrote some of her best pieces concerning women's oppression during the 1920s (e.g. "Communism and the Family", "Sexual Relations and Class Struggle") Kollontai had retreated from any political struggle within the Communist Party. She had found herself unable to cope with the terrifying realities of Soviet Russia: economic chaos, poverty, a growing bureaucracy in the party and state. She was writing in a vacuum and this, inevitably, weakens some of her speculations, analysis and political conclusions.

Anonymity

Eventually Kollontai 'chose' a life of anonymity, exile and loneliness as a Soviet diplomat. She refused to take part in the fight against the bureaucracy which would have meant certain death at the hands of Stalin's thugs...capitulation but at what personal and psychological cost we do not know and Kollontai deserves a better write-up than this.

Alexandra Mikailovna Domonovich was born in 1872 in St. Petersburg. Her father was a Tsarist general, her mother the daughter of a wealthy timber merchant. She married Vladimir Kollontai against her parents wishes and for love in 1893.

As a young woman Kollontai was impressed by the ideas of radical liberals. One of their goals was the emancipation of women. Through combatting prejudice and campaigning for better education for women, the injustice of women's oppression could be destroyed. Of course this was not an option for working class women. Kollontai came towards a socialist understanding through her observation of the conditions of work of St. Petersburg's women textile workers. In 1896 these women came out on strike. Kollontai became involved in the young Russian socialist movement.

In 1898 Kollontai left her husband, turned her back on her family and privileged background and went to Zurich to study political economy. She continued her association with Russian socialists

Women and Class

in exile. She returned to Russia in the following year, to full-time political activity.

During this period strong bourgeois women's movements emerged, largely organising around the question of women's suffrage. The international socialist movement was divided on the question. Although most, rightly, opposed votes for women on the basis of property qualification, there was a generalised hostility to the "woman question" in the social democratic parties. Against this background Kollontai began to develop her ideas.

In 1906 Kollontai was involved in trying to establish a Women Workers' Bureau. In 1908 the first Women's Congress of the Russian Social Democratic and Labour Party was held.

At that congress both Menshevik and Bolshevik wings of the Party argued that genuine social emancipation for women was impossible without working class revolution. At that point it was still unclear what the Bolsheviks' attitude to women's work was. Certainly it evolved over a period of time, shaped not only by the efforts of Kollontai and other socialist women, but also through the involvement of working class women in the revolution.

Kollontai herself did not join the Bolsheviks until 1915. She was aloof from early factional battles between the Mensheviks and Bolsheviks. Her own political education was protracted. Kollontai's writings and political positions suffer from certain theoretical weakness. It also seems she was unable to accept herself as an equal in political activity. All this is best explained by her background and the position of women in society.

In 1909 "The Social Basis of the Woman Question" was published. Here Kollontai argues strongly that women must take up the struggle for their own interests within the social democratic parties. It is a polemic against bourgeois feminism (at the time this was synonymous with feminism) and against a separate women's movement.

Some critics have argued that Kollontai was too soft on social democracy and its ability to represent working class women. But social democracy — and in particular the German party — had not yet betrayed the working class through support for the First World War. To Kollontai things were clearcut:

"The women's world is divided just as is the world of men, into two camps. The interests and aspirations of one group of women bring



it close to the bourgeois class, while the other group of women has close connections with the proletariat and its claims for liberation encompass a full solution to the woman question."

In 1908 Kollontai escaped arrest by fleeing to Western Europe. She joined the German Social Democratic Party. There she gained valuable experience of the German women's organisation and general methods of work among working class women. When the SPD supported the war effort Kollontai was shocked, although she had first hand knowledge of the party.

To be fair, it must have seemed incredible. Kollontai however, did not have the ability to either express or explain the betrayal of the party in political terms: "During the first days of the war I was oppressed by the awareness that the German party was destroyed (now) it seems to me things have worked out for the best. Social Democracy has found itself in a cul-de-sac. Its creativity has dried up. It had become set in its ways. There was no spirit, no enthusiasm. Tradition and routine held sway."

In 1917 Kollontai took on a leading role. She was a talented and popular pamphleteer and agitator and she continued her organisational work among women and was centrally involved in the production of Robotnisa (Working Women), the Bolshevik Party paper for women.

After the October revolution she was named as Commissar of Social Welfare and in that position was responsible for the drafting of important legislation: the establishment of civil marriage, easy divorce, equal pay for women and labour protection for women. In November 1918 the first All-Russian Conference of Proletarian and Peasant Women was held. 1000 delegates attended — an indicator of how many women's lives had been changed by the revolution, how far reaching the involvement of women had been.

In 1919 the Women's Commission of the Bolshevik Party was replaced by women's departments. Women's work could now be much more integrated and influential in the work of the party. Kollontai had proposed just these arrangements in 1906.

In 1921 Kollontai joined a faction in the Bolshevik Party called the Workers' Opposition. They accused the party and state of bureaucratisation. The soviets had become empty shells — what was needed was a reform programme promoting democracy and "freedom of opinion".

Kollontai's motives were sound. Her principle of socialism was the self-organisation of the working class. However, the Workers' Opposition were too trenchant against the political leadership of the party. This was not yet bankrupt. They were before their time. The Workers' Opposition was soundly beaten.

Probably Kollontai lost faith after this and her involvement in the Workers' Opposition was remembered by those elements in the Party who were toe-lickers and forelock-touchers who were intolerant of unorthodoxy — the unorthodoxy Kollontai displayed in "Sexual Relations and the Class Struggle".

In "Sexual Relations" and other works, Kollontai argues that relationships between men and women are not unaffected by changes within society. Of course she was not the only writer to take up various themes about how cultural phenomena were being reflected in post-revolutionary society. But Kollontai was the only writer to forcibly take up this issue and moreover argue that it was not marginal. She was being polemical (indeed there is much bitterness here) but to her it is central.

"Throughout the long journey of human history you probably won't find a time when the problems of sex have occupied such a central place in the life of society."

Her sense of bitterness spills over into her view of human relationships as connections that only reinforce alienation and loneliness:

"People have perhaps never in any age felt spiritual loneliness as deeply and persistently as at the present time."

Here, she is being specific. In the era of decaying capitalism, human relationships, especially relationships between men and women are like this.

Yet Kollontai is optimistic — too optimistic — because the changes she wanted to see were impossible in the wrecked society of Soviet Russia. For her a "spiritual revolution" was one of the core problems of evolving socialist society. And she is right. But such changes are evolutionary even with the promotion of collective households and so on.

Kollontai made her demands in a vacuum.

1923

By 1923 Kollontai had ceased to write. She was pushed into a diplomatic career. Kollontai's strengths and weaknesses were shaped by the fact of her sex. Kollontai had a vision of a better way of living. They called her utopian and we could, too, yet for much of her life she was a determined practical socialist and a fighter for working class women.

Her attempts to uncover the moral straightjackets and material deprivation that are forced on women by society and the personal, individual anguish that accompanies this was, in her time, unique:

"The woman talked. Her eyes seemed to question life. You could catch in her look all the despair, all the horror of being a woman alone and faced with unemployment.

"Here was a woman trying to be independent and trying to fight her old way of life...It demanded an answer...it demanded action...it demanded struggle."

(From Sisters)

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