

SOCIALIST

ORGANISER

INSIDE:

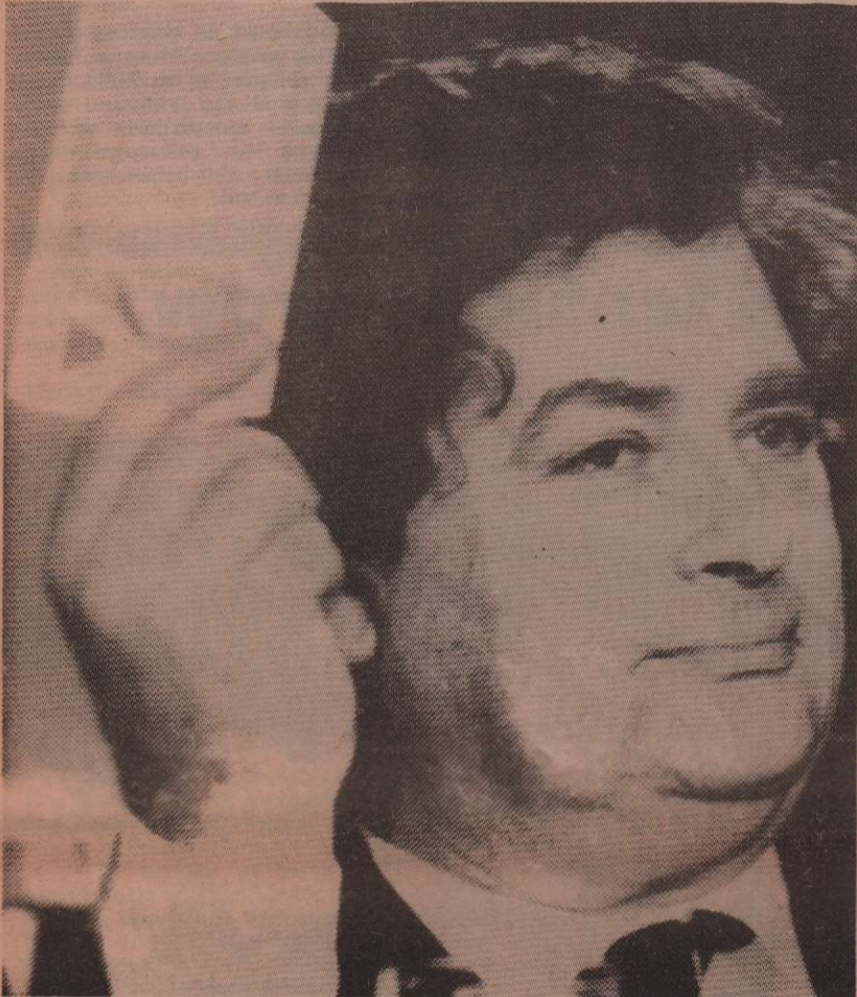
WOMEN'S FIGHTBACK

Turn the tide in 1989!

INSIDE: 'Patriarchy' discussed; nurses' struggle; campaigning against the poll tax; film review: 'Click of the Year' award



4 page Women's Fightback



Chancellor Lawson hands out millions to the rich whilst unemployed people like Tony Heywood are being forced onto the cheap labour ET scheme

Haughey is right — for once

By John O'Mahony

Southern Ireland has a history of dealing harshly with the IRA. The firing squad, internment without trial, and special courts have all been used when the Irish bosses thought it necessary.

Republicans have been banned from the Southern Irish media for over a decade. Dublin is committed to extradite Republicans to Britain and Northern Ireland. Britain and southern Ireland are partners in the Anglo-Irish Agreement, now three years old, under which Dublin is supposed to have a major voice in what goes on in Northern Ireland.

Yet Mrs Thatcher, backbench Tory MPs, and the British gutter press have so got up the nose of Thatcher's friends in Dublin that they have refused to extradite the Republican priest Fr Patrick Ryan wanted on 'terrorist' charges in Britain.

Charles Haughey's Dublin government says that Ryan could not get a fair trial after Thatcher, other Tories, and the tabloid press have pronounced him guilty — without a hearing. The Dublin government is right, for once.

Many of the Irish people in jail in Britain now are living proof that if you are Irish you don't get a proper measure of justice. You get less even than British people get in a system that is becoming increasingly authoritarian and arbitrary.

Mrs Thatcher's brutal outbursts in the Commons suggest that she thinks Britain still rules Ireland. No, it doesn't. At least her outbursts have had the good effect of making it politically impossible for her collaborators in Dublin to do what she wants them to do.

Neil Kinnock has criticised Thatcher in the Commons. He should draw the proper conclusion, and campaign for a review of the cases of unjustly jailed Irish people, like the Guildford Four and those wrongly jailed for the Birmingham pub bombings.

Their Christmas and ours

The rich have plenty to celebrate this Christmas. The windfall granted them this year in Nigel Lawson's budget is worth cracking open a bottle of champagne! But millions will face anxiety, insecurity and poverty.

The rich can look forward to more windfalls. If the poll tax comes in, as it is due to next year in Scotland and the year after in England and Wales, it will mean comfortable savings for upmarket voters. Margaret and Dennis Thatcher will be £33 a week better off — the amount an average single person gets on income support.

Income support has gone hand-in-hand with axing special benefits. And 16-18 year olds have lost all benefits.

Since the Tories came to office, official homelessness has risen from 57,000 to 112,500. 25,000 families are living in hostels, mobile homes and

Riches for a few poverty for many

squalid bed-and-breakfast hotels. This figure is rising by 20% a year. And the Tory Housing Bill will make things worse.

Meanwhile, profits have doubled since the Tories came in, and the profit rate is the highest it has been for 20 years.

According to a Tory-dominated committee of MPs, hospitals and community health have had £1.8 billion cut from them, in real terms, under the Tory government. 161 NHS

hospitals have been shut since 1979 (while 78 private ones have been opened).

Social security snoopers hang around Unemployment Benefit Offices to catch the odd person 'on the make'. But Customs and Excise have a rule not to investigate tax frauds of less than £100,000 — because they can't afford the time!

That's Thatcher's Britain. It gets better all the time if you're rich, and worse if you're poor.

Let's turn the tide in 1989!



Recognise Palestine!

By Clive Bradley

Yasser Arafat's speech to the United Nations (which, as I write on 13 December, has yet to be given) is significant not only for what he says, but for the occasion of his saying it.

It is not the first time Arafat has spoken to the UN: in 1974 it was at the UN that he offered Israel the choice between the gun and the olive branch.

Now the gun has been firmly put in its holster, and most governments in the world are enthusiastic about it. Two notable exceptions are Israel, of course, and the USA.

Arafat is making his speech in Geneva because the United States would not allow him a visa to go to the UN offices in New York. The UN's decision to go to Geneva for the meeting is a forceful snub to the US. It expresses very widespread pro-PLO sympathy in the UN — not only among Third World delegates, but also, for example, in Europe. The European Assembly recently gave Arafat an ovation.

Many on the left regard the PLO's now forthright recognition of Israel with, at best, suspicion. The Palestine National Council in November implicitly recognised Israel, and Arafat, speaking in Sweden on 7 December, made it explicit.

Is this a retreat? It is, of course, an expression of the PLO's strategy, which is essentially diplomatic. They look to the super-powers to secure a Palestinian state, and their approach is to put pressure on those powers.

This is not a socialist approach, obviously. We look to the working class to bring about change. But



socialists are not opposed to negotiation! And it makes little sense to criticise the PLO, which is not socialist, for not carrying out a socialist strategy.

The 'two states' policy makes political sense — whether you look to diplomacy or to working-class action to achieve it. Restoration of all of Palestine to the Palestinians is a utopian dream. On the basis of accepting the rights of the Israeli Jews to a state, the Palestinians can hope to win their own.

Arafat's strategy could lead to concessions on the principle of Palestinian independence; it could lead to attempts to demobilise the uprising in the occupied territories. Such things should be resisted. But they can be opposed while welcoming the PLO's general political offensive.

If the governments of the world recognise the new Palestinian state, it can only help the Palestinian people.

A policy for unity

The 'two states' policy can be a basis for unity between Arab and Jewish workers. This is the platform of the 'Progressive List for Peace', a left-wing Jewish/Arab electoral front in Israel.

The Palestinian question is the crux of the prolonged conflict between the two peoples of this land, and the principles agreed upon outline the means for solving this conflict and paving the way for a just and comprehensive Israeli-Palestinian and Israeli-Arab peace.

The following are our principles: (1) The assurance of equal national and civil rights for the Jewish and Palestinian citizens of Israel within its boundaries of June 4, 1967; the implementation of a determined struggle against all aspects of national discrimination and racism; and the safeguarding of these rights by means of a democratic constitution to be written for the State of Israel. This constitution will ensure the complete equality of all citizens of Israel, be they Jews or Arabs, Westerners or Orientals, men or women, religious or non-religious.

(2) A mutual recognition of the right of both peoples — the Jewish-Israeli and the Palestinian-Arab — to national self-determination. The implementation of this principle requires Israeli evacuation from all

the territories occupied in the 1967 war, including East Jerusalem, and the abolition of the occupation and all its implications. These territories should be returned to their legitimate owner, the Arab Palestinian people, for the purpose of establishing there an independent Palestinian State alongside the State of Israel. The two states will maintain relations of peaceful neighbourhood.

(3) The mutual recognition between Israel and the future Palestinian State; the withdrawal of Israeli forces from the occupied territories; and the peace treaty will be the outcome of negotiations between the government of Israel and the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO).

(4) An immediate and unconditional Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon.

Aware of the enormous obstacles on the road to sincere cooperation between the two peoples, we nevertheless express our hope and belief that the formation of the Progressive List for Peace (PLP) will mark the starting point for a deepening and an extension of the dialogue and cooperation between Jews and Arabs in Israel, as well as between Israelis and Palestinians as national entities, towards the achievement of a just and lasting peace.

We call upon all progressive forces and personalities, Jewish and Arab, to join us.

We call upon all other progressive lists running for election to conduct a decent electoral campaign and to debate the issues on their merits.

The Armenian disaster

By Gerry Bates

In the face of an incalculable tragedy such as the Armenian earthquake, it seems cheap to point a political finger.

The tragedy is too deep, too human, to be viewed politically: it affects everybody, and everybody — East and West — should pull together to help the victims.

Yet the evidence against the misadministration of Armenia is overwhelming. Houses and tower blocks were built that could not possibly withstand an earthquake. Safety precautions and emergency services were woefully inadequate.

Corruption nullified whatever provisions were made on paper.

Western relief services have often found that their Soviet equivalents, and Soviet troops, are slow, inefficient and lacking in the necessary equipment.

A nearby nuclear power station survived the earthquake — proving that it was possible for buildings to do so. But suppose it hadn't? Demands for its closure will grow.

Armenia now seems like a downwardly-spiralling disaster zone. A relief plane crashed into a helicopter on Sunday, killing its occupants. And the clashes between Armenians and Azerbaijanis have continued.

In comparison to Armenia, the

Clapham Junction disaster was small scale. Yet, closer to home, it probably affected most of us more: we could identify more easily with the victims. But in Armenia, where whole towns, like Spitak, have virtually ceased to exist, the survivors are destitute, and left homeless to face sub-zero temperatures. Makeshift hospitals (many hospitals collapsed on their patients) cannot cope with the number of casualties.

We should do what we can to help the people of Armenia. A long-term solution is to build better homes that can withstand earthquakes — and do away with the corrupt or penny-pinching bureaucrats who helped make this disaster so bad.

Communal tensions grow

By Stan Crooke

In the weeks before the earthquake, communal strife in the Soviet republics of Azerbaidzhan and Armenia had again flared up, surpassing in its intensity the inter-communal clashes which swept through the region (in the deep South West of the Soviet Union) in February of this year.

According to *Pravda*, Baku, the capital of Azerbaidzhan, "is not to be recognised. Work has stopped partially or completely in a number of enterprises. The situation in this huge city has become such that troops have had to be brought in, a state of emergency declared and a curfew imposed."

Pravda has portrayed a similar situation in Yerevan, the capital of Armenia: "A curfew is in operation in the city, from ten in the evening until six in the morning. Meetings and demonstrations are banned...125 enterprises were fully operational, 58 partially operational and 43 not working at all."

At the same time, Nagorno Karabakh (the predominantly Armenian-populated autonomous region which Armenians are demanding should be governed by the Armenian Soviet Republic) remained in the grip of a near general strike: "Enterprises and offices were not working, with the exception of those providing for basic consumer needs. Public transport was partially in operation."

The official death toll for the unrest of the fortnight before the earthquake is 31. This is likely to be an underestimate, especially given reports in the Soviet press that local militia units remained inactive in the face of the unfolding pogroms. The death toll includes Red Army soldiers killed while attempting to quell the unrest. There have also been massive movements of Armenian and Azerbaidzjani refugees, though estimates of the numbers involved vary wildly.

At the close of November *Pravda* referred to 55,000 refugees from Armenia and 22,000 refugees from Azerbaidzhan. The Armenian press agency put the total figure of refugees at 88,000. More recent reports have put the number of refugees at some 200,000.

But it is also unclear whether the refugees are fleeing or fear of possible future events or whether they have simply been driven out. A recent statement by Gorbachev and Soviet Premier Ryzhkov referred to the forced "mass removal and deportation" of Soviet citizens for



Free Moses Mayekiso!

Jailed black South African trade unionist Moses Mayekiso was released on bail earlier this week after spending nearly 30 months in detention. Moses, along with four others, is charged with treason. The picture shows Moses with a cake presented to him on his 40th birthday by fellow NUMSA members and Kola Mayekiso. The international labour movement must step up the campaign for Moses' release.

reasons of nationality. An earlier statement from Gorbachev and Ryzhkov had also threatened criminal penalties and party expulsions for the promotion of "mass dismissals" from workplaces on the basis of nationality.

Some of the local Communist Party chiefs, at least, have been involved in whipping up nationalism. In Kirovobad in Azerbaidzhan and in the Nakhichevan region, the local party bosses have been sacked. Azerbaidzhan newspaper editors and television and radio bosses have also been sacked. In Kirovobad and Yerevan local Communist Party offices have been attacked by the crowds and also in the Nakhichevan region.

According to *Pravda*, the blame for this bloody communal strife lies with "the enemies of perestroika, of the party, of the entire Soviet people. The political immaturity of people is an instrument in the hands of corrupt elements, of dirty dealers from the criminal world and unclean 'politicians'."

The "nationalist virus" has certainly destabilised the region, says *Pravda*, but at the same time it claims that, "at the roots of the situation lie the anti-perestroika, anti-socialist activity of a number of

corrupted figures...The national aspect of the events is extremely useful camouflage for them."

Historic national antagonisms between Azerbaidzhan and Armenians are clearly central in explaining the current unrest. Banners referring to the 1915 pogroms, when nearly two million Armenians were massacred, are a common feature of Armenian demonstrations and rallies. But national antagonisms are a relationship between two peoples, not the fault of the 'good' people at the expense of the 'bad' one.

Socialists should not delude themselves into thinking that the events in Azerbaidzhan and Armenia are incipient working class revolution against the Stalinist rulers of the Soviet Union, slightly distorted by residual nationalist antagonisms. Socialism is the product of working class unity, not inter-communal strife.

Gorbachev's Red Army may be able to reimpose 'law and order' on the region. But the rulers of the Soviet Union have neither the ability or the interest to break down nationalist hostilities in order to achieve a socialist future for the oppressed peoples of the Soviet Union.

The road to peace?

EDITORIAL

Those Labour Party leaders who argue against unilateral arms cuts, without negotiated quid pro quos, had the ground cut under them by Mikhail Gorbachev's speech last week.

Gorbachev's announcement of unilateral military cuts was his most successful foreign policy move yet. Everyone had to welcome it — even Reagan and Thatcher — and every government came under pressure to make similar cuts.

Socialists have to welcome these cuts, too. But we need to disentangle reality from the hype. Gorbachev announced a 500,000 troop reduction and the axeing of 10,000 tanks and 800 planes. The cuts include a commitment to withdraw six military divisions from Hungary, Czechoslovakia and East Germany.

For Afghanistan he proposed a ceasefire starting on 1 January, an end to arms supplies on both sides, a UN peacekeeping force, and an international conference to guarantee Afghanistan's future neutrality and demilitarisation.

These moves are welcome. But they will take away only 10% of the USSR's huge arsenal. Khrushchev, in his day, made bigger cuts — reducing the armed forces by one million, as against Gorbachev's 500,000 — but that didn't stop the USSR's invasions of Hungary and Czechoslovakia. If Gorbachev is less likely than Khrushchev to use troops in Eastern Europe — and he is — it's because of the greater assertiveness and confidence of the working classes and the peoples of Eastern Europe, not because of Gorbachev's goodwill.

Gorbachev's announcement took Western leaders and NATO by surprise — no-one expected any moves on arms until next year's scheduled talks in Vienna. It undermines a lot of NATO's arguments for its military build-up, threatens to open up already existing divisions in NATO about how to relate to Gorbachev's Soviet Union.

NATO powers will be worried



about the effect of the arms reductions on public opinion in West Germany. There is already large West German opposition to the presence of NATO missiles in West Germany. Opinion polls show a much higher level of trust amongst West Germans for Gorbachev than for Reagan or Thatcher.

Gorbachev's proposals are an important step forward. But they have to be put into context. They came as part of a long speech to the UN in which Gorbachev spelt out how his policy of glasnost and perestroika applies to international relations.

The speech was full of the

rhetoric of peace. But the real motives are not hard to find. Gorbachev's attempts at economic reform based on the extension of market mechanisms require a greater economic integration between East and West. Gorbachev needs the West to pave the way for more joint enterprises and more economic cooperation.

The announcement will help Gorbachev at home. There is a growing opposition to conscription, particularly amongst young people, which was fuelled by the loss of life in the Afghan war. The Popular Fronts in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania have objected to conscription.

Gorbachev is noticeably more keen on giving big concessions to Western governments than to the opposition in his own country. The Soviet Union is still a prison house of nations. Workers are still not allowed to form their own trade unions or to strike.

As the *Guardian* journalist Martin Walker points out, the Berlin Wall is still standing. As long as people are shot for attempting to escape to the West, as long as nations are brutally denied their rights, and as long as workers do not have basic trade union and democratic rights, Gorbachev's words will ring hollow.

NUS leaders refuse to lead

SOCIALIST STUDENT

By Mark Osborn

The National Union of Students (NUS) Christmas Conference was held in Blackpool on 2-5 December.

In the weeks leading up to Conference, a new militancy had developed in the colleges. There had been a week of angry local action followed by a hastily arranged anti-loans demo in central London.

The London demonstration turned into a confrontation with the police in which 69 students were arrested and a couple of dozen were hospitalised.

So you would think that the fight against student loans would be central to the Conference agenda. Not

so! In fact the NUS leadership (a mix of Kinnockites and the Communist Party) were much more concerned to reshape NUS's internal structures.

Centrally, they wanted to get rid of Winter Conference (there are two conferences per year); reduce the size of the National Executive Committee; elect the President for 2 years, not one; and centralise control and funding of NUS Area organisations.

The aim of these proposals was to consolidate the Kinnockites' position through bureaucracy. Most of the items were not discussed, but on the issue of Winter Conference Socialist Student and the left beat the leadership to retain the conference. We also won a more democratic method ("the block of 12") to elect NEC part-time members.

The basic line-up on these two contentious policy debates, loans and poll tax, were the same. The Kinnockites and CP, backed by people to their right, tried to get away with a radical veneer of a policy position which did not tie them down to doing anything. Socialist Student and the con-

ference left argued for links with the labour movement and the community; policies that could mobilise all sections of the membership in a democratic, mass campaign against loans and the poll tax.

The right wing got the best of these debates. They were helped when the Militant organised a stage occupation after the left had lost a vote in the poll tax discussion.

This gave the chair, Maeve Sherlock, a chance to close down the conference and an opportunity to tag the whole left as anti-democratic.

Finally, as a parting shot after they had lost a couple of their reform positions, the Kinnockites began accusing Socialist Student convenor, Jill Mountford, of calling one of their hacks a "queer". Of course this is completely untrue. It is a measure of the depths they will sink to to attack the left.

•Further Education. Steve Mitchell was elected to Further Education National Committee (FENC) at the FE's sector conference. At the same conference Further Education Socialists was launched. You can contact FE Socialists at 208 Epping Walk, Hulme, Manchester.

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

Karl Marx

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PRESS GANG

Daily Express

The Guardian

DAILY MIRROR
DAILY STAR

THE INDEPENDENT

By Jim Denham

Sorry Ma'am

A statement from
Kelvin Smutt (editor)

The *Sun* newspaper is happy to announce that it has reached an out-of-court settlement involving the modest sum of £1 million with Mr Elton O'Talent. The *Sun* unreservedly withdraws allegations to the effect that the world famous star is anything less than a Wonderful Human Being and Real Man.

In particular, we wish to grovellingly apologise for certain untrue allegations concerning alleged cruelty to dogs. A delighted Mr Elton said last night: "Life is too short to bear grudges and a lot of publicity out of and I don't bear the *Sun* any malice. This is the best Christmas present I have had since Helen Shapiro pushed me out of the charts."

Later, a *Sun* spokesman (K Smutt) said: "We are delighted that the *Sun* and Elvis have become friends again and we are bitterly sorry that our ace investigative reporters were misled by a fiendishly clever teenager living in a world of fantasy but possessing almost super-human powers of deception and plausibility."

The spokesman stated that the *Sun* accepts that Mr Caruso "loves his pets and we are very sorry we suggested otherwise." In future the *Sun* will be more careful when dealing with rich and influential showbiz figures and members of the Royal Family. Only ordinary people who cannot afford legal fees shall in future be abused and lied about in the pages of this newspaper.

In an exclusive interview Ol' Blue Eyes, as he is known to his millions of fans, said: "What is past is past. I have come out of this traumatic experience a richer person and the *Sun* has got a lot of publicity out of it. Everybody is happy."

ON OTHER PAGES:

- * Painfully chummy interview with Elton
- * Embarrassingly unfunny cartoon by FRANKLYN
- * Comment Column: 'Maggie Will Rule Forever!'
- * Exposed!! Labour's Plans to Corrupt Our Kids etc, etc.

ACTIVISTS' DIARY

Saturday 28 January
London Socialist Forum day school.
Contact Mark, 639 7967.

Wednesday 1 February
National Union of Students
demonstration against loans, London.

Saturday 18 February
Socialist Organiser industrial
weekend school, Contact
Tom, 01-639 7965.

Saturday 25 February
Women for Socialism two-day conference, London.

Saturday 1 April
Campaign for Non-Alignment, 'Out of NATO, into the World' two-day conference.

Dole cards for the yuppies?

GRAFFITI

Last year's stock market crash has claimed its first major casualty. Morgan Grenfell, the merchant bank which achieved a level of notoriety in the Guinness scandal, has made a quarter of its staff redundant and has decided to withdraw completely from the risky sphere of gilt-edged and equity market-making.

Morgan Grenfell lost £18 million on share-dealing in the 11 months up to November. This reflects the decline of around 50% in share dealing on the stock market since last autumn's crash.

Before 'Black Monday', around 900 million shares were traded daily. On the day Morgan Grenfell announced the redundancies, the figure stood at 466 million.

City experts reckon that by 1989 50,000 jobs will have been lost in the City and that some firms will completely pull out of the market and concentrate on more traditional banking activities. At the moment there are simply too many dealers chasing too few share deals.

As an example to us all, government ministers are to receive a measly 4.5% pay rise in the new year, with MPs doing slightly better at 6.9%.

Our hardworking representatives in the House are getting such a low award as part of the government's fight against inflation.

Mrs Thatcher herself has led the way by forgoing the traditional Prime Minister's salary, and accepting the lower grading of cabinet minister. And unlike those selfish nurses, she's not working to grade.

The rise averages at £30 a week, with a cabinet minister's salary rising from £51,068 a year to £52,627. An MP's salary will rise from £22,548 to £24,107.

As is clear from the figures, to avoid utter penury, many MPs are forced to 'moonlight' — to supplement their meagre incomes by taking on second jobs. Their extra work as barristers, merchant bankers, company directors, and the like, often leaves them tired and unable to properly fulfill their parliamentary duties — many have to sneak a nap on the benches, or seek solace in the bar because of the pressures of their busy lives.

Many ministers are angry that

they are being undervalued — they could, if they chose, earn more in the City. Lord Gowrie resigned from his £33,000 a year post as Minister for the Arts with the words: "It's not what people need for living in central London."

Maybe he should consider training as a nurse.

George Davies, self-styled architect of the "high street revolution", and the man who transformed boring old Hepworths into post-Fordist paradise Next, has been fired as Next's chairman.

The boardroom coup in which Davies was ousted lasted just three minutes. Davies was criticised for his "autocratic" management style, which his fellow directors judge unsuitable for a "major company".

A more plausible explanation would be the drop in Next's profits. At the beginning of the year accountants reckoned on a profit of £150 million. Over the year this has been repeatedly readjusted down, and now stands at an expected £70 million.

One of the reasons for Next's decline seems to be that it is now too commonplace. Simply everyone now shops at Next, you see. It's lost its social cachet.

Moreover, many of the clothes aren't well enough made, apparently. One of the major beneficiaries from the decline of Next has been good old reliable Marks and Sparks.

Is this the dawning of a new age of capitalism? We await the next issue of Marxism Today with bated breath.

The trend for posthumous rehabilitations started by Mikhail Gorbachev appears now to have reached France.

French television viewers were treated recently to a two-hour reconstruction of the trial of Louis XIV. Louis XIV was executed in January 1793 after having been found guilty of plotting with foreign powers against the republic.

Louis was defended in the mock trial by Jacques Verges — the lawyer who defended Klaus Barbie last year.

Viewers were invited to phone in their verdict. He was acquitted of conspiracy, but of the 44% who thought he was guilty, 27% were in favour of execution and 17% of exile.



The left and the Tory attacks

SOCIALIST STUDENT

By Liz Millward (NUS executive, personal capacity)

The Government's attacks on further and higher education come under two broad headings — the privatisation of education and the erosion of student financial support.

Students should fight with our allies — the trade unions, Labour Parties, community groups, and all those who will lose out if the Tories get their way. Within NUS we have to get in touch with our own membership, and take the message out to school students. Our aim must be to unite around a package of demands, related to action to win those demands. There are no shortcuts to beating the Tories, and no easy victories based on hoping for the best and smiling nicely at back-bench MPs.

The obvious first step is to relate to people where they are. Student unions need to take up students' most basic demands and draw them together so that we are all pulling in the same direction. Thus a campaign to stop a course closure and a women's campaign for better lighting on campus can complement each other rather than competing for resources and attention.

But at the same time our work must relate to students' individual concerns and not generalise them into oblivion. This balance is easily reached by going out to students and responding to their priorities and campaigning ideas — taking democracy and campaign planning out of the student union and to the students. Such a strategy easily builds up momentum and generates energy. Treating students and activists as a 'stage army' to be wheeled out to a pre-arranged plan will generate nothing but apathy and cynicism. Decisions must involve the people who will be carrying them out, and so must not be made behind closed doors or in forums which experience has shown don't attract many people.

The campaigns must involve people practically. Real involvement is not just reading a leaflet, but producing that leaflet

and distributing it as part of a demonstration. Real involvement means identifying as part of a group of people planning and taking action in defence of your rights.

Any campaign must also be taken out of a purely student context. Students alone cannot beat the Tories. And students are not the only people who will suffer. Our campaigning must include campus workers at all levels, and must also be taken out into the whole community, via public meetings, town centre stalls and petitions, work with local Trades Councils, women's groups and schools.

In the first place, our anger must be directed at college authorities who are going along with the Tories. These people have to be disabused of the idea that they can easily make workers redundant, cut course and let standards fall. College directors do not have to go along with the Tories' plans, and they can only get away with it if we let them.

Socialist Student has been arguing for this strategy of 'non-implementation' for the last three years inside NUS. The NUS leadership (dominated by the National Organisation of Labour Students, NOLS, and the Communist Party) has refused to take it up. They have consistently discouraged and condemned student militancy, and pursued a campaign consisting almost entirely of talking to a few back-bench Tories, Jack Straw, Norman Willis's secretary, and the education correspondent of the *Guardian*.

Not surprisingly, the government hasn't shown the least interest, and has carried on hacking away at education. This is entirely consistent with NOLS's whole approach to attacks on students, namely 'wait for Labour'. The last thing they want is a load of angry students stirred up and making demands on the government. The fact is that the current Labour leadership wouldn't fulfill these demands even if they were in office. So NOLS want to keep everything quiet and maintain the illusion that Neil Kinnock will deliver the goods. It would never do if people realised that they can win things by getting organised and taking action...

Since they took up with the CP, NOLS have gained a new ideological justification for the rubbish they come out with. The CP has decided that the working class is dead, so we don't have to bother linking up with it any more. Instead, they propose all sorts of new activities to replace the hated

demonstrations and macho picket lines. They have taken consumerism to its conclusion, and propose that students consume campaigns rather than participate in them. The CP's idea of a poll tax campaign is 'Rock Against the Poll Tax', their idea of defending student rights is a 'festival of youth and students'.

The left groups have not much better to offer. *Militant* is still convinced that NUS is a trade union. They have been involved in NUS for the last couple of years, and appear to be getting more involved, having totally failed to defend the Young Socialists from suppression by the Labour Party leadership. But they turn out rehashed *Socialist Student* campaigns, with different slogans, six months after everyone else has moved on, and always with the demand that NUS calls a joint conference with either the TUC leadership of the 'Education Alliance' — an organisation which has been dead for years. NUS is already working with the trade union bureaucracy — what *Socialist Student* argues for is work with rank and file trade unionists at a local level.

Militant do have a 'strategy' — their problem is that it is a strategy for a student movement which doesn't exist. No wonder they were telling students to stop blocking Westminster Bridge on November 24th and to go to a readers' meeting instead. "Comrades", they said, "the movement isn't ready yet" — no, and it never will be if we have to wait for *Militant* to catch up!

The Socialist Workers' Party (SWP) don't bother with anything so sophisticated as a strategy. They can only relate to tiny sections of the NUS membership, and have no interest in the serious work of turning the whole movement round to fight back. The work of building campaigns in colleges, taking on each and every attack as and when it occurs, is too much for them. They restrict themselves to short-term propaganda and inflexible slogans which serve to alienate many students and workers.

Success depends not on turning up to a demonstration with 1,000 placards but on solid grass-roots activity, and the SWP have proved incapable of that.

Nothing points up the need for a serious left more than the present situation in the student movement — where, as we have seen, most of the 'left' is either an irrelevance or a negative factor. What is at stake here is nothing less than the future of millions of working-class young people.

Reform or revolution in Eastern Europe?

A SOCIALIST ORGANISER PAMPHLET 80 PENCE

A Socialist Organiser pamphlet. Available from PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA, for 80p plus 13p postage.

Stop the growth of fascism!

Throughout France the Nazi movement is growing. In 1986 the neo-Nazi Front National polled more than 2 3/4 million votes. At that time Searchlight called it "the most significant development of fascism in Europe since...1945."

In this year's national elections FN leader Jean Marie Le Pen polled almost 4 1/2 million votes, 14.4% of the total. In Marseilles he received 28%, and in parts of Alsace 37%. The views of Le Pen are best

summed up in his statement on a record he published of songs of the Nazi Waffen SS:

"Adolf Hitler and the National Socialist party came to power through legal elections. They thank their ascent to a mass movement which was popular and democratic."

The growth of the FN has been accompanied by a wave of racist hatred and violence. In one incident in Chateauroux the FN waded into the local immigrant community with clubs and iron bars. In another, in Nice, a "huge welcome" for Le Pen was followed

by a racist murder. Beatings, coshings, stabbings, petrol bombings are the norm. Often grenades and machine pistols are used.

The left has failed miserably in countering the fascists. SOS Racisme, the main anti-fascist organisation, has failed completely to have any impact in stopping Le Pen.

On Mayday this year, 25-30,000 FN marched through the streets of Paris while a nearby 150,000-strong trade union rally did nothing to stop them.

Only now has a serious (though as yet small scale) initiative been

launched to stop the growth of Nazism in France and CAFF (Campaign Against Fascism in France) has been launched as a British-based overseas support group for that initiative. We believe Le Pen poses the gravest threat to the working class and to democracy not only in France but throughout Europe, and the task of stopping him is the most crucial in Europe.

Anyone wishing to help, or would like a speaker to one of their meetings, please contact us. CAFF, PO Box 273, Forest Gate, London E7.

Russia is a bureaucratic workers' state

I have read with interest your 'debate' about the class nature of the Soviet Union in recent issues of SO.

I use the quotes because I feel that you are doing yourselves a disservice by inadequately explaining the positions of those who support the 'bureaucratised workers' states' formula, instead using caricatures ('defencism = nuke western workers') and a tendentious account of the 1953 split in the Fourth International (eg presenting Pablo's own positions as those of the FI).

In fact the state capitalist/bureaucratic collectivist thesis cannot explain anything the 'bureaucratised workers' state' one also finds difficult — for example why the Angolans and Mozambicans did not set up a 'bureaucratised workers' state' or 'state capitalist/bureaucratic collectivist' state when they smashed the bourgeois state and seized power, when the Cubans and South Yemenis did. With either thesis you are left with the need to analyse the parties. It would mean that the most radical 'Stalinist' parties such as the Philippines Communist Party (which could possibly smash the state and seize power) are outside the workers' movement, representing an 'alien' class force, whereas the good old tankie and Eurocommunist ones are part of the workers' movement. (And you would still need to explain how the bureaucratic collectivist class seized power in the USSR — and when — without smashing the workers' state).

Two other points need challenging: a) The comparison of the USSR with the 'West' (and Japan?) must be done with caution. It is just as easy to argue that had the Bolshevik revolution not occurred then Russia would be a neo colony like India, or possibly like Turkey, another empire dismembered after World War I.

We argue that even with the bureaucratic fetters the USSR represents an advance on what would have existed if it had remained within the capitalist world, but that these fetters do indeed prevent it 'catching up' with the advanced capitalist states.

b) One of your supporters argues that the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan is called for out of the interests of the Afghan masses, with the concomitant that 'defencists' must support the presence of the troops. I would argue the exact opposite: even though the continued presence of the Soviet troops may be in the interests of the Afghan masses (the alternative appears to be Khomeinist reaction), it is certainly not in the interests of the world working class.

It was decisive in the ending of the 'Vietnam syndrome' and the rightward shift in US politics. Defencists do not call for the military victory of the USSR on all occasions: the Fourth International correctly called for the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Eastern Europe after the war.

Your articles are characterised by a formalism and a 'normative' viewpoint ("if it isn't perfect it's not a workers' state") "a bureaucracy which suppresses independent workers' action must be an alien class" — like the trade union leaderships??

This will not stand you in good stead when it comes to analysing the dynamics of these societies. (Why does Gorbachev oppose "allowing workers to form their own trade unions and political parties" Why is he not introducing the market wholesale), and will be even worse in analysing world politics: no victorious revolutions since 1917? What has happened to the world balance of class forces since then?

It is interesting to note that those forces which have adopted variants of the state capitalist/bureaucratic collectivist theory have remained nationally isolated, and have made no impact in the "Third World". You are heading down a dead end.

Philip Ward



A defeat for Kinnock

The Govan by-election was a crushing personal defeat for Neil Kinnock and an overwhelming rejection by Scottish voters of Labour's 'new realism'.

There is a crucial lesson to be

LETTERS

learned here. With 50 MPs in Scotland, and control of virtually all councils, Labour has singularly failed to protect the Scottish working class from the evils of Toryism. It is precisely because Labour offers

no resistance to Tory attacks that the Scottish working class are turning in despair and frustration to the blind alley of the SNP.

It is the duty of the Labour Party and trade unions jointly to defend the working class from the attacks of the Tory government, but they have failed to protect working people from any of these attacks, be it Tory plans to destroy the NHS, cheating the nurses, robbing the pensioners, privatisation, forcing council rents through the roof, smashing the welfare state, creating mass homelessness and mass unemployment, attacking civil liberties, forced youth labour schemes, education cuts, destroying local democracy, smashing the trade unions or digging up from the 14th century the evil poll tax.

Instead of mild acceptance, Labour should organise every council in Scotland to unite and as one refuse to implement the poll tax, backing this up by firstly involving all council employees in a campaign of non implementation; secondly, involving tenants associations and linking it to a campaign against rent rises; thirdly, involving the whole trade union movement so that Tory reprisals against Labour councils are met by an immediate response of industrial action, especially targetting steel works.

And not just in Scotland.

Nurses are fighting courageously for a better deal while union leaders dither and Tory minister Kenneth Clarke tries to split the RCN from the other health unions and use them as a battering ram to smash NUPE and COHSE. After he's done that he can deal with the RCN at his leisure, treating them as badly

as the rest.

Kenneth Baker's education plans hang like the sword of Damocles over teachers and threaten every child's right to a decent education, but what have either the teaching unions or the Labour Party done?

While the Tories destroy council housing and local democracy, Labour councils, far from fighting back, implement Tory rent rises and cuts with a savagery to make Thatcher proud.

We need an all-out campaign by Labour, uniting and involving all health workers (and patients) to ensure nurses get the full 17% Thatcher is trying to cheat them out of, and a fair deal for the appallingly low paid ancillary workers and porters, with nurses' and health workers' picket lines outside factories, steel plants and mines everywhere, and linked to the battle against both hospital closures and privatisation — with a similar mass campaign against Baker and linking the two together.

Simultaneously if Labour councils throughout Britain refused to implement the Tory poll tax, rent rises and cuts, involving trade unions and council tenants, and backed it up with industrial action, linking it to the NHS and education campaigns, Thatcher would be reeling.

The key is involving the maximum number of people, both as tenants, patients, parents or consumers, and of trade unions.

Such a campaign would not only weaken the Tories, but would substantially strengthen Labour and give it that dynamism necessary to take power.

Pete Gilman
London N1

South London history

It was good to see the article 'How I wrote the Red Flag' by Jim Connell reprinted in SO of 24 November. It was good to see that you also quoted its original source as 'The Call' newspaper.

Unfortunately you forgot to mention the actual source of your article, being the 'South London Record', journal of the South London History Workshop.

'South London Record' is published once a year and contains a number of interesting articles about labour history in South London. We have published three editions so far, including such articles as accounts of the riots on Plumstead Common, the Campaign for Alternative Work at the Woolwich Arsenal, Some Early Irish Movements in South London, The Gasworkers of South London, the story of Agnes Dawson, President of the National Federation of Women Teachers and a short history of John Archer, first black person to be elected mayor in Britain, and reviews of other historical material on black history in South London.

Issue No.4 will concentrate on New Unionism. The years 1989 and 1990 will see the centenary of a major milestone in the labour history of this country;

that of the immense upsurge of activity in the late 1880s among semi and unskilled workers. This was the year of the Match Girls Strike, the Dockers strike and the Gas Workers strike. It was the time when the beginnings of several of the major unions of today were seen, including the GMB, TGWU, and EETPU to name but three.

To help celebrate this watershed in trade union history, the 'South London Record' will be printing a series of articles on this period. We would warmly welcome further articles on New Unionism and collective help with sources and research can be provided by the workshop.

Copies of the 'South London Record' are available from Dave Russell, 58 Fearnley House, Vestry Road, London SE5, price £2.25 plus p&p, or from the publishers: Oval House Printshop, Oval House, 52-54 Kennington Oval, London SE11 5SW.

You are welcome to use the material we have produced, but it would be nice if the History Workshop got a mention!

Yours in solidarity,
Roy Webb
24 Felbridge House, Quorn Road,
London SE22 8BY
For South London History Workshop

Send letters to
Socialist Organiser,
PO Box 823, London
SE15 4NA

Socialism is still alive

By Eric Heffer MP

Today there are voices — Mrs Thatcher's, but also many others — which say that Socialism is dead. It is a thing of the past, and we who continue to support it are dinosaurs and on the point of extinction.

There are, unfortunately, some in the Labour Party who echo that view. There are voices within the labour movement who, to a large extent, accept the Tory argument and argue that those of us who continue to believe in class politics are throwbacks from a previous age.

We are accused of being "workerist", we are told that "Fordism" is our political base and that we do not live in the real world.

It is they who do not live in the real world. Capitalism may have marginally changed, but not fundamentally, and it can only get worse.

Those who argue that we are old-fashioned most strongly are around the journal *Marxism Today* and the official Communist Party. They, however, are not alone. They have allies and friends in the Labour Party. In fact, some in the Labour Party, including some in the leadership, look to them for political guidance. Their political gurus are Eric Hobsbawm and Martin Jacques.

I do not know why this should be so, because over the years they have not won anything at all, and in Italy, where the theories they hold tend to be accepted by the Communist Party, they have lost support in the urban working class areas. In the last election they lost tremendous support in those areas where in the past they had had rock-solid support. The industrial working class deserted them in droves.

The truth is that the class struggle continues and class politics are as relevant today as they ever were. No matter what the revisionists say, as long as class society exists, politics will be about the balance of forces between the classes.

This government carries out class politics. The whole of its legislative programme since 1979 has been in favour of the class it basically represents, i.e. big business interests, and for some people in the labour movement to argue that the government has raised new issues of choice, only underlines their lack of basic understanding of the nature of capitalism and proves beyond doubt how much they delude themselves.

There has always been choice for the rich, for the propertied class. The only thing is that their choice is wider than that of working people.

Take the argument about Fordism. The argument seems to be



that "Fordism" is equated with mass production and that this evolved a working class which was socialist in orientation.

Mass production, in varying ways, began before Ford. The production of the motor car developed it further. But Henry Ford fought against trade unions in his US and British factories. The Ford Company was eventually forced to accept and recognise trade unions in the USA, not without much violence against trade unionists on the picket lines, with factory spies being employed and attempts to assassinate trade union leaders such as the Reuther brothers.

"Fordism" still exists. Large manufacturers continue to resist trade union organisation, and this is being helped in Britain today by a government which has brought in vicious legislation against the trade unions on a scale worse than anywhere else in Europe. Where large scale industry has closed down, where alternative employment has been created, it is of the small sweatshop kind, similar to Hong Kong.

The problem is that because some like those in *Marxism Today* and the official Communist Party talk as if the class struggle were dead, they objectively help the employers and the Tory government. They weaken the struggle and assist in undermining workers' confidence in themselves. This helps to lead to the concept of "New Realism" in the unions, i.e. class collaboration, and equally in the Labour Party.

Bryan Gould praises the Communist Party and decries the fact that the Labour Party still, as he puts it, has its "class war warriors". Instead of rebuilding, developing and extending public ownership, we are offered shareholdings and that mythical thing called the "controlled market economy". It is all spelt out in "Aims and Values" and the Economic Policy document carried at the Labour Party conference.

It would seem to me that some in the movement do not live in the same world as I do, and clearly have not experienced the same conditions of life and employment

and unemployment as I have and as my constituents do today.

The recent Labour Party conference was an important one. It continued, in many respects, the slide away from basic socialist concepts which we have been experiencing for some time. It was the last but one step to changing the Party into an SDP Mark II. That process was slightly halted, and there is still time to stop it altogether.

Next year's conference will consider the final policy documents. No doubt some in leading positions will continue their support for the ideas outlined in the new Communist Party draft "The British Road to Socialism" and Labour could end up with a document of a similar tepid revisionist character.

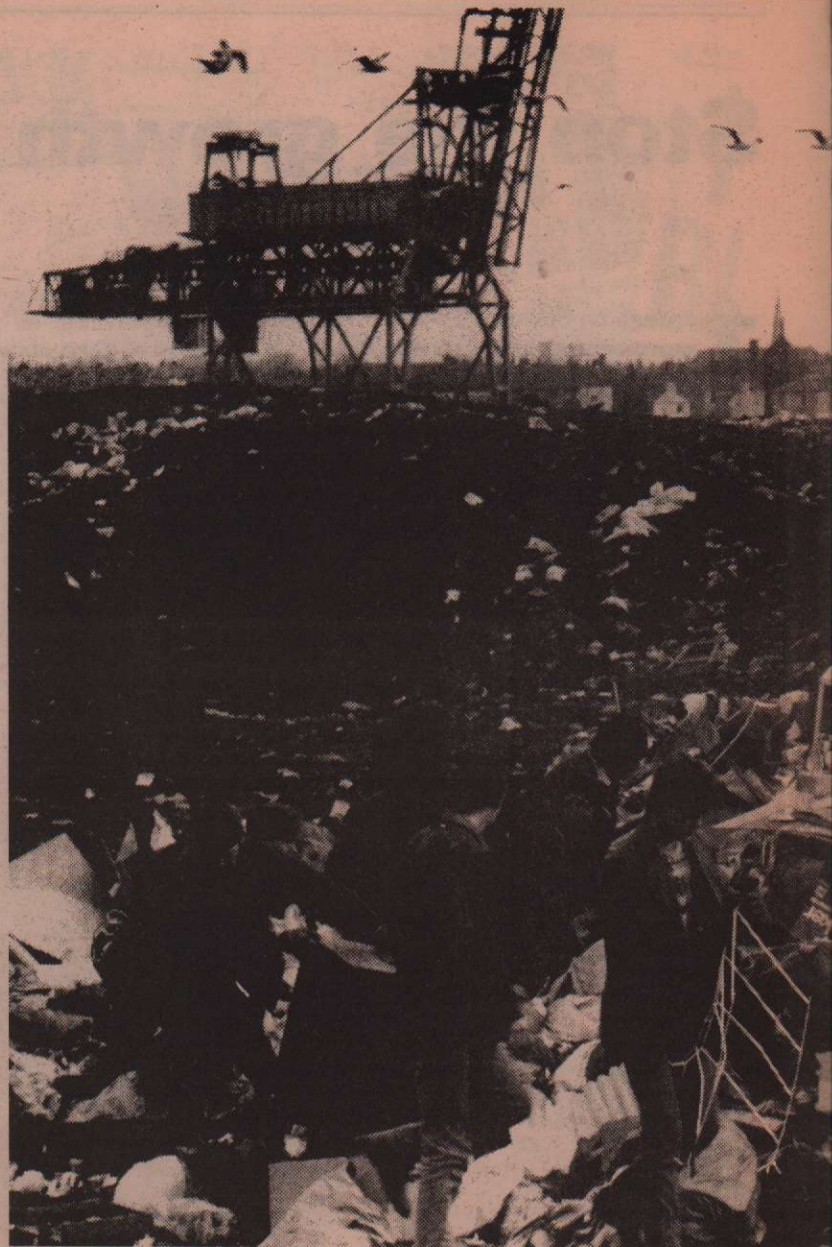
It is therefore important that socialists in the Labour Party and in the movement as a whole seriously consider the way forward. I have called this lecture "The Socialists' Next Step". In doing so, I had in mind the pamphlet issued by the Reform Committee of the South Wales Miners, called "The Miners' Next Step", published in 1912 and reputedly written by Noah Ablett. That pamphlet had quite an effect on the movement in those days. The ideas in it were never really carried out or accepted by the movement, but were an important contribution.

Since 1979 we have had a Tory government which has tilted the balance of power firmly in favour of the capitalist class — the employers, the bankers, the owners of the means of production, distribution and exchange. The capitalist system is put forward as the best possible economic system. We are told that profit making is natural and must dominate, and that any form of public ownership is wrong.

This government is out to eliminate what it calls "creeping socialism". It has not yet finalised its programme. Everything is not yet privatised. It still has the coal mines, electricity, water, the NHS, the railways and municipal services to deal with, but it's well on its way. The future under this government is bleak indeed for working people. That is why it is essential to mobilise the people to defeat them.

To carry through its programme, the government has undermined, weakened and, in some cases destroyed, our democratic rights which have been fought for and gained over generations. The full power of the state, through the police and class legislation, has been used against the workers. At the same time, press and trade union freedom has been undermined.

It is no accident that the journal *Index on Censorship*, which usually concentrates on the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe and dictatorships like Pinochet's Chile, recently had an issue on what was happening to our freedom in this



'New issues of choice?' Unemployed people scavenge on a rubbish tip in E

country. It was a very revealing issue, but unfortunately it had one defect. It failed to have any articles in depth on what has happened to the trade unions.

Yet, as in Nazi Germany, Mussolini's Italy and Pinochet's Chile, the unions are among the first to be curbed, destroyed or controlled because, despite any faults they may have, they were the instruments of working people for the protection of their conditions of employment, their hours of work and their safety and health at work.

Because everyone in the movement rightly wants to see this government out at the next general election, there is a feeling that no one must criticise the leadership of the Party or challenge what is happening to the Party's basic principles and policies. Instead of attacks being fully turned on our political enemies, they are too often directed against critics within the Party.

What should be our attitude to leaders? Should we keep our mouth shut, should we accept policy changes and constitutional changes even if we passionately believe they are wrong, and that the policies being followed can hinder our fight to defeat the Tories? I think it was Hugh Dalton who said, after the debacle of 1931 when Ramsay MacDonald betrayed our movement, that we should have been more concerned with keeping to principles than giving loyalty to leaders.

Political leaders can be good orators, even silver-tongued, they can have a charisma, but they can also be disastrously wrong, sometimes from the best of motives.

In the pamphlet "The Miners' Next Step" the issue is raised, "Are leaders good and necessary?" The pamphlet says: "A leader implies at the outset some men who are being led; and the term is used to describe a man who, in a representative capacity, has acquired combined ad-

ministrative and legislative power. As such he sees no need for any high level of intelligence in the rank and file, except to applaud his actions.

"Indeed such intelligence from his point of view, by breeding criticism and opposition, is an obstacle and causes confusion. His motto is 'Men be loyal to your leaders'. His logical basis: plenary powers. His social and economic prestige is dependent upon his being respected by the public and the employers." What was written then about leaders is as applicable today as it was then.

It is important that socialists proceed from the bottom upward and not from the top downward. If we place all our faith in those at the top, and vote for and support them uncritically and without challenging them seriously on vital issues, then the path ahead can lead to a precipice of disaster, not necessarily to the promised land of milk and honey. It is not that our principles and policies like public ownership are wrong, it is not socialist concepts of class struggle that have to be abandoned and capitalist mores of individualism and greed that must be accepted. We need to learn from the past and look for the element that has too often been missing in our socialist concepts, i.e. the role and place of the working people at the point of production and in the workplace.

Public ownership by the State, whether in the Soviet Union or in Britain has, in effect, been a form of State Capitalism. The missing ingredient has been the role of the workers in the industries, and services which have been publicly owned.

Public ownership is essential to create a classless society, to end class rule, but future public ownership, whatever form it takes, whether state ownership, municipal ownership or cooperative ownership, must have genuine democratic workers' management.

WOMEN'S FIGHTBACK

INSIDE: 'Patriarchy' discussed; nurses' struggle; campaigning against the poll tax; film review; WF 'Dick of the Year' award

Turn the tide in 1989!

1988 hasn't been a good year for women. The Tories have frozen Child Benefit for the second year running, attacking a vital source of income for many women.

The Housing Act worsens an already appalling situation. Thousands of women are living in squalid bed and breakfast accommodation with their children. The Tories' plans to sell off council estates to profiteering property developers will mean more homeless women, more women stuck in the crummy and insecure private sector, more women forced to stay with violent men because there is nowhere for them to go.

The Poll Tax will not only hit women in their pockets, but will mean that around a third of women's refuges will close — again forcing women and their children to endure brutal domestic violence.

The majority of those claiming state benefits are women. This year's social security changes have meant that thousands of women have lost money. The end of special needs payments, and the axeing of the across-the-board maternity grant has left many women having babies in need.

The notorious Clause 28, now Section 29, of the Local Government Act has worsened the position of lesbians even further. Lesbian mothers, always in fear of losing custody of their children, now are even more ghettoised.

The Tories have it in for us. But women can fight back — the fight against the Alton Bill showed us that. We need a crusade by and for women. We need to unite and fight back now, to demand our rights, to roll back the Tory offensive.

Let's make sure 1989 is the year that we turn the tide. Let's tell the Tories 'enough is enough'!



Nurses want regrading not degrading

'Regrading not degrading!' is the battle cry of angry nurses. They forced the Tories to back down earlier this year and they can do it again.

The nurses have been cheated. Led to expect a 17.9% across-the-board rise, instead they have been put on the lowest grades possible. Most nursing auxiliaries can expect a 40p per week rise! Most night sisters, a princely £20 per year!

"I know of one sister with over 25 years experience who's set to lose £2000 a year because of this," said Mary Williams, a NUPE steward.

The nurses' anger has rattled the Tories. Local victories have been won, the Tories have postponed

their "review" of the NHS, and they have lost the propaganda war.

So Health Secretary Kenneth Clarke has teamed up with Trevor Clay, leader of the no-strike Royal College of Nursing (RCN), to isolate NUPE and COHSE. Clarke and Clay have come to an informal arrangement about "sifting" out the worst injustices and letting them appeal first.

But this won't help the rest. Clarke said on TV he expected most appeals to be rejected, and it could take up to a year to have an appeal heard in any case. Lodging an appeal is not the way forward.

Nor is the stunt by midwives at North Middlesex who resigned en masse. Resignation is not a realistic

option for most nurses — not everyone can flit off to work for another Health Authority. It is simply a disingenuous way of avoiding a collective fight — one where nurses can act together to get everybody at least 17.9%.

What is needed is a national strategy. Building on work-to-grades where they exist and stepping up to national strike action. COHSE and NUPE leaders should work together — instead of knocking their heads together by calling separate days of action all the time.

And both the Labour Party and TUC leaders should get off their backsides and support the nurses by calling for solidarity strikes if necessary.

We all need the NHS. And the best way to defend it is to back the nurses — not to trust the Tories, or waiting for the next Labour government.

* Invite a nurse to speak to your next Women's Section, trade union or college women's group meeting.

* Take the arguments out to a wider audience by calling public meetings on estates or in community centres — linking the pay issue to that of defending the NHS.

* Set up street stalls and leaflet shopping precincts explaining the nurses' case.

* Support strike action and days of action called by nursing unions. Get down to the picket line and show your solidarity.

'Patriarchy': a static theory

Women and Class

Lynn Ferguson argues that women's oppression is linked with class exploitation

It is common currency amongst all feminists, from radical feminists to socialist feminists, to use the term 'patriarchy'. As a descriptive term it seems very useful — throughout history men have lorded it over women, have dominated all aspects of public life.

Women have occupied a subordinate role, have been exiled to the margins of society, have been abused, beaten and raped by men. Even now, 20 years on from the women's movement, rampant sexism still exists, women still receive lower wages than men, and are concentrated in jobs modelled on their role in the home.

Throughout history there have been complex networks in society which have held women down. Surely this is 'patriarchy'?

But the trouble with patriarchy as a concept is that it obscures the real issues. We end up with a history which is defined by the oppression of women by men, in which the sex struggle is paramount.

Or, in the socialist-feminist version, we have two parallel systems linked but with their own autonomy — patriarchy and class society. The patriarchy and the class system are seen as essentially separate, each with its own history, and each requiring its own struggle to overthrow it.

Shulamith Firestone, in her book 'The Dialectic of Sex' uses Engels' 'The Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State' to map out a detailed theory of patriarchy. Engels said the first class division was that between men and women. Firestone interprets this as saying that the sex struggle is primary, that class divisions are built on top of the original sex-class division. Patriarchy is the thread running through human history, and which needs a revolutionary struggle to overthrow it.

The French feminist, Christine



'Women must fight as part of the labour movement' — South African workers at Checkers, on strike over the demotion of a (white) worker

Delphy, sees housework as a mode of production separate to capitalism, with housewives constituting a distinct, oppressed sex-class. All other women, even if working, are defined by the housewife role, and are clawed into this distinct class who are oppressed and exploited by men.

Women's first struggle, then, must be to throw off the chains of sex-class slavery, to revolt against men. Only then will the struggle against capitalism be of any relevance to them.

What did Engels mean by women being the first oppressed class?

Primitive societies generally had a division of labour between women and men. But women's work was valued no lower than men's — indeed, it generally was more central to primitive economies, being a more reliable staple.

But when these economies moved from mere subsistence to producing a surplus, women were pushed into a subordinate position. The exact details of this are impossible to discover, but most evidence shows

that this was because it was in 'men's work' that the growth took place.

The oppression of women was a result of developments in the sphere of production, and arose out of the same dynamics which led to the formation of classes, and ultimately the state. That it was women who lost out was because of their place in production, because of the intermeshing of the beginnings of a surplus with the pre-existing sex division of labour.

There is no evidence of a biological drive in men to put women down, and there is no evidence of sexist ideology until after this point. Women's oppression and class society arose together, thoroughly intertwined, one part of the other.

Women's oppression has existed for thousands of years. In that sense it is constant. Different social formations, different modes of production have come and gone. Yet women's oppression remains.

But the forms of women's subordination and its social role have changed dramatically over time. The position of women today is radically different from the position of women in ancient Greece, or in feudal Europe. The position of women, the form women's oppression took in each of these societies, was defined, though not completely determined, by the nature of production in those societies.

In feudal Britain, women were

legally chattels. Rape was an offence not against the woman but against her father or husband — it was his property which had been violated.

But there was no rigid division between home and work. Production took place on land around the home. Women did not suffer the sense of isolation and lack of worth which is characteristic of women's experience of their oppression under capitalism.

The development of capitalism and the industrial revolution again radically altered the structures of women's oppression. Tens of thousands of families left the countryside for the towns, and work in factories. In the 1840s Marx and Engels said the family in the working class was being destroyed. Men, women and children were being drawn into capitalist production.

By the latter half of the 19th century this had changed. The family was reconstructed in the working class, on the model of the bourgeois family, but with a different function.

The bourgeois nuclear family, with its emphasis on monogamy and female chastity, was a vehicle for the transmission of property.

The working class family looked the same. It was the same in that it was a refuge for men, a place of relative comfort, and a prison for women.

But the working class family has particular characteristics. After a

Where we stand

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.

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.

2. 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-

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.

Better than its advertising



'Call Me' is at odds with its advertising. I shared the cinema with a number of single men who had obviously come for a different kind of movie altogether.

It isn't a typical movie about a woman terrorised by a psychopath; it's not voyeuristic about a woman's sex life either.

I'd gone along ready to cringe, but I was surprised. In parts it's cliched and predictable. There is slack in the editing that allows you to hear the plot devices creaking. Yet, for all its similarities to other terrorised womanhood movies, the film doesn't condemn or punish Anna, the heroine, for wanting a more exciting life.

That's a departure. Films like 'Dressed to Kill' and 'Looking for Mr Goodbar' implicitly blamed their heroines for their free sexuality. They were 'punished' for not being traditional women. 'Call Me' is emphatically on Anna's side.

It's not always handled very well, and the plot gets into a bit of a muddle, but you can watch it without feeling put down. The film also shows up very clearly the inadequacy of the men in her life. Her steady boyfriend, Alex, is an insensitive clod; her boss at work could

Belinda Weaver reviews 'Call Me'

give seminars in sexism and sleaze. But they aren't unbelievable. We can see Anna stays with Alex because she thinks she can get what she wants from him, even though we in the audience know he's a dud.

Anna's hopes about Alex lead her into her first mistake. When she gets an obscene call, she believes it's Alex trying to spice up their relationship. She's excited. It answers her wish for some thrills and danger in their sex life.

In rushing out to meet him in a bar, she runs headlong into a much more dangerous encounter. In the bar another man tries to pick her up, she witnesses a murder, and she learns that Alex hasn't phoned her. So who was the caller? Was it Jellybean, the man in the bar?

Anna's not sure, and neither are we. She really thinks that Jellybean is the caller and, despite herself, she begins to respond. As she tells her friend, he was "really handsome, in a dangerous kind of way." Unlike Alex! The calls don't terrorise her; she feels she's in control.

Gradually she's drawn in, building on the caller's fantasies, taking a lead. She feels titillated by the calls, but also safe. She can hang up, she can refuse to answer,

she can ignore him. She can be freer, less inhibited than she is with her real life lover.

On its own, this could have been a pretty interesting theme, since it doesn't treat Anna in either a prurient or a judgemental way. But the movie has been made with an eye on the box office. The murder plot starts to intrude into the story and eventually takes over from the sex story.

This is a shame because the murder plot is simply ludicrous. Anna, who's come across till now as bright and street-smart, is forced by the plot to wander around ill-lit underground car parks and lonely riverbanks as if just waiting for some bogeyman to jump out and frighten her. It's nice that she's not shown as little Miss Timid and Terrified, but this is inconsistent.

At the end, Anna seems to be turning her back on fantasy as being too dangerous to handle. Yet, ironically, it's reality and not her fantasy life that was threatening.

I'd like to have seen the film that should have been made. But, even so, it's nice that a film can show a woman wanting more emotional and sexual satisfaction without condemning her for it. I'm sorry for those single men in the audience that day, but maybe they learned something.

South of the Border

By Trudy Saunders

At long last television has come up with a series about working class women (one black) living on a run-down council estate that doesn't make you reach for the sick bag and wonder if television producers have ever set foot outside of Hampstead.

I'm talking, of course, about 'South of the Border'.

Pearl and Finn are Private Dicks. They got into it by accident, having met when Pearl threw her (married) boyfriend's floppy discs, complete with computer, into a skip — on Finn's head. It wouldn't have made any difference to her by now ex-boyfriend anyway — he didn't know how to work the computer.

Set in South London amid the black music scene and high-rise flats, 'South of the Border' charts the unglamorous escapades of our two unlikely heroines. The real dicks of the piece are, of course, the men. Union bureaucrats, corrupt nightclub owners, exploitative pop star managers and porn merchants all get their comeuppance when faced with the investigative skills of P and F.

It sounds far-fetched, but it's not. The most unlikely episode featured a goody trade union leader who actually supported and encouraged his striking members — unfortunately there aren't too many like that around!

What's more, shag-pile carpets and shoulder pads are nowhere to be seen in this series. It's all jeans, jumble sales and 'What She Wants' for the intrepid pair. Nor are there any "loveable Cockneys" (why do all TV producers think Londoner = Cockney?), not one "cor blimey" or "ows yer father".

Instead there's a black preacher who's got a pirate gospel radio station, a wimpy, well-meaning councillor (played by Lofty) who gets knocked off his bike — reflective jacket and all — and ends up in bed with Pearl. But she's too much for

him; she could eat him for breakfast.

All in all, 'South of the Border' is second only to 'The Golden Girls'

in portraying a positive image of women and, in this case, black women — something that's sorely missing from our TV screens.

The infamous five

Yet another year draws towards a close, and a new year looms on the horizon. It's a traditional time for taking stock and as our contribution the Women's Fightback collective presents its coveted 'Dick of the Year' awards, to those men who, over the past year, have served as ugly reminders of just what it is that we're up against.

Competition has been tough this year, but, after much deliberation, we've settled on a choice five.

In first place we have Stuart Bell, Labour MP for Middlesbrough, whose crusade in Cleveland against doctors, social workers and all those involved in the field of child sex abuse achieved a pinnacle of philistine, ignorant complacency.

Running a close second, David Alton, come on down. David "every sperm is sacred" Alton narrowly failed this year to slash the time limit for legal abortion from 28 to 18 weeks. In the wake of defeat David, a "decent Catholic", married. As yet, surprisingly, there is no word of a David junior on the way. A little odd, you might think. Maybe he's just got natural rhythm.

In third place we have good old Judge Cassell. The 72 year old defender of justice sentenced a man who had sexually abused his stepdaughter to a derisory two year suspended sentence.

As if this weren't bad enough, he rounded up with a quaint little speech, saying that the incident happened when the girl's mother

was pregnant: "a time at which ladies are naturally not receptive to their husbands", thus neatly absolving the perpetrator of all responsibility — after all, we all know men can't control their sex drives, don't we?

Judge Cassell has since been consigned to a home for the terminally bewildered.

Our great leader Neil Kinnock this year proclaimed himself to be "a reactionary on the family" and spent the rest of the year proving it. From Clause 28 to the Alton Bill, to his nauseating bear-hugging of Glenys on the platform at Labour Party conference, Neil has wasted no opportunity to show himself to be a staunch defender of traditional family values. Cheers, Neil.

Our awards wouldn't be complete without at least one member of the royal family. No surprises here, yes, it's Mr Tact and Diplomacy himself, HRH Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh. Good old Phil did it again with his witty comment that wives and prostitutes do the same job.

For a moment we did think it was possible that HRH had, in fact, been reading the Communist Manifesto and had adopted Marx's critique of bourgeois marriage as legalised prostitution. We now consider this unlikely and reckon it's simply yet another anti-woman comment from his royal reactionariness himself.

These men and their like give the lie to the notion that women don't need feminism any more. I reckon they've done us all a service, don't you? Take a bow, gentlemen!

of wage slavery, of subservience to the boss and the machine, the working class man could have some power — over his wife and kids.

The hierarchical structure of the family instills obedience to authority. The physical separation of home and work not only isolated women, but them out from the social world, but meant that work which took place in the home was not a 'labour of love' — simple, the natural caring of a mother for her husband and children.

But in reality housework is mind-bombingly backbreaking toil. It is work which is not paid for and which directly benefits the capitalist class. For if wives were not expected to care for children, the old, the sick, to feed and clothe workers and turn them in the morning ready for work, then who would?

For the capitalists to pay for such servicing would mean a massive reduction in their profits. In short, capitalism adapted the already existing oppression of women to its own needs.

The domestic economy may not be theoretically indispensable to capitalism, but historically it is part and parcel of it.

All this gives the lie to Delphy's notion of a separate 'domestic mode of production' and of a specific 'housewife class' with a community of interest.

For sure, all women are oppressed. All women are subject to sex-

ual violence, and can be raped. Women are

discriminated against at all levels of society.

But, by and large, this oppression is of direct benefit to the capitalists. Men do benefit, including working class men. They often benefit significantly. The fact that working class men benefit is a problem that we have to tackle if we are to build a labour movement which is responsive to women's needs.

But any real women's movement can only be built on an understanding of the differences between women of different classes. Middle class women will have to consciously side with their most oppressed sisters — working class women. A movement cannot be built on the fudge of a classless sisterhood.

For if women's oppression began with the beginning of class society, has been interwoven with class society, and is ultimately defined by production, then it is only the end of class society that can provide the precondition for the liberation of women. A socialist revolution will remove the economic basis of the family as it is, and begin to allow women to develop as fully free and equal human beings.

But that means women now must fight alongside men, as part of the labour movement. Often this will mean fighting against men to take our rightful place in the workers' movement. It's not an easy answer, but it is the only one. The concept of patriarchy points us in the wrong direction.

Build a campaign to stop the poll tax

The Labour leadership's determination to stamp out any sort of fightback against the poll tax — and their contempt for party democracy and debate — were demonstrated at the Scottish Labour Women's Conference last month.

Seven resolutions on the poll tax submitted to the conference by women's sections were ruled out of order by the Standing Orders Committee. The reason given was that Annual Conference had already debated the issue and decided the policy and it was therefore against the rules to discuss it again!

To back up this pathetic — and blatantly untrue — excuse, the SOC quoted two Labour Party rules in its defence — Clause IV.i and Clause III.ii — neither of which gave any reason as to why Scottish Labour Party women couldn't discuss the poll tax!

In addition, the SOC did accept the GMB resolution on the poll tax — a wishy-washy, toe the Kinnockite line, resolution which said nothing more than that the poll tax is unfair and the Scottish Labour Women's Committee should get involved in the 'Stop It' campaign.

The seven resolutions ruled out of order, however, demanded that the Labour Party, both in Scotland and nationally, should launch a massive campaign against the poll tax, including the call for non-payment, and that Labour-controlled local councils should refuse to implement the tax, in conjunction with trade unionists.

At the conference, the delegates whose resolutions had been ruled out of order mounted a successful challenge to the Standing Orders Committee, overturned their ruling and won the right for their resolutions to be heard. Many of the delegates there were appalled by the anti-democratic manoeuvring of the SOC and, even though, like the T&G delegates, they later voted against non-payment and non-implementation, supported the

right to have the debate.

The resolutions themselves were only narrowly defeated, proving that Labour Party activists know what Kinnock refuses to admit, that it's the absence of any fight by Labour that loses us support — not the number of members on the streets at election time, or 'left-wing' candidates.

Women's Sections must fight to make the Labour leadership back the working class in their fight against the Tories and, too, we must fight to stop the Kinnockites stifling debate and discussion in the party.

Councils should say no

Council officials are to be given a battery of new powers, now held only by magistrates courts, to enforce the collection of the poll tax.

Regulations being drafted by the Department of the Environment will give the poll tax officers the power to deduct wages at source, send in the bailiffs, deduct social security at source, and to start bankruptcy proceedings.

Poll tax officers will also be able to recommend that a non-payer be sent to prison if they decide failure to pay is due to "wilful refusal or culpable neglect".

All poll tax officers will have to do will be to obtain a "liability order" against a non-payer from a magistrates court. Once they have that, all the above measures can be taken without further application to a court.

Most alarmingly, there will be no right of appeal to the courts if deduction do not leave you with enough to live on. Poll tax officers are not required to take into account any other deductions or debt repayments when they calculate the poll tax deductions.

The liability order will also empower poll tax officers to make

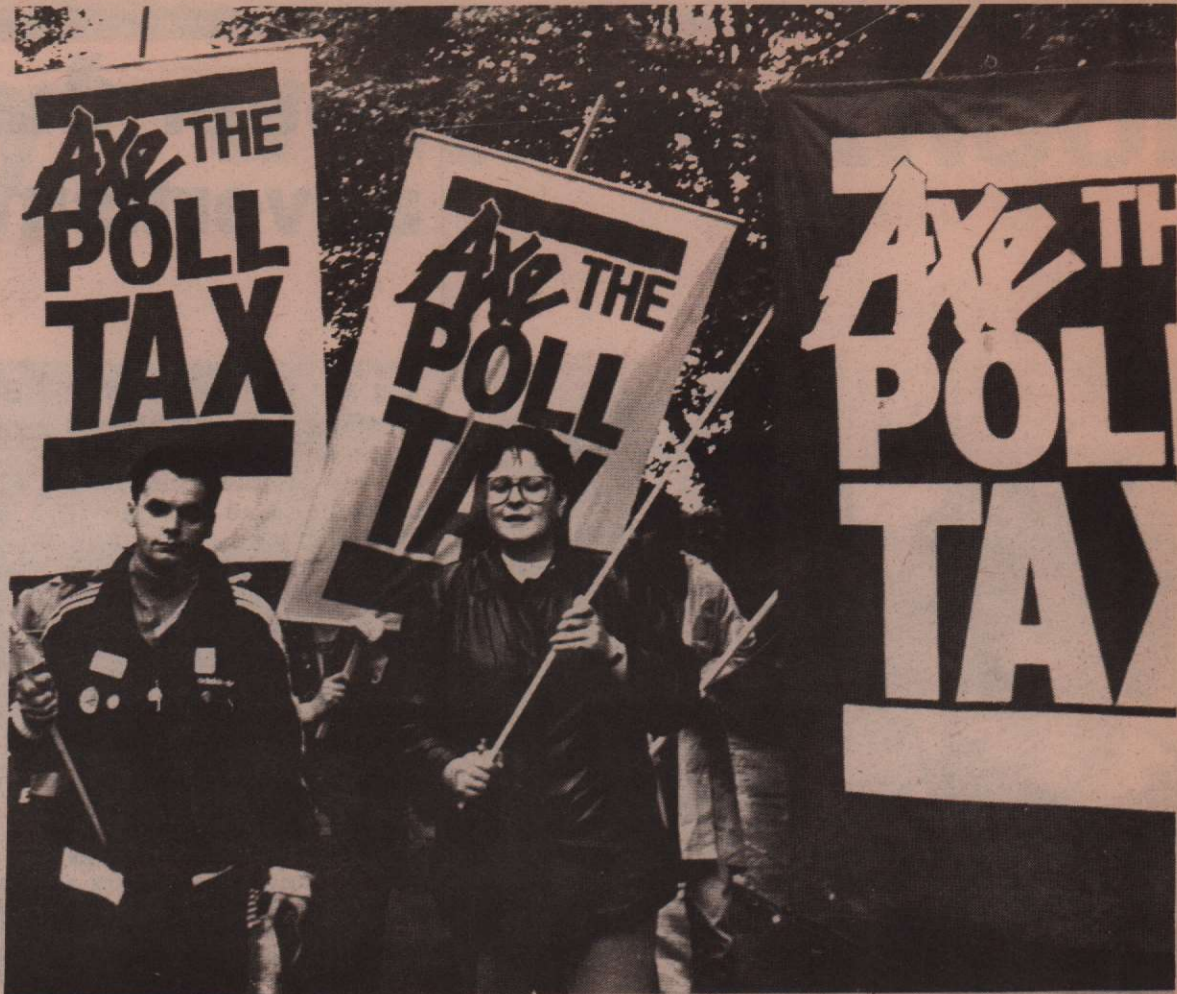


Photo: John Harris

defaulters fill in a form giving all sorts of personal details — how much you earn, the name of your employer, whether you are married or cohabiting, whether you have goods which could be sold off to pay the debt. Refusal to fill in the form carries a £400 fine.

These new rules show that the poll tax is not only an attack on our pockets but on our civil liberties. Councils are advised to employ private bailiffs to seize non-payers' belongings. The state is telling local authorities to employ private bullies to force their way into our homes.

This is one of the biggest attacks on working people's rights and living standards in years. The labour movement's — particularly the Labour Party's — passivity on the issue is a disgrace. We should demand that Labour-controlled local authorities follow the example of Lambeth in stopping work on all poll tax preparations and looking for ways to refuse to collect the poll tax.

We need a massive campaign based in the communities and trade unions to force local authorities not to implement the poll tax. Let's strangle it at birth.

Work A woman's place

Health at work

Today more than 9½ million women work and they are 45% of the workforce. Work has a particularly important impact on women's health, both negative and positive, because:

- * the systems, standards and equipment at many workplaces were designed for men;
- * most women have two jobs — one at work and one at home;
- * many women who bear the main, or sole, responsibility for child (and other dependent) care face special problems that men do not;
- * some workplace hazards, such as sexual harassment, violence at work, and stress affect women far more than men.

A recent NUPE women's course on health found that all the above factors, plus low pay, shift work, payment by results, staff shortages and, in addition to the dual role of worker and mother, responsibilities of being a union rep all contributed to extra stress suffered by women workers. In response, NUPE and other unions are now taking up the issue of stress at a national level, running special courses for women on how to cope with stress — and the factors that cause it.

More young women aged 16-19 smoke than men. One in three (6.6 million) women aged 16 and over smoke. Since 1972 the number of smokers has fallen, but the rate for women has declined twice as slowly as that for men. Unions are now becoming more concerned about smoking at work — not only in terms of the hazard to the smokers, but the hazard of passive smoking. Unions such as the GMB have issued advice on how to deal with workplace smoking issues in its Health and Safety for Women handbook.

Pressure at work, and at home may lead to women drinking more heavily. The number of women who are frequent light drinkers rose from 39% to 42% of the female population between 1978-84. Heavy drinking among younger women (18-24 years) remains relatively high, despite the fact that heavy alcohol consumption may increase the risk of contracting breast cancer by 30%. More unions are now negotiating agreements to ensure that employees with problems with alcohol consumption are treated

under a special "alcohol policy" and not a disciplinary procedure.

Over 2,000 women a year die of cervical cancer. An effective screening programme could reduce this death rate by at least 1,000 a year and possibly more. For many women, finding the time to go for regular screenings is difficult. The workplace provides a more convenient location for many women, and some unions have recognised this and are getting better at taking up issues of preventative health care — such as screening for cervical and breast cancer.

A number of unions run courses and campaigns specifically on cancer screening and some, like NUPE and SOGAT, have successfully won the right for women workers to have paid time off for cancer screening, or, more usefully, won agreement for on-site screening.

The workplace is especially important for reaching those women who do not attend GPs or other non-workplace health education courses or screening programmes. Working class women suffer three times the incidence of heart disease, stroke and lung cancer than professional women, and unions should fight for women to have paid time off for cancer screening, and to attend health courses, as well as fighting for better health and safety at work.

WOMEN for SOCIALISM

**Women for Socialism Conference
Saturday 25 & Sunday 26 February
"Socialist Feminism into the '90s"
Wesley House, Holborn, London WC1**

Saturday: Starts 10.45am

Plenary with Martha Osamor, SWAPO representative, Bernadette McAliskey, Betty Heathfield and other labour movement speakers

Workshops on the themes of: Women & the Family; Welfare State; Women and Work; Internationalism; Education & Culture

Sunday: Launching Women for Socialism

Discussions on: producing a newsletter; developing regional and national structures; and much more

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As James Connolly put it in his pamphlet "Socialism Made Easy": "It will be seen that this conception of socialism destroys at one blow all the fears of a bureaucratic state, ruling and ordering the lives of every individual from above, and this gives assurance that the social order of the future will be an extension of the freedom of the individual, and not the suppression of it. In short, it blends the fullest democratic control with the most expert supervision, something unthinkable of any society built upon the political state."

In facing the future, it is important to begin from where we are now and not base ourselves on false hopes. The struggle for socialism, to eliminate capitalism, to build a new, classless, democratic socialist society, has always been a hard fight. At certain stages in that fight there have been people in the movement who have wanted to abandon the struggle, accept compromises, make their peace with the idea of the political enemy and adapt themselves to the policies of the ruling class.

It happened after the 1926 General Strike and it led to the betrayal of 1931. After the defeat of Labour in 1951 and the loss of three general elections, we saw the Gaitskellite retreat and the almost total abandonment of socialism by the Labour Party. That retreat, however, was halted and socialist ideas re-emerged as strong as ever.

Today we are witnessing the same thing. Labour has lost three elections. We saw the miners defeated in 1984/5 and other sections of the workers have also been defeated. The movement has been in retreat for some time. The Labour councillors of Liverpool and Lambeth had the full weight of the law and the state against them, and they too were defeated. They have been surcharged and disqualified.

Defeat leads to gloom and it is asy in such a situation for the

power of the political enemy to be got out of perspective. For some people in the movement to despair and to think that the political enemy are there for ever. The truth is they are not.

Capitalism is in crisis. The rich are getting richer at the expense of the poor. It is at such a time that the message of socialism is needed more than ever.

It would be totally wrong to believe that the argument for capitalist concepts of greed and individualism have won and that people cannot be won for the ideas of caring and working together for the good of all. The ideas of Thatcher, because of the experience of the mass of the people, can easily be blown away.

I would therefore call upon all serious socialists in the Labour Party and the trade union movement to fight back now, to organise, to win the Party and the people for socialist ideas and policies. That is the way to win the next general election.

In the coming year members must meet regularly and formulate their ideas, based on the Party's socialist constitution, and submit their ideas to the policy committee. That should be done in every constituency and affiliated body, with the widest possible involvement of our membership. They should hold educational meetings, classes and schools, study basic socialist ideas and relate them to the needs of people today.

Campaign Groups should be formed in all parts of the country and where CLPs get together to formulate ideas these should be encouraged.

In conclusion, I believe that Labour must state clearly it will take back into public ownership all those industries and services that have been privatised, without a great deal of compensation and in certain cases with no compensation at all. In future the publicly owned industries, etc. must have real democratic management and control. Industrial democracy

must exist alongside political democracy.

All anti-trade union legislation must be repealed, as decided at the TUC and Labour Party conference.

It is essential to get rid of all nuclear weapons and bases from and around British soil, and we must be prepared to get out of NATO. We must fight for peace in Europe and the world, and give our support to those in the Soviet Union who are seeking to democratise that system.

The Party must again fight for full employment and to do that it is essential to plan democratically the economy of the country. That means we work for a socialist Europe, but recognise that the EEC stands in the way of that.

Lastly, we need a programme of house building by local authorities and we need to rebuild the welfare state, the educational system and the National Health Service. That is the way ahead in the fight for socialism.

I would like to end by quoting from G.D.H. Cole's pamphlet "Is This Socialism?":

"The alternative is to rest content with what has been achieved and to give up trying to establish a socialist society. That I fear is what many who continue to call themselves socialists are really minded to do, sheltering from apostasy behind the assertion that the majority of the electorate would not be induced to vote for it."

"But what is the use of winning an election except as a means to an end? To win an election without a policy is the surest way of losing the next and of spreading dismay and disillusionment among one's supporters. If the end is no longer socialism, but something else, what else? If it is still socialism, let us tell the electorate frankly how we propose to advance towards it."

Abridged from the S.O. Davies Memorial Lecture in Merthyr Tdyfil, 29 October 1988.

Virus and chips

LES HEARN'S SCIENCE COLUMN



There was an outbreak of a nasty virus disease in the US last month. The 20,000 victims were unconscious for 36 hours but made a complete recovery.

They were, in fact, computers and the "virus" was a piece of software — a rogue computer program. Written by a mischievous computer expert, the "virus" was "injected" into one computer.

After a specified period of "incubation", it instructed the computer to send copies of itself to other computers connected to the first, easily evading safeguards built in nowadays to try and keep out viruses. It also told its host to fill its memory with useless information.

Eventually, some 20,000 computers became clogged with useless information and were unable to carry on with their normal work: they "crashed".

The virus was written by the son of one of the US's top experts in computer security. He faces possible prison for unauthorised entry into government computers. Some people feel he should be leniently treated since he has performed a service by revealing flaws in computer security.

This virus was fairly harmless — it didn't damage or wipe files of valuable information. Others are not so mild. Computer viruses are not rare. The Computer Virus Industry Association talks of some 300 cases of infection in the last eight months, with some 48,000 victims. Undoubtedly, there are many more dormant viruses, waiting to be activated, some of which will cause great harm.

An early example of such harm was the revenge of the sacked programmer. Suspecting imminent dismissal, such a person would enter a program that would only be activated if the person's name disappeared from the payroll. Then it would wipe clean files of valuable information.

Computer controllers are now on their guard against such tricks, but there are still plenty of loopholes to be exploited. Some people do this for fun, like the "hackers" (en-

thusiasts who like to pit their wits against the system) who "broke into" the Duke of Edinburgh's electronic "mail box" and left light-hearted messages. Others have a fraudulent or mischievous intent.

Loopholes in security systems are just one consequence of a more fundamental problem with computers — undetected and, indeed, undetectable errors in their software.

Programmers make errors in up to 10% of lines of code that they write. Careful checking and testing can reduce this to about 1%. The programs will run satisfactorily under most conditions but may fail unpredictably. How is this?

Suppose a program controlling an industrial process is monitoring 100 binary signals. These signals are what numbers are turned into so that the computer can read them. The numbers might be information fed in by an operator, from a memory store or from instruments monitoring a piece of machinery.

Each binary signal can have two values, so the number of possible combinations is two times itself a hundred times — well over one billion trillion. To test each of these combinations at 100 tests per second would take about 20 billion times the present age of the universe! And this is not a particularly complex example.

Errors that have got through the checking process include the following:

- A computer tried to heat a chemical process to 800 degrees Celsius when the operator meant to enter a pressure of 800 millimetres of mercury. The resulting overheating caused the release of the chemicals into the air. The program should have disallowed such a high temperature.

- A computer turned off an expensive process for one hour when the operator reset its internal clock to British Summer Time.

- Clients of Midland Bank had their cashcards "eaten" by Nat West automatic tills one New Year. Midland's computer was one day out because no-one had told it it was a leap year. Nat West's computer then refused to cooperate.

- The Civil Aviation Authority's air traffic control program, renowned for crashing and stranding passengers in departure lounges, had an even more bizarre fault when it was bought from America. It had no provision for the longitude of zero degrees, which passes through Greenwich. Consequently, it introduced a fold into its internal map of Britain, placing Birmingham on top of Norwich!

These inbuilt errors, many avoidable, make it unwise to rely uncritically on computers. Dispensing entirely with human help after installing computers is a false economy.

Intelligent surveillance will always be necessary, else glitches, like the confusion of a flock of geese with a flight of Russian nuclear missiles which occurred in America a few years back, could have tragic consequences.

Information from *New Scientist*.

A victory against the witch hunt

By Max Gordon

At the Wales Labour Party Regional Conference last May, the Regional Organiser, Anita Gale, declared: "We do not need to set up a New Model Labour Party in Wales — we already are the New Model Labour Party."

This is quite an astonishing claim in a region that is full of old-fashioned, right-wing party bosses running moribund local party organisations. There are still places where they tell you that you can't join the ward because "we're full up". While people who should know better romanticise about a "socialist heartland", the valleys reverberate with the sound of long-dead militants spinning in their graves.

There is another reason why Cde. Gale's proclamation is rather premature — that is the fight against the witchhunt in Cardiff Central. One ward within the constituency, Plasnewydd, was suspended last February, ostensibly on the grounds that one Chris Peace was present at the ward AGM.

Chris was expelled in October 1987 for being a supporter of Militant and the ward's explanation that he was attending the AGM as a guest was not accepted. Anita Gale had informed the constituency officers that if the ward was not suspended, then the constituency would be.

Accordingly, the constituency executive met and obeyed the diktat, though the fact that non-executive committee members were present and voting made the decision unconstitutional. Cde. Gale judged that this was an inadvertent error and therefore didn't matter — the suspension stood. Worse, the ward was to be investigated by an 'inquiry'.

Plasnewydd was clearly being 'fitted-up'. Despite repeated requests, verbally and in writing, Anita Gale has never been able to quote which party rule or NEC rul-

ing was broken by the ward. Even more embarrassing from her point of view, right-wingers in the constituency were spilling the beans about the witchhunt. The constituency secretary admitted it was all about "re-fashioning the constituency in the image of the leadership now that it was a key marginal."

Chief witchhunter and ex-Parliamentary candidate, Jon Jones, spilled his guts to the press, talking about "restoring the integrity of the party in Plasnewydd."

What lay behind these shenanigans was a very crude and bungling attempt to silence a very active, campaigning and, worst of all, left-wing ward. Typically, the right-wingers in Cardiff Central run wards that have low membership, poor turn-outs, and do not actively campaign outside of election time. More generally, Plasnewydd has been a thorn in the side of local party bosses for a while now. These people control City and County Councils that enthusiastically use 'new realist' attitudes to justify the implementation of Tory policies.

The crunch came over a County Council plan to re-organise tertiary education and set up sixth-form colleges. Included in this plan was a proposal to close the excellent multi-racial Howardian Comprehensive School in Cardiff Central. This was justified by using the straightforward Tory argument that falling school rolls mean school closures.

The proposed closure generated an incredible community outcry and a lively, well-supported campaign to keep the school open and for the Council to refuse to make the cuts in education demanded by the Welsh office. This campaign naturally had the support of Plasnewydd and other wards, and even the constituency party, but what really angered the party bosses was the recruitment of the chair of the Save Howardian Action Committee into membership of Plasnewydd ward. It was after this point that local rumblings about 'getting' Plasnewydd ward became audible — even on the Labour Party Wales Executive.

The real reason for the suspension then, lay here. It was an at-



Neil Kinnock. Photo: John Harris.

tempt to root out opposition to the policies of the right-wing Labour councils, and also to reshape the party, minus its vocal left-wing. Here, too, were the sources of the blunders made by the witchhunters. Their lack of political judgement, revealed in unpopular policies, also led them to think the left could be suppressed if only the ward was suspended.

With the ward out of the way, the real cause of the problem would be isolated and dealt with — a small number of committed individuals could be picked off and that would be that. They were wrong on both counts.

In the first place, the reaction from members of the constituency was fury. Excluded from the constituency AGM, Plasnewydd organised a large and successful lobby. Delegates from other wards demanded the reinstatement of Plasnewydd and refused to let the business of the AGM proceed. At the second attempt to hold the

AGM a week later, the Plasnewydd delegates occupied the meeting for 45 minutes.

Despite the presence of Anita Gale, the business was talked out once again. While the first AGM was bantering and relatively light-hearted, the second was angry and came close to violence. In a vain attempt to ram through the business, both the party rule book and local standing orders were virtually ripped up. Anita Gale appeared to be totally confused about which body had suspended the ward — whether it was the constituency executive, Labour Party Wales executive or, as she said on another occasion, "no-one really suspended the ward!"

The witchhunters had clearly not expected such strength of feeling and had begun to run for cover. A meeting of constituency officers argued that the suspension was unconstitutional, that the ward should be allowed to re-run its AGM and that, meanwhile, the constituency AGM should be adjourned. This was turned down by Cde. Gale who handed the whole matter over to Joyce Gould, the Labour Party's Director of Organisation at Walworth Road, after the second attempt to complete the AGM failed.

At this point a number of comrades in the constituency set up 'Fight the Witchhunt in Cardiff Central' under the banner of Campaign for Labour Party Democracy (CLPD) and consciously modelled on the 'Reinstate Khan and Scally' campaign in Birmingham. Letters asking for support, a model resolution, a background information pack and a press release were issued as widely as possible. Speakers were invited by other wards.

The Regional Conference at Tenby was leafleted and lobbied in May and a FWHCC speaker appeared on the platform of the Benn-Heffer fringe meeting. The ultimate sign of recognition came when the campaign was denounced from the conference platform by George Wright, T&GWU regional secretary and head witchhunter in these parts. The campaign was also taken to the Chesterfield Conference where fringe meetings were lobbied.

The response to all of this activity varied. Hardly surprisingly, the best came from South Wales itself, with wards, CLPs and Women's Councils expressing support. What was more surprising was the paucity of the national response. With a few honourable exceptions, the campaign received almost no support outside South Wales.

The response of the right, and, more specifically, of Joyce Gould, became clear only slowly. The constituency AGM was held for a third time without Plasnewydd and, heavily stewarded, it was completed. But then there was what appeared to be a climb down. All mention of an inquiry into the ward was dropped. Anita Gale even denied she had called for an investigation. Instead the ward was to have a new AGM after the credentials of each member had been checked. There followed the farce of the Labour Party Wales organiser 'doorstepping' every member of the ward over a number of weeks. Joyce Gould was obviously punishing local witchhunters for failing to do the business.

At the new ward AGM held, appropriately enough, on Halloween night, the rump of a right-wing were hammered by the left. In the eight months of suspension support for the left had actually increased and the same officers were returned with larger majorities. The ward has since reaffirmed its campaigning stance over the Poll Tax and over the proposed closure of Howardian school.

The lessons of all this are obvious. In the first place, the witchhunters must be fought. Keeping our heads down will not make the bogeyman go away. Even now in Cardiff Central the right-wing are returning to the fray and attempting to witchhunt individuals. Secondly, they must be opposed with as broad and open a campaign as possible. The essential thing is to politicise the fightback by pointing out the underlying issues and giving them publicity.

Thirdly, when comrades hear of an appeal for support by people being witchhunted, listen to it and act on it! Nothing boosts the morale than hearing of support from far away places — it's called solidarity. Also, nothing disheartens the right-wing more than a fightback that begins to spread.

Finally, it is possible to win, even if it is only one battle. If it ever comes into being, the New Model Labour Party will be built over the hopes, wishes and ideas of all kinds of people on the left. These comrades, as well as those on the organised left, stand to be abused, ignored and even expelled if the leadership have their way. A fight against the witchhunt can be a tremendous force for unity on the left, and that unity is essential in winning the battle for socialist ideas in the Labour Party.

WHERE WE STAND

Socialist Organiser stands for workers' liberty East and West. We aim to help organise the left wing in the Labour Party and trade unions to fight to replace capitalism with working-class socialism.

We want public ownership of the major enterprises and a planned economy under workers' control. We want

democracy much fuller than the present Westminster system — a workers' democracy, with elected representatives recallable at any time, and an end to bureaucrats' and managers' privileges.

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states against their own anti-socialist bureaucracies.

We stand:

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Against racism, and against deportations and all immigration controls.

For equality for lesbians and gays.

For a united and free Ireland, with some federal system to protect the rights of the Protestant minority.

For left unity in action; clarity in debate and discussion.

For a labour movement accessible to the most oppressed, accountable to its rank and file, and militant against capitalism.

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Labour and Scotland

By Stan Crooke

Even before Labour's debacle in the Govan by-election, the ground was being prepared for a breakaway Scottish Labour Party. Labour's humiliation and the Scottish National Party's sensational success in that by-election have given added impetus to the movement towards a breakaway.

This article outlines the history of the last attempt to form a Scottish Labour Party and concludes that the current attempt to repeat history is unlikely to be any more successful.

The Scottish Labour Party (SLP) was launched in January 1976. By October of the same year it was in its death throes.

The SLP stood for Scotland and Socialism. "We are Scottish with a capital 'S' and Socialist with a capital 'S'," declared its leader Jim Sillars, at the SLP's founding meeting. The SLP was to be more "Scottish" than the Labour Party and more socialist than either the Labour or Scottish National parties.

The SLP was also to be more democratic than the Labour Party, or at least many of those joining it hoped and believed so.

At the time of the formation of the SLP, Jim Sillars was Labour MP for South Ayrshire. Once a firm opponent of devolution, he had gradually swung round to a perspective of Scottish independence within the Common Market.

In the early 1970s Sillars had met regularly with three other MPs (John Robertson, Harry Ewing and Alex Eadie, though the latter two eventually dropped out) and various journalists (especially from the *Scotsman*) to discuss plans for reforming the Labour Party in Scotland. After the 1974 general election, against a background of the rise of the Scottish National Party, the focus of the meetings shifted to the creation of a breakaway Scottish Labour Party.



Jim Sillars

The involvement of journalists ensured good press coverage. The *Economist* magazine described Sillars' SLP as "the darling of the Scottish political correspondents". The 32 issues of the *Scotsman* which appeared between the first "leak" about the creation of a new party and the inaugural meeting of the SLP carried 28 articles about the event, 14 of them on the front

page. Some 400 people attended the SLP's inaugural meeting in Glasgow in January 1976. The new party's members included journalists Chris Baur and Neal Ascherson, and academics such as Tom Nairn (author of 'The Break-Up of Britain') and Jim Young. But the gap between the SLP's aspirations and the composition of

its membership was summed up by one of the numerous post-graduates who joined the party: "Sillars' problem was that he wanted my father — who's a railwayman — to join; what he got was me."

The International Marxist Group (political forerunner of today's Socialist Action and Labour Briefing) also directed its members, somewhat haphazardly, into the new party.

The SLP's promise of an open and democratic party soon bit the dust. The first decision of the first meeting of its leading body, the National Organising Committee (NOC) was to ban dual membership, apart from with the Labour Party. It was a measure directed against the IMG, alleged members of which soon came to be suspended (on the basis of hearsay). The Leith and Glenrothes SLP branches were shut down on the basis of an alleged IMG takeover.

Without prior consultation with the Glasgow membership, the SLP leadership reorganised the Glasgow branch into a series of smaller branches so as to isolate its opponents.

Illusions that the SLP would automatically support workers in struggle were quickly shattered. When the Cumbernauld SLP branch backed local refuse workers on strike against the attempts of the local SNP-controlled council to cut their wages, the NOC refused to support the branch's action, apparently fearful that to do so would alienate the SNP and give the SLP too "extreme" an image.

The SLP was more sympathetically disposed towards the SNP than towards striking workers. It announced that it would only contest Labour-held seats where the SNP was not a stronger challenger. Foreshadowing his own membership of the SNP, Sillars also favoured dual membership of the SLP and SNP.

The economic policies adopted by the SLP were less than radical. The 'Jobs and Industry' document adopted by the NOC proposed the establishment of nearly a dozen government agencies, run by appointed boards, to "regenerate" the Scottish economy in conjunction with multi-national corporations, whose operations in Scotland were to be welcomed. Rather than propose the wholesale takeover of all financial institutions, the document restricted itself to the possible purchase of one major banking group.

Discontent with the political direction of the new party and the increasingly autocratic nature of its leadership came to a head at the SLP conference held in October. The NOC misread the situation and believed that the unrest had been engineered by the IMG. Hence the remedy was to crackdown on the latter.

"At times of crisis, working-class organisations expel without discussion," declared Sillars. "We should get our fucking pit boots on and wade right into them," suggested another member of the NOC.

In fact, the IMG members were too few in number and too disorganised to pose a real threat to Sillars. Although the first session of the SLP's October conference voted to approve the suspension of the Leith branch and of alleged IMG members, this did nothing to diminish criticism of the leadership. Sillars hit back by having an emergency resolution railroaded through the conference, expelling another four SLP branches.

By the end of the October conference the SLP was damaged beyond repair. The expelled branches and individual members who had left in disgust at the expulsions set up the SLP (Democratic Wing). The IMG moved quickly to take over the new organisation, which consequently went into rapid decline. By the time it declared itself in favour of affiliation to the IMG's version of the Fourth International, it consisted of no more than the IMG's Scottish membership, plus one or two others.

Sillars' SLP was likewise in a state of terminal decline. A declining membership, a growing financial deficit, a slump in the level of activity, a still more autocratic leadership, and a strict refusal to engage in any political accounting for recent events — plus the loss of free publicity via the press — combined to ensure the demise of the SLP, forcing Jim Sillars to take up his natural political home in the SNP.

Jim Sillars' political authoritarianism was certainly a major factor in explaining why the SLP ended up as yet another "dream turned sour". His autocratic leanings ran counter to the SLP membership's hopes of a more democratic party.

But the focus on Sillars obscures the deeper political failure of the SLP, which was inbuilt from the outset: it was a collection of individuals lacking a common political programme and devoid of a base in the labour movement. Not a single trade union or Labour Party branch, nor the majority of any branch, joined the breakaway SLP.

The ingredients for another SLP (whatever name it chooses to call itself) can easily be collected: a semi-charismatic figure converted to the cause of Scottish nationalism, a couple of academics, and a collection of politically confused though well-meaning people to serve as the foot soldiers. And there is no reason to believe that an SLP Mark II would not meet the fate of its less than illustrious predecessor, and deservedly so.

NEC whitewash defeat

The outcome of the Labour Party National Executive Committee's inquiry into Labour's catastrophic defeat in the Govan by-election in Glasgow on 10 November is the predictable cover-up.

The Govan by-election saw a 33% swing to the Scottish National Party. The Labour vote collapsed from 24,071 in last year's General Election to 11,123. The SNP vote jumped from 3,851 to 14,677 to give them victory.

The NEC's inquiry's explanation for this debacle? The campaign organisation was poor, more party members should have been out canvassing for Labour and the Labour candidate, although "credible", could, in the inquiry implies, have been better.

The solution to avoid another such humiliation in future? You've guessed it — the NEC should have the powers to select parliamentary candidates in future by-elections! How convenient for the NEC that just at the time it is seeking such powers, its inquiry into Govan should come out in favour.

Unfortunately, but not unsurprisingly, the NEC inquiry's findings were devoid of any relationship to reality.

Govan was not a one-off incident but part of a pattern. In the 1987 General Election the SNP won 10% of the vote in Scotland. In the 1988 District Council elections they won 20% of the vote. They now stand at 30% in the opinion polls.

A number of local council by-elections held in recent months — without the glare of publicity which the Govan by-election received — have shown the SNP consistently improving their position, gaining seats from Labour.

The problem in Govan was not the number of Labour Party canvassers out on the streets, but the message which the Labour canvassers were expected to deliver to the electorate: "Vote Labour, pay the Poll Tax!" This hardly encourages Labour Party members to go canvassing. It certainly did not encourage voters to support Labour.

One explanation for Labour's defeat in Govan is that Labour lost the seat because the party has failed

to pay sufficient attention to the so-called "Scottish dimension" in politics. I don't agree with this argument, but a serious inquiry into Labour's defeat would at least address it. Not so the NEC inquiry, however.

The NEC inquiry's outcome is nothing but a sham. Who — apart from the members of the inquiry — could deny that Labour paid the price in Govan for the miserable performance of Labour MPs in Parliament, the failure of Labour controlled councils to fight the poll tax, and the general bankruptcy of Neil Kinnock's no-fight leadership of the party?

CLPs should pass resolutions condemning the inquiry as a sham and rejecting its proposal to strip CLPs of their rights to select candidates in parliamentary by-elections.

CLPs in Scotland should also pass resolutions demanding that the findings of the separate Scottish inquiry into Govan be circulated round CLPs for amendment and that they be presented to the 1989 Labour Party Scottish annual conference for voting upon.

Yuletide teasers

Compiled by Uncle Jim

A. General Knowledge

1. Who is President of Pakistan?
2. Which region is at the centre of the Armenia/Azerbaijan dispute?
3. What do Kenneth Asquez, Stephen Bullock and Carmen Proetta have in common?
4. What is the Fennell Report about?
5. Who is Eric Pickles?

B. Who said...? (Quotes of the Year)

1. "Facts are stupid things."
2. "Daddy is such a sensitive father."
3. "None of these people on the dole know what it is like to be in debt for half a million pounds."
4. "They can always send the money back."
5. "What is money? You can't take it with you."

C. The Grim Reaper (Deaths of the Year)

1. The voice of Rambling Sid Rumpo.
2. Socialist socialite who "invented" the colour supplement.
3. Britain's first Arts Minister and creator of the Open University.
4. He said, "the movement kept me alive. The movement owes me nothing: on the contrary, I owe it much. Life would have been empty without it."
5. The last bastion of tripartism.

D. Street of Shame

1. Name the two female editors of national papers, and the papers.
2. Which paper criticised Labour for letting the government off too lightly over the Gibraltar shootings?
3. Who took which paper to the Press Council to "defend the decent standards of working class people"?
4. Which former *News of the World* and *Star* editor promised a "clean, decent tabloid"?
5. Which FT journalist wrote most of Neil Kinnock's Blackpool speech?

E. Your resignations this year

1. Who was "fed up with being humiliated"?
2. Who blamed a wife for her husband's sexual abuse of a child?
3. Who resigned with Clare Short?
4. Who is Sir Keith Bright?
5. Who is Dr Tony Ridley?

F. World of Books

1. Name the title and author of this year's Booker Prize winner.



2. Who wrote 'Prime Time'?
3. Who wrote 'The Lives of John Lennon'?
4. Which publishing house is under threat from Rupert Murdoch?
5. What is the title of Norman Tebbit's autobiography?

G. Cupid's Arrow (Romance in the air)

1. Who married his own publicist?
2. Who, having tied the knot with TASS, eloped to the Tasmanian rainforests?
3. Who won £300,000 for not having an affair?
4. Which Prime Minister's carrying-on with a "younger woman" enlivened the Mont St Michel talks?
5. Who won the Mills and Boon "most romantic MP" award?

H. State of the Unions

1. Whose dues arrears led to a walk-out from the TGWU Executive?
2. Which two single-union deals were the official reason for the EETPU's expulsion?
3. Which general secretary boasted of his "shabby little trick"?
4. What is the CONFED?
5. Who chairs the TUC's Women's Committee?

I. Sporting Life

1. Which of the following football clubs have never gone bankrupt?
 - a. Manchester United
 - b. Middlesbrough
 - c. Liverpool
2. How many of them are there in a team for the following sports?
 - a. Volleyball
 - b. Basketball

- a. Netball
3. Which cricket writer was once a leading Trotskyist?
 4. Locate:
 - a. Central Park
 - b. Bislet Stadium
 - c. Eden Gardens
 5. Which current football league club was once run by its local council?

J. Sectariana

1. Which master of understatement admitted, "We were a little slow to move during the miners' strike"?
2. Which 'Marxist' wrote, in what publication, "The left must be committed to international competitiveness"?
3. Which paper argued that, "Though Israeli Jews are indeed a nation with a distinct culture and identity, Marxists can never confer legitimacy on this state precisely because it is an oppressor state"?
4. Which journal warned that "imperialism prepares a nuclear Operation Barbarossa against the homeland of the October Revolution"?
5. Who said, about whom, "I was very bitter, I remember my reply. 'Yes, you were right: life must be very simple for you. No need to build alliances, no need to build anything in practice, no need to take risks — just sit on the sidelines and prophesy defeat and betrayal. You may be useless, but I suppose — at least until the revolution — you will always be right!' I didn't convince him, I wasn't totally convinced myself"?

Answers

A. General Knowledge: 1. Ghulam Khan; 2. Nagorny Karabakh; 3. Whittakers to the Gibraltar shootings; 4. The King's Cross disaster; 5. Leader of Bradford Council.

B. Who said...? (Quotes of the Year): 1. Who said: I. Kenneth Williams; 2. Marx Boxer; 3. Jenny Lee; 4. Harry McShane; 5. The MSC. D. Street of Shame; 1. Wendy Henry (News of the World); Eve Pollard (Sunday Mirror); 2. Daily Telegraph; 3. Kelvin McKenzie, editor of the Sun, accused The Independent of obscenity; 4. Lloyd Turner; 5. John Lloyd.

C. The Grim Reaper (Deaths of the Year): 1. Resignations: 1. Dennis Davies; 2. Judge Sir Harold Cassel; 3. Andrew Bennett; 4. ex-chair, London Regional Transport; 5. ex-chair, London Underground.

D. Street of Shame: 1. Oscar and Lucinda by Peter Carey; 2. Joan Collins; 3. Albert Goldman; 4. Collins; 5. Liverpoolly Mobile.

E. Your resignations this year: 1. Derek Jameson; 2. Clive Jenkins; 3. Koo Stark; 4. Andreas Papanetron of Jameson; 5. Hugo Hawley Fitzthomas Greec; 5. Hago Hawley Fitzthomas Summerson (Con, Walthamstow).

F. World of Books: 1. Steve Riley; 2. Orion; Christian-Salveson; 3. John Edmonds (GMB); 4. The Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Union; 5. Ken Gill.

G. Cupid's Arrow (Romance in the air): 1. Sporting Life; 1. c. Liverpool; 2. a. b. s., c. 7; 3. C.L.R. James; 4. a. Wigan, b. Oslo, c. Calcutta; 5. Chesterfield.

H. State of the Unions: 1. Tony Cliff at this year's SWP conference; 2. Martin Jacques, editor of Marxism Today in the Sunday Times; 3. Workers Power; 4. Spartacist; 5. Graham Bash of Labour.

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Roy Orbison

Luther Perkins pays tribute to Roy Orbison

Roy Orbison's contribution to music was a distinctive one. The songs he wrote and recorded in the Sixties were ballads of male insecurity and longing unmatched by any other rock and roll singer.

Born in Texas in 1936, he first recorded with the legendary Sun label in Memphis — one of the first labels to record white singers singing black rhythm and blues. Songs like 'Ooby Dooby' and 'Domino' were frantic rockers — but essentially Roy wanted to sing ballads.

He left Sun and spent some years songwriting — notably selling 'Claudette' to the Everly Brothers in 1958. In 1960 he wrote 'Only the Lonely', which he recorded for Fred Foster's Monument label in Nashville after both Elvis Presley and the Everlys had turned down the chance to record it. The song was the first of over 20 hits he had during the Sixties with songs such as 'Pretty Woman', 'Crying', 'It's over' and 'Blue Bayou'.

His records were distinguished by sparse arrangements which allowed his massive voice to dominate. Their subject matter was the lonely outsider desperately trying to get his woman. His appearance contributed to the image of his songs. He wore black clothes, dark glasses and a quiff of blackened hair. Elvis Presley is reported to have copied Roy's hairstyle to the extent of dying his hair black.

The image was to some extent accidental — Roy took to wearing dark glasses after leaving his normal pair on the plane that brought him to England for his first tour here. But it seems that his all-black dress helped gain him an acceptance among British rock and roll audiences of the time, who had given other American acts a rough ride.

Roy's personal life in this period was more than usually tragic. His first wife Claudette died in a motorcycle crash and two of their three sons were killed in a fire at his Nashville home.

At the end of the Sixties, Roy left Monument Records. During the Seventies he failed to find any further success. In recent years, however, his career seemed to be taking off again.

He re-recorded his greatest hits a couple of years ago, proving that the lean years since his first success had not taken away any of his voice's power or range. David Lynch used his re-recording of 'In Dreams' extensively in his film 'Blue Velvet', which helped bring his music to the attention of a younger age group — a development which was apparent from the audience at his last performance in London in 1987.

Spurred by this, he recorded an LP of new material and took part in the Travelling Wilburys, a collaboration between Roy, Bob Dylan, George Harrison, Tom Petty and Jeff Lynne. It is a cruel turn that the work that came as a result of this welcome return to songwriting and recording was probably responsible for the heart attack that killed him.

My most lasting memory of the 'Big O' will be of a show he gave in Catford, South London, in 1982, to an audience consisting mainly of people who remembered his big hits from when they were first released. He opened with 'Only the Lonely', showing immediately that he was far from the pitiful parody of a former self that many old rock and rollers have become, and ending with a storming version of 'Running Scared' that sent the whole place wild. It was one of the most convincing demonstrations of the power of the human voice to convey emotion that I have ever witnessed.

It's difficult to be objective about someone who affects you like that — it's also pretty stupid to get too worked up about a few pop songs. But I'll miss Roy Orbison.

