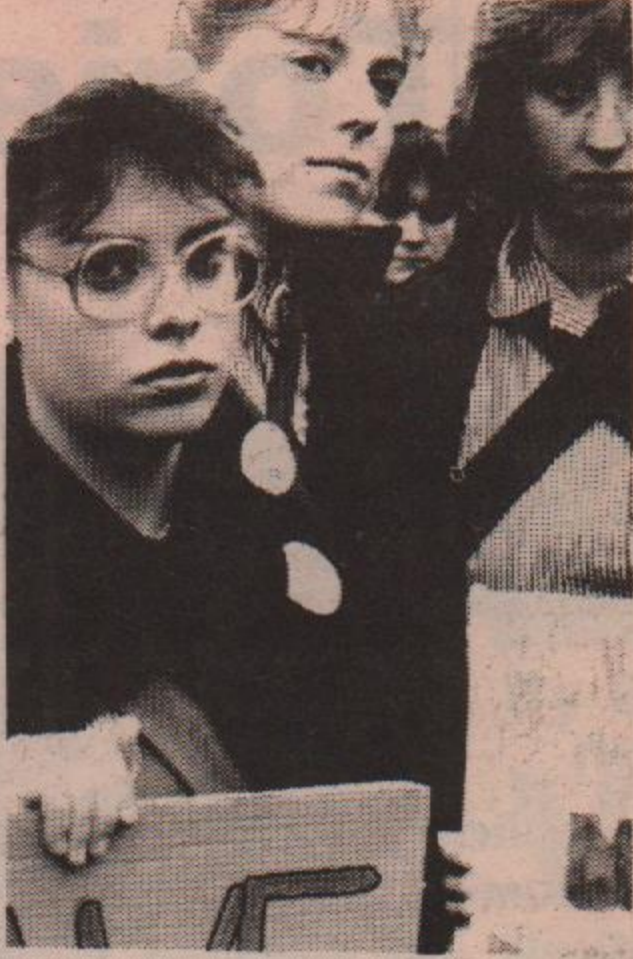


SOCIALIST

ORGANISER

INSIDE:



Tories plan British Health PLC

see centre pages

Capitalism makes you sick

Is it safe to eat? The tidy shelves of your local supermarket may be offering salmonella in eggs, listeria in soft cheese, and bovine spongiform encephalitis in meat pies.

Big business would like us not to worry about chickens, or cows infected with BSE (a disease that makes cows go mad and can go on to induce dementia in people).

They were powerful enough to get rid of a Tory minister, Edwina Currie, just for telling the truth about eggs.

For decades, probably centuries, food has got safer to eat. Technology has improved. Governments have been forced to impose regulations. Standards today are much higher than they were 100 years ago when bakers routinely put chalk in bread.

But now food poisoning is becoming more and more common. Food is becoming less and less safe.

Under this capitalist system, food — like everything else — is produced for profit, and only for profit. Whether it is nutritious or even safe is incidental: what matters to the food business is whether

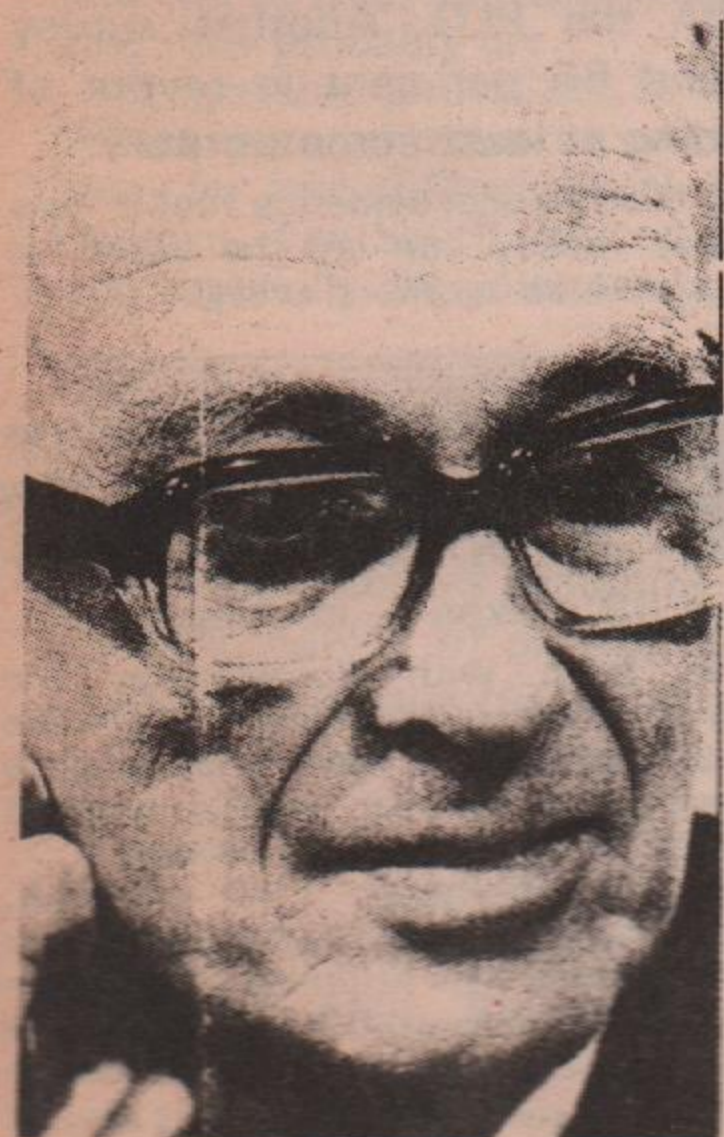
food is profitable.

Costs are cut ruthlessly on the farms, with animal waste reused as animal feed. More and more elaborate technologies are used to keep food looking fresh — and saleable — for longer. And the food business tries to make us buy more and more heavily-processed “convenience” and “fast” food — because it’s more profitable, and because all sorts of by-products which would otherwise have to be thrown away can be stuffed into meat pies, baby food, and the like. They throw in more and more chemical additives for taste and colour.

At each stage food is made less safe; and existing safety regulations become less and less able to protect us. Yet the Tory government’s basic aim is a free-market economy with as little social regulation as possible hindering the drive for profit.

Capitalism is making us sick. And it is able to do so all the more easily because farming, food processing, shops, and fast-food places are areas where trade unionism is exceptionally weak — areas where the necessary struggle for workers’ control starts from a low base.

Capitalism is as rotten as the food it offers us.



The water rip-off

By Kate O’Leary

The government has found itself in trouble over its plans to privatise the water authorities.

Private water companies already supply a quarter of households in England and Wales. They announced last week that they will need to raise charges by 30% or more to comply with new EEC rulings on higher drinking water quality, cleaner beaches and improved sewage treatment.

But the government has insisted

that the water authorities should raise charges by 9.8%, and wants the private companies to keep in line with this. The government has always said that privatisation would not mean higher prices for the consumer to pay for investment — the announcement by the companies, according to the Labour Party, has “blown the lid off” the whole privatisation programme.

The government is attempting to get round the problems by referring applications for price rises to a firm of accountants, who are to act as arbitrators. But the government is still faced with the problem of what

to do if the accountants approve high price rises.

Water authorities have been told to meet EEC standards on water cleanliness by 1995. But many impurities enter the water supply through the mains.

To replace the mains will take years, and be extremely costly. As the government has been uncooperative about agreeing a full timetable with the EEC, water authorities are in a state of confusion about what they are supposed to be doing, and how much it will cost.

The City, apparently, is not at all

happy about the present state of the privatisation plans.

Under the present scheme, with limits on price rises, the scheme will not be profitable for investors — unless standards are not met. Given Nicholas Ridley’s dismissive attitude towards EEC directives the outcome seems pretty clear — higher prices and lower standards.

The Water Bill gives privatised companies immunity from prosecution over standards, so long as the government believes they are doing “all that is appropriate” to comply with regulations.

Do the Tories want women to work?

WOMEN'S EYE

By Lynn Ferguson

The government's policies on childcare are becoming increasingly difficult to work out.

This week the Treasury has become the first government department to provide child care for its staff. A holiday play scheme, costing £5 a day, has been opened, catering for 5-12 year olds.

This development is rather ironic as it was the Treasury in 1984, which virtually halted the spread of workplace childcare when it decided to treat it as a taxable perk.

Apparently later on this week the Minister of State for the Civil Service, Richard Luce, is to announce a childcare initiative for civil service employees.

So who knows what government policies are on childcare?

Last month an all-party select committee, with a Tory majority, came out for state childcare for all 3-5 year olds. The minister responsible, Angela Rumbold, refused to give any commitment.

Various ministers have expressed opposition to workplace nurseries, instead mooted the idea that local employees could get together to fund nurseries in their particular areas.

Childcare for working mothers can be alarmingly expensive. A nursery catering for workers in the City, City Child, charges £560 per child per month.

Fine of course if you're a banker — utterly prohibitive if you're a secretary or a cleaner or an ordinary bank clerk. The Tories would probably approve of the enterprise culture being extended to childcare in this way, but it hardly does anything for the mass of working mothers.

The committee given the job of sorting all this out, the Ministerial Group on Women's Issues, was supposed to present plans this week. But now the meeting has been put off until April. Don't hold your breath.

Despite all the advertising geared to making condoms the latest trendy accessory, men are still unwilling to use them, according to a survey commissioned by the Health Education Authority.

Though women are a lot less inhibited than before about asking a man to use a condom, men, it seems, still use the same old excuses. "I can't feel anything", "It's like doing it wearing a rubber glove" etc etc.

The point of wearing a condom also seems to have escaped many of them. Women reported being assured "It's alright, I've had a vasectomy". When it was pointed out to one man that avoidance of pregnancy wasn't the point, he became outraged protesting that he wasn't a dog.

The fact that a condom could protect him from AIDS just hadn't registered.

Sex is supposed to be spontaneous. 'Being prepared' is seen as militating against passion, romance and pleasure. But funnily enough, though women are supposed to be more romantic than men it's men who use these arguments as an excuse.

The truth is that it's women who've always had to deal with the consequences of unprotected sex. Men just don't seem to have clicked that if they can't get pregnant, they can get AIDS.



The Tories want women workers — but they don't want to pay for nurseries

Southampton wakes up!

POLL TAX

By Tony Twine

At long last the Southampton labour movement has woken up to the threat from the poll tax!

The Trades Council has resolved to convene an open conference against the poll tax no later than April this year. The motion for this was initiated by SO supporters via the university Labour group.

Both NALGO and the Labour Council continue to peddle the illusion that jobs are at risk if they join forces with anti-poll tax resistance. We must expose this hypocrisy!

Despite the yuppie illusion of prosperity in Southampton, thousands of working class people suffer from poverty and slum conditions. Nearly 7000 people are on council housing waiting lists. Some 3000 people remain trapped in bed and breakfast accommodation (the highest figure outside London). Thousands more people survive on income support.

Many people genuinely cannot pay the poll tax. In a recent report to the city council it was estimated that the likely poll tax figure was £182 per adult.

On this basis 51% of all households in Southampton will be

worse off. For example, in St Lukes ward alone it is reckoned that 13% of households will have to pay four times the level of their current rates bill.

If this regressive tax is not fought

the Tories' 'inner city' strategy will discredit Labour by coercing it into carrying out Tory policies. The first part of our local campaign against the poll tax involves a city-wide demonstration and rally on 18

February.

In the next few months we will be canvassing workers and households on how they will be affected and why they should join forces with us to fight the poll tax.

Birmingham needs coordination

The ruling Labour group on Birmingham City Council has decided to rename the building they have set aside for administration of the poll tax: from now on it is to be known as "Margaret Thatcher House".

This imaginative move, along with information leaflets stressing that the "Community Charge" (sometimes known as the poll tax) comes from central government, is the sum total of Birmingham Council's response to the tax. Apart, that is, from agreeing without hesitation to implement it and to fine defaulters.

The West Midlands regional TUC is co-ordinating a 'People's Campaign' against the poll tax. This worthy initiative is supported by the Bishop of Birmingham, the SDP, the Liberals (they still seem to call themselves that round here), various voluntary sector organisations like the Low Pay Unit — oh yes, and the Communist Party.

So far the 'People's Campaign' has held a series of 'public' meetings at which the absence of any members of the public was made up for by assorted Liberals and vicars. They have also circulated a petition asking the government to 'think again'.

This bold campaign is being co-ordinated by a special working party of the Regional TUC, the minutes of which recently fell into my hands: "Owing to a number of factors it has been impossible to hold a quorate meeting of the Poll Tax Working Party... the last scheduled meeting (28 November 1988) was attended by the chair and the secretary."

Fortunately, that is not the end of the story as far as opposition in Birmingham is concerned. Anti-poll-tax groups have begun to organise in a number of areas and the Indian Workers' Association is co-ordinating opposition amongst black organisations.

The community-based groups fall, roughly, into two categories: those organised by Labour Party branches and those organised by anarchists.

The Labour Party initiatives are usually in wards where Militant supporters are active. Militant has never been strong in Birmingham but they have (quite rightly) seized upon the poll tax issue to begin to establish themselves as a force to be reckoned with.

If the Militant's work is to be criticised it is for a rather one-sided emphasis on community based non-payment campaigns with no parallel work aimed at winning the council unions (and eventually, the council itself) to a policy of non-implementation.

But at least they take the question seriously. Not so the 'mainstream' of the Labour left in the city, organised variously around the Campaign Group, Labour Briefing and the 'Summerfield Group' of dissident councillors.

When the council abolished its largely tokenistic Women's and Ethnic Minorities sub-committees, the Campaign/Briefing/Summerfield axis organised a whole series of public meetings and lobbies but they have not yet organised even a single meeting on the Poll Tax.

The anarchists have tapped into working class anger against the tax quite effectively. Their main priority has been organising community-based groups that concentrate on spreading information without worrying too much about the practical details of how to fight the tax.

What is clearly needed is a Birmingham (or maybe West Midlands) co-ordinating body to bring together the various community groups with the serious left of the Labour Party and trade unionists prepared to organise against the tax. It can be done, but it will have to come from the local groups and rank and file trade unionists — not the useless Campaign/Briefing/Summerfield 'left', the Regional TUC or the 'Peoples' Campaign' with its massed ranks of vicars.

Hungary: another crack in the monopoly

WORLD BRIEFS

Karoly Grosz, the Hungarian Communist Party's General Secretary has announced the setting up of a committee to prepare for the transition to a multi-party system.

Grosz said the party had "grown wiser" since last May, when it announced its commitment to 'socialist pluralism' under a one-party system. A multi-party system, he said, would ensure that 'fewer mistakes' were made. Parties would still have to accept the 'socialist order' and Hungary's membership of the Warsaw Pact.

The announcement comes after two weeks of intense political debate in Hungary arising from remarks made by the leading reformer of the Politburo, Imre Pozsgay.

Pozsgay had announced that he had no arguments for a one-party

system, and that the events of 1956 were a 'popular uprising'.

His remarks angered many Party members, who go along with the orthodoxy that 1956 was an attempt at 'counter-revolution'.

The two-day Central Committee meeting which came up with the moves to a multi-party system also produced a compromise formula on the events of 1956.

"A real uprising, popular uprising, broke out, in which the forces of democratic socialism played a part. But those endeavouring to restore capitalism, and lumpen elements were present from the beginning. From the end of October 1956 counter-revolutionary actions became stronger".

Hungary's largest electronics business is sacking 1,000 workers.

The cause is cuts in military spending, which are expected to cost another four or five thousand jobs elsewhere in the economy. The sacked workers will become the first-ever in state-monopoly Eastern Europe to get unemployment benefit, under a

scheme introduced by Hungary last month.

Hungary's official unemployment figure was 30,000 last year. The government expects it will rise to 100,000 this year.

Most workers in Hungary need two wages to survive, and have a second job in the 'second' (private, and semi-legal or illegal) economy. Poverty is increasing. It's an illustration of where Gorbachev's programme will take the USSR.

South Korean capitalists made overseas investments totalling \$63 million in January this year.

It was a 33 per cent increase on January 1988.

South Korea is one of a few Third World countries that have begun to export capital seriously in the 1970s and '80s. Before then, capital exports were almost always from Europe, the US or Japan to the Third World.

The other Third World capital exporters are the Middle East oil states, Argentina, Brazil and India.

A new opinion poll in Israel shows 53 percent of Israelis favouring talks with the PLO. Another survey found 65 per cent in favour of ceding at least some territory.

It is additional evidence that a 'two states' policy can lay the basis for Jewish-Arab workers' unity.

Poland has had 53 disputes over wages already this month, following 150 — and 39 strikes — in January.

In talks with Solidarnosc, the Government is seeking a no-strike deal. Solidarnosc leader Lech Walesa has called for six weeks without strikes while the talks continue.

But workers still strike. Steelworkers at the Laziska works in Silesia have just returned after winning a 100% increase in basic pay. The Government says that inflation will be 55% this year and wage rises should be kept down to 40%.



Violence on South African streets: comrades against Inkatha

Behind the Mandela scandal

EDITORIAL

Winnie Mandela, wife of the imprisoned ANC leader Nelson Mandela, is accused of running a gang of thugs in Soweto, South Africa, whose activities may have led to the death of one young man.

Several weeks ago, several youths were abducted from a Methodist care centre by the Nelson Mandela Football Club, Mrs Mandela's unofficial bodyguards. One of the youths later escaped, to tell horrific stories of their treatment, and allege the death of one of his friends.

It is not the first embarrassment surrounding Winnie Mandela. Protest at a luxurious house she built for herself in Soweto was so strong that she probably won't live in it.

The allegations against the 'Football Club', and Winnie Mandela's direct involvement in its activities, may not be true; but reports suggest that they probably are.

Progressive journalists in South Africa were reluctant to cover the story for fear of the political consequences. The South African right, and especially the government, will

seek to use the issue as anti-ANC, and indeed, anti-black propaganda.

Groups of young men who terrorise local communities are not unique to South Africa. They are most common in the most down-trodden and deprived societies. The most dangerous places to live are usually the poorest. And black South Africa is generally poor, and deeply brutalised by the social and political system.

There are terrible levels of crime and violence in the townships. The role of a political movement should be to control the violence, direct the anger — not to copy and participate in the formless, apolitical gang fighting.

Trade unions and socialists in South Africa have long faced the problem of divisive, partly-political violence. Sometimes violence, even in the form of 'necklacing', a horrific form of murder originally directed against collaborators, grew out of faction fights. Different tendencies murdered each other. 'Enemies of the people' were fingered and 'dealt with'.

Moses Mayekiso, leader of the metalworkers' union, was especially prominent in finding a socialist means of solving this problem. In Alexandra township, street committees were formed (linked in an Action Committee) precisely to give a

working class type of organisation to township struggles. Moses is now on trial for his role in the Action Committee.

Mayekiso said of the Alexandra experience: "We do not believe in corporal punishment...If the person listens then we don't need to implement any punishment. We have been discussing punishment for the person who does not listen...However, the 'necklace' will never be used, because we believe that the (popular) courts have an educational function."

This socialist approach has come largely from outside the ANC, whose leaders have often been ir-

responsible demagogues. Winnie Mandela herself declared: "With our boxes of matches and our necklaces we will liberate our country."

And within the popular movement, the ANC, dominated by the South African Communist Party, has often used undemocratic and demagogic means to silence its opponents.

Our solidarity with the ANC, as part of the liberation movement, should not blind us to its misdeeds, or divert us from clear solidarity with socialists and working-class militants in South Africa.

Defend unilateralism!

Labour leader Neil Kinnock has ditched party policy on nuclear disarmament. Speaking to the This Week TV programme, he said unilateralism belonged to an era that has passed.

"The logjam is broken, we are in a different process, and the choices are different from what they were before the advent of Gorbachev and Reagan and Reykjavik."

So Labour Party Conference policy, which is firmly committed to unilateral nuclear disarmament, is kicked out of the window.

Kinnock must be stopped. The question of disarmament is a to be or not to be question for the next Labour government. Either it will demonstrate a commitment to get rid of nuclear weapons — without waiting forever for international talks — or it will knuckle under to the British ruling class and its international allies in NATO.

Tory MPs have challenged Neil Kinnock to state clearly that he

would use nuclear weapons in wartime if he were prime minister, reversing his earlier statement that he would never do so. From their own angle, they've gone straight to the essence of the issue. either the mass murder of millions of civilians and the destruction of civilisation by nuclear war is a usable military tactic, or it isn't. If it is usable, keep the Bomb. If it isn't, scrap it — now!

A Labour government completely subordinated to NATO would scarcely be radical.

If we want a radical Labour government, we need to hold it to unilateralism and other conference policies.

This is a question also of democracy. Who does Neil Kinnock think he is? We have decided our policy. If he wants to change it, he should get a conference to vote for the change.

Conference voted firmly against the change last year.

Defend Labour Party democracy!

Defend unilateralism!

The bigot and the snob

TV

By Edward Ellis

Victoria Gillick will no doubt one day get elected as a Tory MP, and we will be subjected to regular outbursts of such venomous reaction as to make Edwina Currie seem sensible, enlightened and shrewd. Her appearance on The Late Show last week was like a premonition.

The discussion concerned the £500 fine imposed on Canadian artist Rick Gibson for his sculpture Human Earrings, which consists of a mannequin's head bearing a dried human foetus dangling from each earlobe.

Gillick, of course, was all for doing much worse than fining the man, while those rushing to the defence, if not of his artistic merit, at least of his right to be a weirdo, included the extraordinarily conceited Jonathon Miller.

Gillick's case rested upon the assertion that if anyone bothered to ask someone standing in a bus queue, they would certainly consider a human injection of a fatal serum the very least punishment deserved by the filthy degenerate artist (though "artist" would be a word that people in the street, like Mrs Gillick, would have to spit out in snarling amazement.)

Jonathon Miller, who cannot open his mouth without it unleashing a long list of names nobody (including the unfortunate Mrs Gillick, who responded with an uncomprehending sneer throughout his discourse) has ever heard of, argued that whilst indeed the sculpture was possessed of no artistic merit whatever and was justified by means of entirely fatuous argument, Mr Gibson had a perfect right to be a lousy sculptor without being financially penalised.

Important questions are at stake here, including artistic freedom and the issue of "public decency".

Presumably the artist's point is that foetuses are treated like commodities in our society, though the sensationalist method he chose to express this is apparently typical of his style. Outrage at the use of actual human foetuses is understandable, and even justified up to a point. But undoubtedly the objection rests on a psychological link with the issue of abortion — certainly in the mind of Mrs Gillick. Arguably, in fact, the work itself is anti-abortionist; but for extreme anti-abortionists like Gillick, whose general argument rests on the alleged humanity of a fertilised egg, the use of human foetuses is no different to the use of a shrunken skull.

Miller, quick off the mark, pointed out that an Egyptian mummy is also a dead person, but no one minds ogling at them in the British Museum, and Mrs Gillick here lost the argument resoundingly with her apparent conviction that someone dead for a long time is less human than someone who was never independently alive in the first place.

She also stupidly allowed herself to be sidetracked into an argument about What Is Art, which Miller was able to win with his hands tied behind his back, whilst preparing a monologue for future use on What Is Science, and without even needing to check the pronunciation of various French authorities on either subject.

These two thoroughly obnoxious people, the one personifying breathtakingly arrogant stupidity, the other breathtakingly arrogant erudition, were not in fact the only ones present in the debate, but I doubt if either one listened to anyone else.

Miller, inevitably, was right. Whether Gibson's weirdoism is artistically worth a small parking offence, never mind £500, or not, laws invoking "public decency" are certainly reactionary (and in particular, though this is not immediately relevant, are used against homosexuals). And artists should have the right to sculpt, paint, write or say what they like.

'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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4 LETTERS

Tory council's hush money

GRAFFITI

Westminster City Council's chief executive is to receive over £1 million hush money when he takes early retirement this month.

The chief executive, Rodney Brooke, clashed with Westminster's Tory leader, Lady Porter, over the Council's now infamous selling off of three cemeteries for 15p each. During the inquiry into the sale, Brooke said he had given advice to the Council that the sell-off would lead to poor maintenance. Lady Porter denied she'd received any such warnings.

Now, at the age of 49, Brooke is being immediately retired, but he will collect his full salary until his contract expires in December. Then he will receive a lump sum of £119,422, and an index-linked pension of £41,106 a year. But the time he is 65 this will total over £1m.

Brooke's side of the deal is that he will keep silent on his time at Westminster. The Council's intention was to keep the deal secret and to explain Brooke's retirement as part of Council reorganisation.

Lady Porter is obviously furious that the details of this deal have got out. Carefully avoiding any specific reference to the golden handshake, she said: "I am one of the most ardent supporters of freedom of information and have worked hard to ensure that the workings of this Council are honest, straightforward and open." Who's she trying to kid?

The Tory council which includes Mrs Thatcher's own constituency is planning to abandon the Employment Training scheme.

Barnet Council say they have had "severe difficulties" in getting the programme going. These include old Community Programme operators being unwilling to take on ET and low take-up from trainees.

Barnet is not the only local authority to discover that the scheme is unworkable. According to NALGO, over 70 local authorities have withdrawn from the scheme. On performance to date, the scheme is extremely unlikely to achieve its target of 300,000 trainees by the end of March.

The Department of Employment is putting a brave face on it, issuing a statement that 111,000 trainees are at present taking part in the scheme, an "enormous achievement" given that ET is only in its fifth month.

No other programme of its kind has matched its performance apparently. That doesn't seem to say much for any of the previous schemes.

The Government is desperately casting around for a way to prevent its proposed student loans scheme from floundering.

The high administration costs entailed by the scheme have led to opposition from all the High Street banks. The banks would accept a scheme by which loans are repaid through national insurance contributions, but both the Treasury and the DHSS have rejected this.

Possibilities under investigation include putting the scheme out to tender to foreign banks, involving the universities directly in administering loans, or setting up a quango.

The quango option is not popular with government ministers, who would prefer loans to be administered by the private sector, but if they are to salvage the scheme at all they may have to resort to it.

Trade and Industry secretary Lord Young has said he is "struck by certain similarities" in British and Soviet policy.

Speaking at a dinner in honour of the Soviet Deputy Premier, Vladimir Kamentsev, Lord Young also said that moves in the USSR to give factory managers greater autonomy from the state mirror what is going on in Britain.

To give Soviet factory managers a chance to learn even more about Thatcherite business skills, the British government is going to fund places for 20 of them on a three week course at the London Business School.

Apparently Coventry Polytechnic's business school is also looking into setting up courses for Soviet managers in Western business techniques, marketing and advertising.



What is Sinn Fein's strategy?

LETTERS

I was very interested to see the report by Martin Thomas of the Sinn Fein Ard Fheis (SO 387).

At their conference, Sinn Fein welcomed the Provisional IRA's decision to disband the Fermanagh and South Tyrone unit, which had been responsible for many of the sectarian killings, notably the Enniskillen bombing.

The disbandment may have temporarily quelled the disquiet within Sinn Fein, but has only removed the worst excesses of a futile and counterproductive military campaign.

The move towards political campaigning is to be welcomed, and the search for a "broad all-Ireland

anti-imperialist front" is certainly a new tactic. But is it simply codification for a "pan-Catholic political front", as Martin suggests? Although renewed talks with the SDLP are undoubtedly a part of Sinn Fein's strategy, I don't think they are central to it.

Sinn Fein's model, I think, is the H-Block campaign and the Anti-Extradition campaigns. Sinn Fein believes that if it concentrates on building alliances with sympathetic elements in campaigns like those, and if the IRA "refines its activities so that they do not hinder but complement efforts to build a broad-based front against imperialism", then it can break out of its current impasse.

This will no doubt please supporters of *Labour Briefing* and *Socialist Action*, as this is what they have been saying Sinn Fein should

have been doing all along.

But it will not lead to a united Ireland. It does not deal with the Protestants' fears, correctly identified by Gerry Adams, of the "creation of a Catholic state and an end to their Protestant identity". Nor will it win the Southern Irish workers to rise up in support of a 32-County Republic.

If Sinn Fein is really committed to bridging the gulf between Protestants and Catholics, then it needs to open a dialogue between the two communities. A good start would be a campaign against the closure of Harland and Wolff shipyard. Such a move would mean attempting to cross the Catholic/Protestant divide, and not simply responding to events within the Catholic community.

**Mark Lindsay,
South London.**



our future rulers? The Young Tories at their conference last weekend. The 'Tinney Team' are the far-right faction challenging the 'wets' who currently run the organisation.

A bad market is not no market

Stan Crooke (SO 386) argued that the Eastern Bloc bureaucracies are not ruling classes, because their societies have no economic regulator, nothing but waste and chaos.

Clive Bradley (SO 388) replied that bad planning is not the same as no planning; and he's right, I think. I would add that bad markets are not the same as no markets.

Stan declared that "there is no market in these states". Untrue! Workers in the Eastern Bloc sell their labour power, receive wages, and buy what they consume. They are not slaves, serfs, sharecroppers, or peons, but wage-workers.

Yes, the prices of labour power and consumer goods are set by the state, and often do not equate supply and demand.

But the Western academic economists who spend their lives studying markets would be startled indeed by the idea that any market which does not 'clear' is no market at all.

Obviously the free play of the market plays a qualitatively bigger role in a country like Britain than in the Eastern Bloc; but that's not the same as saying that there are no markets in the East.

Are all the prices in the East fictitious and arbitrary, and workers' living standards in fact set by the volume of consumer goods allowed for in the plan? No. Excess purchasing power flows out of the official markets into the black markets and legal free markets which play a big role everywhere in the Eastern bloc. This fact, and political pressure generated by long queues, forces the bureaucrats to adjust consumer production — badly — to consumer demand.

The vehement protests sparked off — as in Poland in 1980 — when the bureaucrats increase prices of basic goods are conclusive evidence that those prices do mean something.

The State is the only employer — or, at least, the only major employer — in the Eastern bloc, and in many countries wage rates are set by central government. But this does not mean that there is no labour market.

Firstly, a market with only one buyer is still a market. Secondly, it is no more than half-true to say that there is only one buyer. Individual enterprises use bonuses, piece-rates, and fringe benefits to attract more skilled and reliable workers. It is worth the worker's while to 'shop around' from enterprise to enterprise. Indeed the USSR has long had a much bigger turnover of labour than the West.

If the official wage rates are too low, then labour will drain out of the official economy into illegal or (in some Eastern Bloc countries) legal private enterprise.

To sum it up: there was and is a qualitative economic difference between wage-workers in the USSR and labour-camp workers. There was vague speculation in the early '30s about replacing wages in the USSR by ration-tickets: it is an economically significant fact that that was never done and never could be done.

It is not just a historical accident that the working class in the Eastern bloc acts like a wage-working class, using the same forms of struggle, raising the same sort of demands. It is a wage-working class.

ed to build the STA nationally or (ii) that they have "actively opposed" setting up local and regional structures. Although other groups have underestimated the significance of basic grassroots mobilisation, the criticisms above should be levelled at the Socialist Workers Party alone.

**Liam Conway,
Nottingham**

**Martin Thomas,
Islington.**

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

Saturday: Starts 10.45am

enary 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

For more details contact: Ruth Clarke, 7 Cumberland Park, London W3 6SY

Creche, food, accommodation, social, help with fares for women outside London.

Sorry!

I would just like to correct an inaccuracy in my report in last week's Socialist Organiser about the Socialist Teachers Alliance.

This mistake may give a misleading and unhelpful message to readers. It was not my intention to (i) imply that the IMG strand inside the STA have deliberately fail-

Students protest against loans

SOCIALIST STUDENT

By Rob Read

This week, 13th-17th, is the NUS week of action against the Tories' threat to introduce student loans.

It is vitally important that this week is used to "Step up the Action". The NUS leadership has once again tried to dampen down the activity, but nevertheless rank and file activists around the country are organising action.

On Thursday 16 February colleges will be shutting down for the day. We need to mark this day with more than just a lecture boycott.

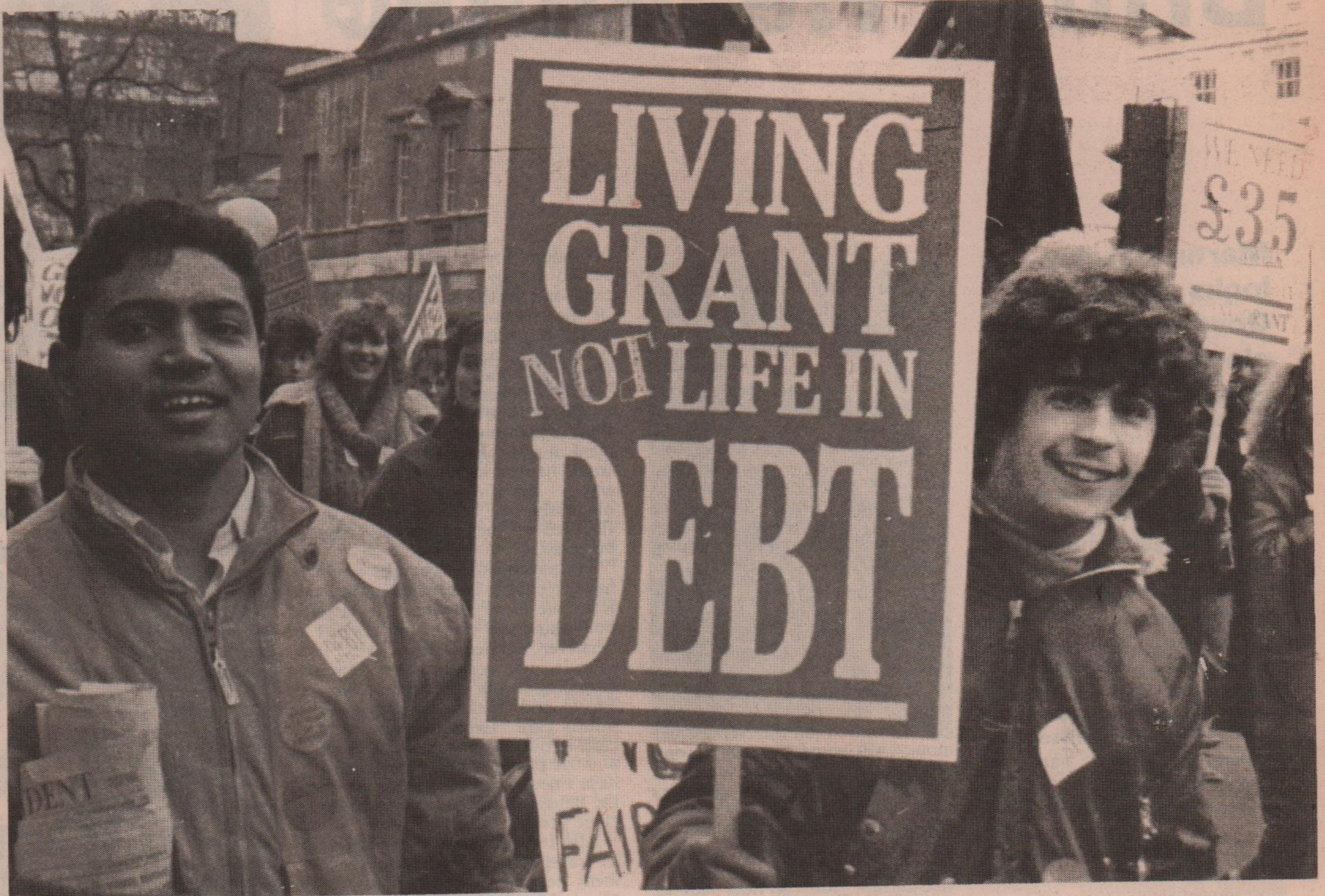
We should get the college trade unions involved — NATFHE, NALGO, GMB — and make it a united student/worker shutdown of education.

Despite the leadership's strategy of cosy chats with government ministers and the SWP's ranting about Higher Education students being able to bring down the government, loans will only be beaten by a campaign which unites students in schools, in Further Education and in Higher Education with the organised working class.

We should take the same attitude to the NUS demonstration on Saturday 25 February in London. We need to make it the biggest demo that NUS has ever organised — build for it amongst students but also with trade unionists, community groups, unemployed organisations etc.

And the campaign must not stop on the 25th February. It must continue throughout this term and into the third term.

Only a concerted, militant campaign which links the student movement to the workers' movement can beat the Tories.



A lively weekend

Last weekend (11th-12th) some ninety students gathered in Sheffield for discussions and debates hosted by Socialist Student.

The first day was an activist conference on the Campaign for Education. NUS (National Union of Students) National Executive members, Area Convenors and ac-

tivists from the colleges, led sessions on Access, Benefits and Cuts, Loans, Poll Tax and campaigning.

Running simultaneously was the launch conference of 'Further Education Socialists'. The Further Education sector has for far too long been ignored by NUS and by Labour Students.

There were sessions at the conference on Loans, Areas, how to get

funding for your union and "What is Socialism?"

The conference elected and voted to support Steve Mitchell who is standing for the position of Further Education Union Development in the NUS elections at Easter.

The second day was based on the theme "Activists — get political" and included a session on the cur-

rent situation of the class struggle with a speaker from the rail union NUR, a debate on the Soviet Union and workshops on pornography, civil liberties and on why socialists should be green.

The weekend was lively and informative bringing together student union campaigns and arming students with the politics to carry them out.

Socialist Action stands wrecking candidate against Labour

By John Maxwell

Socialist Action supporters at Manchester University are running a spoiling candidate in the Student Union elections against the Labour Club nominee, a Socialist Student supporter.

The Socialist Action candidate, running as 'Campaign Student' has no chance of winning the election, only of weakening the Labour Club campaign in the face of an — otherwise weak — challenge from the right wing.

The Socialist Student supporter was selected as the Labour Club candidate in a democratic vote by the Labour Club, as part of a slate which also includes Labour right-wingers.

Many left students in Manchester see the Socialist Action candidate as a put-up job by the right wing in a calculated effort to split the left vote in an otherwise closed-book election. But there is more to it than that.

The answer was given by the candidate herself: "we stand against Socialist Organiser because of their pro-imperialist politics, their positions on South Africa, Ireland and Palestine." Or as Socialist Action's Manchester organiser put it: "we do not consider you part of the left".

Socialist Action imagine a world in

which imperialism — the world capitalist system — prevents any serious economic development in much of the world. Class politics is off the agenda for large parts of the world's population. No worry, however, because this imaginary world has a better motor than class struggle: an automatic development of history, the 'process of revolution'.

Thanks to this 'process', near enough any nationalist movement can be 'the revolution'.

So for SA, Manchester city council leader Graham Stringer is "part of the left", because he supports us on Ireland, Palestine and the demands of the Labour Women's Action Committee. Never mind about cuts in Manchester. Socialist Organiser, whose supporters have been prominent in fighting those cuts are not on the left!

The wrecking candidate's criticism of our politics on Ireland is that we are "pro-imperialist" — "you say the demand for troops out is insufficient". So not only us then with our concern for a programme for workers unity, but almost the whole Northern Irish population, Catholic as well as Protestant, is pro-imperialist. Lucky there's 'the revolution' to bomb us to our senses.

On South Africa, we don't 'really' support the African National Congress. Socialist Action of course, are indistinguishable from the Stalinists in their opposition to solidarity with all

forces fighting apartheid (including the black consciousness movement, independent trade unions etc) and to the development of an independent workers party in South Africa.

But "the real issue", to quote the spoiling candidate, "is Palestine". The PLO's turn to 'two states' has led this 'anti-Zionist' to devote her entire political activity to building a 'Students for Palestine' (SFP) group. Socialist Action supports the PLO, yet thinks that Socialist Organiser's support for 'two states' is outrageous and 'pro-imperialist'. They do not explain the contradiction.

Manchester University Labour Club has overwhelmingly condemned Socialist Action's venture as a scab candidature like that of a right-winger in the club. This is important not only for the unity of the club and electoral designs, but also for the enforcement of standards on the left.

The British left today is one poisoned with a tolerance of distorting or lying about opponents' arguments, and pulling whatever unprincipled trick suits short-term factional advantage. The apolitical opportunists of the SWP can take much of the credit for feeding that atmosphere.

But the short shrift given to one sectarian pretend-trotskyist in Manchester has certainly been a step towards shutting off another source of the poison that debilitates the left.

Further Education Socialists

FES — for FE and Vith Form activists

Decent grants for all students — No to loans!

Paul Albert (President, Barnet College of FE Students Union)

The National Union of students (NUS) has organised a Week of Action (13-17 Feb) against the Tory's threat to introduce student loans.

As FE student activists we must play our part in uniting students from every sector of education in disgust and protest against the government's proposals. As FE students we must also be

have done. At the start of the year our union was in a bit of a mess. Most of the Exec members had left and so people like me were elected to get things going again.

One of the first things we did was to set up an anti-loans week. This group was the core of a 24-hour shutdown we organised on November 19 — we had 40 people picketing all day. We took 60 people on the November 24 NUS demo.

The activists' group has now widened its brief to include all the basic campaigns that need to be run in college — for cheaper coffee, better access for disabled people and stopping course cuts. We have found that this has kept the activists going, involved more people — who then become active in "bigger" issues like loans grants.

These are the sorts of actions we've organised for the

down with pickets at all our gates at both sites. NATFHE are helping the Students Union. We are speaking to the GMB and NALGO too.

End the week off with a big rally — speakers are coming from campus unions, NUS and NUS London.

We're building to get people on the National NUS demo on February 25. However, we do think it's a bit stupid that the demonstration was organised for a Saturday — many of our members have Saturday jobs and will not be able to attend. I think this shows the sort of attitude which the people at the top of NUS have for FE students.

Another gripe — how come the Week of Action was allowed to clash with so many FE half-terms? It's a disgrace. It's got quite a lot to do with the leaders in NUS (again) taking so long to get round to organising some action. Why are we so far into the second term before

Inside
• A charter for Action
• Areas and union development

10 pence
February/March '89

POLL TAX

Mandy Gordan (Xaverian Vith Form)

The Tories' poll tax is yet another attack on working class youth. The tax, which is already in operation in Scotland, is going to come into effect in 1990 in England and Wales. Who will it affect? You if:

• You're over 18 — even if you are in full time education, you will still have to pay some of the tax.

• If you're on social security benefits, you will have to pay 20% and the promised rise in benefits won't cover all of that.

If you don't pay, you can face fines, and even imprisonment. The DSS can deduct poll

New broadsheet launched

FES broadsheet: for more information and copies, write to 208 Epping Walk, Hulme, Manchester

Tories plan British Health plc

Martin Barclay looks at the Tory Government's plans for the Health Service

The Government's plans for the NHS, outlined in a White Paper, are a clear indication that it intends to sell off the Health Service. The measures will introduce an 'internal market' to the NHS in preparation for complete privatisation. This market will take a number of different forms in the different sectors of the NHS, but each will seriously undermine patient care and replace it with profit as the main object of 'British Health PLC'.

As patients, over 90% of our encounters with doctors are with GPs, and changes there will affect us most immediately.

GP medical practices with over 11,000 patients on their books at present cover about a quarter of the population. Under the new scheme it is these practices that will be able to apply for their own budgets — buying drugs and hospital care for their patients from the cheapest source, public or

private. Half of any 'surplus' or profit left over can be kept.

Quite rightly, GP representatives in the British Medical Association have pointed out that this will be an incentive not to treat 'expensive' patients such as the disabled, the chronically ill, and the elderly. All of these kind of patients usually need more drugs and medical attention than others, and this will eat into the budget surplus. Thus the most vulnerable in our society are the most likely to be penalised, having to tout themselves from one surgery to another hoping to find a GP that will take them on.

The second major area of change involves the way major hospitals are to be run and where their money is to come from. Echoing recent changes in education, the 300 British hospitals with 250-plus beds will be able to apply for self-government within the NHS. Their money will come from borrowing (from government and the private sector) and from selling their services to GPs, the health authorities, and other hospitals, public or private. They can also buy services from these sources and must provide certain 'core' services such as Accident and Emergency facilities.

The effect on NHS staff will be dramatic. These hospitals are to be run by a 'trust' governed by a board of 'Executive Directors' who must be able to demonstrate 'strong and effective leadership' and 'financial expertise'. These are obviously code words for union-busting and making cuts. Staffing levels, pay and

conditions for all staff are to be settled locally. National negotiations and settlements would go out of the window and 'open season' would be declared on unions.

In the name of 'efficiency' we would see drastic attacks on pay and conditions. Local bargaining would become the norm for auxiliary, technical, nursing and medical staff. It is not stated what would happen in the small hospitals which cannot opt out, but obviously pay here would be influenced by the cuts in the larger hospitals.

For patients these changes would have an equally large impact. Apart from the 'core' services, the large hospitals are free to market whatever services they like. It stands to reason that they are going to opt for the most profitable and marketable sectors of health care. Expensive long-term care is out; high patient turnover and fast profits are in. (Sponsorship hasn't been ruled out — the age of the Benson and Hedges lung cancer clinic perhaps?).

Also in is the prospect of having to travel long distances for treatment because your local hospital has decided it doesn't get a sufficient rate of return by treating your ailment. The least able and those most in need of care will again be the hardest hit.

On the other hand 'optional extras' such as a choice of meals or a single room can be yours — provided you pay for them.

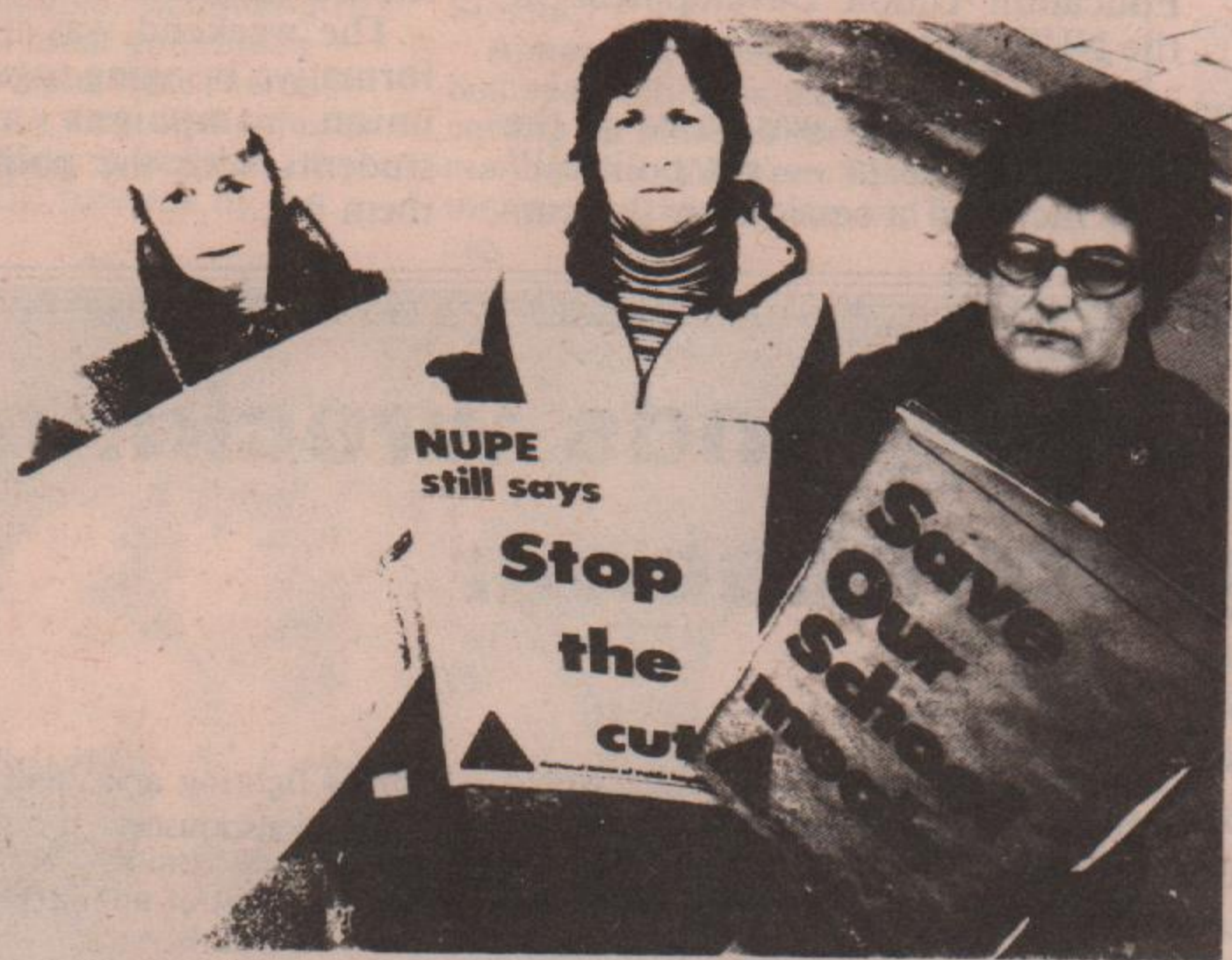
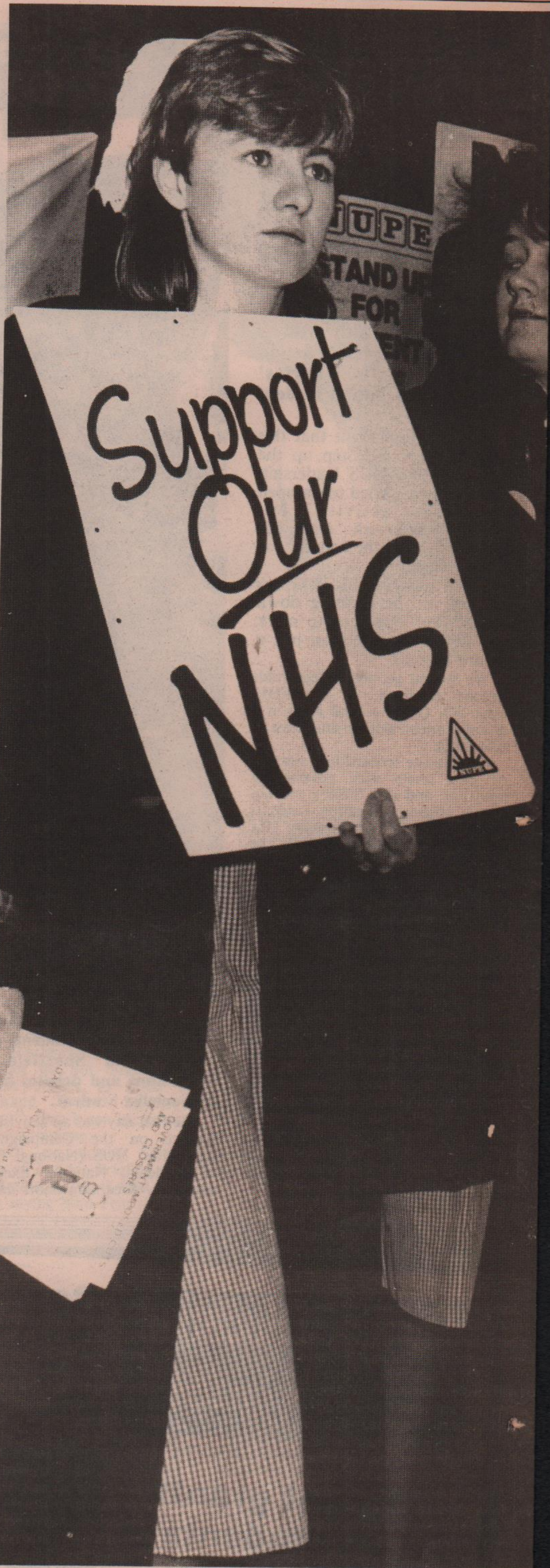
In order to get the most out of the new set up 'medical audit' will be used to police GPs and hospital consultants. In itself medical audit is no bad thing — it consists of analysing the use of resources, type of treatment and outcome for the patient to measure the quality of medical care. As such it can be used to ensure the most efficient delivery of health care at the point of need.

In the hands of our 'Executive Directors' and the new, re-structured Family Practitioners Committees, however, it is likely to become a rod for the back of medical staff. It can be used to ensure a high turnover of patients in those all-important profitable areas of treatment at the expense of the downright unprofitable.

A 'review' of 'merit awards' — separate payments currently made to consultants with particular skills — will ensure they fall into line. In future, to get a merit award, they will have to 'demonstrate their commitment to the management and development of the service' and all awards will be reviewable every five years.

Finally there is a small concession to the loony right. They wanted the wholesale scrapping of the NHS in one go — instead they've got a halfway house and the introduction of tax cuts for elderly people with private medical insurance. The White Paper also outlines an expanded role for the private sector in the new set-up, but in competition with new cost-cutting hospital managements the private sector is not likely to fare very well, as the history of competitive tendering has shown.

All this adds up to a halfway house, with large parts of the NHS being 'freed-up' by the introduction of an internal market. Effectively it's being fattened up to a piecemeal sell-off after the next General Election — should the



Socialists and the trade unions

A Socialist Organiser weekend school

Saturday and Sunday February 18/19
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Oxford Road, Manchester

For details contact Tom on 01 639 7965 or write to
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Tories win.

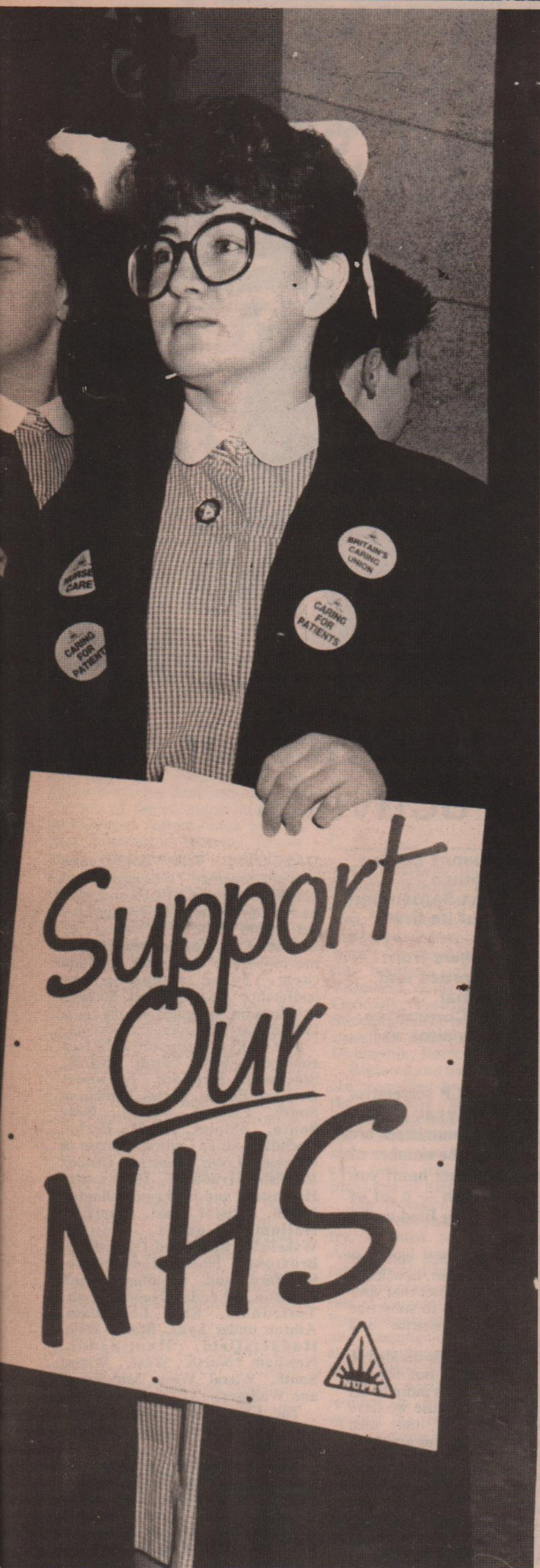
The timing of events is crucial here. It seems clear that the original announcement of an inquiry into the NHS one year ago was a panic response to the overwhelming public support for the service and for the nurses in their pay dispute. The White Paper had to come up with something but, still faced with public support for the NHS, the Government proposals fall far short of suggestions coming from the think-tanks on the right wing of the Tory Party. What is more, the key date for implementing these changes is April 1991, the very last month before a General Election has to be called. If the election is called ahead of that debate, then we will have been spared the effects of the proposed changes and they

are less likely to be a central issue. That is, unless we make them a central issue here and now.

While hospital administrators and some consultants can't wait to get their hands on the profits, most GPs have got good reason to oppose the Tories' plans. Likewise all hospital staff. For them it presents the prospect of de-unionisation, job cuts and drastically worsened conditions. Pay will be decided locally. All but the best-organised hospitals will lose out.

For consumers of the NHS, it will represent the worst deal of all, ending 40 years of a public service committed to patient-care rather than profit.

The basis is here for a concerted fight against these proposals organised on the broadest possible



How to save the NHS

By Paul Woolley

Thatcher and her greaseball Kenneth Clarke do not want to privatise the NHS — not in the sense of an outright sell-off as with some nationalised industries. Why not?

It makes neither political nor economic sense. A system where thousands of hospitals competed as individual businesses fighting for profits would be a recipe for chaos. Over time, increases in ill health could lead to epidemics and even threaten the relative stability of society.

Since the late 1940s, the NHS has been an integral part of British capitalism. It is no longer such a welcome part. But a high degree of state control is needed if there is to be a health service of any real sort.

For certain, privatisation has already ravaged the NHS — destroying jobs, reducing services — and lining the pockets of Tory MPs and their friends. But when the Tories howl "let market forces rule!" we should not take them at their word.

It makes more sense to see their plans for the health service in similar light to Gorbachev's 'perestroika'. They are 'restructuring' a cumbersome edifice, trying not just to cut costs but to make the NHS more dynamic and more profit-oriented.

This is not without its contradictions. For example, privatised work can cost the NHS more than it did when done by the NHS. And despite their talk of ridding the NHS of bureaucracy, more bureaucrats are being taken on (at over £20,000 per year) and thousands of reams of paper wasted as reports on this or that closure or



'cost efficiency' measure.

The government's aim is a two-tier health service where the rich go private, and the poorer queue in subsistence-level NHS hospitals. Clarke himself sees the proposals as a "mixed economy". There are parallels with the Tories' designs on the education system.

None of this makes the White Paper any better. The Tories have done their homework again. Last year's strikes in the NHS must still be fresh in their minds, so they have used the cloak of 'choice' and anti-bureaucratism as cover for what may well amount to 'the abolition of the NHS within the NHS itself'. Although the plans are to be phased in up to 1991, the groundwork will begin this year.

The health union leaders have cat-wailed long and hard but refuse to even examine their claws, let alone hiss and fight. Their answer is more appeals to the friends of the working class on Tory back benches, in Fleet Street and in the

higher ranks of the medical profession.

Socialists must argue for an all-sided campaign. In the NHS unions, there should be mass meetings to discuss the White Paper and organise action to resist. That should be coupled with a big rank and file campaign through the unions' structures to make the leaders fight.

The details of how to tackle and defeat the proposals must be worked out. For example, many of NALGO's 60,000 administrators and clerical members in the Health Authorities will be involved in the work of enabling hospitals to 'opt out'. That in turn will reduce the role of the Health Authorities, leading to job losses. So 'opting out' needs to be obstructed.

'Internal markets' already exist in limited forms but health workers have to address such problems. We should integrate things like the still-outstanding 1988 pay claim of ancillary workers and nurses' grading appeals into a tidal wave of action.

A good starting point is for health union branches and joint stewards' committees to organise marches and rallies. Together with local Labour Parties, the unions need to mobilise the millions who use the NHS in order to defend it.

We should organise petitions and pickets of doctors' surgeries to demand that they refuse to take budgets. There must be regular mass lobbies of Health Authority meetings to fight 'opting out' proposals and the remodelling of the Authorities as boards of directors.

The Tories know they are vulnerable on the NHS. Yet the labour movement has allowed them to nibble and chop at it for ten years. It is not too late to raise an army that can hit them hard in one of their weakest spots.

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.

Socialism can never be built in one country alone. The workers in every country have more in common with workers in other countries than with their own capitalist or Stalinist rulers. We support national liberation struggles and workers' struggles worldwide, including the struggle of

workers and oppressed nationalities in the Stalinist states against their own anti-socialist bureaucracies.

We stand: For full equality for women, and social provision to free women from the burden of housework. For a mass working class-based women's movement.

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.

We want Labour Party and trade union members who support our basic ideas to become supporters of the paper — to take a bundle of papers to sell each week and pay a small contribution to help meet the paper's deficit. Our policy is democratically controlled by our supporters through Annual General Meetings and an elected National Editorial Board.

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basis. NHS trade unions and local Labour Parties along with other trade unions and community groups should come together to set up such a campaign locally and nationally. The potential exists to harness the widespread public feeling of support for a socialised system of medicine and to get the White Paper scrapped.

Further than that, we need a campaign for the radical expansion of the NHS into areas like preventative medicine and health and safety, linked to a strategy to eliminate poverty.

We need to organise around proposals to democratise the NHS by opening up its decision making processes to NHS trade unionists — the people who actually run the service — as well as the community — the

people who consume the service. No doubt this campaign would need to debate the precise nature of these changes, but it also needs to fight for their implementation by a future Labour Government.

Just as money, in the form of profits being taken out of the NHS, is at the heart of the Tory proposals, so money in the form of resources being pumped into the NHS should be at the heart of the campaign for the kind of NHS we need. We cannot allow the Labour leadership to wriggle out of hard and fast commitments to make the necessary changes and provide the necessary resources. We have the potential to take on and defeat this Government at its weakest point; it would be criminal to waste such an opportunity.

8 ACTIVITIES/ LABOUR PARTY

New sales drive for Workers' Liberty

By Martin Thomas

Max Shachtman's articles on the nature of the Soviet Union have been the main focus for interest in the latest issue of Workers' Liberty magazine.

"Congratulations on rediscovering Shachtman's theoretical legacy", wrote Barry Finger from the USA.

Among the organised groups of the British left, interest in theoretical issues is currently at a low ebb; but the coverage in the magazine has prompted a public debate between supporters of Workers' Liberty and of Socialist Outlook in Manchester, and other public debates are planned.

Unaffiliated labour activists in many areas have shown an interest in the debate. Shachtman, a close collaborator of Trotsky until shortly before Trotsky's death in 1940, argued that the Soviet Union is not any sort of workers' state, but a new system of class exploitation.

His major articles have been out of print since the early '60s. An editorial introduction in Workers' Liberty comments: "Workers' Liberty believes that the state monopoly societies are systems of class exploitation, broadly parallel to capitalism in the development of the productive forces. Some of us think, with Shachtman, that these societies are a new form of class society, different from capitalism and in many fundamental respects — notably in what they do to the working class and to its possibility of organising itself — regressive."

"With Shachtman's later politics [he died in 1972] — which flowed from his basic incoherence on the place of the state-monopoly societies in history — we have of course no sympathy... But Shachtman is an important figure in the history of the Trotskyist movement..."

With social ferment in Eastern Europe at a level unparalleled since 1956 — if then — and Gorbachev being hailed by the media as the architect of a new era, no debate is more timely and urgent for socialists than this one on the nature of the Eastern bloc.

There is much else in Workers' Liberty. Richard Aplin of Wallasey Constituency Labour Party told us: "the combination of the interview with Eric Heffer on his life and politics and the article on the 'blue union' on the docks with Shachtman articles is a very good balance".

Other items which have aroused special interest are an article on modern and post-modern architecture, and a critical survey of the theory that new computer technology is defining a 'post-Fordist' era in which class struggle must be replaced by a diversity of

pressure-group campaigns.

One reader commented: "Compare Workers' Liberty with other left magazines, like Living Marxism, Marxism Today or Socialist Outlook — there's so much more in it. The content of the others is very thin by comparison".

This Workers' Liberty has sold well in a number of bookshops. Collets, in London, and Bookworm, in Derry, have sold out and ordered more. But most sales have been hand-to-hand sales by activists seeking out friends, colleagues, and comrades in the labour movement who they think may be interested.

Bob Fine in Coventry, has sold 22 copies so far this way, and ordered another 15. Pat Markey in Northampton has sold 15 to individual contacts.

Sometimes Workers' Liberty sellers are hesitant about pushing the magazine at labour movement meetings because they think it is too 'heavy' and too expensive. All the evidence however, is that sales can be made if only we get over that hesitation.

It's not difficult to sell four or five copies in an average — not very active and not very left-wing — Labour Party ward. £1.50 is hardly expensive for a magazine with as much content as an average book and a lot more than most similarly-priced magazines.

The same principle goes for using Workers' Liberty on street sales and at demonstrations.

One seller told us about his experience at a recent picket. Steady rain, small numbers there, and a high proportion of people who were trying to sell various other left publications made it an unpromising sales site. He went round the picket with Socialist Organiser and sold three copies. Then he tried with Workers' Liberty. Result: four copies sold.

There must be many demonstrations and pickets where we don't make the effort — and the odd three copies here and four copies there would add up to a few hundred extra sales over time.

Workers' Liberty business manager Tim Anderson told us that he is planning a Workers' Liberty sales week from 20 to 26 February, to give a renewed boost to sales.

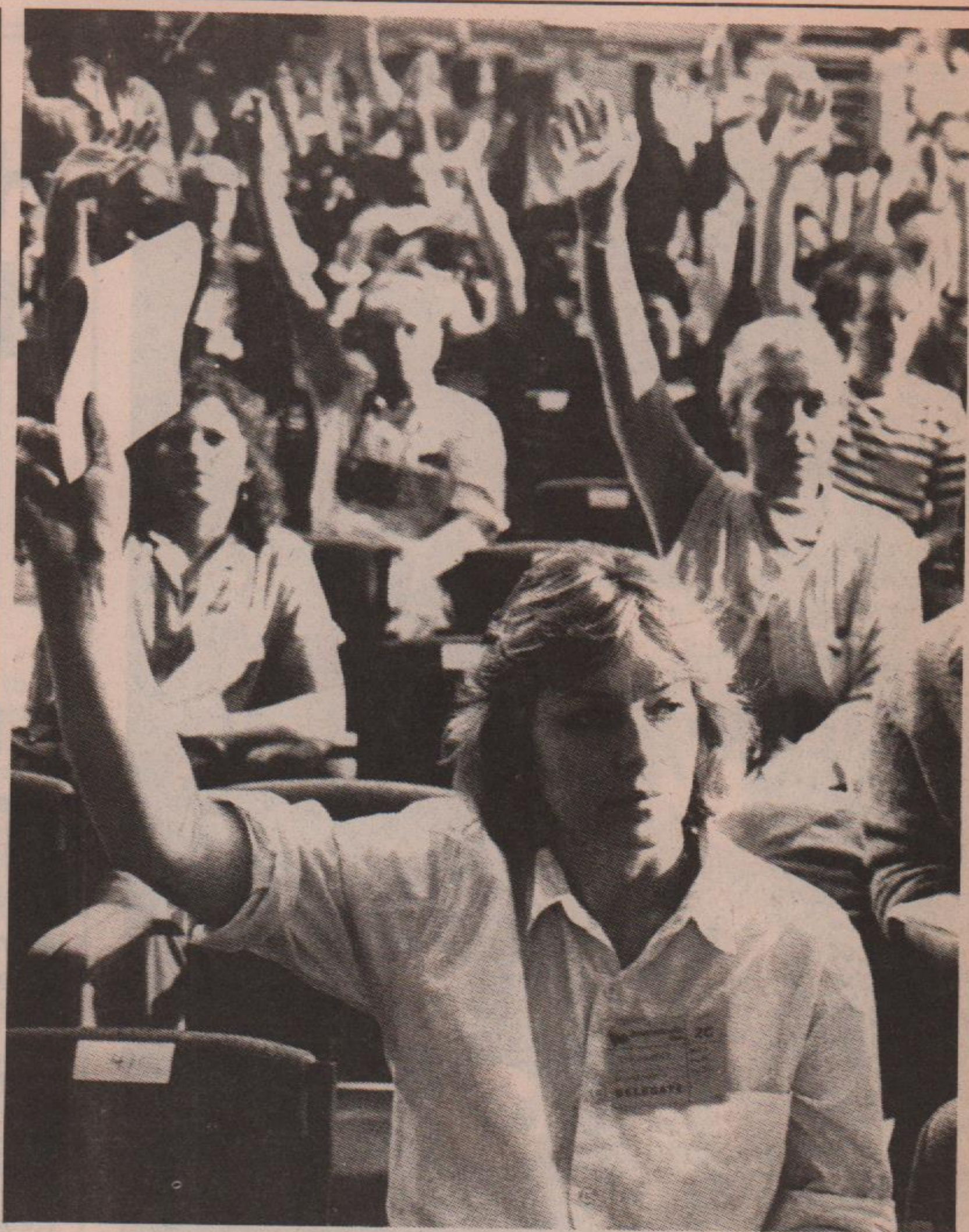
Sellers will be asked to draw up new lists of friends, colleagues, acquaintances and comrades to approach with the magazine — people whom they perhaps missed or failed to think of the first time round. Often people who are not particularly close to our politics, and not interested enough to buy Socialist Organiser each week, will find some item of interest in Workers' Liberty.

We will also be asked to make a point of taking Workers' Liberty with us to all our labour movement meetings and activities, and offering it for sale. Street sales and door-to-door sales can be done alongside sales of Socialist Organiser.

The lead editorial in this Workers' Liberty defines the magazine's job like this: "Faced in 1914 with the collapse of the powerful Second International... Lenin and his comrades set about digging down to the roots of the corruption, examining what had passed for Marxism over the previous 20 years and more in the light of that collapse. They found their way back to the Marxist roots."

"A similar task needs to be accomplished today by those who want to continue the fight for Trotskyist politics and yet are forced to recognise that much that passes for Trotskyist politics is incoherent and irrational. That is one reason why we publish Workers' Liberty."

The issues discussed and debated in Workers' Liberty are not academic or marginal. They are issues which will be central in transforming the left from a chaos of amateur doctrinaires into an agency of enlightenment and leadership, and the labour movement from a sprawling, fumbling monster into a coherent fighting force which changes society. We need to get those issues discussed as widely as possible.



A newsletter for local activists

The "Constituency Labour Parties conference" established last September has just put out its first newsletter.

It includes news from local Labour Parties and from the National Constitutional Committee, and explains its aims as follows.

No doubt CLP secretaries and General Management Committees are snowed under by the number of newsletters and other bumf you receive every month — a lot of which ends up being filed under 'B' for bin.

We want to convince you that this is not just another newsletter but that it is the newsletter that your constituency will want to subscribe to and contribute articles and information to.

The CLPs Conference decided to launch this newsletter not for the sake of giving ourselves more to do in our spare time because we have no work to do in our own constituencies, most of us are up to our necks in CLP work, but to provide a vital link between CLPs on issues that concern us all.

The simple fact is that we just don't know what's going on in each others CLPs. Examples of good campaigning work are not passed on, appeals for support from trade unionists and others in struggle don't get a wide enough circulation and CLPs who are under represented in the Labour Party structure, do not exchange experiences and discuss how we take the campaign for socialism forward. We hope your CLP will see this newsletter as your newsletter and your communication link to other CLPs — that's what it's here for!

The CLPs Conference was initiated at a fringe meeting called by Wallasey CLP at the 1988 Socialist Conference.

The fringe meeting agreed to organise a conference of CLP delegates in Manchester on the 17th September 1988 around the issues of Defence of Clause 4, Unilateralism and Party

Democracy. That conference brought together 71 delegates and 31 visitors from 53 CLPs and gave us the opportunity to discuss how we defend these basic aspects of Labour Party policy against the moves by the leadership to ditch them. Those attending the conference also received detailed briefings on the issues coming up at Labour Party National Conference.

The CLPs that supported the first conference were: North Norfolk, Stockport, Stretford, Norwood, Bow and Poplar, Eccles, Blackpool South, Preston, Redcar, Bury South, Shipley, West Derby, Rochdale, Stoke Central, Barrow in Furness, Leeds Central, Denton Reddish, Hyndburn, Hemsworth, Hampstead and Highgate, Islington North, Bristol East, Sheffield Hallam, Gorton, Bootle, Wakefield, Richmond (Yorkshire), Broxtowe, Nottingham North, Stamford and Spalding, South Hendon, Leeds North East, Tottenham, East Lewisham, Ashton under Lyne, Bristol West, Huddersfield, Huntingdon, Newham North West, Wirral South, Wirral West, Mid-Sussex and Wallasey.

The Campaign Group of MPs and CLPD also supported the conference.

The newsletter is available from Lol Duffy, 11 Egremont Prom, Merseyside L44 8BG: £1.20 for one year's subscription, £6 for 5 copies, £12 for 10, £16.80 for 20 copies of each issue.

CLPs Conference on the witch-hunt and democracy

Saturday 29 April

AEU Hall, Mount Pleasant, Liverpool. 11am to 5pm
Each CLP is entitled to three delegates at £2.00 per delegate. Visitors are welcome.

Contact: Lol Duffy, 11 Egremont Prom, Wallasey, Merseyside L44 8BG



Out now!

The new issue of Workers' Liberty, with articles on the Eastern Bloc, 'post-Fordism', Thatcherism, civil liberties, modern architecture and much more. £1.50 plus 32p post from PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA.

weekend school (two days). Manchester Poly Student Union. Contact Tom, 01 639 7965

Monday 20 February
Adam Keller tour meeting. Hardman St. unemployed centre, Liverpool, 7.30

Monday 20 February
London SO education series: 'The formation of the Labour Party'. Speaker Cathy Nugent. Conway Hall, Red Lion Sq, WC1, 7.00

Monday 20 February
Edinburgh SO meeting: 'The politics of Gorbachev'. Windsor Buffet, Leith Walk, 8.30

Tuesday 21 February
West London SO meeting: 'The state of the unions'

Tuesday 21 February
Adam Keller tour meeting, London

Wednesday 22 February
Adam Keller tour meeting, Brighton

Saturday 25 February
Labour Committee on Ireland Conference (two days), Birmingham

Saturday 25 February
Women for Socialism Conference

(two days). Wesley House, Wild Ct, London WC1. Contact: Ruth Clarke, 7 Cumberland Park, London W3 6SY; 01 992 0945

Tuesday 28 February
Northampton SO meeting: 'Gorbachev and the Eastern Bloc'. Speaker John O'Mahony, 7.30

Monday 6 March
London SO education series: 'The General Strike of 1926'. Speaker: Vicki Morris, 7.00

Saturday 8 April
Gorbachev and the European Left Conference (two days). ULU, Malet St, London WC1. Contact Gus Fagan, 30 Bridge St, Oxford OX2 0BA

Saturday 17 June
Socialist Conference Third Conference (two days). Octagon Centre, Sheffield

Saturday 8 July
Workers' Liberty Summer School (two days), London

Saturday 11 November
Socialist Conference 'Building the Left in the Unions', Sheffield

ACTIVISTS' DIARY

Wednesday 15 February
Adam Keller tour meeting: 'The struggle for Palestinian-Israeli Peace'. Leeds University Union, 7.30

Wednesday 15 February
Adam Keller tour meeting. Sheffield University Union, 1.00

Thursday 16 February
Adam Keller tour meeting. Manchester Town Hall, 7.30

Friday 17 February
Adam Keller tour meeting. Church Hall, nr Central Station, Newcastle, 7.30

Friday 17 February
Adam Keller tour meeting. Manchester University Union, 1.00

Saturday 18 February
Socialist Organiser industrial

Yugoslavia flounders, the army waits

By Adam Novotny

Yugoslavia's ruling party (the League of Communists of Yugoslavia, or LCY) has stayed in power for over 40 years, without the backing of either the Soviet Union or China.

Sections of the western left used to talk as if somehow Yugoslavia was quite different from the other East European countries. Yugoslavia, they said had a democratic system — its self-management system, in which most enterprises are governed by workers' collectives.

Self-management meant something different to Yugoslav workers. The possibility of workers participating in management, let alone controlling it, was limited in two ways. Yugoslav workers have been controlled and atomised by the direct will of the ruling LCY bureaucracy and by the impersonal hand of 'market socialism'.

The LCY never really let power out of its own hands, throughout all the constant reforms of the constitution. The duplication of decision-making structures, and the division of the economy into eight autonomous regions, each with its own investment pattern, labour laws, environmental regulations and so on, has been incredibly wasteful. The cost of maintaining the huge army has been ruinous, but no Yugoslav Communist outside Slovenia would call for a reduction in the army's size or influence.

When Slovenian members of the League of Socialist Youth said last summer that the army was ready to intervene to stop democratisation in Slovenia, they were arrested. The army bureaucracy is the only real all-Yugoslav institution. Its Serbian trained officers have their own Communist Party organisation and newspaper. People are increasingly talking about possible martial law if the political and economic situation deteriorates.

The second reason self-management is an illusion is economic. The system is supposed to work in a market economy. To earn any money, enterprises must compete with each other, and increasingly with foreign and multinational firms.

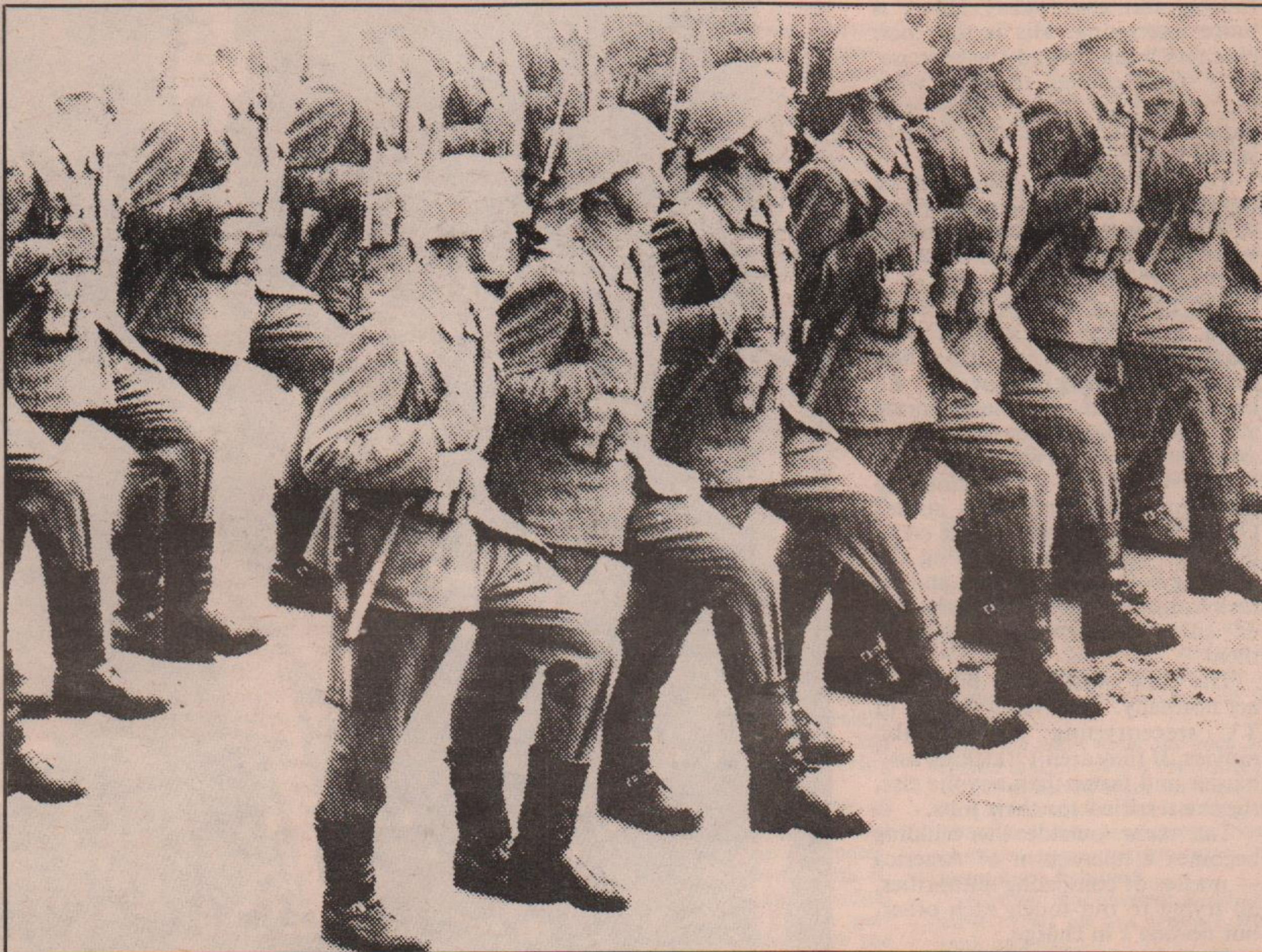
Yugoslav workers have faced the same realities as in worker cooperatives in the west — exploit yourself by working long hours, ignoring health, safety and insurance regulations, accept low take home benefits, and try to make profits like any capitalist.

'Workers' enterprises in the north of Yugoslavia make more money if they contract out dirty and labour intensive work to 'worker-managers' in the underdeveloped south. The real profits are made by the self-managing collectives of specialists (lawyers, marketing people, accountants) and by the managers the workers have to 'employ' if their enterprise is going to compete at all.

Not surprisingly, Yugoslav sociologists have 'discovered' time and again that workers divide society into 'us' and 'them'. They see self-management councils as a waste of time at best, and more usually as management's way of forcing up productivity.

What workers lack in the self-management system is any representation of their collective interests as workers, as producers of the wealth of the country. There are hundreds of strikes against management and the government in Yugoslavia, but without a genuine trade union to represent them and link their grievances, workers will only improve their conditions in a piecemeal way.

Being more integrated into the



world economy than the rest of Eastern Europe, Yugoslavia has suffered much more from recession. The country would have gone bankrupt a long time ago if it wasn't for the money sent back by the hundreds of thousands of Yugoslavs doing the shit jobs in Germany, Austria, Holland and Sweden and the millions of tourists spending their hard currency in Dubrovnik, Porec and Bled.

Regional and national differences are magnified by the structure of the economy and the political system, with trade unions and even the Communist Party split into eight — for the six republics and the two (until recently) autonomous provinces of Serbia.

The recession has widened the gap between the north of the country, oriented to the markets of Austria and Italy and the southern republics and inland Serbia, where the state plays a similar role to the rest of Eastern Europe, subsidising huge outputs of low quality goods, and keeping the price of food, alcohol and apartments well below their market price.

As the north feels the need to reinvest in its own industry to weather the recession and keep up with its capitalist neighbours, there is a growing public resentment of the 'lazy' Moslem southerners. In Croatia in the '70s and in Slovenia today, economists and journalists suggest that the nation should cut itself adrift from Yugoslav stagnation and find a new home in western Europe.

In Serbia and Montenegro (where many people are ethnically Serbian) the nationalist distraction from economic decline and triple-digit inflation is fueled by the charismatic communist leader Slobodan Milosevic. He wants a re-centralised economy and political domination by the traditionalist Serbian Communists led by himself. His condemnation of inefficiency, bureaucracy and the selfishness of the north strikes a chord with many ordinary Serbians.

The Serbian nationalists have also stirred up traditional racist attitudes to the Moslem Albanians of southern Serbia, in the autonomous province of Kosovo. Even the liberal dissidents and university 'anarchists' of the '70s have accepted and repeat the claims of mass rapes of Serbian women, murder of Christian babies and so on.

Millions of dinars were wasted on

prestige projects in Kosovo, and in lining the pockets of Serbian and Albanian bureaucrats. People are, however, encouraged to blame Kosovo's continued underdevelopment on the Kosovars themselves and on the Albanian mafia which lies behind the harassment of Serbs in Kosovo. Kosovo Albanians working outside Kosovo report increasing racial attacks, but the press controlled by the eight Communist leagues, says nothing.

Most Albanian workers want to stay in Yugoslavia, but with the same rights as other nationalities. With the exception of the left in Slovenia, they find most Yugoslavs hostile to them. Caught between economic underdevelopment, Slav racism and super-Stalinist Albania across the border, the situation of Kosovo's people is set to get worse.

Political developments are most pronounced in Slovenia — rich by Yugoslav standards but much poorer than neighbouring Austria and Italy. The league of Slovenian Communists has a programme of economic integration with western Europe, reduced ties with the rest of Yugoslavia, and limited political pluralism. The Slovenian Communists bank on maintaining power

as nationalists, and as good managers.

By allowing some political pluralism they can react to discontent, without allowing a real opposition. Their plan can only work if they can produce economic prosperity compared to the rest of the country.

They have little room for manoeuvre. Opposition parties have already formed. There is a private farmers' party (and a young farmers youth organisation), and a Social Democratic party, popular with the intelligentsia, which wants deeper economic integration with the west.

There is also a new left Party, mainly supported by 'alternative' circles of students and young workers and the Youth League magazine Mladina.

Finally there is the League of Slovenian Communists with partial support from the trade union structures. A recent opinion poll in Mladina suggested that the Slovenian Communist Party would get only 10 per cent of votes in a free republican election. The army is waiting to see if the political gamble and economic restructuring will pay off.

Jail — East German for glasnost?

Hundreds of East Germans have been jailed after secret trials.

In January of last year, a number of people were arrested after attempting to join an official demonstration in memory of the German revolutionaries Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht. For carrying placards bearing Rosa Luxemburg's words "Freedom is always the freedom of those who think differently", they were charged under Articles 215 and 217 and sentenced to six months in prison.

About 100 prisoners of conscience in East Germany are adopted by Amnesty International each year. Given the sweeping nature of East German legislation and the way in which the authorities interpret it, this figure probably represents only a fraction of the full number.

A new Amnesty International report 'Sweeping Laws, Secret Justice', highlights some of the cases and the laws that make them possible.

Article 27 of the country's constitution declares: "There can be no freedom in a society for anti-socialist (as defined by the Government) agitation and propaganda, especially that practised by the imperialist enemy... It is a Constitutional duty to oppose all such attempts decisively. This includes the spreading of anti-socialist ideology which is practised in the name of 'freedom', 'democracy' or 'humanity'."

Contact with foreign organisations for individuals by East German citizens can be a particularly hazardous affair. Passing on information to such bodies "to the disadvantage of the interests of the GDR" can be punished by two to twelve years imprisonment, declares Article 99 of the GDR Penal Code.

In 1986, Mike Wolf was sentenced to 2½ years imprisonment, after being tried in secret for phoning a friend in West Berlin and telling her he had submitted an application to emigrate. Three years earlier Wolfgang Hartmann had been sentenced to 3½ years imprisonment after writing to the West German authorities and his sister (who lives in West Germany) about his plans to emigrate.

Wolfgang Hartmann was charged under Article 214 as well as 99. After his initial application to emigrate was rejected, he protested in public with a placard bearing the words 'Human Rights — Also for the GDR'.

In 1983, Ines Meichner was arrested and charged with "rowdiness" under Article 215, for demonstrating with a lighted candle next to a monument to Karl Marx. The prosecution alleged that her action constituted a "gross annoyance to the public". She was sentenced to ten months imprisonment.

Heavy penalties are also enforced on East German citizens who attempt to cross the borders without permission. Individuals attempting to do so face a spell of two years in prison. Attempts to cross borders with others is an "aggravated" offence and punishable by up to eight years in prison.

In March of last year Heiko Grund and Carola Hoffman were arrested in Hungary, returned to East Germany and sentenced to two years imprisonment, for attempting to emigrate illegally to Austria.

"Sweeping Laws, Secret Justice", available from Amnesty International, 1 Easton Street, London WC1X 8DJ.



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A send-up of Reagan's America

CINEMA

Belinda Weaver reviews 'Die Hard'

If post-modernism means little more than a gratuitous mixing of styles, then 'Die Hard' is the ultimate post-modern movie.

Every conceivable movie genre has been thrown in — western, cops, thriller, romance, action, gore, disaster, war, comedy, yuppie nightmare, even a bit of TV sitcom.

Just as post-modern architecture throws out the orders behind the styles, making use of surface appearances only, this film junks the conventions. It's anarchic, chaotic, and thoroughly reprehensible.

Yet it has a crazy vitality. Despite all the gore, you come out cheering.

The plot goes beyond far-fetched. New York cop John McClane comes out to Los Angeles to visit his estranged wife, Holly, for Christmas. She has become a megatycoon with a Japanese multinational.

When the firm's Christmas bash in its state-of-the-art skyscraper gets invaded by a band of well-organised crooks, only John stands between the hostages and certain death.

McClane, played with considerable gusto by Bruce Willis, has more brawn than brain. He has to keep reminding himself to think. But he's game. Luckily.

The crooks are phenomenally well-organised, with an impressive weaponry arsenal, but they have one major drawback; they're Germans. As everyone knows, the Yanks beat them once before. Since McClane has little to fight this lot with, barring his gun and the desire of the scriptwriters to keep him alive, we're obviously meant to remember that.

Most of the crooks are just stock

movie Germans, sadistic blonde robots. But the leader, Hans, is more interesting. His is the cool, planners brain behind the exercise. He's smart enough to know what the American police and state paranoia will be, and how best to take advantage of it.

To the American authorities, he figures, every gun-toting German will be a Baader-Meinhof extremist, so he plays on their fears. It's a sly, witty characterisation.

The building becomes the scene of a new type of guerilla war, mayhem in a high-rise. It's a new kind of jungle, with an undergrowth of cables and wiring and alarms, and hideouts in lift shafts and fire stairwells.

As ever, it's hard to distinguish the enemy. Is it the bandits inside? Or the police, FBI and rescue crews outside? Their idea of saving the building is to lay siege to it and attack it, just as the Americans bombed cities in Vietnam to "save" them.

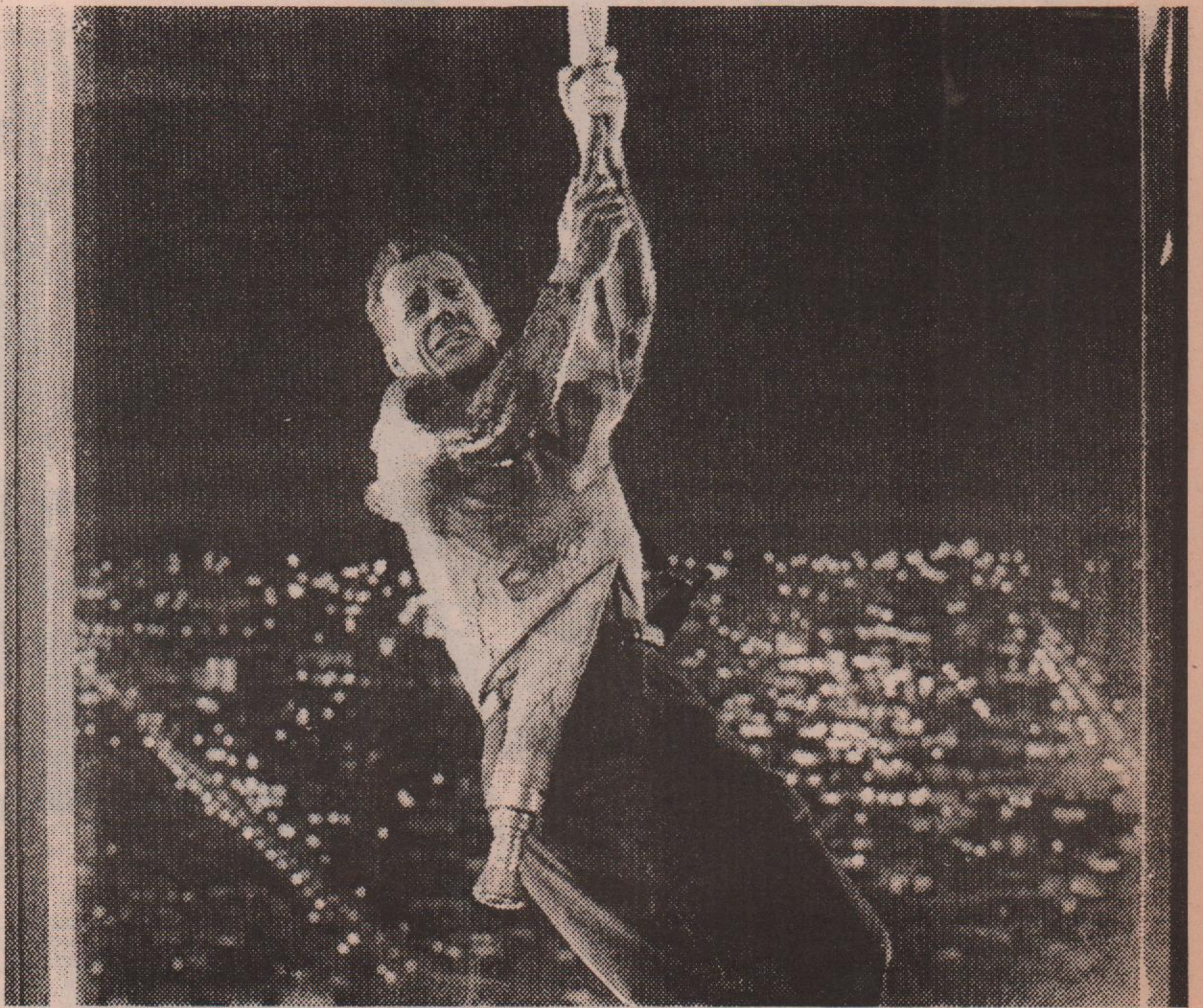
The cops outside can no longer act normally. They're all victims of TV stereotyping and Rambo movies. If they aren't "kicking ass" harder and faster than anyone else, they're terrified for their jobs.

The scene outside the building becomes a microcosm of America — masses of competing authorities, all trying to out-tough each other, but no-one's in charge.

The characters really have to work. This is value-for-money acting. Their being killed is no guarantee that they can relax over a job well done. Like characters in 'Dynasty', they have a better than even chance of coming back to life.

Alexander Godunov, who appears as a kind of relentless killing machine, survives an astonishing amount of punishment. He makes the Russian monk, Rasputin, look like a wimp. After all, Rasputin was only poisoned, shot and drowned. Peanuts!

Godunov is like the hopelessly aggressive knight in 'Monty Python and the Holy Grail'. Gushing blood



Bruce Willis doesn't hang around in 'Die Hard'

from every artery, arms and legs cut off, the knight continued to harry his opponent, taunting him for cowardice.

But even Godunov pales before McClane. I've long suspected that Bruce Willis is thick skinned, but this film proves it. Not even machine gun bullets can penetrate that serene hide.

The film is terrifyingly, noisily, violent. I expected to leave the cinema drenched in blood. The gore

explodes right in your face. The only quiet, thoughtful moments belong to Hans, and to Powell, the black copper on the beat who first realises something's wrong.

The movie is a prime example of overkill. The police "rescue teams" outside the building would be sufficient to wage a small war. No-one bothers to find out what the crooks really want. It's easier to kill them, as violently and messily as possible.

When the FBI finally wing their

way by helicopter gunship to the top of the building, planning to "waste" a quarter of the hostages for propaganda value, you know that everything has got totally out of hand. It's a perfect send-up of the US's "big stick" foreign policy.

In this comedy-thriller, no-one with any sense of reality has a chance of being heard. Everyone else is trying to be John Wayne or Rambo, with predictably disastrous results. It's a cautionary tale.

Brecht wasn't a Stalinist

LETTER

In recent years SO has been in the forefront of a movement to debunk the various Stalinist mythologies which permeated the British left and labour movement — something not only very welcome but also long overdue.

It's a shame, therefore, that Mick Ackersley spoils his very good article 'Joking about Nazism (SO 383, 5 January) with the oft-repeated, yet unsubstantiated, claim that the German dramatist and poet Bertolt Brecht was a 'Stalinist'.

Perhaps Mick Ackersley could tell your readers (and me) where he gets this notion from?

Now I wouldn't suggest for a minute that Brecht's ideas about Stalin or the Soviet Union are a model of clear thinking and sharp political analysis. On the contrary, he is often confused and confusing. However I hardly think this makes him a Stalinist.

If someone who is an internationally acclaimed playwright (let's leave aside the poetry for a minute) is labelled a Stalinist then it would follow, logically, that elements of this Stalinism would manifest itself in his/her plays. But where, for example, in 'Mother Courage', 'Galileo', 'The Caucasian Chalk Circle', 'Threepenny Opera', 'The

Resistable Rise of Arturo Ui' can such traces be found? I don't know of any — does anyone else?

But perhaps Mick Ackersley has erected a Chinese Wall between the artist's work and his personal life (a somewhat dubious separation at best). Brecht lived and worked in East Germany for about nine years — from his return in exile in 1947 to his death in 1956. In this time he received the Stalin Peace Prize (1955) and wrote a much publicised letter supporting the government of Walter Ulbrecht on the occasion of the 17 June 1953 working class riots in Berlin.

The letter (as printed) was brief, merely stating: "I feel it necessary to write to you and express my association with the SED (German Communist Party). Yours, Bertolt Brecht." Not as much publicity was given to later statements by Brecht where he drastically qualified his support for the SED:

"The SED has made mistakes which weigh heavily on a Socialist Party and have turned workers against it. I am not a member, but I respect many of its historic achievements..."

In a letter to an East German newspaper Brecht was also to speak of the workers' "justifiable discontent" and of "mistakes on all sides". Brecht, it seems, was concerned that the riots and disturbances would provide a pretext for fascist elements to re-assert themselves and he was also worried about the possibilities of Western

intervention and the danger of yet another war.

Stalin died in March 1953 and Brecht wrote an obituary notice which was published in an East German cultural magazine. He said: "The hearts of all who are oppressed throughout the five continents, of all who have already found their freedom, of all who are fighting for world peace, must have missed a beat when they heard the news, Stalin is dead."

"He was the embodiment of their hopes. But the spiritual and material weapons he made are there, and so also is the teaching to make new ones."

Fulsome as this praise is, it has to be contrasted with the mountains of sycophantic drivel that accompanied the death of the Butcher of the Revolution. It is also noticeable that Brecht is not talking about his own feelings but what he perceives as the feelings of others.

Apart from this there are two references to Stalin in his whole body of poems, in one Stalin is described as "...the great leader of the harvest" and in the other his name is coupled with Mao Tse Tung.

In his prose work 'Me-Ti or the Book of Changes' Stalin is both criticised and praised. In this work Stalin is given the name Ni-en which itself signifies "no" and in a passage on the Moscow Trials Brecht has this to say of Ni-en:

"...trying them without proof he has harmed the people. He should

have taught the people to insist on having proof, particularly from him, who is in general so useful."

There is of course much that could be said, both good and bad, about this kind of double-edged praise and criticism, but, as I've said before, it hardly makes Brecht a Stalinist.

Further evidence of Brecht's contradictory attitudes are evidenced by this account (from his close friend, the German literary critic and philosopher, Walter Benjamin):

"Brecht came over to my place to read me his Stalin poem, which is entitled 'The Peasant to the Ox'. At first I did not get its meaning completely, and when a moment later the thought of Stalin passed through my head, I did not dare entertain it.

"This was more or less the effect Brecht intended, and he explained what he meant in the conversation which followed...he emphasised, among other things, the positive aspects of the poem. It was in fact a poem in honour of Stalin, who in his opinion has immense merit.

"But Stalin is not yet dead...He (Brecht) is following the writings of Trotsky. These prove that there exists a suspicion — a justifiable one — demanding a sceptical appraisal of Soviet affairs.

"Such scepticism is in the spirit of the Marxist classics. Should the suspicion prove correct one day, then it will become necessary to fight the regime and publicity."

This conversation took place in 1934 while Brecht was undergoing his first exile. I have been unable to find the poem 'The Peasant and the Ox', it doesn't appear to be in his Collected Poems 1913-1956, edited by John Willet.

There is of course much more that could be said in defence of Brecht, his friendship with longstanding anti-Stalinists like Karl Korsch or his equally longstanding hatred of Moscow's most illustrious official scribe Georg Lukacs (who also wasn't a Stalinist, in my opinion!), his outspoken opposition to the policies of 'Socialist Realism', etc.

Certainly his action in 1953 was weak, contradictory and confused but must be seen in the context of a divided post-war Germany. This doesn't make it any more forgivable but at least helps us to understand Brecht, which is a darn sight more than asinine labels like 'Stalinism' do!

Finally, just as a footnote, Brecht wasn't the scriptman for 'Hangmen Also Die'. He collaborated with an American writer, John Wexley, on the script, but due to various problems and disagreements, very little of Brecht's script actually remains in the film. The only film Brecht worked on which ever saw the light of day was his much earlier collaborative effort 'Kuhle Wampe' made in 1932 just before he fled Germany.

John Cunningham
Sheffield

Conflict looms on the railways

By Rob Dawber

Industrial action on the railways is looking increasingly likely in a matter of months.

Exactly when it will happen, and around which issue, is difficult to say. But so much has been piled on the backs of rail workers, so many long-standing conditions taken away, worsening prospects for jobs and earnings, that one unnamed NUR full-timer in the *Independent* was moved to say recently that if the union doesn't take some action then the rank and file will.

Encouraged by a quiescent NUR which has wrung its hands at each new attack, BR has become increasingly emboldened. In the last year BR has announced:

1. An end to the Machinery of Negotiation which has existed since 1947 and in some areas since 1927. BR has demanded that the union accept five separate, different, Machineryes, covering different aspects of railway operations. At all levels BR want 'total right to manage' imposing their decisions after any 'consultation'.

2. Regional Pay. On 9 January this year BR imposed extra payments (amounting to £300 per quarter in some instances) for shift workers within 40 miles of King's Cross. They say the payments are an attempt to stem high staff turnover in the South East. They have made clear that the extra money paid in the South East comes out of the general money available to BR and therefore means less to meet the NUR's pay claim for all BR workers in April.

The union leadership has bleated opposition to this regional pay imposition and has merely asked branches for examples of high staff turnover outside the South East to try and show management how unreasonable they are being. Meanwhile rail workers in Kent, just outside the 40 mile limit have taken action to demand the extra money. Reportedly this action was smothered by NUR full-timers.

3. An end to the 8-hour day and total flexibility for the Civil Engineering staff. The civil engineers in question are those who install and maintain the Permanent Way — track workers. They are the largest single section of BR workers.

Management want an end to the



Stop Knapping

guaranteed 8-hour day and the freedom to roster the 39-hour week in shifts varying between six and 13 hours. "BR offers a 3-day week" was how they got it headlined, suggesting you might just work 3x13-hour shifts in a week. The reality is, of course, that 13-hour shifts would be worked overnight at weekends when traffic is least. The rest of the 39 hours will be made up of short shifts during the week.

Saturday and Sunday becoming part of the basic week will mean loss of overtime rates. Battles by guards and drivers in 1982 kept flexible rostering, which the then NUR general secretary was in favour of, down to between just seven and nine hours.

BR also demand that seniority as the basis for promotion be done away with. They want to choose who gets the training (and the associated payments) for the skills that bring promotion. Job descriptions will go gone; everyone will be required to do whatever job is "within their capacity".

Of course, once BR has succeeded in getting their way (if they do) then it won't be long before they want to offer the advantages of this system to other BR workers, starting with those working alongside the P-way workers —

signal, telecomms, welders, brickies, joiners, etc.

4. A new pay and grading structure for the signal and telecomms department. Some 80,000 S&T workers were told last May that they would be regraded into a simplified structure against the union's agreement. The end result was less than half getting any extra money — usually about £3 per week — along with an elaborate system of payments for skills taken on.

The union had no choice but to ballot, as the policy was not to accept the imposition. Despite knowing nothing about the issue up to May, and the fact that many had got extra money out of it, nonetheless 83% turned out to vote for action.

Ineptly led, the dispute dragged on for seven weeks before widespread scabbing made continuing it impossible. The imposition was accepted.

5. What remains of the major wagon and local building workshops have been privatised. Throughout the whole long sorry saga of run-down and closure of BR Engineering Limited there has never been any serious resistance.

6. Further privatisations have taken place with the complete handing over of Travellers Fare to the private sector. The NUR now has a serious recruiting problem in Travellers Fare — especially after accepting a pay cut last year — and other railway stations' catering establishments like Casey Jones.

7. National pay negotiations for all managers on BR was torn up last August. Our old tradition of 'paternalism' on the railways went with it. Now each manager is on an individual contract with pay linked to his/her 'performance'. Simply put, the more the manager saves on his/her budget — jobs done with less workers, each working harder; less money spent on frills like decent messing facilities; less time 'wasted' by reps talking to members about their problems — the more the manager gets paid and gets on. The pressure is widely felt.

8. BR are driving home their advantage over the Traincrew contract. The idea of this is that guards and drivers are on the same line of promotion instead of the two being rigidly separate. But BR insisted on all sorts of strings relating to ending promotion based on seniority and other hard-won conditions.

Labour council sacks 500

On Monday 13 February Haringey council voted to sack over 500 of its 1,000 building workers.

The decision had been rushed through the ruling Labour group the previous week without any consultation in the local Labour party. The once left wing Haringey council has gone a major step further down the path of being the local administrators of Tory policy.

These sackings have a nasty twist in the tail. According to the council's statement, the choice of who keeps their job will be based on 'commitment to the public works service'.

The council's criterion will not just be attendance and sickness, but the maintenance of their equal opportunities programme. It is difficult to think of a more cynical policy — pushing through sackings under the radical cover of equal opportunities and thus trying to keep support from women and black workers or maybe second generation Irish, who knows?

The effects of this cynicism on the workforce and the wider working class will be destructive. It will open the way on the shop floor for black to set against white and women against men. It will seem to prove all that the tabloid press and the Tories have been saying about radical councils.

The council has been able to get this far because, as one militant put it, the Council unions have 'rolled over and died'. There has been no attempt to mobilise the workers to fight against the proposals. The workforce has been left in the dark by the leadership.

The workers are angry at their leaders. Militants on the sites must take hold of the situation, and fight redundancies on the basis of a united working class fight against Tory policy and the Labour council which carries it out.

Hard line on buses

By Ray Ferris

On Wednesday 8 February busworkers from Camberwell garage in South London struck for the second time in one week, and about 50 of them marched up the High Street to the next bus garage, one mile away at Peckham, to ask for support.

The dispute is over the actions of a new garage manager who was moved into Camberwell two weeks ago to do a job on the union there. He is a hard-liner and has already been through two other garages before getting to Camberwell.

At Camberwell, so far, he has ripped up a local agreement on the notice spare conductors get of their jobs, cutting it from seven days to two. The fleet agreement is for two days, but the Camberwell workers had won a better one.

He has also pin-pointed 19 people he intends to sack over their sick records, and he refused to talk to or negotiate with the union rep until strike action forced him to back down.

There will almost certainly be more strikes at Camberwell, and it is important that links are built between the garages to provide support and solidarity. What is happening to Camberwell is what we can all expect.

The London Buses fleet has now been split up into 11 separate units of three or four garages each, the more easily to be sold off. They will be sold to the lowest bidders, ie. those companies who promise to cover the mileage as cheaply as possible, and the cost-cutting will come from the wages and conditions of the busworkers. Hence the new manager at Camberwell.

This kind of attitude has resulted in several small-scale, isolated and unofficial stoppages around the city over the last year.

But they remain isolated, despite the fact that there isn't one garage which isn't in the firing line. Some Peckham drivers did turn around in support of Camberwell on Wednesday 8th, but it was individual action with no directive from the union branch.

We must build rank and file groupings across the units and across the fleet so that, if the officials won't support those on strike, the rank and file can be appealed to directly.

Rayware workers strike

By Lol Duffy

Transport and General Workers Union members at the Rayware Islington Potteries warehouse in Speke, Liverpool, have been on strike since 10 October 1988.

Dave McMahon, the shop steward, spoke to SO.

"The strike started after a rumour went round the warehouse that management suspected that robbing was going on. One night as we were leaving work, management wanted to do a bodysearch on us.

I refused to be searched without a policeman or someone from security being present. Management couldn't get a policeman so they suspended me on full pay.

A couple of days later the police came in and took one of the lads down to the police station. After they'd questioned him they told him to go back to work as there was no further action to be taken.

When he got back into work he was sacked for theft! We decided to strike until something was sorted out.

Originally there were 32 strikers, but now we only have a hard core of 15.

We've had tremendous financial support from union branches around the country. We have a mass picket every Friday with 50 or 60 people coming to shown their support. Today we've had people from Batley in Yorkshire.

We still need financial support. It's a big strain when you're on strike and you don't know how you're going to cope with the bills.

We also need more people to join us on the picket line — not just on Friday but any day of the week. We did have a caravan for use by the pickets, but that was mysteriously burnt down while it was left unguarded.

Most Liverpool drivers are turning around at the picket lines, no problem. But we've had problems with drivers from out of town. They turn up here, we tell them there's a dispute on. They phone their bosses and then get told to

unload at another company's warehouse on the industrial estate.

The drivers unload at H&R then Rayware send out their vans to pick it up. Transport firms that are scabbing on our strike are JK Phillips, on Station Road Industrial Estate in St Helens, and ANC National Carriers."

Messages of solidarity and donations to: Rayware Islington Potteries Dispute, TGWU, Transport House, Islington, Liverpool.

Carworkers reject offer

Car workers at Peugeot-Talbot, Coventry, have overwhelmingly rejected their bosses' pay offer. The two-year deal was worth over 15% but was tied to attendance allowances.

The result of Jaguar's ballot on industrial action is also due this week. Management's final offer was worth £15 over two years, and amounted to a pay cut in real terms.

The unions are insisting on a one year deal, though they will need more than the series of one day strikes planned to brow beat management.

Workers are obviously encouraged by the 17½% two-year deal awarded at Nissan and the 8.9% rise that Ford workers won this year (as the second part of a two year deal).

They are also worried about rising inflation and interest rates eating into their pay packets.

Car sales are high and workers are finding their bargaining position improved. There is a serious possibility of industrial action.



The Channel Tunnel

IN BRIEF

500 Channel Tunnel workers walked out over health and safety last Thursday, 9th, after an ambulance took over 20 minutes to reach an injured man.

400 workers at the Sizewell B nuclear power station site have been sacked after walking out over bonus payments.

The banking union BIFU are recommending industrial action over this year's 5.75% pay increase imposed by the National Westminster Bank.

The AUT university lecturers' union has asked the government to fund a 16% pay increase over two years. University management want to break up national pay rates and to marginalise the AUT in negotiations. Kenneth Baker, Education Secretary, wants private firms to top up lecturers' salaries!

The latest report by Incomes Data Services shows rising levels of pay deals in the engineering industry.

The Government is to cut the number of Employment Training places by 10% because of the poor response to the scheme.

STOP THE KILLINGS!

Stop executions in Iran!
Stop massacring the Kurds!
Hands off all Iran-Iraq refugees!
Committee against the massacres in Iran, Iraq and Turkey

Activities

- Iraqi Cultural Centre, Tottenham Court Rd, 1pm, Saturday 25 February
- Turkish Airways, 1pm, 18 March
- United Nations Information centre, 1pm, 25 March
- Public Meeting, 22 April
- Demo, 6 May

SOCIALIST

ORGANISER

The way to peace in the Middle East

Israeli socialist Adam Keller is touring Britain, arguing the case for "two nations, two states" in Israel/Palestine. This was his speech to the London meeting on 13 February, where he shared a platform with a PLO representative, Dianna Neslen of the Jewish Socialists' Group, and Clare Short MP.

I am an activist of the Israeli peace movement. I have been active for nearly 20 years, since I was 17 years old. I've been involved in all kinds of groups, movements and political parties, which have in common the aim of establishing peace between the Israeli people and the Palestinian people.

Our struggle has been based on an assessment of the situation as a conflict between two nations which are struggling for the same piece of land. There are two distinct nationalities, two distinct peoples, with each one having its own very strong nationalistic feeling, its own traditions, its own self-identity.

I don't think that any solution could be achieved which does not take account of both.

I acknowledge completely the way in which the state of Israel was created, the way in which my own people came to live in Israel, was a way which created a very grave injustice to the Palestinian people. It has caused misery for three generations of the Palestinian people. I think that Israel must acknowledge its historical responsibility.

It must acknowledge that the Palestinian people have the right of self-determination; that they have the right to their own independent state, their own independent nationality, their own flag, their own

parliament and so on.

I think that the Palestinian people must recognise — and indeed in the last period the PLO has recognised — that the Israeli people are a people which is not going to be destroyed, which is not going to disappear and is not going to give up its nationality.

The intifada, the Palestinian's uprising, has had two interlinked effects.

The Palestinian state has not only been declared on paper in Algiers but to a very significant extent, already exists at the moment in the occupied territories. In every Palestinian town, village and refugee camp there exists a popular committee which has very strong roots in the population and which has taken on itself governmental jobs such as the welfare, health, education and so on. To a very great extent there already exists a Palestinian alternative governmental structure under the Israeli military occupation.

Despite the very brutal and very massive effort by the Israeli government to destroy this culture — massive arrests, destruction of houses and shooting — this alternative Palestinian government is in existence.

This has put the Palestinian people in a position of strength in which they can also make concessions.

The PLO has a new position of willingness to recognise Israel and to establish relations with Israel. This has made for a substantial change in Israeli public opinion.

The positions which groups like my own such as the Progressive List for Peace and the Israeli Council for Israeli/Palestinian Peace have had for many years are now accepted by rapidly growing circles of the Israeli public and by several other parties. They are even accepted by a significant part of the Israeli Labour Party.

The question of whether or not to recognise the PLO is now one of the main items of internal debate within the Israeli Labour Party. Now there is a very good chance that within the next two or three years we will see the Israeli government working to establish relations with the PLO and maybe to start the process of



withdrawing from the occupied territories.

A great number of demonstrations, pickets and protests are taking place in Israel. In public opinion polls 54 per cent of the population have now expressed support for talks with the PLO. A month ago tens of thousands demonstrated in Tel Aviv for talks with the PLO.

All these things were made possible because of the new positions which the Palestinians in the occupied territories and in exile and the leadership of the PLO are taking. This has opened new possibilities for peace in the Middle East.

We, the people in Israel who have advocated this solution for many years, at last feel it is going to come about.

I hope that people here in Britain will lend as much support as possi-

Kinnock is out of line

WHETTON'S WEEK

A miner's diary

Neil Kinnock has put his foot further and further into the mess.

I am not at all surprised at the uproar that has followed his statement about unilateral nuclear disarmament. I hope the uproar will

grow. I hope that at annual conference the Labour Party will spell it out very clearly that we will not abandon unilateralism and that Kinnock can either take notice of what conference says or he can step to one side.

If Kinnock believes unilateralism is wrong then he should argue it from the position of the back benches but certainly not as Party leader in defiance of annual conference and the broad mass of the labour and trade union movement.

I don't think unilateralism is a vote loser for Labour, but it has been presented badly. The Tories have taken the advantage and we haven't put forward our case as strongly and forcefully as we ought to have done. It's only been a vote loser in that we failed to spread the message.

On pit closures we're seeing a great lack of morale. Management are riding on a high horse.

It certainly isn't the same industry to work in as it was before the strike. Management have got the bit between their teeth.

Arthur Scargill is absolutely right about it: at some stage, sooner or later we've got to stand up and fight and win.

I don't know whether we can raise the consciousness. Some of the older lads are saying: 'I've had enough and I'm getting out'. But there is still going to be some sort of an industry left, it's going to have a workforce and that workforce needs a lead.

Many young miners have perhaps recently got married, got kids, and got a mortgage round their necks and there is certainly no future in taking redundancy for them. It's quite difficult, but sooner or later we are going to have to stand up and fight it.

Manton, my pit, isn't one of the pits down for closure. It's down as a receiving pit from Shireoaks and one or two other pits around here.

Even so there are men at our pit that are talking about getting out. I think it's a lack of morale more than anything.

Justice for the Mineworkers is organising a do on the eve of the anniversary of the strike along with the union and it's going to be in Manchester, from 9.30 am on 4 March at the Town Hall.

Justice for the Mineworkers is having its AGM and wants re-affiliations. They're also going to pursue the 50p levy which was agreed at last year's annual conference. They're asking everyone to remember that over 1,000 were sacked for defending their jobs and honouring picket lines.

Five years after the strike, we've still got a number of miners sacked, many of them guilty of no offence. They need support, and the way to do it is through the Justice for the Mineworkers campaign.

I've been on a course this week at Manvers — one of the closed pits, which still has school facilities — about roof bolting.

It was interesting to sit there and listen to the very plausible arguments put forward about how good it was. Tomorrow we go into the second phase and actually do some roof-bolting, but it seems there's going to be a strong push by the Coal Board to gradually introduce it — not all at once, overnight, but gradually, little by little to get it in.

There's no way I'm going to accept it, but there are a lot of young lads coming up and it may well be that the Coal Board can succeed.

Paul Whetton is a member of Manton NUM, South Yorkshire.

For details of the Adam Keller tour meetings, see **Activists' Diary, page 8.**