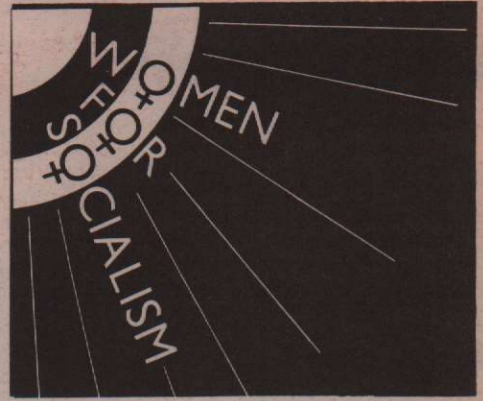


SOCIALIST

ORGANISER

INSIDE:



Page 5: New start for socialist feminism

Labour must fight to beat Poll Tax

Get the Tories on the run!

Life is hard for Mrs Thatcher at the moment. As well as bad results in last Thursday's by-elections (23 February), she has to explain away the highest inflation rate in Western Europe.

Inflation was always the Tories' showpiece. But now the prospects just look worse and worse.

Worse for the Tories. Now is the opportunity for the Labour Party and the labour movement to go onto the offensive. A serious campaign against the Tories could really put them on the run.

A recent opinion poll puts Labour one point ahead. We must not allow that lead to dip.

Labour's leadership have missed many opportunities. They have been too busy changing Labour Party policy with minimum consultation with Party members.

Neil Kinnock should focus his fire on Thatcher — and the Labour Party should call demonstrations against Tory policies, and support people fighting back.

In particular, Labour should be four-square behind the campaign against the poll tax. Learn the lesson of the Govan by-election! If Labour doesn't fight the Tories, opportunists like the Scottish Nationalists will gain support.

The Tories are wobbling at the knees. Let's force them out of the ring.



Workers strike for Moses Mayekiso's release. Photo: IDAF

Free Moses!

Moses Mayekiso, general secretary of the giant South African metal workers union, NUMSA, is now on trial for treason for organising working class people into street committees in the black township of Alexandra, near Johannesburg.

To raise support for Moses and the other four defendants on trial alongside him, Khola Mayekiso (Moses' wife) is to visit the UK next month.

Khola Mayekiso's tour is organised jointly by NUMSA and the TUC. Regional TUCs will be organising events on the following timetable:

- 5 March: arrive London
- 6 March: address TUC international committee
- 6-10 March: TUC North West region including TUC Women's Conference (Blackpool, 9 March)
- 11-13 March: Glasgow (and STUC international forum, Edinburgh)
- 14-15 March: Newcastle upon Tyne. TUC North region
- 16-17 March: TUC Yorkshire and Humerside region
- 18-19 March: TUC East Midlands region
- 20-21 March: TUC West Midlands region
- 22-23 March: TUC East Anglia region
- 24-25 March: NUT Conference
- 27-29 March: Wales and South West TUC regions
- 29 March-1 April: London area (South East region TUC)
- 2 April: Depart for USA and Ireland

For details of meetings, phone NUMSA UK on 0533 712041 or TUC 01 636 4030



What is Islamic fundamentalism?

EDITORIAL

Since the Iranian revolution in 1979 Islamic fundamentalism has been on the rise in and around the Middle East.

From the '50s until recently the politics of the region had been dominated by nationalists who aimed to modernise their societies. The main nationalist leaders were usually Muslims themselves, but far from fanatical. They wanted to make their societies more secular, less dominated by religion and tradition.

Now the secular nationalists are being challenged or pushed out by Islamic militants. But who are they? What do they represent? Are they a force for progress or reaction?

Khomeini is in line with an old tradition, represented by the Muslim Brotherhood, or 'Ikhwan', founded in Egypt in 1928. They aim for an Islamic government (and holy war, or *jihad*, to achieve it). And their political system would be 'totalitarian' — a society run by 'God' (ie. the mullahs) in every detail.

The Ikhwan is a sizeable force in Egypt and Sudan, and sponsors fundamentalist groups in the Gaza Strip.

On women, they had a slogan 'communism equals atheism equals the liberation of women'. Muhammed al-Ghazali, an Ikhwan ideologist, advocated an economic system modelled on 'fascist Italy...Nazi Germany, and (that) still force in Britain, (that is, state intervention)."

Politically opportunist, the Brotherhood supported first King Faruq (who said, with the agreement of the Brotherhood's leader, "since the British will soon leave Egypt, our only enemy now is communism") and then the secular nationalist leader Nasser, although

later Nasser repressed them severely, driving them underground.

Other fundamentalists are less inclined to 'realpolitik'. These words of Mustafa Chukri, a leader of one of Egypt's more prominent groups today, give something of an idea of their ideology.

"God by praised. He will prepare the land for the group of the just by provoking a war between the two great powers, Russia and America...The war is inevitable; they will destroy each other. God will thus have prepared the land for the Islamic state and the society that follows the right path. Following the destruction of the two great powers in the Third World War, the forces of the Muslim nation will be about equal in number to those of its enemies. It is then that the true Jihad will start."

To understand the resurgence of this fundamentalism, it is necessary to understand the failure of secular nationalism.

The post-war period saw a great rise of nationalist movements across the Middle East. Nasser in Egypt, Mossadeq in Iran, represented this new assertiveness of rising bourgeois classes.

In different ways, these movements came to grief. Nasserism, the dominant form of Arab radicalism in the late '50s and '60s, was smashed to bits in the June war of 1967. A rightward shift was accelerated, leading eventually to Sadat's 'opening' — the warm encouragement of foreign capital and trade.

Mossadeq was toppled by the CIA. And secular nationalists failed to mount a challenge to the Shah. In particular, the Communist (Tudeh) Party discredited itself by its role in that period.

Disillusionment with the secular nationalist dream was accompanied by huge social and economic changes, exacerbated by the 'oil

economy' of the 1970s. Poverty went hand in hand not only with wealth, but with Western symbols of it, the 'Coca Cola-isation' of society.

The traditional nationalists had no answer at all to the terrible sufferings endured by the masses of the Middle East. Islam seemed to be an answer — a rejection both of the West and of the East ('communism') in the name of a return to the past. The symbols of the radical anti-imperialist recent past were in tatters. But the symbols of Islam were intact.

Lebanon is the clearest example of this process of Islamisation through despair. Since the mid-'70s, Lebanese society has undergone unbelievable torment. The Shi'ite youth have literally nothing to lose. Islam — which includes a commitment to martyrdom — gives them hope.

In Iran, moreover, a section of the old ruling class displaced by 'modernisation' was able to take advantage of the situation — and take its revenge, relying for support upon sections of the middle class

and the dispossessed.

In some cases — Egypt, the Israeli-occupied territories — the fundamentalists were 'used' by the authorities in the early stages, and then got out of control: Sadat helped his own assassins on their way. After a period of official patronage as a counterweight to the left, they developed their own dynamic. In the case of Egypt, this has forced the government to introduce more and more 'Islamic laws' — bad news for everyone, but especially the large Christian minority.

The pub bores' pub bore

Have you ever read 'The experts' expert' feature in the *Observer* magazine? It's quite interesting — or seems so in comparison with the rest of the drivel they put in between the adverts.

The basic idea is simple: take eight or nine 'experts' on a particular subject or from a particular profession and ask them which of their contemporaries they admire most. Tot up the results and — hey presto! — you have The Experts' Expert.

It has to be said that the final choice of experts' expert often seems pretty arbitrary and I have a suspicion that they often choose whoever is around to have a nice arty photo of themselves taken.

But when the magazine asked national newspaper columnists their opinions recently, the winner emerged with a clear majority: Keith Waterhouse. He won the votes of Katherine Whitehorn (*Observer*), Lynda Lee Potter (*Daily Mail*) and Auberon Waugh (*Spectator* and *Sunday Telegraph*), plus honourable mentions from Miles Kingston (*Independent*) and Hugo Young (*Guardian*).

As it happens, Keith Waterhouse was the first columnist I read with any regularity, back in the late '60s through to the early '80s, when he wrote every Monday in the *Daily Mirror*. He had a lightness of touch, an eye for the ridiculous and a nose for humbug that I found irresistible. Above all, he had a sense of fair play and general decency which shone through everything he wrote.

I remember a powerful piece he did in the mid-'70s in defence of Tony Benn, who was even then being branded a 'loony' by most of the press. Another one that stands out in the memory was a brilliant demolition of the hang 'em and flog 'em, law and order brigade; it closed with a footnote to the effect that

PRESS GANG
Daily Express
The Guardian
DAILY MIRROR
DAILY STAR
THE INDEPENDENT

By Jim Denham

since writing the above, the author had discovered his car aerial had been broken off by some passing yobbo, occasioning an incandescent rage that had very nearly caused him to completely rewrite his column.

But the best Waterhouse of all took the form of an open letter to his 18 year old daughter, just before the 1974 general election, urging her to vote Labour and explaining why. I clipped it out and carried it around in my wallet for years.

Towards the end of the '70s something began to happen to Waterhouse. His regular tirades against petty bureaucracy and municipal officiousness began to sound more and more like the voice of a middle class suburban Ratepayer (with a capital R). He became increasingly indignant, not about injustice and prejudice, but about such world-shattering subjects as the change in the design of Marmite labels and the fashion for calling dustmen 'waste disposal operatives'.

The GLC (whose occasional foolishness would have been the subject

of some gentle ribbing in the old days) became almost an obsession with him.

By 1979 Waterhouse could only just bring himself to call for a Labour vote, with his own version of 'no illusions'. He finally left the *Mirror* when Capt'n Bob took over, which admittedly seemed like a pretty good reason. But to join the *Daily Mail*! That was almost an act of betrayal.

These days, the Waterhouse column is little more than an extremely articulate and often witty mouthpiece for the typical *Daily Mail* readers' opinions. His one hangover from the past is a reluctant, half-hearted support for Labour at election time. Even that may not last much longer: in 1987 he warned that this could be the last time.

Katherine Whitehorn (in the *Observer* magazine) said she preferred Waterhouse when, "his old-fashioned common sense was an antidote to the left-wing extremism of the *Daily Mirror*." How anyone (even an SDP-supporter like Whitehorn) could consider the *Mirror*, at any time, to have been guilty of "left-wing extremism" is beyond me. Quite often, in fact, Waterhouse used to defy the *Mirror*'s editorial line from the left — as when he defended Tony Benn.

But Whitehorn's main point about that "old-fashioned common sense" is true enough: "Too many *Daily Mail* readers may mistake it for their own prejudices. Columnists often do best when they are writing against the grain of their own newspaper."

Waterhouse, in the same 'Experts' Expert' feature (he nominated Oliver Pritchett of the *Sunday Telegraph*) defined a 'good columnist' as "someone who says what the man in the pub would have said if he had thought of it first." That's a pretty good description of Waterhouse himself these days: a wittier than average pub bore. But there was a time when Waterhouse would have made the man in the pub choke on his pint of Double Diamond. I'll drink to the old, younger Waterhouse.

'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

Dog's breakfast safer than airline meals

GRAFFITI

Dogs get a better deal than humans when it comes to food safety, according to senior microbiologist Professor Richard Lacey.

Top brands of dog food such as Pedigree Chum are, it turns out, produced under much stricter controls than most cook-chill foods for humans! Both canned and dried pet foods are produced in such a way as to eliminate all potentially harmful bacteria.

Professor Lacey also believes that listeria has killed about 200 people in Britain over the past year.

As if the news reports of aeroplanes falling apart in mid-air weren't bad enough, a survey shows that eating in-flight meals is an even more risky business.

Of 1,000 meals tested at Heathrow airport, one in four contained potentially dangerous levels of bacteria.

We advise jetsetters among our readers to pack their butties in future.

The Queen is to receive a massive £5,500 a week pay rise in next month's budget.

The total amount spent on the Civil List — the money given to members of the royal family supposedly to cover the costs of their 'duties' — will reach £6m this year.

Prince Philip will get an extra £13,000 a year, taking his share of the booty to £230,000. The Queen Mother (God bless her) will get a £25,000 increase, taking her annual allowance up to £415,000 — no wonder she looks well for her age.

Other members of the royal family fare less well. Charles and Di for instance get nothing at all — they are expected to subsist on the income from the Duchy of Cornwall estates, poor dears.

All this money of course comes from our pockets, through taxes. Meanwhile the Tories are planning attacks on benefits and single parent families — to 'reduce the burden on the taxpayer'!

The anti-abortionists are resorting to some very sneaky tactics in their attempts to tighten up the abortion laws.

Their latest move is an attempt to slip an amendment 'protecting the unborn child' into a government bill banning human organ sales.

The 'pro-lifers' are clearly hoping they can do a sleight of hand job, in the wake of the defeat of David



Alton's bill last year.

The last thing they want is another very public debate — after all, all the opinion polls conducted during the Alton campaign showed that the vast majority are in favour of a woman's right to choose — giving the lie to the anti-abortionists' claim that they speak for the 'silent majority'.

China's main cities are facing a crisis as hundreds of thousands of unemployed rural labourers move into the cities in search of work.

Rural unemployment is on the increase in China as economic reforms and austerity policies begin to make their mark. The response of the unemployed has been to head for the cities — which are already overcrowded. Instead of work, the rural migrants are more likely to find homelessness and poverty.

In Canton, for instance, official figures show that over one million people have moved into the city since February 10th. Around 30,000 homeless and jobless people are living on the railway station.

When the migrants do find work it is in jobs that the urban population will not accept. China's Labour and Personnel Journal reports, "Many enterprises like to employ rural labourers because they are ready to accept even the hardest work at very low pay."

As a panic measure the government is to restrict the employment of migrant workers to mining, oil exploration, salt-making and geographical surveying. Other industries will only be allowed to employ them on temporary contracts.

These moves will, of course, do nothing to stem the tide of unemployment and homelessness.



SO's Afghan switch

LETTERS

So Socialist Organiser finally wakes up to how reactionary the Afghan muslims are. But it's a bit late don't you think?

After years of relentless propaganda against the USSR's "occupation", SO suddenly changes line, calling for a 'defence of the cities' in Afghanistan. You are not neutral in the civil war, you say.

But if you defend the cities, if you want to see the reactionaries defeated, surely you should want to see those aims met effectively? And is it not screamingly obvious that 'the cities' are more likely to be conquered without the Russian army?

You cannot have your cake and eat it. Either 'defend the cities' or 'troops out'.

Maybe your 'conditional troops out' approach to Britain in Ireland

would have made some sense. 'Troops out' in Afghanistan plainly means a bloodbath. If a political settlement in Ireland is the precondition for troops out, why not in Afghanistan?

At the very least, if you are going

to support the Kabul government (if not 'as such'), you should also support their right to invite whichever foreign government they wish to come to their aid.

Frank Anthony
Birmingham

Unfair to Cliff

Eric Heffer makes many many valid points against Tony Cliff of the Socialist Workers Party (SO 390).

It is certainly true that the SWP minimise the political class struggle, which includes — for now — the parliamentary struggle.

But on certain points Eric Heffer is, I think, unfair. It is unreasonable to cite as argument that "Unlike Cliff, I spent years of my life on the shop floor." Neither Marx, Engels, Lenin nor Trotsky

were noted for their shop floor experience, and the political argument between Heffer and Cliff stands or falls independently of their sociological background.

Similarly, that "some of those in the SWP earned more in a day as bourgeois journalists" than Heffer earned in a month is irrelevant.

It's an exercise in being "prolier than thou" which undermines Eric Heffer's basic argument.

Clive Bradley,
Peckham

Death on the sites

By Ray Ferris

Over 150 building workers died at work last year. Thousands more were maimed or scarred in accidents.

In 1987 reported deaths in London rose by 15%. Building labourers are five times more likely to meet an early death than the average worker; and many suffer from respiratory diseases caused by dusty working conditions and cement.

Yet the average fine on the bosses for neglecting safety is less than £500! Such is the price of human life under capitalism. Health and Safety Executive reports show that 9 out of 10 accidents could be prevented, and that in over two-thirds of cases positive action taken over safety would save lives.

The problem is endemic. A safety blitz by inspectors in London visited 476 sites and served notices halting work at 102 of them! Yet only two prosecutions resulted from this blitz.

It is a familiar story. The Tories have given the green light to bosses on health and safety. Fewer inspectors, fewer safeguards and more deaths and 'accidents'.

At the same time, in 1987, the ten leading building contractors shared out almost £700 million in profits between them. No wonder firms like Bovis and Laings are so keen to give money to Tory Party funds.

Bosses are keen to stop building workers getting organised. Workers fear the sack if they complain about bad safety practices. Contractors use casual labour to hinder unionisation and often use blacklists to stop union activists getting re-employed.

Where a site is unionised they encourage a *laissez faire* attitude from union reps.

But organisation is the key to stopping this scandal. A 'Construction Safety Campaign' has been set up to organise building workers and to make health and safety into a real issue. With bosses facing shortages of skilled labour

there is a real possibility of improving the situation.

Sites must be unionised and health and safety reps must be militant in pressing their demands. And the Labour Party must commit itself to overhauling legislation to put bosses in the dock for treating flesh and blood humans as cheap dispensable commodities.

Construction Safety Campaign AGM, 8 April, Kingsway Princeton College, Sidmouth St, London WC1. 11-5.30.

Sources: Health and Safety Executive Report, Daily Hazard, Building Worker.

On the Anniversary of the outrageous frame-up convictions of Mark Braithwaite, Engin Raghup and Winston Silcott for the killing of a policeman during the Tottenham Rebellion in 1985:

March for Justice!

Saturday March 18th

Assemble 12 Noon
Tottenham Green, Tottenham Town Hall
Tube: Seven Sisters Buses: 243, 123, 279, 259,
149, 73, 41, 76.

Rally: with Irish in Britain Representation Group,
3pm, Duckett's Common
Tube: Turnpike Lane Buses: 123, 221, 41, 67, 29.
With Speakers including: Bernie Grant MP, Unmesh
Desai, and relatives of the framed prisoners.

REFORM OR REVOLUTION IN EASTERN EUROPE?

A SOCIALIST ORGANISER PAMPHLET 80 PENCE

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

Fresh start for socialist feminism

Cate Murphy reports on the 'Women for Socialism' conference

Four hundred women attended the first 'Women for Socialism' conference last weekend, 25-26 February. It was the largest socialist feminist event for almost a decade.

The conference debated socialist feminist perspectives for — amongst others — education, housing, health, the poll tax and international solidarity, and discussed issues such as racism, ideology of the family and lesbian and gay rights. Proposals coming from these debates included a 'Women for Socialism' health conference to plan a campaign in defence of the NHS.

Women's Fightback supporters Lynn Ferguson and Cathy Nugent successfully argued for 'Women for Socialism' to campaign on the poll tax — in particular to campaign in the Labour Party women's sections for a non-implementation policy and to link up the Labour Party with local community resistance groups on the basis of non-payment.

The conference adopted a labour movement orientation towards organising working class women in the Labour Party and trade unions. Liz Williams (elected as one of the Labour Party liaison officers on the 'Women for Socialism' Steering Group) presented a document calling for 'Women for Socialism' to lead the fight in the women's sections against Kinnockite policies, to campaign for democratic rights and to turn the women's sections outwards, making the Labour Party more representative of, and accountable to, working class women.

'Women for Socialism' should be

at the forefront of fights against local authority cuts, nursery closures etc, and in support of the healthworkers.

Similarly, in the debate on women and the trade unions, we argued that 'Women for Socialism' should reject the Rainbow Coalition-type politics of many Labour authorities who use women's — and black people's — oppression as a tool to divide the workers, making cuts under the banner of feminism.

We called for 'Women for Socialism' to organise women workers in the unions to fight for better pay and conditions for all workers — particularly part-time workers, the majority of whom are women. In addition, 'Women for Socialism' should fight to make unions more accessible to, and representative of, women workers.

It was agreed that 'Women for Socialism' should produce a working women's charter around which to campaign; would organise meetings at TUC and union conferences; and would regularly cover industrial disputes and trade union issues of particular relevance to women in its newsletter.

National Union of Students executive member Emma Colyer organised a workshop on 'Women for Socialism' and the student movement. The NUS women's campaign, she said, is alienating to the majority of women students, particularly in Further Education colleges, because of its cliquiness. She argued that 'Women for Socialism' could re-orient the student movement, providing real campaigning initiatives that are sadly lacking at present.

It was agreed that Emma, as the 'Women for Socialism' student liaison officer, should organise a 'Women for Socialism' speaking tour around colleges and produce literature on campaigns such as the poll tax, childcare, Section 28, etc.



Clothing workers on the demonstration in support of the NHS

The final plenary session heard that local groups are being set up in Manchester, Sheffield, Stoke, Kent, Newcastle and York; voted through a statement of aims and objectives and elected the new Steering Group — Emma Colyer (student liaison), Cate Murphy (trade union liaison), Liz Williams and Liz Davies (Labour Party liaison), Lynn Ferguson, Betty Heathfield (Socialist Conference reps), Ruth Clarke (Secretary), Jane Kelly (National Regional Organiser), Barbara Green (Treasurer), Sarah Roelofs (Press and publicity). The positions of Black and Disabled liaison officers are still open.

The size of the conference shows that there are women looking for an alternative to the Kinnock-style politics dominating the labour movement, who want to fight for a socialist alternative. It was the best fresh start for socialist feminism for a decade.

Black or Afro-American?

RACE AND CLASS

By Dion D'Silva

In the USA, there are now more blacks than ever in local government positions. Yet in Chicago, one of the first cities to elect a black mayor, it looks likely that the incumbent black mayor, Mr Eugene Sawyer, will be defeated by his white challenger Richard Daley.

Daley is the son of former Mayor Daley — the notorious 'Boss'. In this city with a 40% black population, the voters are dividing along racial lines. Jesse Jackson, who lives in Chicago, is campaigning for Eugene Sawyer. However blacks — or as Jackson likes to say, African-Americans — are extremely disillusioned with their black leaders.

Trapped by a conservative state machine and the reformist capitalist Democratic Party, black politicians are seen merely as 'the lesser of two evils'. Eugene Sawyer is commonly known as Uncle Tom Sawyer.

Greater black representation was only one of the goals of the American Civil Rights Movement. The demand for 'black power' in the late sixties was a call for direct action.

Initially it developed out of a need for black self-defence and a rejection of the state and Democratic and Republican parties. Black was a political term rather than a definition of the colour of one's skin. Black activists identified with anti-imperialist forces throughout the world.

In the last presidential campaign Jesse Jackson broadened his support from Iowan farmers to Detroit carworkers. Still the politics are the same — that of the Rainbow Coalition. Blacks, women, lesbians and gays are quite correctly seen to have different interests and needs. The importance of these groups acting in a working class movement is downplayed.

Recently Jesse Jackson took the language of this Rainbow Coalition (*Marxism Today*-like) politics to its logical conclusion. Black Americans should now be called African-Americans and treated on the par with other ethnic groups — Polish Americans, Irish Americans, Italian Americans etc.

It's not an original term — the use of 'African-Americans' has been common in academic circles in the eighties. It remains to be seen what meaning the term has to black youth in the ghettos on the South Side of Chicago.

The term calls for African-Americans to have equal status in the dividing of the spoils, an equal 'slice of cake' alongside all the other hyphenated-Americans. In and of itself this cannot be faulted. Unfortunately it is limiting and can be divisive.

In Britain the term black has also come under attack. The black community mainly consists of Afro-Caribbeans and Asians. Now some Asians don't want to be lumped together as 'black'.

There are marked differences in the history and struggles of these two groups. Indeed there is some argument as to whether there has ever been a 'black' community, as such, in Britain.

Nevertheless in a racist British society many of the problems we face and continue to fight are the same. In that context, the term black is an all-encompassing, unifying term.

Without doubt the findings of the Scarman Report and the funding practices of the GLC has opened the way for a growth of ethnicity. Into this gap has stepped a reactionary conservative element — most notably some prominent Asian businessmen. Their attempt to deny any common struggle is a big leap backwards.



Jesse Jackson

Three key dates

POLL TAX

By Cate Murphy

Action against the poll tax is being stepped up with three major events

planned for the next few weeks.

Strathclyde Federation of anti-poll tax unions has called a demonstration in Glasgow on 18 March, which will attract not only the majority of local community poll tax groups in Scotland but large numbers of anti-poll tax campaigners in England too. It is mobilising around the slogan of mass non-payment, backed by industrial action.

dustrial action.

On 1 April the Stop It campaign — spearheaded by the STUC and the Scottish Labour Party — has organised an action day in Edinburgh.

The Labour Party is launching its poll tax campaign with three 'days of action' on 7, 8, 9 April, culminating in a rally on the Sunday in Nottingham. Or is it Derby? Labour Party leaders haven't quite decided yet!

Nor have they decided exactly what 'action' should be taken by local Labour Parties, but that's hardly surprising given that their campaign consists of protests at the 'unfairness' of the poll tax coupled with instructions to Labour Councils to implement the tax.

If you don't call for non-payment or non-implementation, there's not a lot left to campaign around; so like many other Walworth Road sanctioned campaigns the poll tax 'action' will consist of handing out a few leaflets saying how wicked the Tories are.

Local Labour Parties should seize the initiative and turn the three days of planned inaction into a fighting campaign. They should join up with local Trades Councils, tenants associations and community groups to hold public meetings, to build local anti-poll tax unions. Petitioning should be done on the basis of pressurising Labour councils to refuse to implement the tax.

Kinnock won't lead a fight that can really defeat the poll tax — local Labour Parties must stand firmly on the side of the working class and lead the fight to defeat the Tory tax.

Southampton debates defiance

By Tony Twine

Over 300 people marched through Southampton last Saturday, 18 February, in a city-wide protest at poll tax registration.

The rally heard a speaker from Strathclyde Anti-Poll Tax Federation paint a graphic picture of resistance north of the border.

Already as many as a quarter of a million people are organised under the banner of the Strathclyde Anti-Poll Tax Federation, he claimed. They will not pay poll tax, and have called a national demonstration of defiance in Glasgow next month.

Unfortunately discussion was cut short because *Militant*, who bussed in over 50 supporters, refused to hear speakers from the floor. They closed the meeting early.

A public meeting last Friday 24 February, called by the trades council,

attracted over 50 people to hear speakers from Lambeth and Camden poll tax campaigns.

In the debate that followed, Labour councillors argued that we had to stay legal and wait for a Labour general election victory in order to defeat the poll tax.

We replied by pointing out that if the working class had stayed legal there'd be no trade union movement. We accused the Labour council of treachery. In four years of administration they have hiked up council rents and rates beyond the rate of inflation, to the point where many tenants are likely to consider transferring outside the local authority.

If, on top of these attacks, Labour does not oppose the poll tax, they will end up doing the Tories' dirty work and next year the electorate will vote them out.

We will press ahead with our anti-poll tax campaign from the scheduled trade union council delegate conference on 29 April — but we will not stifle political debate for the sake of polite argument.

No more Thatcher decades!

SOCIALIST STUDENT

At the Socialist Student day school on 12 February, Ruth Cockcroft spoke about how to turn the tide in British politics.

When I was 17 and first became interested in socialist ideas, I read the Communist Manifesto by Marx and State and Revolution by Lenin.

I absorbed the theory of the state as alien to the working class, as 'bodies of armed men' who would be used to smash up working class organisation. What drove home to me that all these ideas were true, that I had to fight for a different kind of society, a socialist society, was my experience on a picket line in Warrington in 1983.

The NGA dispute with Eddie Shah has come to symbolise Thatcher's assault on the labour movement, her cynical dislike of the unions and her attempt to "wipe socialism off the political map."

At the time, even though I was uncomfortably squashed between hundreds of heaving pickets, I thought that we would win and prevent Shah's newspaper from leaving the gates. But the police

used new tactics. They smashed up the NGA van from which the picket was organised, then they charged the picket lines wearing full riot gear, wielding batons and turning police dogs onto pickets.

I was chased across the fields and hid in a ditch.

After that defeat there came more. Young people don't have the mass picket as a point of reference. Young people living in Thatcher's Britain today could be called the lost generation.

We've grown up without mass youth movements of any significance. Alienation from politics is so intense, youth don't even bother to vote. We've grown up in an environment of vicious self-seeking and greed and in a period when the left is weak, not only in size, but ideologically weak. There are very few challenging or new ideas from the left.

Because of the left's desperate isolation we've seen an emergence of false strategies, attempts to commit the labour movement to electoral alliances with the right. We also see attempts at creating new labour movements from scratch instead of socialists relating to the real mass movement of the working class, the Labour Party and the trade unions.

Notable academics associated with the Chesterfield Conference talk of a 'pure' socialist party. Sectarian outfits such as the SWP and the RCP likewise want to create a party without relating to the existing movement.

Some sections of the left have theorised the decline of the working class. They claim the working class has no ability for self-liberation.

They argue that trade union struggle and class struggle are outdated and old fashioned.

Marxism Today thinks that they've said something profound when they use trendy words like 'post-Fordism' and 'post-Modernism'. Their views are welcomed by the right-wing and by the new realists who run the labour movement, who parrot that compromise is right because victory is unobtainable.

What Marxism Today and the new realists have in fact done is build defeat into their theory. They have learned to mirror the actual state of the class struggle instead of saying what must be done to overcome demoralisation.

Left Labour councils have created an industry around specially oppressed groups. It was after the collapse of the GLC's attempt to fight for its Fares Fair policy that it turned to making commitments to women, gays and lesbians, and ethnic minorities without mentioning the working class. The defeat of the fight against rate-capping saw other 'left' councils follow suit.

In Sheffield the post of Women's Officer took priority over adequate pay for nursery workers.

These are the politics of the Rainbow Alliance, of defending marginal interests as sanctioned from above and the cynical careerist politics that occur within the student movement and large sections of the labour movement. Again these politics have become prominent and taken centre stage in a period of defeat.

The question to be answered is, how do socialists organise in such a climate? We have to take on the

struggle within the labour movement to reorientate it to working class politics.

During the miners' strike the miners condemned Neil Kinnock for his treacherous role. They called him Ramsay McKinnock, after a past Labour Party leader Ramsay McDonald. McDonald was a right-winger who centralised the party, who flouted conference policy, who cut benefits to the unemployed.

By evoking his name and his ghost, the miners were saying that their struggle was an historical struggle. The political fight against the Ramsay McKinnocks has happened in the past, is happening now and will happen in the future. We cannot abandon that fight to the bureaucrats, allow right-wing ideas to dominate.

We have to prepare ourselves for future struggles, and these are inevitable. There is the struggle around the poll tax, there is the struggle to save the NHS. Inflation is rising and workers will have to take militant action to defend the most basic of living standards.

We have to wipe out all the demoralisation which comes from defeat both in ourselves and in the labour movement. We have to go on the offensive politically and reassert socialism amidst the mish-mash that passes for socialism today.

Although we have stood against the stream, we have been right to stand for the ideas of working class self-emancipation.

The right-wing press tell us that picket lines are violent. Then some feminists say that picket lines are macho and male. I'd like them to tell that to nurses.



The right-wing press say that violence is perpetrated by lager louts, by hooligans and trade unionists. They do not let you know that violence is an institutionalised part of the state. Kinnock said he condemned all violence and as a result watched the miners sink in defeat because his words committed

NUS: vote La

By Rob Read

At the National Union of Students Easter conference (20-23 March) delegates will once again have the chance to vote for a national leadership.

What sort of leadership do we need to run what sort of campaign? How do we mobilise our membership, alongside which allies? How do we back the liberation campaigns? And how do we help to develop our movement in the Further Education sector and in Area organisations?

Socialist Student is standing two candidates for full-time positions on the National Executive — Liz Millward for National Secretary, and Steve Mitchell for Further Education Union Development.

We need a leadership which is prepared to take on the Tories unreservedly. Instead of campaigns which are based on sporadic Days of Action, we need campaigns based on the anger and militancy of the rank and file, on direct action, on education shutdowns and on the imagination of the members.

An active, vibrant movement is needed which fights alongside our allies — the organised working class. We share our battles with the trade unions and community groups, and we can win our battles if we fight together with them.

The liberation campaigns need to be given active — not tokenistic — support. We must highlight the attacks on women, mature, disabled, black, overseas and lesbian and gay students and develop campaigns on an activist basis.

The Further Education sector must be taken seriously by NUS. These 64% of NUS membership need campaigns relevant to Further Education colleges, help getting sabbaticals, a fight for a living grant

Grants, not loans! Build a united campaign!

By Steve Mitchell

Last Saturday 15 or 20,000 students marched to a muddy park in South

London. This was our long-awaited post-Xmas protest against the Tory student loan system.

The Tories want students to borrow £1200 over three years. This comes on top of ten years of educa-

tion cuts, course closures and falling real level of the grant, so students are not a happy bunch.

When the proposals came out at the end of last year there were big mobilisations in the colleges and a large demonstration organised at short notice which ended with 64 arrests as students fought police on Westminster Bridge.

If the leaders of the National Union of Students (NUS) had given proper direction to the action, hundreds of thousands could have been brought into the campaign and the activity carried over into the second term. But NUS leaders are scared of mass mobilisations. Through a mix of incompetence and design they have wound down the anti-loans campaign.

This demonstration was held six weeks into term, to let the campaign die away without a national focus in the first weeks of term. It was held on a Saturday to exclude the working class youth of the Further Education colleges, many of whom have to work on Saturdays in order to live.

What would a decent leadership have done? One of the major problems with the anti-loans campaign is that it is focused almost exclusively on the Higher Education sector (universities and polytechnics). In fact the majority of NUS members are Further Education students without mandatory awards (grants).

At the beginning of term Area Convenors and the Further Education sector were promised materials to help campaign for better discre-

tionary awards (grants). These have not arrived and the gap between Further Education and Higher Education still remains.

The political answers: tie a campaign against top-up loans to campaigns for mandatory grants for all, or at least better discretionary awards, more money on YTS, and state payment of all college fees. This is the way to unify the NUS's one and a half million members behind a campaign.

Not to build a wall around the loans campaign. Other issues — from local cuts to national issues like the poll tax — can be pieced together to bring new activists, build links with local communities and the national and local unions.

Actively pursue the formation of alliances to protect education. Students are relatively weak and Thatcher is strong — unless the student movement builds links at every level with the labour movement, loans, cuts, etc. will be brought in. Unfortunately, NUS prefers cups of tea with Tory ministers to talking with the labour movement about joint action to defend education.

NUS leaders are being immensely short-sighted. Unless NUS mobilises around the issues that directly affect the quality of education and students' standards of living, we will lose not only those direct battles, but we stand to lose our National Union.

Voluntary membership of NUS is lurking in the background — the only way to stop the Tories introducing it is to mobilise around the other issues — now!

Further Education Socialists

FES — for FE and V1th 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.

Inside
• A charter for Action
• Areas and union development
10 pence
February/March '89

POLL TAX

Mandy Gordon (Xaverian V1th 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!

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

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/ we need grants. Activists' Group. 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 students' group has

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 labour movement to being neutral. Our starting point is that working class self-defence is a tradition of the labour movement and is necessary.

Class struggle is not dead. The miners' strike showed that in reality the working class is innovative, is creative, it can throw up new spon-

taneous methods of organisation, unparalleled in their ability to mobilise. The working class is immensely powerful. In the process of a struggle many people learn liberating ideas; and in defeat their ideas can become conservative, prejudiced and small-minded.

In the struggles that are ahead of

us, when young people are once again on picket lines in solidarity, let's hope we give the police a bloody good hiding, let's turn the tide of events, ensure that there's not another decade where young workers are condemned to betrayal and it's theoretical equivalent in the ideas of New Realism.

Labour! Vote Socialist Student!

or all.

Areas need to be developed, properly resourced and based on activists in the area, not dictated to by NUS HQ.

This is part of what Socialist Student stands for, as the broad alliance of left-wing activists in Labour Students and NUS.

• Socialist Student candidate for National Secretary, Liz Millward, has been on the National Executive for two years as a part-time member. She has been active in lesbian and gay work, the Women's Campaign, sport and Public Sector Higher Education.

Previously Liz was president of Newcastle Poly Student Union and deputy convener of Tyne Tees Area. She was also active in Women Against Pit Closures.

Liz's two main opponents are Cosmo Hawkes and Joe Marshall. Cosmo Hawkes is an 'independent' elected last year as a joke candidate who regularly dresses up as an elephant.

At last conference he insulted medical students at their admission. He has made speeches at colleges which consisted of McCarthy-style red-baiting. He has made a joke out of NUS. He clearly does not fit to hold a position in the National Union. Yet a large section of the 'Democratic Left' faction are likely to vote for Cosmo against Liz, a Labour Party member.

Joe Marshall is a member of the Communist Party, who along with the Democratic Left faction of Labour Students, currently control NUS. His main responsibility this year appears to have been to disperse the November 24th demonstration on Westminster Bridge.

• In the VP Further Education Union Development election, the Socialist Student candidate is Steve Mitchell. Steve was a student at Averian VI form college in Manchester. Despite opposition from the school authorities he helped affiliate it to NUS and the



Many from the ruling 'Democratic Left' faction in Labour Students and NUS want to support this joke candidate 'Cosmo' Hawkes, against Labour Party member and Socialist Student nominee Liz Millward

Manchester Area of NUS. He is presently at Central Manchester College.

Steve is convener of the newly formed Further Education Socialists set up at last National Conference. He is the candidate of the Further Education sector which must be taken seriously by NUS. He is the Labour Party member in the election...Vote Labour!

His opponent is Jane Marshall, an 'independent', which from her election manifesto would appear to mean independent of any political ideas. What is left is a list of problems in the FE sector and in society — but with no answers.

In both elections the choice is clear — vote for the candidate of the left, the Labour Party members, the candidates with practical ideas to turn the student movement round into a fighting organisation which is capable of winning our demands.

Socialist Student is also standing candidates for the part-time positions on the NUS executive. Paul McGarry and Emma Colyer have been on the NUS executive for the last year; also Mischa Eligoloff (currently Sussex Area Convenor), Claire Standing (North Yorks Area Convenor) and Sigrid Fisher (president of Newcastle Poly SU).

The new King Elvis

By Philip Crawford

Amidst the media hype about sightings of Elvis Presley we have the much awaited new offering from Deckland P. Macmanus or Elvis Costello. The album 'Spike' has attracted a fair amount of attention — and deservedly so.

In place of The Attractions, Elvis has joined by a host of big names and renowned session musicians — Paul McCartney, Roger McGinnis, Christy Moore and T-Bone Burnett to name but a few. The result is a collection of songs which sees Costello at his very best.

Elvis has always been a bit above his contemporaries. Always a purveyor of finely crafted songs, he combines an anger with a poignancy and subtlety so often missing. He can always write a good love song too.

'Spike' is more openly political than his previous work. 'Oliver's Army' and 'Shipbuilding' carried the message, but on 'Tramp the Dirt Down' on the new LP it hits you in the face.

Unlike many other writers' embarrassing attempts to tackle politics head-on, with Elvis it works. The old anger is there again on 'Let him Dangle', the story of Craig and Bentley, an attack on those who call for the return of capital punishment. (Bentley was hanged for the murder of policeman Sidney Miles. Craig pulled the trigger but was a minor, so Bentley swung).

'This Town' is an indictment of 'self-made man' society — "you're nobody 'til everybody in this town thinks you're a bastard".

Other songs show Elvis' ability to stretch the English language and



put it to good effect — to use words to paint characters and stories.

There is the sleazy business man and his mail-order bride in 'Chewing Gum'. The disappointing affair between a young woman and a married man in 'Satellite'. The lamenting misunderstood 'Miss Macbeth' who sticks pins in dolls to live up to her fairytale old spinster image. Or 'Veronica' an upbeat, yet touching portrait of old age.

'Baby Plays Around' is a love song written with Pogues bass player and wife Cait O'Riordan.

There isn't a bad song on the album and what makes it even more interesting is the mix of influences and styles and instruments.

Freed from the constraints of The Attractions, Costello moves through the heavy brass of 'Deep Dark Truthful Mirror' or the instrumental 'Stalin Malace', the Irish pipes and drums on 'Any King's Shilling' and 'Tramp the Dirt Down', the cacophony of strange sounds of 'Miss MacBeth' to the simple acoustic guitar on 'Baby Plays Around'.

For my money Costello is the best writer of popular songs of this or any other generation.

The king is dead — long live the king!

Fat, funny and welcome

TV

By Vicki Morris

Believable working class American characters are now appearing on Channel 4 in 'Roseanne'. What a welcome change to find fat and funny people in American soaps.

On the whole the soaps are as cruddy as ever. In 'Dynasty' at the moment the tycoon's wife, Krystle, has gone philanthropic, loitering around some dustbins where poor people live; she assures her stylish friends that these hoodlums would be as good as the rich people if only they had somewhere to live. Then one of the poor people comes up and tries it on, so — phew! — Krystle was wrong after all.

The trouble with 'Dynasty' is it tries to portray all human qualities amongst a small group of spoiled dummies. Thus, Blake Carrington is a nice millionaire who made his bucks with integrity albeit, presumably, by exploiting lots of people we seldom get to see.

Once in a while a working class person comes along, usually disguised as a policeman, probing some dynastic skeleton in the cupboard. This reassures us that millionaires are not above the law... or else that working class people — with chips on their shoulders — pursue justice just because they've got it in for the rich.

After deregulation, pontificating TV bosses like Michael Grade tell us, we'll get more of this pap, less serious television. I watched some of the latter: Clive James talking to three old bores about 'Revolution'.

Programmes like this provide 'balanced' discussion — someone on the 'left', someone to the 'right' and a liberal. In time I suppose the effect is to convince people that the 'middle path' is always best. I expect less of that after deregulation, i.e. even less of the truth than we get now.

Quality TV does its best, but it's not always good enough. Channel 4 news confidently reported one of the US Senate's charges against John Tower as 'womanising'. Granted it's in the dictionary and maybe that is what the Senate said. But what would be the equivalent charge against a female politician? 'Trousers chasing'. Get serious!



The Communist Party-led guerrillas, the New People's Army

The Philippine left in transition

In 1985 the hideous dictatorship of President Marcos in the Philippines was overthrown by a mass movement demanding "people's power". Corazon Aquino, a wealthy liberal opponent of Marcos, was elected president. Yet poverty, inequality, violence — and huge US military bases — remain. This is the first part of an article by a Filipino socialist, Joly Macuja, which looks at how the left is organising.

In many ways, the problems of the Filipino people are like those of many countries in the Third World. Poverty stalks the land, with more than 50% of the population, the majority of which are industrial and rural workers, living below the poverty threshold.

The roots of the problem are not a lack of resources. Per capita the country would be classified as middle income, and it has registered a respectable growth of gross national product.

The answers are glaringly simple. Even government figures cannot deny the fact that the richest 10% of the nation receive more than 35% of the national pie, while the poorest 70% receive a comparable amount.

The roots of this problem are historical. 300 years of Spanish colonisation institutionalised an unequal distribution of wealth based on land ownership. The

American occupation that followed did little to alter that power structure but consolidated a ruling landed class from which capitalist interests emerged dominant.

This elite continued after independence following World War 2, controlling the political scene on the local level via the perpetuation of land owning oligarchies, and on the national level via businesses which were closely linked to the international market.

Power on the national level was shared by the rural oligarchies. The Presidency was the indivisible prize, and was rotated among the various cliques in the ruling class, all of them servile to the interests of the United States — which continues to wield political influence because of its economic interests, and the presence of its largest military facilities outside of mainland USA — Clark and Subic.

The Philippine working class has borne the brunt of the order's inequality. It is within this context that the Philippine Left has organised and grown in both capacity and sophistication.

The movement in general is understandably anti-imperialist in much of its sentiment and rhetoric, for such was its legacy — the revolt of the Philippine masses under the leadership of Andres Bonifacio against the Spanish; the organisation of independent trade and peasant unions to fight for better conditions while still under American colonial rule in the 1930s, revolving eventually around sympathy for the Communist Party of the Philippines of the 1920s-30s; the peasants in Central Luzon which composed the backbone of the Hukbong Bayan Laban sa Hapon (or the Huks) which proved one of the ablest guerilla movements during the Japanese occupation of the Philippines, operating independently from the pro-American guerilla command; the attempts following independence by the Philippine government to disarm the Huks, who had instituted de facto land reform when the landlords fled the countryside; the rebirth of nationalism via the student movement in the '60s — against

Philippine participation in the Vietnam war, for land reform, for Filipinisation of the schools, and other issues.

It was in the '60s that the present crop of activists which make up the leadership of the Philippine left emerged.

Following the declaration of martial law in 1972, the left continued to organise clandestinely. It emerged in the open again in the leadership of the 'parliament of the streets' after the assassination of Senator Benigno S. Aquino in August 1983, when there was a massive outpouring of sentiment for the dismantling of the Marcos dictatorship (which continued in effect in spite of the paper lifting of martial law in 1981).

The decision by the left in general to boycott the May 1984 legislative elections (rightly perceived to be pointless given Marcos' decree-making powers) put it more sharply into contrast with the 'traditional' (ie conservative) opposition whose agenda lay mainly in the realm of parliamentary struggle.

Participation varied in the snap presidential elections in the latter part of 1985 and the popular revolt which unfolded in February of 1986 resulting in the ousting of Marcos and the installation of Corazon C. Aquino as president.

Three years after that revolt the basic problem of the Filipino people succinctly encapsulated by the late respected bourgeois nationalist Jose W. Diokno as 'food and freedom, jobs and justice' remain. And the Philippine left has seen just cause to step up its efforts to forward its socialist alternative.

All the left's various tendencies are clearly anti-imperialist, favouring national capital versus perceived transnational domination of the economy and pledging to dismantle the US military bases. All would agree on the necessity of agrarian reform which distributes land to the tiller, and all broadly commit themselves (at least on paper) to the respect of political rights normally enjoyed under liberal dispensations. That is as far as the similarities go.

Continued next week

The bureaucrats don't have control

Peter Burton continues our debate on the Eastern Bloc, replying to Clive Bradley's argument (SO 388) that the bureaucrats are ruling classes

The Soviet Union is visibly disintegrating after only 70 years of existence. But why has it lasted 7 decades and who knows, perhaps even another one?

Doesn't this mean that the society has a ruling-class, that the economy has a central dynamic, and that there must be planning in the USSR, however bad?

I think the first point to note is that in those 7 decades there hasn't been one decade of stability. The system has never been out of crises, from the NEP of the '20s to the stagnation under Brezhnev in the '70s.

The 'scissors crisis' in the mid-'20s was followed by the agricultural crisis in 1929; the purges of the '30s; the external crisis of war in the '40s; stagnation in the '50s; a failed attempt to reintroduce the market in the mid-'60s by Brezhnev and Kosygin; and complete stagnation in the '70s, which resulted in the K.G.B. putting a reformer into power in March 1985, in the belief that reform is better than revolution.

The bureaucrats have some control or *partial* control over the surplus product in the Soviet Union; not *no* control. This results from the centre/periphery relationship in the Soviet Union, well documented by Hillel Ticktin in 'Critique'.

This relationship causes real problems of information between the central 'planners' and the enterprises. In the absence of democratic forms of organisation, i.e. workers' self-management, accurate information is only fed back to the central planners if this information coincides with the personal interests of the workers and the managers in the enterprises.

This has two consequences. The first is massive waste; the second is a limited degree of reproduction, as the centre does get some accurate information occasionally.

However to go on to describe this as planning or even bad planning is to divest the category of planning of any real meaning for Marxists. 'Organised' or 'administered' are better categories for describing how the economy is regulated.

The existence of the armaments industry and its relationship to the bureaucrats does not negate this. Military discipline is used here in a way that wouldn't be efficient if applied to the whole of the economy. Incentives to the workers in the industry are also real incentives, i.e. better quality food, cars etc.

Moreover the industry still has the same centre/periphery problems as other industries, with the product being defective in the same way — tanks with no armour plating are commonplace!

The elite are not only not a ruling class because of their *partial* control over the surplus product, but also because they don't constitute a collectivity (a point that Marx stresses). In other words there are no equivalent organisations in the Soviet Union to the CBI or the Institute of Directors or the London clubs, organisations which exist independently of the state and where the ruling class in the West can meet and discuss anti-working class strategies.

Citing stagnant pre-capitalist

forms of society to prove that the Soviet Union must have a ruling class as these societies certainly had reveals a false underlying perception of the nature of the Soviet Union. Those pre-capitalist societies (the Ottoman Empire; pre-colonial sub-Saharan Africa etc etc) were modes of production. The Soviet Union isn't one. That is the whole point.

The regime's simultaneous anti-socialist and anti-capitalist nature continues to focus the debate on one of definition, i.e. the search for a label is paramount. Historically the working class overthrew capitalism in the October Revolution but had its own dictatorship of the proletariat removed. The result was a highly contradictory society. It is in an examination of these contradictions that the debate lies.

Right now in the USSR the elite is trying desperately to turn itself into a ruling class, by attempting to marginalise and divide the working class. In May 1985, two months after Gorbachev's advent to power he raised the salaries of the intelligentsia in what can only be seen as a deliberate attempt to separate the working class from the intellectuals.

The joint ventures with the West have as their objective the creation of a skilled working class, a labour aristocracy, with higher wages.

The elite know that all attempts at partially reforming the system in the past have failed and that the society has to change as a whole. Socialism would mean the end of their privileges; the only other alternative is the introduction of the market. The introduction of the latter means dealing with a powerful working class first, and that is what they are doing at present.

The elite's objective is an ideology of their own, which means being able to conceptualise in a way that they cannot do just now. They want the reproduction of educational privileges for their children without going through the barbaric process that they have to go through now; and above all they want full control of the surplus product.

None of this means that there is not exploitation in the Soviet Union, nor conflict between the workers and the elite; and certainly not that socialists shouldn't stand unequivocally with the workers against the elite in the Soviet Union; but it does mean that the focus of the debate should change to analysing what Gorbachev and the elite are trying to do, as the lessons of this for Marxists are vitally important.



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.

The victim's viewpoint

CINEMA

Lynn Ferguson reviews 'The Accused'

A young woman walks into a bar. The way she is dressed is what would be called 'sexy' — short skirt, high heels, skimpy top.

She drinks, she smokes a joint, she dances seductively and flirts with several men. It's all a bit of fun, a bit of a laugh.

Then she is thrown on top of a pinball machine and gang-raped — surrounded by shouting, clapping and cheering men. Did she ask for it?

"The Accused" is an apt title. Three men are accused of raping Sarah Tobias (played by Jodie Foster). The men in the bar are accused of inciting the rape. But Tobias herself is accused — accused of being a woman who drinks, has a drugs conviction, overtly displays her sexuality, and is working class.

She is by no means the ideal rape victim — as her woman lawyer wastes no time in telling her. She is a 'bad witness' — remember, in rape cases the victim is only a witness.

Her well groomed success-oriented lawyer believes Sarah has been raped — her behaviour and her injuries speak for themselves but does not believe she has a case.

So, without even consulting Sarah, she indulges in a spot of 'plea bargaining' with the rapist's lawyers. The men are put inside — but for 'reckless endangerment', not rape. Sarah does not even get the chance to tell her story in court.

Her lawyer, Kathryn Murphy, rejoices in a job well done. Meanwhile Sarah hears how she has been sold down the river from the TV.

One of the most powerful scenes in the film is when Sarah bursts into Murphy's yuppie flat, interrupting a dinner party and tells her exactly

what she thinks of her. Murphy is sufficiently shamed to try to make amends.

After ploughing through legal textbooks she finds a way — she takes the onlookers to court on the charge of inciting a rape. A victory on this would prove that a rape had in fact taken place. Sarah would be vindicated.

This film is strong and realistic in that it refuses to show any fake sisterhood between the women characters. Sarah is poor, streetwise, 'vulgar' — Kathryn is successful and middle class. Their worlds will never meet and the film never pretends otherwise.

They do develop some natural trust and affection, but slowly and not without ups and downs — no trouble-free female bonding here.

Sarah's best friend is a waitress at the bar where the rape took place. She knew it was going on but did nothing. She ran away from it, just didn't want to know. No oversimplification there either.

There are lots of small but very telling scenes in the film. Sarah's boyfriend can't or won't cope. He gets angry — he just wants everything back to normal. Why doesn't she want sex with him — it's all over isn't it?

After the confrontation at Murphy's apartment, Sarah goes home and hacks off her own hair. She tells her stunned boyfriend she "felt like a change". It's not possible to explain the significance of this — but I felt it, and I'm sure most other women will too.

The rape itself is only shown at the end of the film, and is shown from Sarah's point of view. It's long, nasty and thoroughly draining.

We see, from Sarah's viewpoint, the animals in the bar cheering, egging the rapists on, chanting "One, two, three, four, poke that pussy till its sore". We see the distorted, ugly faces of the rapists as they ejaculate.

Some feminists in the US have objected to the inclusion of this scene on the grounds that the



Jodie Foster as rape victim Sarah Tobias

graphic depiction of rape could titillate some men. No way!

No-one, woman or man, could endure this scene without feeling anger, horror, and disgust. It smashes the myth that rape is anything to do with sex, or even solely to do with relationships between women and men — the relationship between the men themselves are just as important — the need to compete, to prove themselves in front of their mates.

At the end of the film, two statistics appear on the screen. In the USA, a rape happens every 6 minutes. A quarter of these involve two or more men.

The poster for the film states rape is "the only crime in which the victim has to prove her innocence". A big step forward — after all, the film comes not from a small independent film maker but from Paramount.

Jodie Foster is marvellous as Sarah Tobias. It must have been heartbreaking role, but she plays with vitality and a strange dignity. Sarah is never just a pathetic victim.

What sticks in my mind though, is something before I even set foot in the cinema. Next to the poster for 'The Accused' was one for 'The Naked Gun', the other film showing.

There were small pictures of each of the main characters. One of Priscilla Presley carried the caption, "The Blonde. Like a drugstore, she was open all hours". We've still got a long way to go.

Two Chinese films

Cheung Siu Ming reviews 'Red Sorghum' and 'Sour Sweet'

Red Sorghum' starts with the narrator claiming that a lot of people do not believe his story.

His grandma was a young peasant girl married off by her parents for the price of a mule. Her rich husband-to-be, a rotting leper who owns a winery, was mysteriously murdered. Many thought it was done by the narrator's grandpa,

one of the winery's hired hands. The winery is in the middle of a vast field of wild red sorghum (a kind of Chinese millet). It is in a harsh, wind-swept part of North China where the peasants struggle hard to survive.

The girl abandons her new role as owner of the winery and persuades the former hired hands to work as a cooperative. They managed to make the winery a flourishing success — until the Japanese army arrives to build a road right through the field of red sorghum.

This might sound just what the Party ordered — the Bad Old Days before the Revolution and the People's Resistance against the Japanese occupation.

This film indeed had to satisfy political requirements. It manages to do so while still conveying in a sensitive and silent way, the dignity of the poor peasants' lives, their celebration of collective labour and their uncluttered heroism. To achieve this with a story line that has so often been used in crude propaganda is a brilliant achievement.

It has been widely acclaimed in the West as another breakthrough for China's new generation of film makers. The scenery is breathtakingly beautiful. If it reminds you of 'Yellow Earth' it is because the person behind the camera in 'Yellow Earth', Zhang, is the director of 'Red Sorghum'.

This is his first film. He and others are the products of China's only film school, only recently re-opened.

I hear that this film has had quite a mixed reception in China. Audiences there these days seem to prefer Westerns (or just anything Western!) — an inevitable consequence of China opening up to the West?

It is important for this film and others of its kind to enjoy success in China as much as they do in the West. While overseas fame flatters, freedom from censorship at home is what all artists really strive for, and domestic success helps to loosen the censor's grip.

Sour Sweet' is based on a well-written novel by Timothy Mo, about a young Chinese couple newly settling down to life in London in the '60s.

They set up a takeaway shop, away from Soho's Chinatown and away from the tentacles of the Triad gangs. However, the family could not eventually escape from being embroiled in a Triad war.

The good acting is unfortunately spoiled by not very good directing and camerawork. The film could not capture what was for me the sheer humour of the book, the Great Han chauvinist in-jokes (ie, how the 'civilised' Chinese perceive the peculiar ways of the English 'foreign barbarian devils').

Go and see it if you like, but if you've already read the book then you might be disappointed.

We're here because we're here!

LES HEARN'S SCIENCE COLUMN



In 1963, when he was a student, Stephen Hawking was told he had motor neurone disease and had possibly two years to live. Now, confined to a wheelchair, unable to move, breathing through a hole in his windpipe, communicating by computer and voice synthesiser, he is one of the world's leading

theoretical physicists.

It cannot have been easy for Hawking to build his career, even with the devoted help of his family, colleagues and students. Luckily, theoretical physics requires little equipment and much thought. Like Newton before him, Hawking is Lucasian Professor of Mathematics at Cambridge. His major work has been to describe the appearance and behaviour of 'black holes'.

And — a rare achievement for any scientist — Hawking has written a readable book about the origin of the universe, tackling the age-old questions: "Why is the universe the way it is?" and "Why are we here?"

Over the last 300 years, science has banished humanity from the centre of the universe to the sidelines. We live on a speck of dust orbiting around an average star near the edge of a galaxy of a hundred thousand million stars, surrounded by a hundred thousand million other galaxies. Was all this created just so we could exist?

Through the 20th Century, reality has become more and more weird. Light can only travel at one speed, which nothing else can reach; absolute time and speed do not exist; there are no simultaneous events; space-time is distorted by gravity so that straight lines do not exist; gravity and acceleration makes clocks run slower and lets radio-active particles live longer; matter and energy can be converted into each other; the universe is expanding and has a definite age; it

started when all matter was concentrated at one point (a singularity) and then exploded in a 'big bang'.

The list of strange truths does not end there. Energy comes in little packets, called quanta, rather than matter occurs as particles; but both energy and matter can behave as waves; and we can never predict exactly how something will behave because we can never know both its position and momentum. Bizarre and disturbing though these facts are, they have all been identified many times, including the discovery of the echo of the big bang still reverberating around the universe as microwaves.

Hawking takes his readers through all these discoveries, including his own work on black holes. These are formed by the collapse of a large dying star under its own gravity. An astronaut on the surface of the star would be stretched like spaghetti by the colossal gravitational pull of the new black hole. Luckily, time would stand still at that moment.

Hawking has calculated that black holes are not really black. As matter is crushed out of existence, they radiate energy and are really a sort of cosmic recycling plant.

The story is leavened by humorous anecdotes or scenes from Hawking's life.

He describes how he met the Pope at a Jesuit conference on the origins of the universe in 1981. The Catholic Church had already some thirty years earlier, accepted the Big

Bang as being the same as the biblical moment of creation. The Pope sanctioned research into the evolution of the universe but not into the Big Bang itself since that was God's work! Hawking had just given a talk denying the idea of a precise moment when a Big Bang had occurred.

This is Hawking's particular contribution. He argues that the universe has a finite size but no boundaries, just like the surface of a ball. But with no start, there is no creation.

Other physicists are eager to see the hand of God in determining the fundamental values of things, like the strength of gravity, so that intelligent life could evolve. If things like the charge and size or the electron or the rate of expansion of the universe had been even slightly different, life would not have been able to develop.

Hawking argues, however, that things are as they are because, given the number of possible universes, one like this was most likely to result. Even less role for a creator!

Hawking ends by saying that a complete theory of everything would be the ultimate triumph of human reason for "then we would know the mind of God". Since, up to there, he had tended to argue that there was little or no place for a creator, I can only assume he put the phrase in to sound good in the reviews.

That apart, I can't praise the book highly enough. Read it!

A Brief History of Time, £14.95.

Things that go bump in the night

INSIDE THE UNIONS

By Sleeper

Not all folk these days sleep as easy as the Somnolent One. As I reported a few weeks ago, the gaffers of the land have lately been disturbed in the wee small hours by a fearsome spectre known as the 'Wage-Price Spiral'.

I have now to report upon further manifestations by this dreadful apparition. Incomes Data Services, a sort of bosses' ghostbusting team, this week produces a most disturbing report: of the 110 pay settlements they monitored in the first two months this year, about 70% were between 6% and 8%, while a further 13 settlements were over 8%.

When overtime and bonus additions are taken into consideration, this points to an annual increase in earnings of more than 9% — the highest level since 1982.

With inflation at 7.5% and rising, even right-wing union leaders like the AEU's Bill Jordan are now citing 8.9% (the second stage of the Ford two-year deal) as the current 'going rate'. The period between January and April is by far the busiest time of year for pay negotiations.

Already Rolls Royce Aerospace have agreed to between 5.2 and 6.2% (compared with 4% last year), Tesco has increased wages by between 7.75 and 22% and Nissan, of course, agreed to 22.5% over two years.

Meanwhile Peugeot Talbot management have been forced to up their latest offer to 16% over two years and Jaguar workers have voted for industrial action in pursuit of their £17 per week claim.

Cedric Thomas, chief executive of the West Midlands Engineering Employers Association, has also been losing sleep of late: he reports that whereas between May and June last year well over 80% of settlements by his members were below 6%, now the going rate is 7 to 8% and rising.

Interestingly though, this boss of bosses does not believe the main cause of the increase is union militancy: he reckons it can largely be put down to the 'skill shortages' and the 'need to retain key workers'. Bill Martin, chief economist at Phillips and Drew, agrees, suggesting that "to get pay



Jaguar picket, 1984. Photo: John Harris (IFL)

under control, the government will have to engineer a rise in unemployment."

It is certainly true that union leaders at national and local levels have so far been very hesitant in pressing home the potential advantage that the sharp rise in inflation ought to give them in pay negotiations.

The situation at Jaguar is probably fairly typical of the state of the union movement at present: a workforce with a reputation for conservatism threw out management's 'final' offer (worth 4.5% over two years) by 5,000 votes to 2,000 in January.

Jag management were said to be 'reeling' after this result, but instead of preparing for industrial action the union side hoped to simply use the result as a bargaining counter in further negotiations. AEU full-timer John Allen even complained that "our negotiating team has bent over backwards in the past four months to ensure that industrial action was seen as a last resort... Now it looks as if we are going to be driven down that route by the company."

By the time further negotiations and a series of delegate conferences had taken place, some of the shop floor militancy had inevitably cooled. By the time a second ballot, specifically on industrial action, was called in mid-February, the majority had decreased to 769 in favour of action. Now the union side is putting a 'final, final' offer

worth 50p above the previously proposed increase to the workforce without a recommendation.

It is obvious that the dissatisfaction of the workforce has not decreased since January — if anything, it must have increased, given the well-publicised increases in inflation over the past month. What has declined is their confidence in being able to fight and win. The blame for that clearly lies with the full-time officials like Mr Allen and — to a lesser extent — with the Jag shop stewards committee.

Whatever the outcome at Jags, big battles are looming between now and April. Key groups of workers like the 100,000 British Rail workers, 150,000 workers in the Post Office and 20,000 water workers either have pay claims

under negotiation already or soon will have.

And, of course, the Confed/Engineering Employers national negotiations affecting 600,000 engineers, continue apace. The water workers (largely represented by the GMB) are talking about demanding up to 25% while the rail unions are said to be talking in 'double digit' terms.

The task will be to ensure that union leaders don't just wave the inflation figures about to try and force a bit extra out of management in negotiations, but use this situation to mobilise for action.

The time is coming when we might even start raising that old, 'orthodox' Trotskyist gaffer-scarer, the 'sliding scale of wages'. Now that would give the likes of Mr Cedric Thomas the night-time horrors.

Rail Broad Left refounded

By Mick Sidaway

Saturday 28 February saw the refounding of the National Union of Railwaymen Broad Left.

Previously the Broad Left had been run by *Militant* and withered. This one

was set up by a loose coalition of *Socialist Action/Labour Briefing* types after a series of 'invitation only' meetings.

We had opening contributions from John Berry (NUR executive member, in a personal capacity), Tony Benn and Steve Bell from the UCW Cardiff branch, who spoke on the fight against regional payments.

Women present had held a meeting before the start of the conference and Tessa van Gelderen gave us a summary:

1. The NUR Women's Advisory Committee would meet every quarter.
2. Men need to become conscious of the problems of women in the union.
3. Resolutions on childcare, ie providing funds.
4. Opposition to NUR-sponsored MPs having a free hand on the abortion bill. We should appeal via our branches to the NUR AGM on the matter.

We also discussed the NUR Broad Left Charter. The general line was what you would expect about pay and conditions. However, the charter includes calls for immediate withdrawal of British troops from Ireland with no alternative.

On international solidarity, *Socialist Organiser* supporters moved that the Eastern Bloc countries should be specifically included as well as South Africa and Nicaragua. This was defeated, with the SWP abstaining.

We decided to back Geoff Revel for union president.

It was good to see 70 people representing 39 branches. Hopefully next year we will see more than eight women attending and more branches.

shows pay deals running at their highest levels for 7 years.

Cardiff University has offered lecturers a 5% pay increase. They are the second university to offer a local pay deal faced with an exams boycott by the AUT. The boycott, over this year's 3% pay offer will bite as summer exams are due to be set soon.

Bosses at Earr and Stroud, a Glasgow based subsidiary of Pilkingtons, withdrew 430 redundancy notices after a strike and occupation of the plant. Management have now agreed to consult the unions over redundancies.

Management at P&O European Ferries in Portsmouth have issued an ultimatum to their workforce — pay cuts, job cuts and cuts in leave.

Attempts are being made to set up a breakaway union for airline cabin staff. It would be a breakaway from the TGWU. The TUC affiliated pilots union BALFA is providing money and resources. This is likely to cause a serious row within the TUC.

Ballots for industrial action have

been called at Leeds and Birmingham Polytechnics where jobs have been advertised under new contracts. Management want a shift from national to local pay and are imposing the new contracts as Polytechnics are due to leave local authority control.

Six more GCHQ workers have been sacked for belonging to a trade union. Only one trade union member remains. Norman Willis described the sackings as "typically shabby and defensive" — an apt description of the TUC response to the GCHQ affair.

British Rail unions representing over 100,000 workers are putting in a 'substantial' pay claim. BR management are on the attack. They want to scrap national pay bargaining by November and have already imposed regional allowances and performance related bonuses. It will take more than the perennial posturing by the NUR and ASLEF to make them back down.

Government figures show 151,000 on ET — well below the original target figure of 45,000 per month.

CPSA votes no to YTS

By Trudy Saunders

Oh dear, members of the civil service union CPSA have got it wrong again! After back-breaking attempts by the right-wing union executive to win a 'Yes' vote in a recent ballot on YTS (Youth Training Scheme), CPSA members voted against YTS by 26,000 odd to 16,000 odd.

The ballot came after years of rank and file campaigning, strikes and conference motions opposing YTS. It was run in true right-wing style — propaganda in the union journal 'Red-Tape', scare tactics, no facility time for union meetings and a ballot paper which gave a number of reasons to vote 'Yes to YTS'.

NFCO branch and members of the Department of Employment Section Executive Committee are being witch-hunted for opposing YTS.

CPSA members successfully fought Tory attempts to bring YTS into the Civil Service until last year when YTS was forced in. Now CPSA members have conclusively thrown out YTS. Already CPSA General Secretary John Ellis is hinting at the possibility of a re-run ballot, no doubt by accusing the Broad Left of cheating!

Rank and file CPSA members must organise a massive fight back if Ellis decides to force through a re-run. It is a golden opportunity for the left to build.

CPSA members have shown they are opposed to YTS despite the way the right-wing ran the ballot. It is vital that the Broad Left begins a massive campaign against YTS immediately.

The right-wing tried to scare members by saying 'it's YTS or all-out strike'. For once we agree with them! It will probably take an all-out strike to defeat the Tories on YTS. We must begin the fight-back now.

Fight this pay sell-out!

By John Maloney

All branches of the civil service union, CPSA should have now received details of the pay deal negotiated by our right wing union executive.

Although the deal is complex, it basically consists of staff receiving variable pay increases over a 14 month period starting from April this year. At the end of that time staff will be on what is called "a pay spine".

The variable pay increases are heavily weighted towards London staff with some people receiving 20% and others outside the capital only getting 7%.

Once on the "pay spine" groups of workers can be moved up or down depending on the ease of recruiting and retaining these people.

On the spine also, people become eligible for performance pay.

The right wing is selling the deal although it introduces regional and performance pay, on the strength of the initial pay increases and the argument that there is no alternative.

Unfortunately, the *Militant* dominated Broad Left can't supply the answer. It's reaction has been vigorous by its own standards, but this has been partially motivated by the forthcoming executive elections. If they lose the pay ballot they will probably lose the elections. The Broad Left has no deep roots in the workforce and can't mount an effective fightback.

It becomes clearer everyday that the CPSA need a genuine rank and file movement. The Socialist Caucus has started to build it. Join the Caucus and fight the deal!

IN BRIEF

Pay talks at Jaguar have resumed. The bosses are insisting on a two year deal which amounts to a pay cut in real terms. The workforce have insisted on a one year deal and 54% voted for industrial action. However, union officials seem intent on giving in to management who have offered an extra 50p a week!

The government has decided to postpone abolishing the National Dock Labour Scheme. They are worried about the effect a dock strike would have on the economy already under pressure from the balance of payments and the value of the pound.

Thatcher wants to set up a special Cabinet committee to plan winning a strike at some later date. In the meantime the Tories will focus their attacks on closed shops and on wages councils.

A survey by Incomes Data Services

SOCIALIST

ORGANISER

Two nations, two states!

The Campaign for Israeli-Palestinian Peace has been founded in solidarity with the Israeli Council for Israeli-Palestinian Peace. Formed in 1976, ICCIPP is active in the wider Israeli Peace Movement, and has consistently advocated talks between Israel and the PLO on the basis of a two state

solution to the conflict. CIPP aims to promote the ideas and aims of ICCIPP in Britain, and to make solidarity with both the Palestinians and the Israeli left.

Contact Ben Cohen, 91 Granville Road, Fallowfield, Manchester M14 6AD.

Gorbachev in trouble

By Lynn Ferguson

Restructuring will conquer" declares Mikhail Gorbachev. But with even his own economic advisers sounding increasingly ill at ease, not to say bewildered, by the state of the Soviet economy, his assurances are unconvincing.

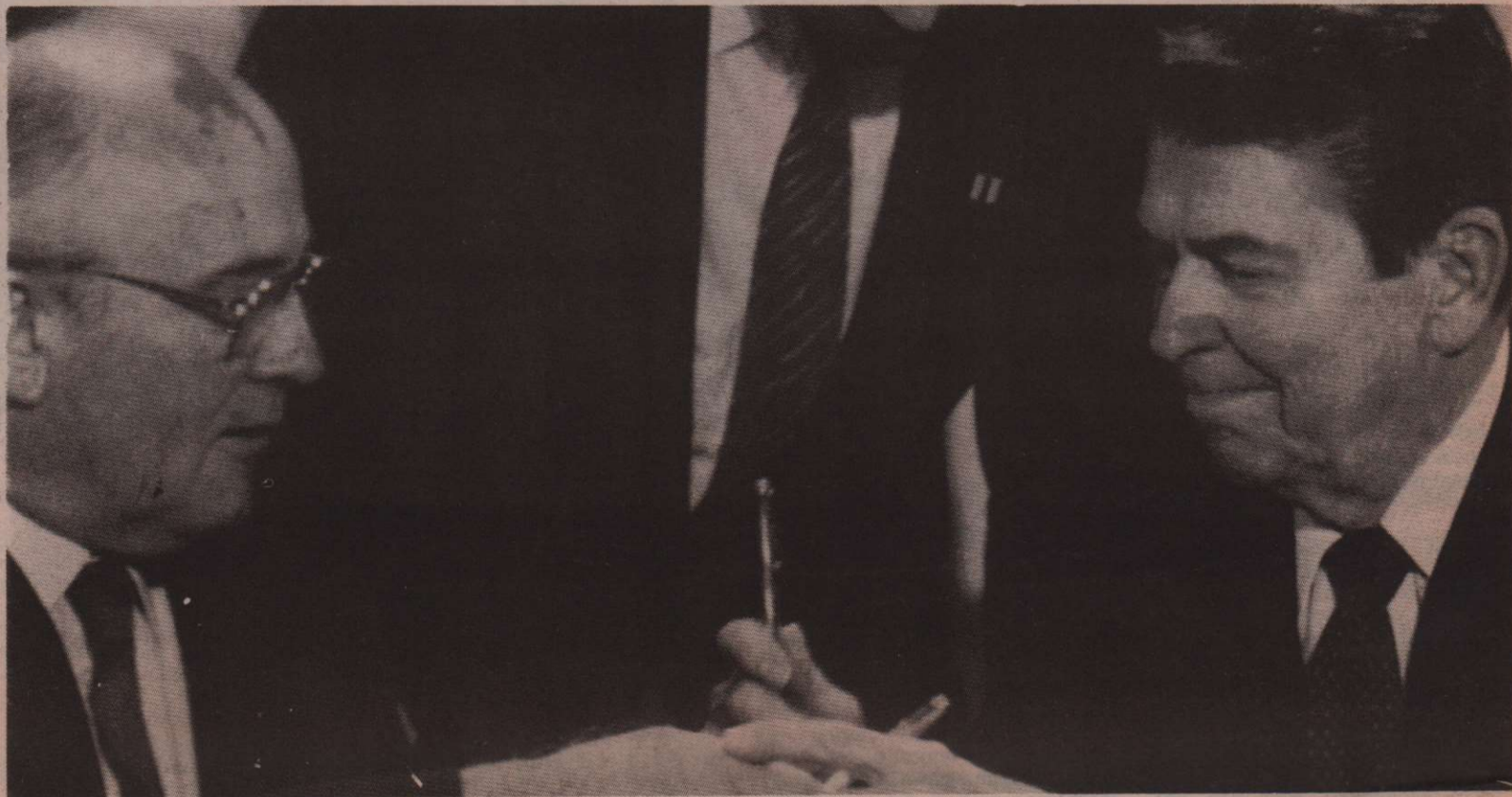
Indeed, it is difficult to believe that Gorbachev convinces himself. Perestroika so far seems to have produced nothing but more muddle and conflict. For sure, neither for the government nor Russian workers has perestroika delivered.

Gorbachev's supporters have taken to blaming failures on circumstances beyond their control. For some the collapse in the prices of oil and gas — two of the USSR's major exports — has not helped. Nor have the massive bills for the Chernobyl clean-up and the Armenian earthquake operation.

But economists in the Soviet Union admit that the real problem is the form perestroika itself is taking — the piecemeal market-oriented reforms of the bureaucratic economy are often producing perverse results, or no results at all.

The cooperatives which were flavour of the month with the government last summer are now facing newly-imposed restrictions on their activities.

Shortages of goods in official shops drove workers to the co-ops. The new Soviet entrepreneurs took the main chance and charged well over the odds. The result — angry workers demanding that the government do something about the



cooperative 'extortionists'.

Attempts to improve productivity in agriculture have also floundered. 50 year leases were offered to farm-workers as an incentive — but hardly anyone took them up. Strikes have begun to occur again, over inflation and shortages. Perestroika has done nothing to put good in the shops, or to do away with queuing as a fact of life. Inflation is running at over five per cent.

The reformers want the market rather than the ministries to deter-

mine prices. Subsidies — 70 billion roubles a year — on food prices would have to go.

The result of this would be higher inflation and reduced living standards, leading to more popular discontent. Not surprisingly, Gorbachev has put off any discussion of price reform until 1991.

Moreover, the Soviet Union's budget deficit is now judged to be not the officially-claimed 35 billion roubles, but 100 billion. One motive behind Gorbachev's much-

publicised arms and troops reductions was to help reduce the deficit.

Other strategies include halting major capital investment projects, and ending subsidies to loss-making enterprises.

But how can industry be modernised if investment is cut? And workers will resist job losses caused by factory closures.

Gorbachev may make confident noises about perestroika. But a look at Hungary, where the market-socialist experiment has been in

progress for 20 years shows the size of the problems.

The Hungarian leadership are now edging closer to a full market economy, with political pluralism. In the USSR Gorbachev has constantly ruled out anything of that sort. If anything, an attempt to clamp down again looks more likely.

Gorbachev's reforms are an improvement on the old Stalinist order. But there's no room for blind faith or illusions.

Who decides miners' pay?

**WHETTON'S
WEEK**
A miner's diary



The so-called independent arbiters have upheld the Coal Board's pay offer. The UDM leaders have accepted it, and I imagine it will be imposed on the NUM without us having any say.

We're going to finish up with the

entire workforce getting a pay deal which nobody was prepared to vote for. The UDM rank and file voted against it and the NUM were never consulted.

It bodes ill for what's going to happen in the future. It should be more than obvious now to the UDM members that nobody is going to get anything while these divisions remain.

We can never agree to any deal with the UDM but we would certainly appeal to their members to join the NUM so that once again we can start to talk to the employers with some sort of authority.

The issue of the NUM joining the TGWU has again come up in the news. I think it would be unfortunate if we were pushed into the position of having to join the T&G.

I can understand the arguments, the economics of it, the fact that now we're below 100,000 members, we may no longer be viable. If we are eventually forced into the T&G than I hope that there is a careful negotiated settlement and we don't go in, as it were, on

the nod.

The Labour Party is running neck and neck with the Tories in mid-term. But Labour should be miles ahead.

People are throwing their arms up in the air and saying 'hooray, we're level with the Tories!' We should be streets ahead of the Tories.

Of course, a Labour victory was to be expected in the Pontypridd election. I think the interesting thing about Richmond is how many people voted for Thatcher and how many people voted against Thatcher. Although a Tory was elected something like 30,000 voted against Thatcher.

Whether or not that is indicative of some need for electoral reform or not; whether there will be some sort of pact that's in the middle ground — whatever happens about all that — I would urge the Labour Party not to consider any such pact.

We should be instead reaffirming our firm commitment to the socialist policies and principles that the party was born out of. We shouldn't budge from that.

On Salman Rushdie, I don't think you can get away from the basic principle of freedom to publish and print what he wishes.

Of course, we all recognise that we shouldn't give that sort of right for the National Front to publish and peddle its filth on the streets, so there always has to be some sort of line.

But outside that the basic right to print and publish, the freedom to do that, should apply to everybody — both to a middle class liberal intellectuals and to working class activists.

Before people misunderstand what I am trying to say, I would remind them of the leaflet that two young lads from Welbeck colliery printed and published objecting to the amounts of money the Coal Board was spending on tarring the pit up for a visit by Ian MacGregor shortly after the strike. For that heinous crime they were sacked.

You could say that the Coal Board sentenced those men. The sentence was carried out, and endorsed by the courts at their industrial tribunal.

I don't remember thousands of people turning out on the streets or the left wing press going for the throats of the Coal Board and Ian MacGregor.

It seems to me that two rank and file trade unionists getting the sack for putting their ideas into print can quite easily be forgotten whereas we have to make this great hoo-hah about this middle class intellectual who's written a book about religion — albeit knocking it, but about religion.

It seems to me that if you look at it in that context then perhaps you can get some of the understanding of the idea that I was trying to get across last week. I'm not condemning the principle of free expression but condemning the way the argument is carried through and about whom.

Trade unionists get trampled into the mud and very little is said. Middle class intellectual liberals publish some book about religion and straight away it's a massive persecution and people are screaming blue murder.

We should keep it in context. Paul Whetton is a member of Manton NUM, South Yorkshire.