

# SOCIALIST ORGANISER

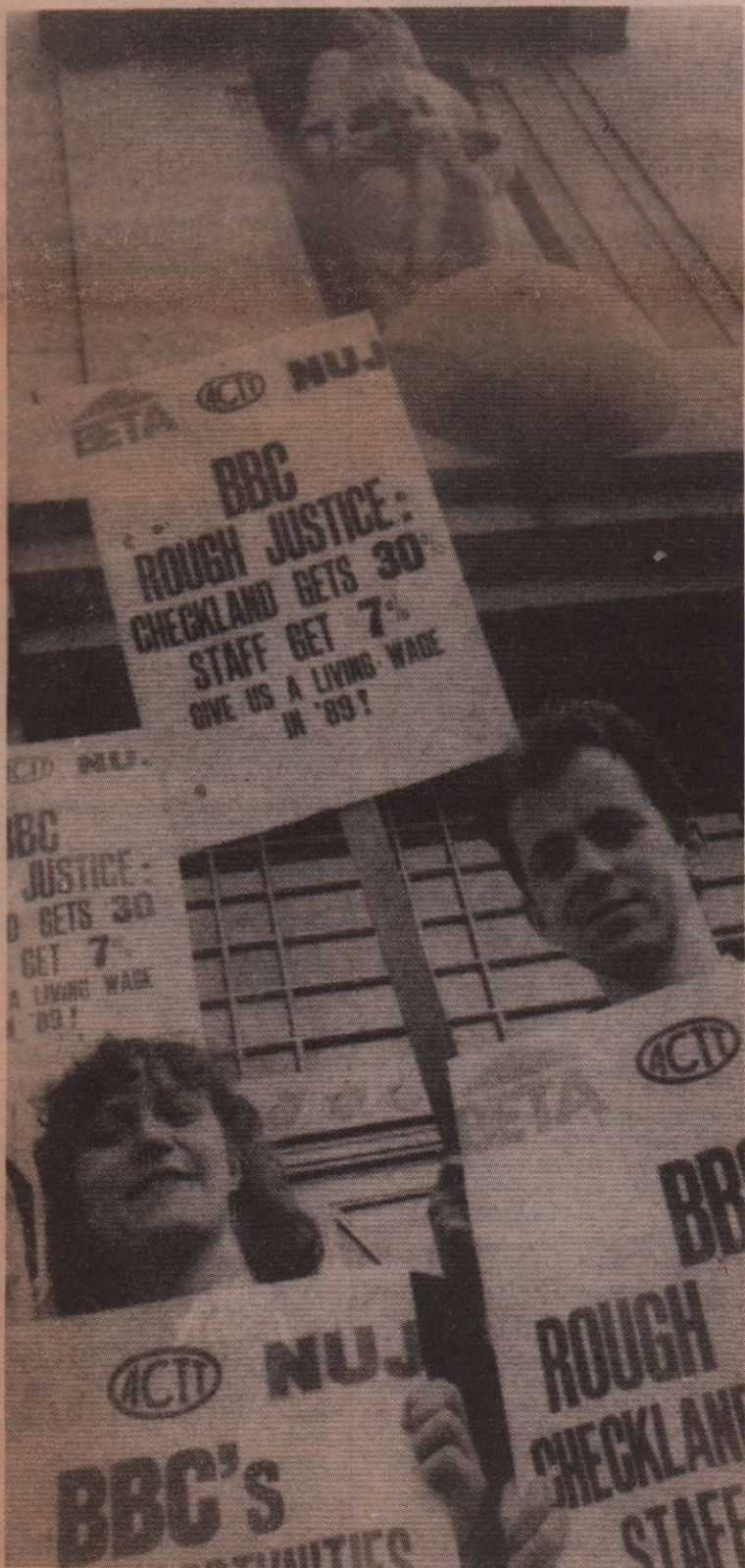


The first  
Neil  
Kinnock

See centre pages

# Unite and fight!

## We can beat the Tories



BBC workers picket line

**M**any workers are 'celebrating' 10 years of Thatcher by striking or threatening to strike. It looks like many more workers will do the same in the months ahead. As the gloating and backslapping and champagne cork popping comes to an end, there are signs that the smiles could soon be rubbed off the faces of Thatcher and her friends.

The economy is in a mess. Inflation is around 8% and following an upward trend. Lawson's inflationary 'blip' deserves a place in the Guinness Book of Records as the longest 'blip' in history.

Interest rates are still high and we have seen a series of record trade deficits. At the same time unemployment has fallen. The Tories regularly fiddle the figures, and exaggerate these falls, but they do not falsify them outright. Real unemployment seems to have fallen.

As workers try to avoid inflation eating its way through their pay packets they become more keen to take action over pay. And faced with this, the Tories are putting pressure on their friends in big business and the state owned sector not to make concessions. It is no ac-

cident that public sector workers across different industries are facing hard-nosed bosses sticking to pay offers around 7% — amounting to a pay cut.

- BBC workers have staged three 24-hour strikes over a 16% pay claim. Management have imposed 7%.

- London bus workers have begun a series of one-day strikes over a 7.1% pay offer. They want £5 per hour minimum rate and a 35-hour week.

- Tube drivers have taken **unofficial** action over a pay claim without strings — they want £6.43 an hour for all drivers.

- British Rail bosses have imposed a 7% pay rise. **Unofficial** action has already been organised, and a national ballot has been called over pay and changes to the negotiating system.

- Power workers have rejected a 7.5% offer and are due to begin an overtime ban late in May.

- Engineering workers are due to ballot for inflation-linked pay rises and a shorter working week.

- University lecturers have been in dispute over pay and are refusing to mark exams. Polytechnic lecturers are due to ballot over pay and conditions.

- Steel erectors in London have **unofficially** struck over pay, conditions and a management lock-out.

Much of the action is still sectional and patchy. But there are real possibilities of linking up pay struggles. Last Monday, 15 May, both tube drivers and bus workers struck for the day. Articles in the capitalist press have discussed the prospect of a 'Summer of Discontent' facing Thatcher and the Tories.

Nor is it simply pay battles that they face. A national docks strike is still imminent, and civil service workers took **unofficial** action last week over management reorganisations which will cost thousands of jobs. The NUR/TSSA ballot on the London Underground was called over the bosses' attacks on terms and conditions.

But the bosses have called in the courts over both the docks and Underground ballots. They intend to use the Tory trade union laws as a club to beat unions into submission without a fight. It shows how these laws now shape the whole landscape on which trade unions do battle. Faced with this, many workers have opted for **unofficial** strike action.

But the Tories cannot always rely on their laws. The stronger the action, the more generalised the action, the less they will feel confident about raising the stakes. The law was not used against the postal

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## Engineers need a strategy

By Pete Radcliffe, GMB steward, Stanton

**S**elective strike action is being proposed by engineering union leaders in pursuit of the national claim for reduced hours and increases in pay.

A special Confed (Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions) Conference has been organised for 9 June to discuss the conduct of the dispute. Individual unions are organising 'consultations' to find the views of their lay and full-time officials.

During this time engineering union officials are being told to place this campaign as their top priority: pay meetings have been promised throughout the country this summer.

All this can only be good news for engineering workers looking to build industry-wide solidarity against the bosses. It is becoming increasingly clear that the right-wing union leaders at the head of the Confed want at least some action to strengthen their hand against the EEF (Engineering Employers' Federation). Anxious at the continuing erosion of their influence over the rank and file, particularly in the AEU, there is great pressure on AEU President, Bill Jordan, to deliver something in the '88/'89 pay claims.

This explains, in part, the details of the campaign released by the Confed's strategy committee which met on 10 May, but another factor undoubtedly influencing the Confed leadership is that they don't want to open themselves up again to the storm of criticisms like that which erupted when Jordan proposed a flexibility package to the EEF in February.

In conducting their consultation exercise and convening a special Confed conference, a challenge is being made to the left to formulate a viable strategy for involving all engineering workers in a national dispute. The anger and militancy of engineering workers indicated by a continuing series of local disputes makes a national dispute very possible this summer.

But with a union leadership of the likes of Jordan and an opposition closely identified with the likes of the Communist Party's Jimmy Airlie, engineering workers cannot be certain that there is an effective or capable leadership for the campaign, and the price of defeat in this campaign could be considerable.

At present, the EEF are threatening to allow their affiliated companies to unilaterally pull out of national agreements and even veiled hints are being made that the EEF might effectively disband itself as a national negotiating body.

These threats are fairly wild. But if the campaign fails then they could give Jordan the excuse for renewed sell-outs.



# The biggest general strike in history

April in Brazil saw the largest general strike in history. For two days, 34 million workers brought the country to a standstill in opposition to

government austerity measures. Pictured above are thousands of metalworkers in the 'ABC' region around Sao Paulo.

The left must formulate a viable strategy and fight for it. If not, we will share in the responsibility for defeat — a fact that the right-wing would not allow the left or the rank and file to forget.

The selective strike strategy so far leaked will prove difficult to prosecute as anything other than a short introduction to far wider action. The indefinite selective action envisaged by the Confed could isolate and rapidly exhaust the militant sections called out.

Jordan has put the ball at the feet of his most militant critics. The sections of workers to be called out — Rolls Royce, British Aerospace, etc — are precisely those sections who have been most vocal in their opposition to the leadership's manoeuvrings.

While these workers cannot be expected to take all the weight of the campaign, they need to take a leading role quickly or else Jordan will attempt to blame them for any failings in the campaign.

Stewards from all Confed districts — particularly those on the 12 April lobby — need to link up and work out a fighting campaigning strategy.

The delegates from that lobby should reconvene, as was agreed, and invite stewards from the rest of the industry, particularly those being called on to take action immediately.



## Press the button Neil

There has been much speculation in the press about Neil Kinnock's switch from unilateral nuclear disarmament to commitment to keeping a British nuclear bomb... Will he press the button? What follows is to the tune of 'Sam Hall' the well-known song about the chimney sweep who was hanged for burgling his employers.

Yeah, I'm Press the Button Neil,  
How d'ya feel? Like my speil?  
Yes, I finally came to heel  
— I'm for real, I'm for real!  
I finally came to heel,  
She's my Bush, I'm her quail,  
I finally came to heel,  
I'm Press the Button Neil.  
Damn your eyes!

Yeah, I understudy Mag  
(Hide that flag! Hide that flag!)  
I understudy Mag,  
I won't gag on this Zig Zag,  
'Cos I know it's in the bag  
If I study under Mag  
Damn her eyes!

The poll-deaf left can squeal,  
Let 'em squeal, watch 'em reel!  
I'm no heel — So? I kneel!  
The joyous bells will peal  
The party won't repeal  
Judge me by the sequel  
I'm slippery as an eel,  
Just hear those Tories squeal!  
Yeah, I'm Press the Button Neil,  
Damn your eyes!

Yeah, I'm smart, I learn from  
Mag  
(Hide that flag! Burn that Rag!)  
The left is just a drag  
The left can only nag,  
The soft left's in the bag  
Damn their eyes!

To me the left must kneel,  
Cease to feel, curb their zeal,  
To me the left must kneel,  
That's the deal, how do you feel?  
Must kneel to great good Neil:  
I'll ameliorate and heal,  
In heroic words I deal,  
Maggie's policies I'll steal  
For office I'm febrile.  
Yeah, I'm Press the Button Neil.  
Damn your eyes!

Yeah, now I've done for Mag:  
She's in the bag — let me brag —  
If we lose that left wing tag  
(Hide that flag! Dye that rag!)  
We'll make old Maggie lag  
With me they won't need Mag  
'And the Big Job's in the Bag!  
Downing Street! — Damn your  
eyes!

Yeah! I'm Press the Button Neil,  
And my back-bone's made of steel  
A man of firm ideal,  
In principles I deal  
Writ in steel — Yeah, I'm really  
real!  
Yeah, my back-bone's made of  
steel  
I'm Press the Button Neil,  
Damn your eyes!  
S.M.

## Racist police attack

**B**ernie Grant MP has spoken out against racist attacks by police.

At a press conference last week, arranged by Grant, three black families from the Tottenham area spoke of the harassment, and in some cases beatings, they had suffered at the hands of the police.

It has become quite common for the police to launch so-called 'crackdowns' on drug trafficking which in fact means police going on to estates in droves, conducting house to house searches, breaking down doors, and frequently arresting people on spurious charges even when nothing has been found.

The victims of this heavy-handed 'policing' are mostly black people. Of the families from Tottenham, one woman suffered kidney damage from blows to her back. Someone else had a door smashed in by police with dogs. The woman living in the flat was not allowed to get dressed and the police finally showed a search warrant and identification 90 minutes after entering her flat.

Of course there is very little victims of police attacks such as this can do. The police are accountable to no-one but their superiors. In



Bernie Grant MP

theory you can bring them to court on a private summons, but that is not in fact an option for the people at the receiving end of their bully-boy tactics.

Recent discussion of the Winston Silcott case and Broadwater Farm has highlighted the virulent racism of many policemen and the sham of 'community policing'. Bernie Grant's call for community defence against "the lawlessness of the police" should be welcomed and defended.

## Moralistic voyeurs

### WOMEN'S EYE

By Lynn Ferguson

**T**he woman who's made a profession out of being a Catholic mother is coming out in her true colours.

Victoria Gillick, the woman who tried to ban doctors from prescribing the pill to under-16s, and who is an anti-abortionist has let slip her true reasons for being opposed to abortion.

"Even if I were ever the victim of rape, I'd never consider abortion. A society that's prepared to kill its own children will get overrun by another race.

"The sadness is to see an indigenous population wiping itself out and being taken over by another."

So, sanctity of life is the last thing on Gillick's mind. Her real worry is that white foetuses are being aborted, reducing the proportion of whites to blacks.

Swamping by an alien culture? Haven't we heard those ideas somewhere before?

Of course, Gillick has for many years been a fervent supporter of Enoch Powell. She's no idiosyncratic crusading mum, our Victoria. She's a conscious, worked-out racist and reactionary. Let's take a look at her views on AIDS:

"It was obvious AIDS was going to happen.

"Stick matches up your nose long enough and you'll get a germ in your head... Their (gay men's) practices are dangerous and unnatural. They play in open sewers."

It's odd, isn't it, how these crusaders for morality seem to have very vivid, not to say lurid, ways of expressing themselves. A bit like that censorious Victorian literature on the pathology of sexual 'deviation' — the moral outrage thinly masks a rather unhealthy and voyeuristic fascination.

## Unite and fight From front page

workers on national strike for two weeks last year without a ballot. They declined to use it last Spring against solidarity strikes over NHS cuts.

The stronger we are the less likely they can fall back on the laws. But it shows the tremendous importance of a Labour government repealing all Tory trade union legislation, and drawing up a Workers' Charter declaring positive rights for trade unionists.

The Labour leadership should be championing these various struggles against the Tories and their laws. They should be making a commitment to fighting the poll tax, the NHS Review, the Tory housing plans, etc. Instead they are steaming ahead with the Policy Review: dropping unilateral nuclear disarmament, embracing Tory anti-trade union legislation, dropping any hint of radical policies.

Every serious socialist should be inside the Labour Party and fighting this drift to the right. They should be fighting to link up the various pay struggles and to organise solidarity action in support of the dockers. Turn Labour Parties out to support workers against both bosses and the Tory laws. And demand that Labour leaders spend their time and energy fighting the Tories and not the left-wing.

If we do give the Tories a 'Summer of Discontent' we can not only wipe the smiles off their faces — we can begin to turn the tide on them.



# The struggle inside Israel

After nearly eighteen months, the Palestinian *Intifada* against Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza continues, although Israeli repression gets worse and worse. After recent heavy fighting in the Gaza, and following celebrations of Israel's forty second year, Arabs working within Israeli borders have been forced to return to their homes in the occupied territories. The Israeli government's proposal for elections to be held in the West Bank and Gaza have been rejected both by the exiled Palestinian leadership and by local leaders. The proposal, they say, is a substitute for Palestinian statehood. Israeli leaders have threatened dire consequences for the Palestinians if they continue along this road. But Israel is increasingly isolated internationally. These articles from *The Other Israel* examine the background.

In February and March, the military authorities started to implement a new policy, aimed at dividing and weakening the refusing soldiers' struggle. In hundreds of cases, refusers were not imprisoned but offered a variety of 'deals'.

In some cases, they were sent to duties in the Occupied Territories, which do not involve direct contact with the Palestinian population.

Others were sent home or offered temporary or permanent discharge from the army on medical or psychiatric grounds.

In all these cases, the military authorities attempted to avoid publicity, to obscure the political aspects and play down the whole issue as 'personal problems of certain individuals'.

However, with the growing number of refusers, these 'deals' have become such a massive phenomenon that they became an

interesting item in themselves for several papers.

According to 'Ha'aretz' (April 2), senior military officers who denied that the army command is encouraging units to make such 'deals' with refusers, were unable to explain why such deals have become so numerous.

Simultaneously with the large-scale offering of 'deals' the military authorities have singled out a number of refusers for particularly severe treatment. An arbitrarily chosen soldier was made an example of: 33-year old Rami Chasson of Jerusalem. Chasson who had never been particularly active politically, refused in April 1988 to participate in putting down the Intifada and served a 28-day prison term.

Before the end of the same year he was called again and ordered to serve as a guard in the Fara'a prison, notorious for cases of mistreatment and torture of Palestinian youths. Upon his refusal, Chasson was sentenced to another 28 days.

Since that time, this reservist again and again received upon his release a new, similar order; he has been going in and out of jail, now serving his fifth consecutive prison term.

The few days of freedom, in between, he spent sitting in front of Prime Minister Shamir's home, holding in his hands a big photograph of a three year old Palestinian girl, who lost her left eye from a 'rubber' bullet shot by an Israeli soldier.

All of Chasson's trials were conducted by his commanding officer, rather than before a regular court martial.

In a trial by a commanding officer the accused is not allowed to be represented by a lawyer, and the trial is held in camera. Such trials, in fact, seldom last more than five or ten minutes.

On the other hand, the commanding officer is limited to imposing no more than 28 days of imprisonment, in comparison with the far longer terms in a court martial's authority.

Chasson's case shows this limitation can be circumvented. In theory there is nothing to prevent the army from putting a person in prison again and again for the rest of his life, without ever allowing him any legal assistance, or a possibility of appeal.

Only protests and public pressure provide a counterforce. And here the Chasson case is moving forward. It is already getting wide and sympathetic media-coverage. On April 9 several papers published the picture of Rami Chasson presenting himself at the prison gate for another term.

On April 22, in the middle of the Pesach week, hundreds of Yesh G'vul supporters gathered at that same gate, and proceeded to climb a mountain overlooking the prison.



On the mountain side, from where loudspeakers could reach to Chasson and the five other imprisoned refusers, they held a Pesach ceremony: Pesach is the holiday of the Exodus from Egypt and the liberation from slavery — the time of freeing captives and prisoners.

Letters of encouragement to: Samal Rishon (senior sergeant)

Rami Chasson, personal number 2245495 (reservist prisoner), military prison six, military postal code 03734, Israeli Defence Forces, Israel.

Contact: Yesh G'vul PO Box 6953, Jerusalem 91068; or PO Box 4172, Tel Aviv 61041; or British Friends of Yesh G'vul c/o 6 Endsleigh St, London WC1.

## Jews and Arabs for peace

A conference organised in Jerusalem by 'The International Centre for Peace' brought together Israelis, Palestinians, Diaspora Jews. The PLO participated... through a video cassette, showing Abu-Iyad, with a special message to the gathering:

"After decades of struggle and suffering we have reached a realistic approach: this land belongs to the two peoples and both of them have a national right

to live in it. The only solution to the conflict is dividing the land into two states, which will exist side by side, in a relationship of peace and cooperation. Problems cannot be solved by force. We must end the bloodshed and the killing of women and children on both sides. We are willing to talk; there is no problem we would refuse to discuss.

Quoted from Ha'ir, 3.3.89

## Israeli major condemns West Bank repression

The following excerpt from the speech of Major (res.) Yossi Dantziger, commander of a reserve infantry company, was delivered at the Tzay Kriah rally, and is translated from 'Zu HaDerech' (April 12, 1989).

This year I did seventy-two days' service in the Territories, most of them spent fighting children. I did not refuse the call-up order. None of my soldiers did — I convinced them not to refuse. Nor will I disobey the next call-ups. I am gnashing my teeth and continuing to serve. This is not just a figure of speech — my front teeth were broken by an Intifada stone, on the Jewish people's front line in Rafah.

Israel's political and military leadership is leading us into a dead end. The soldiers know what is happening on the ground. They know it far better than our sleepy Prime Minister. They are losing confidence, both in the political leadership and in their commanding officers.

I was brought up upon Jewish history. I was told that, after the Second World War, Jewish life will never again be defenceless. Today this argument is still in use. Having commanded a company which restored order in the Territories, I can tell you that today it is Arab life which is defenceless.

They tell us that all the women, children and old people who were killed, died because there was no other way. That is not true.

Our leaders give moral legitimacy to the killing of Arabs; they create a situation where any trigger-happy psychopath can kill Arabs in the Territories, knowing that the system will cover up for him.

The army could maintain the struggle in the Territories at a far lower cost in human life; but what is really necessary is just to get out of this quagmire.

I call upon the government: For the sake of Israel's security, get out of the Territories! Let the Palestinians determine their own fate. Stop playing tricks, stop inventing a non-existent 'Palestinian leadership'. Sit down and talk with the true leadership, with the PLO, with Arafat and if need be with Saladin's ghost in person!

## Human rights

42-year old Carlos Levinhof came to Israel from Uruguay, after his father-in-law was tortured to death by the military dictatorship. In Israel, he and his family continued to struggle for human rights.

In February 1989 he was ordered to do reserve service on the West Bank. His refusal brought him 35 days in prison. A few days after his release, his son Amit — a conscript and founding member of the 'Highschool Students' Group' — was imprisoned in turn.

Meanwhile, Irene Levinhof — Carlos' wife — went to Athens, where she was supposed to address an international conference of jurists, convened to discuss the Intifada. The Libyan delegation, however, put a veto on the participation of a Jewish Israeli, and this was upheld by the organisers, despite strong protests — especially from the Palestinian and the Greek participants.

## Refusniks

The rise in the number of soldiers refusing to serve in the Occupied Territories is a source of constant concern for Israel's military and civilian authorities. At the end of 1988, an attempt was made to isolate the refusers by delegitimising their support organisation, Yesh G'vul — with the intention of eventually outlawing it altogether.

However, this attempt backfired. Far from discrediting Yesh G'vul, the intensive police investigation of its members resulted in a wave of public sympathy and solidarity, making its positions more widely accepted than ever in the Israeli public. In February 1989, the investigation was terminated.

## Defiance

In 1988 reserve lieutenant-colonel Dov Yirmiyah, a veteran of all Israeli wars, spoke at a rally in Haifa and called upon soldiers to refuse service in the Occupied Territories.

Interrogated by the police, he admitted the charge of 'inciting soldiers to disobey orders' and told his investigators that he would welcome a trial. He declared that, in such a trial, the true defendant would not be himself but the occupation.

Several months later — presumably after the implications of the prospective trial were considered — the police closed the case of this "self confessed criminal" on grounds of...lack of evidence.



# The first Neil Kinnock

Neil Kinnock has declared he wants Labour to abandon its commitment to unilateral nuclear disarmament. Kinnock is in many ways like the first Labour leader, Ramsay MacDonald. He too was prepared to ditch Labour policy and socialist principles in order to appear respectable to our rulers. We reprint an account of MacDonald's life and 'career'.

By Barry Haslam

Labour's leader, Neil Kinnock, is in many ways a carbon copy of the past.

His crucial advantage is the ability to win the assent of left-wing activists while also appearing acceptable to the most conservative sections of the labour movement — a talent which in the past, too, has been the prime qualification for becoming Labour leader.

With such an ability, however, go certain drawbacks. Nothing illustrates this better than the career of Labour's first leader, Ramsay MacDonald.

In 1900 a conference of delegates from the trade unions, the Independent Labour Party, and socialist societies decided to set up the Labour Representation Committee to be a voice for the trade unions in Parliament. It was a defensive reaction to the anti-union measures of the employers and the then Tory government, rather than a conscious movement for socialism.

The delegates chose Ramsay MacDonald as secretary. As Beatrice Webb said at the time, "Jamie's mellifluous Celtic persona gives him a cosmopolitan air that makes him acceptable to all factions in the movement. Henderson isn't intelligent enough for the job, Keir Hardie smells, and the others are far too uncouth".

While acceptable to the middle class Fabians like Webb, and to conservative trade union leaders, MacDonald also had a left-wing base in the Independ-

ent Labour Party, which had been formed in 1893 and now became a component part in the federal structure of the new Labour Party.

The ILP had many left-wing activists, but mostly it remained at the level of a vague, moralistic, often religious, socialism.

MacDonald, ironically, summed it up in 1904:

"Every time I go abroad and see on the bookstalls evidence of intellectual and imaginative activity amongst foreign socialists I am ashamed of our English movement".

MacDonald himself, however, was much more fascinated by the goings-on in radical Establishment circles than in developing a socialist philosophy for the working class. From 1900 to 1914 he hoped that the way forward for Labour would be through a great split between the Asquith and Lloyd George wings of the Liberal Party, after which Labour would fuse with the latter to create a new 'Radical Party', carrying on the reforming work of Gladstone and the 1906 Liberal Government.

## Desertion

For MacDonald, the working class was not quite good enough to deserve its own independent political party. His desertion in 1931 was intellectually prepared for long in advance.

Indeed, if the years 1889-95, 1910-14, and 1916-22 had not been characterised as they were by the enormous growth of the trade unions, MacDonald would not have been a Labour leader, but a semi-orthodox Liberal MP, sitting alongside John Burns and Lloyd George.

In 1911 MacDonald forced his MPs to vote for the clause in

the National Insurance Act that forced employees to pay one third of the contribution to the scheme. This was against the Labour Party's Annual Conference decision that the whole contribution must be paid by the employer and the Government. But MacDonald was contemptuous: "What would Lloyd George say if we were seen to be pettifogging over details?"

The cornerstone of MacDonald's tactics was the MacDonald/Gladstone pact of 1903, agreed with the 'old stager's' son Herbert. The Labour Representation Committee and the Liberals agreed on a division of seats so that in a few constituencies Labour could stand against the Tories without Liberal competition.

29 Labour MPs were returned in the 1906 General Election. The price of the electoral success, however, was capitulation to Liberal policies. Anyone who opposed this orientation was, in MacDonald's eyes, 'a wrecker'.

In 1918, for example, when a by-election occurred in Fife-shire, it was the Fife-shire Miners' Federation who were the 'wreckers'. They nominated a local miner, Raymond Mc-Attwell, as the Labour candidate, in preference to an ex-Liberal worthy.

MacDonald was furious. "Do not those dim-witted miners realise that the former Liberal MP, Sir Arthur Ponsonby, is willing to stand (for Labour)? I must go to Fife-shire to put some sense in their heads". Sir Arthur became the candidate.

Here as always, MacDonald's guideline was the Fabian idea that social reform would come through the enlightened sections of the bourgeoisie, not through the crude, uncouth efforts of the working class itself. The same outlook determined his attitude to the industrial struggle.

During the national rail strikes of 1907 and 1911, in which the union was fighting for the right to negotiate, MacDonald spent his time talking to the company and the government side in an attempt to "bring harmony to our nation by finding a solution".

It was the same later, during the General Strike. MacDonald had always opposed all "that syndicalism stuff", and used all



MacDonald

his energies to try to call off the "calamity of the General Strike".

On May 5, the second day of the strike, he journeyed to the country house of Winston Churchill, who was editor of the government's 'British Gazette' and master-mind of government strike-breaking policy, for dinner and a chat.

For MacDonald there was nothing out of order in the Labour leader, quite arbitrarily and off his own bat, dining with the leader of the class enemy in such circumstances. He noted: "Besides the miners' issues, we had a pleasant dinner talk on superstition and ghost topics".

"The notion that socialism has anything to do with the mad scramble for the extra penny a week is nothing but an illusion", MacDonald warned Party members in 1913.

"It is the job of the trade unions to negotiate for better conditions for the workers, not the Labour Party. Our goal is to unite the country and take it towards progress".

## Trespass

And in MacDonald's view, the other main component of the Labour Party, the Independent Labour Party (whose place in the Party corresponded roughly to that of the constituency activists today), had the job of painting a moral vision of socialism.

It should not trespass on the territory of the trade unions, or get its hands dirty by leading struggles against capitalism, but "follow the teachings of Jesus and point the way to the Promised Land" by general moral enlightenment.

In 1931 he was to say: "I am the representative of the whole nation and not just one region or class. The King expects me to do my duty by himself and the country. Not to form a National Government would be the highest treachery to them both".

This desertion of the labour movement in the name of loyalty

to 'the nation' was only the logical conclusion of long-held views. In 1910 he had argued for distancing Labour from the unions.

"Labour needs to be an independent party — not just a caucus for implementing TUC decisions".

## Class war

In MacDonald's view, "the Labour Party should have no class consciousness. Our opponents, they are the people with a class consciousness. Instead of this we wish to advance the consciousness of social solidarity. The class war is not the work of our hands. It was created by capitalism".

And when young militants fought for a genuine socialist programme for the Party, he told them: "You speak of revolution — but look at nature. How wise is the worthy tortoise, and you will find in its movement the natural rhythm for the transformation of society. Learn from nature".

Trotsky was to comment: "English pigeon-fanciers by a method of artificial selection, have succeeded in producing a variety by the progressive shortening of the beak. The beak of the new stock is so short that it is incapable of breaking through the shell".

The English bourgeoisie's political skill lies in shortening the revolutionary beak of the proletariat and thus preventing it from breaking through the shell of the capitalist state. This beak is the Labour Party.

A single glance at MacDonald, Thomas, and Mr and Mrs Snowden, is sufficient to convince us that the work of the bourgeoisie in the selection of short-billed and soft-billed specimens has been crowned with immense success, for these ladies and gentlemen are not only not fit for breaking through the shell of the capitalist system, but are good for nothing whatever".

In 1915, however, MacDonald was forced to resign leadership of the Labour Party. The Labour Party had supported World War I. Arthur Henderson, with majority TUC and Labour backing, joined the Liberal Government as Minister of Education.

It was a small minority Labour leaders, including MacDonald and Clynes, who remained opposed to the War.

No doubt MacDonald recalled the career of Lloyd George. The 1900 Liberal MP had vociferously opposed the Boer War. It did him no harm at all. Lloyd George rocketed from anonymity to the centre-stage of British politics.

Why could Ramsay MacDonald not do the same?

## Pacifism

Lenin called MacDonald's position 'social pacifism'. MacDonald deplored war as slaughter — "violence in its form is unthinkable and unacceptable" — but confined himself to appealing to the capitalist governments to stop it, made no effort to mobilise the working class to take power from the hands of the warmongers.

He stumped the country campaigning for peace initiatives in Germany and an immediate ceasefire, and also chastised the Coalition Government for military incompetence.

As the war ended, the Coalfields Commission in Sheffield, Manchester and elsewhere became smouldering cauldrons of industrial discontent. The centre of gravity



The miners' strike 1984-5. Kinnock sits on the fence

King George V: "Mr MacDonald about the singing of that and elsewhere."

Ramsay MacDonald: "but a small group of ruffians well in hand."

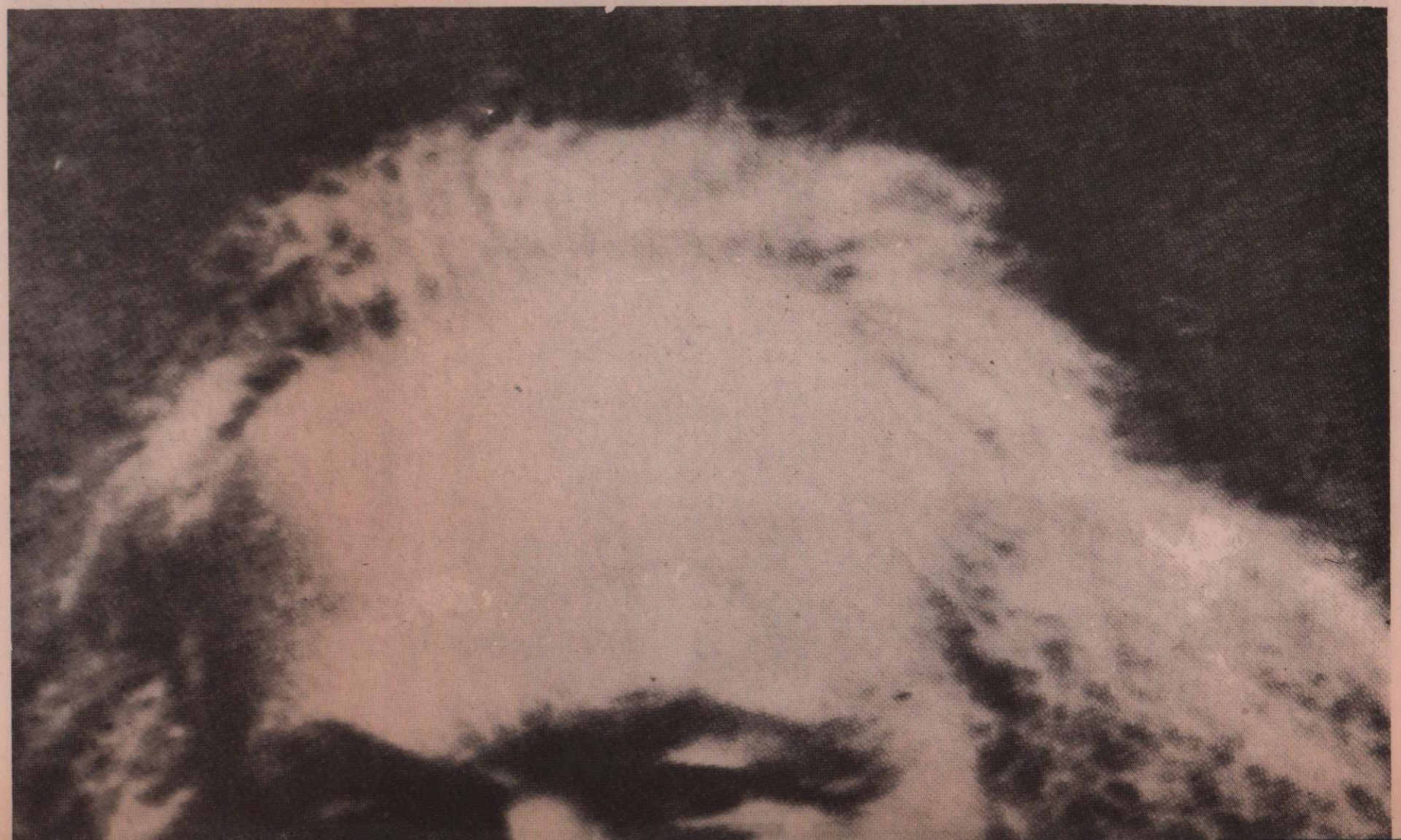


# Workers' Liberty '89

**Friday 7 July**  
**Caxton House,**  
**St John's Way, Archway,**  
**London N19**  
**Workers of the World**  
**Unite!**

Speakers include  
Socialism and Revolution (Iran), US  
Marxist Robert Brenner, Polish  
Socialist Party (RD), Chinese Socialists,  
Socialist Organiser

**Saturday 8 and Sunday 9**  
**July**





Saturday  
Sessions include

- **How to save the world — a debate with the Green Party**

- Robert Brenner on Imperialism

- **Hilary Wainwright and Bob Fine discuss the Left and political democracy**

- Socialism and Revolution (Iranian Marxists): ten years after the revolution

- **Socialist Organiser and Marxism Today debate 'New Times'**

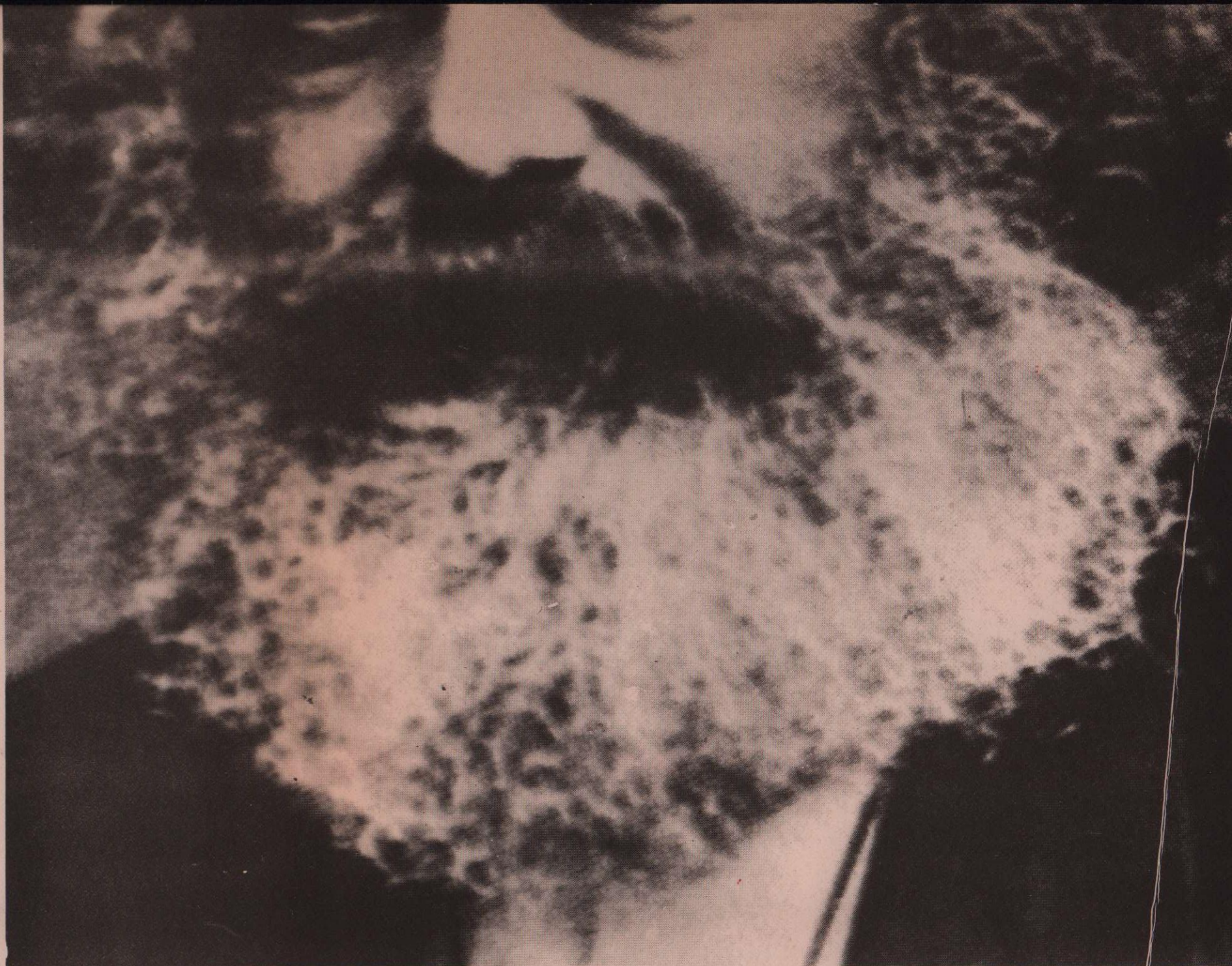
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**Kinnock**  
shifted to the left in the TUC and the Labour Party.  
In this period MacDonald produced all manner of left talk. No doubt he found it morally uplifting. Besides, it could help his career.

**Workers' councils**

At the famous Workers', Soldiers' and Sailors' Convention in Leeds in July 1917 he hailed "the great achievements of our comrades in Russia" — and called for soviets (workers' councils) in Britain! In 1920, he loudly backed the action of London dockers who refused to load munitions for use against Soviet Russia onto the ship 'Jolly George'.

But revolutionary rhetoric was one thing, revolutionary conclusions were another. MacDonald denounced the Third International and the new (then revolutionary) Communist Party, at the same time as he tried to ingratiate himself with the Clyde Shop Stewards' movement. He defended the doctrine of Parliamentary democracy as the central motor of change, while also calling for social revolution.

The General Election of 1922 produced a radical break with the past. The Liberal Party was eclipsed, taking third place. Labour became a major force, with 142 seats. (The Conservatives had 347 seats and formed the government).

MacDonald was re-elected leader of the Party, beating Clynes by a whisker — 61 to 56 — in a Parliamentary Labour Party vote.

That the mass of ordinary workers had illusions in MacDonald and his crew cannot be doubted. The 'New Leader' wrote at the time:

"He is the focus for the mute hopes of a whole class. When he entered his constituency of Aberavon, it took his car one hour to move two miles. It is enough for us to know that rarely, if ever, in English political history has such a scene been witnessed — who could be a pessimist after this!"

The 1924 election tilted the balance even more. The Conservatives had 259 seats, Labour 191, and the Liberals 159. No overall majority for anyone. The King sent for MacDonald and the first Labour Government in history was formed.

Trotsky wrote:  
"If MacDonald walked into Parliament, laid his programme on the table, rapped lightly with his knuckles, and said, 'Accept it or I'll drive you all out', if he did this, Britain would be unrecognisable in two weeks."

**Reverence**

MacDonald would receive an overwhelming majority in any election. The British working class would break out of its shell of conservatism with which it has been so cleverly surrounded; it would discard that slavish reverence for the law of the bourgeoisie, the propertied classes, the church and the monarchy."

But MacDonald had different ideas.

"Socialist measures are not on the agenda. We have to prove that we can govern as competently as Baldwin. We must not alienate the middle classes".

No measures were taken against Capital. No welfare or social policies were introduced. This government did not even deserve the name 'reformist'.

For MacDonald that was unfortunate, but secondary. What mainly impressed him was this:

"Who would ever have thought that MacDonald the starveling clerk, Thomas the engine driver, Henderson the foundry labourer, and Clynes the mill-hand would one day form the King's Cabinet".

MacDonald enjoyed himself:  
"The left wing people have been criticising me again for wearing Court Dress. They are a dull-witted lot. In their view, if I was to give sixpence a day from public funds to the poor, then I would be a socialist. What rot!"

I do not care a fig for the argument that Court Dress is part of royal flunkeyism. The King has been cordial and friendly, and that is important to me."

Nine months later the Labour Government was bundled out of office, with the help of the forged 'Zinoviev letter' scandal.

But by the late '20s, with unemployment climbing steadily, Baldwin's Tory government lost popularity. In 1929 Labour won 287 seats in the General Election, with the Conservatives taking 261 and the Liberals 59.

John Maynard Keynes had begun to put forward his theory that the government could use budget deficits to reflate the capitalist economy by launching public works programmes. The Liberal Party entered the 1929 General Election with a Keynesian platform, 'How to Conquer Unemployment'.

But the Labour Party manifesto, 'Labour and the Nation', was cautious, conservative, and monetarist. It made only vague hints about expansion, and repudiated the 'wild adventurism' of Lloyd George's claim that unemployment could be brought down to 500,000 within a year.

While Keynes and the Liberals had the confidence to challenge the shibboleths of orthodox economics and to propose radical changes within capitalism, MacDonald, Snowden, and Henderson were concerned above all to make themselves respectable in the eyes of the conservative bourgeoisie.



Strike-breakers in 1926

The first act of the new Labour government was to preside over the sentencing of Wal Hannington, organiser of the National Unemployed Workers' Movement, to 12 months for sedition: its second act was to reduce the pay of civil service clerks, dockers and railworkers by 5%.

Then the Wall Street finance empire blew up.  
In January 1930 unemployment was 1,533,000; by March 1,731,000; by June 1,946,000. By December 1930 it was 2,735,000.

The crisis split the government down the middle. Philip Snowden, the Chancellor, demanded strict adherence to monetarist orthodoxy. There would have to be cuts all round in order to keep sterling on the Gold Standard, he said.

Oswald Mosley (later to go over to fascism, but then still Labour) proposed a Keynesian alternative. MacDonald was unmoved: "There is no more socialism in that than there was in the cup of tea I had for breakfast this morning".

Snowden placed a statement before the Cabinet calling for a cut of £67 million in unemployment benefit.

For three weeks the government prevaricated. Henderson, who had the closest links to the trade unions, led the opposition to MacDonald and his Chancellor. Finally, the vote was 11 to 9 in favour of cuts. Immediately the nine resigned.

**Expelled**

MacDonald, Snowden and Thomas formed a National Government with the Tories, and were promptly expelled from the Labour Party. Henderson became Labour Party leader, and was backed by the TUC.

MacDonald's daughter, Sheila, noted in her diary:

"Daddy spoke to Mr Thomas. 'We cannot shirk our responsibilities', he said. 'All this sentimentality about the workers is trash. The unemployed must make sacrifices too'.

"But what about Henderson", Mr Thomas said.

"Bugger him! We've got a National Government to form", said Daddy".

Ramsay 'MacShackles' remained prime minister, but was a mere prisoner of the Tory Baldwin and became a pariah

figure for the rest of his days. In the 1935 election, when the National Government was re-elected with a 247 seat majority and Labour was reduced to 46 seats. MacDonald nonetheless lost his own Parliamentary seat to Labour's Emmanuel Shinwell.

MacDonald became an increasingly pathetic figure, and died in 1937, aged 71.

**Reflex response**

Why did it all happen?

The working class movement in Britain was formed organisationally and ideologically long before Marxism became accessible. The trade unions, the bedrock upon which the Labour Party came into being, had grown through piecemeal

spasmodic lurches forward, as a reflex response to Capital's attempts to increase the exploitation of labour.

The labour movement's leading cadres were often imports from the reforming wing of the Victorian middle class. Trotsky put it well:

"At bottom the English Labour Party has thus far been living without a head on its shoulders, while the party of the English bourgeoisie has a head — a head with a high and mighty brow, supported by a robust and powerful neck".

It is only by understanding this history that we will be able to fight for a socialist leadership of the labour movement today.

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Kinnock, sorry Mac Donald's election material



# The basis of socialism today

**M**arxists today must set out clearly their programme for working class freedom and democracy world-wide.

The labour movements of the world have been polluted as much by the influence and the example of the bureaucratic states calling themselves 'socialist' as by reformism and pro-imperialism. We need to restate our commitment to genuine Marxist socialism and to the international organisation of the working-class — East and West — for self-emancipation.

## Marxism and workers' power

The working class is the basic productive class: it can aspire to oppress and exploit no-one, and it must rule collectively and therefore democratically. The emancipation of the working class must be the task of the workers themselves. The rule of the working class will eliminate class differences and thus lay the basis for the withering away of the state, the family and all class institutions.

The Marxist view is based on an understanding of history as the product of class struggle. Capitalism, the rule of the capitalist class, is to be replaced, for the first time in history, by the rule of the same class which actually overthrows the ruling class — the working class.

The idea of working class rule, working class democracy — what is called the dictatorship of the proletariat, before the founding of Stalinist police states made this term confusing — found its first practical expression in the Paris Commune of 1871. From that Marx drew a picture of how the 'Dictatorship of the proletariat' would operate in practice — how proletarian democracy, with the right of recall of representatives and the end of privileges for officials and managers, was radically different from bourgeois democracy.

The Paris Commune was also a practical lesson in the need to smash the bourgeois state and the apparatus of army, judiciary and bureaucracy, in order to establish the rule of the proletariat and without which there could be no working class power.

The working class came first to power for more than a brief few weeks in Russia in 1917, under the Bolsheviks. The workers' state was organised through Soviets (workers' councils) which had been created by the working class in its struggle against the old order. This was the most democratic system which had ever existed.

Although Soviet power was eventually usurped by a privileged bureaucracy (led by Stalin), it remains the longest experience of workers' rule on which we can draw.

In countries and situations as widespread as Russia in 1905, Chile during Allende's government, Portugal in 1975, Hungary in 1965, and Poland in 1980-1, the working class has thrown up Soviets, or workers' councils, as its committees of struggle. With its flexibility, democracy and contact with the very pores of the daily life of the working class, the workers' council of elected, accountable, recallable delegates is undoubtedly the historic form of rule of the working class.

To the working class struggling for power, or in power, it is what Parliament was to the democratic bourgeoisie. It has been counterposed by revolutionary workers both to capitalism and to bureaucratic Stalinist rule in countries like Hungary, Poland and the USSR.

Even before the privileged

**Socialism is not an outdated concept. But socialist theory does need constantly to be updated. What are the essentials of a socialist theory for the 1990s?**

bureaucracy usurped power in the USSR, the Soviets had become undermined during the protracted civil war, and a debate established that trade union independence was essential even from the workers' state. Lenin outspokenly championed this view in these debates.

In the existing stasised economies like the USSR the workers do not have political power. On the contrary they are denied even the most basic political rights by a bureaucracy which seeks monopoly control of all areas of social life.

Cuba was for long the least repressive of the existing stasised economies. The institutions there, called Poder Popular (People's Power) are claimed by some to represent organs of workers' power. However, they are quite different. They are organs of bureaucratic state control of the people.

They do not arise as a means of the working class pursuing its struggle. They are not independent of the bureaucracy. They have no control over the bureaucracy. Their jurisdiction is limited. The real centres of decision-making are only effective, if at all, only at local government level.

The central bureaucracy rules, and the workers do not have the right to organise freely in parties or even in trade unions.

In all the Stalinist state monopoly systems the working class needs to make its own proletarian revolution which will smash the state and replace it with genuine workers' councils ('soviets') and which will impose a democratic working class and consumers planning on the economy, rejecting both bureaucratic 'planning' and 'market socialism'

## The world since 1945

Since 1945, capitalism has had a new era of great expansion, including an immense (though uneven) growth of capitalism in the 'Third World'. This development has brought with it terrible suffering. Yet it has also brought a great expansion of the force which will overthrow and replace capitalism: the working class.

In many ex-colonial countries, bourgeois and petty-bourgeois nationalists have led revolutions against imperialism: in others, the old imperial powers have conceded independence peacefully. In a number of underdeveloped countries, forces linked to the USSR (or, in Cuba, petty-bourgeois radicals who eventually linked up with the USSR) have made revolutions and destroyed or broken up old ruling classes.

The regimes produced by these various revolutions have often led to considerable economic development and social reform: they have all, however, suppressed the working class. Where they have been revolutionary against the old capitalist order, they have simultaneously been counter-revolutionary against the working class, imposing a police state on it.

We were and are for the right to independence of the oppressed nations; for land reform; and for the nationalisation of major enterprises. In that sense we stand with the nationalist revolutionaries against imperialism and the old oligarchies.

We are with the Sandinistas against the US and the Contras.

But our touchstone is the working class and working class control. Our programme is workers' liberty — working class self-emancipation

from wage-slavery and state oppression, for a cooperative commonwealth. We are for the workers, for this programme, and for free and independent working class and trade union organisation everywhere — against the non-working class revolutionary regimes as well as against the long-established capitalist and old Stalinised regimes.

## Consistent democracy and the national question

The world is not divided into 'imperialism' and 'anti-imperialism'. The big capitalist powers have their own conflicts of interest among themselves. The USSR is the world's greatest oppressor of nations.

Unless nothing in history except monopoly capitalism can be called imperialist, the USSR is imperialist.

A number of Third World capitalist powers, from India through Israel, Saudi Arabia and South Africa to Mexico, Brazil and Argentina, have become regional big powers, or 'sub imperialisms'. Oppressor or privileged nations can become oppressed; oppressed nations can become oppressors.

The cause of international working class unity demands that we reassert the Marxist commitment to consistent democracy on the national question.

1. The national question is one of political democracy. It is not a question of 'economic independence'. No country in the modern world can be economically independent, and there is nothing progressive about trying to be.

Many former colonies and semi-colonies have now won real political independence — ie, such independence as is possible in the modern world. A programme of 'fighting for real independence' in such countries is a nationalist-populist snare.

2. Currently oppressor nations are not 'bad nations' that must be destroyed. We recognise the right of all nations to freedom.

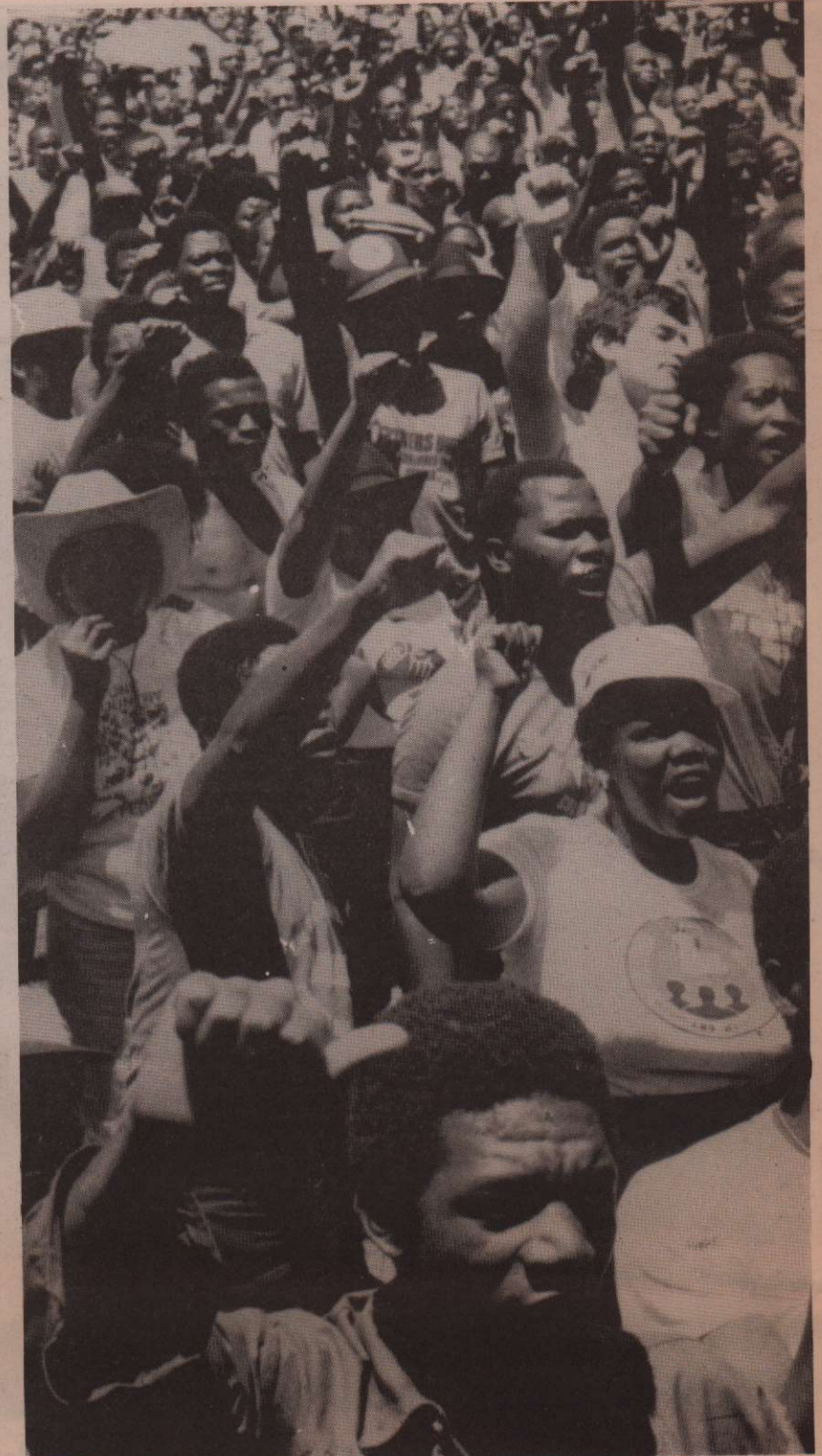
Our principles are Lenin's: "A struggle against the privileges and violence of the oppressing nation and no toleration of the strivings for privilege on the part of the oppressed nation".

## The working class needs democracy

Even bourgeois democracy is an immense advantage for the working class. It allows working class organisations to develop, and thus the working class to prepare itself to become the ruling class.

Revolutionary Marxists like Lenin and Trotsky criticised bourgeois democracy scathingly. Behind its formal equality lies real inequality. The ruling class gains vast advantages from the possession of wealth; from its control of the 'ideological trades'; from the obstacles to political activity imposed on the working class by poverty and overwork; and from its control of the permanent military and bureaucratic state machine.

Thus Lenin and Trotsky poured polemical vitriol on those socialists who made a god of bourgeois democracy and its institutions. They argued that bourgeois democracy is only a very limited form of democracy. The working class should use bourgeois democratic institutions, but it should also use direct action and go outside bourgeois democratic



The South African workers' movement has faced a choice: either develop independent working-class politics, or fall under the sway of populist and nationalist ideologies. So far, the

channels as necessary. The class struggle and the working class interest within it, is the only rigid rule.

They were right, and their tradition here is ours. Today, however, we have to supplement their approach with another one, based on the conclusions we must draw from modern history.

Counterposed to bourgeois democracy in the last 60 years have been a variety of totalitarianisms — fascist, Third World nationalist, and those on the model of the USSR. In terms of civil liberties and human rights, these political regimes were an immense regression. They fall short of bourgeois democracy by a whole epoch in human progress. In this sense the existing bureaucratic state monopoly economies are incontestably a step backwards — however we evaluate their social basis, 'degenerated workers' state', 'state capitalist' or some new form of society.

Working class socialists today have to combine the attitude of Lenin and Trotsky in the class struggle with defence of the democratic traditions and democratic values which we inherit from the bourgeois democratic revolutions, and with advocacy of liberty and democracy in the way it was advocated by Marx and Engels in pre-democratic Europe.

## Our movement

For over 60 years now, radical workers' movements across the world have been split up and thrown into disarray by the influence of revolutionary nationalist forces and of the forces,

like the Chinese and Vietnamese Communist Parties, which have created new stasised economies under bureaucratic rule. Often workers' movements have become just appendages of these non-proletarian forces.

Events in the last 12 years have drawn sharp lines between working class socialist politics and non-proletarian 'anti-imperialism'.

• In Vietnam the forces led by the Communist Party fought heroically to defeat US imperialism — and then immediately imposed a police state on the working class. Marxists, while supporting the CP-led forces against the US, should simultaneously have been fighting to mobilise the workers to resist the imposition of a regime modelled on the USSR. But in fact most Marxists barely criticised the CP at all.

• Even worse, in Cambodia, most Marxists said nothing about organising workers independently from and eventually against the Khmer Rouge — who, once in power, ran a regime of mass murder.

• In Iran, Khomeini's opposition to the US led many Marxists to hail him as 'progressive' while he was beating down the workers' independent organisations that had emerged in the struggle against the Shah, and constructing a totalitarian Islamic regime. Khomeini presented his opposition to modern society as opposition to imperialism, and many took it as good coin. Many Marxists at least initially, took Iran's side in its war with Iraq, instead of denouncing the war on both sides.

• Immediately after the USSR's invasion of Afghanistan in



## NUR: vote for action!

By a railworker

The NUR is to ballot on pay and defence of the Machinery of Negotiation between 30 May and 3 June. The results will be announced after 12 June. ASLEF's ballot result will be out a little earlier.

The ballot papers will ask for support for industrial action up to and including 24-hour strikes in pursuit of a 'substantial' pay rise, and negotiation over the current Machinery of Negotiation.

BR have imposed a 7% deal which we will have in our pay packets this Thursday (18 May). Their intention is to undermine the pay campaign by making the issue not the whole rise, but just the difference between 7% and whatever the claim is.

The problem is that we do not have a claim on pay, just an aim that BR should offer a bit more. In the 'time honoured' manner, the rail union leaderships then discuss amongst themselves about whether or not they believe BR has really made a final offer or secretly have a bit more ready. On that basis, they then decide whether or not to accept it.

In a campaign such as this we need a clear claim. Our attitude should be that 7% has just put us slightly below where we were this time last year. So we had a slight pay cut now we want a pay rise — 8% should do it.

On the Machinery of Negotiation, the whole issue needs explaining in language and terms to ordinary rail workers. This is not to say that people are not capable

of understanding — rather that the leadership must stop talking in jargon and code and spell things out in a way which is relevant to the membership.

The Sheffield Joint Steering Committee of NUR and ASLEF, with some involvement of the TSSA membership, has attempted to do this with a leaflet 'Why you should defend the Machinery of Negotiation'. This leaflet has been widely distributed. We also need to make sure that involved in this campaign are all the grievances which rail workers feel, after years of management lording it over us. There is plenty of disgruntlement around as long as the leadership turn it against management rather than just complaining that BR won't let them negotiate on our behalf anymore.

Finally, lessons from last year's S&T

dispute. First, don't go around the country telling rail workers to vote 'yes' and they will not have to do anything else; BR will negotiate without any need for action. This builds an Achilles heel into our campaign, which management will be fully aware of and can exploit. We should prepare for action, setting up strike committees now.

While the ballot only allows 24 hour strikes we should ensure these have the maximum effect. The S&T workers lost the equivalent of 18 days work last year, spread out and forwarned in such a way as to cause least harm to management. The 24-hour strikes should be as close together as possible. And perhaps unofficial action can fill in the gaps.

The membership needs to be as fully informed as they can be in the dispute. BR are serious — so should we be.

## Tube unity needed

The unofficial tube strike on Monday 15 May was an even greater success than the last two stoppages. Less than a dozen trains ran on the whole network — and few trains ran on the Victoria line, which responded poorly to the strike call previously.

The strike is over a pay claim of £6.43 hourly rate for all train drivers with no

strings — and increased rates for guards made up through differentials. Another three 24-hour strikes are planned, one a week, coinciding with bus workers' strikes wherever possible.

Some crew managers have put down strike days as 'Unsatisfactory Attendance' which can lead to disciplinary action. But significantly, the last mass meeting voted unanimously to stage a walk-out if anybody, strike leaders or anybody else, was victimised for their role in the strikes.

Tube drivers have taken the initiative off management. But to keep up the momentum action will need to escalate towards an all-out strike. Drivers should push for united — NUR and ASLEF — all-out official action. And drivers must link up with station staff too. Management intends the same fate for both groups of workers. So tube workers need maximum unity against the bosses.

linking up with other groups of workers and organising the solidarity and support needed to win a strike. And union leader must start behaving as though they want to win!

## All out on the buses!

By Ray Ferris

Last Monday's (15 May) strike by London bus workers was a great success. Only a handful of buses ran in Central London. And traffic chaos was increased by

the unofficial tube strike on the same day.

But privatised routes in outer London ran normally and it is vital London bus workers put out appeals for solidarity. Links should be built up and claims brought into line wherever possible.

Bus workers are demanding a £5 per hour minimum rate and a 35-hour week. Bus bosses offered a derisory 7.1% — a pay cut if you take inflation into account. They say there is no more money for the workers who run the industry, while they cream off the profits preparing for privatisation. Angry bus workers voted by a margin of 5 to 1 for action.

It is good that the London Bus Committee has called strike action — a series of fortnightly 24-hour stoppages — and that they talk about bringing action in line with action by tube workers. But the 24-hour strikes will not be enough to win.

They should be used to build confidence and solidarity across the London fleet leading up to all-out indefinite strike action for the full claim.

With discord on the Underground, and a strike ballot called over pay on the railways, transport workers are in a strong position. If they do strike alongside each other, London will be brought to a grinding halt. Monday's success has boosted confidence. Action should be stepped up to win a speedy victory.

of flexibility are grave, but the anger is there to stage a fight. The time is right for a campaign for all-out action for the full claim — with no strings.

On 9 May a call for a ballot of NALGO members for an all-out strike was passed unanimously at a meeting attended by about 200 NALGO members in Southwark.

The proposal is that the strike should start on 20 June, if the council's Policy Committee, which meets on 19 June, agrees a policy of compulsory redundancies. It is a clear warning to management and councillors.

They want a deal which would mean that NALGO members could be placed in a 'redeployment pool' and made redundant after 16 weeks if they haven't by then found a new job elsewhere in the council.

The same meeting heavily defeated a proposal for the union to drop its opposition to compulsory redeployment.

Activists in the union are calling for a broad-based campaign group to be set up to help win the largest 'yes' vote possible, to involve the ordinary members as well as the officials.

This would be a great way to help rebuild a strong and effective shop steward system, and a way to prepare the ground for the formation of an effective strike committee to be formed to run and organise the strike should that be necessary.

Making the links between the redundancy package, the threats to pay and the new performance targets is going to be essential in the battles to come. So will making links with other NALGO branches across the country. A vital opportunity to build this support will be the NALGO National Conference on 11-18 June.

## CPSA conference: right in control

By Trudy Saunders, CPSA DHSS HQ

Delegates to the CPSA annual conference returned home last weekend after the week-long conference in Blackpool — a conference which was one of the most undemocratic in the history of the CPSA.

CPSA conference is fast becoming a joke. Since the right-wing took control in 1987 (they won again this year) they have constantly ignored any conference decisions which they do not like — or have them ruled 'illegal', such as last year's motion which called for the wages of the £30,000-a-year General Secretary to be brought into line with those of the rank and file.

This year a motion calling for conference to be allowed to debate and decide the wages of full-time officers, after a ruling against it last year, was narrowly defeated on a card vote. The NEC will no doubt now claim they can continue to ignore conference, as a motion confirming conference as the supreme body was defeated.

Before conference had even started, over 200 motions were ruled out of order — most on spurious grounds, and many on subjects the right-wing would rather not have debated, such as the election of Assistant Secretaries, who are currently appointed for life!

On the plus side, motions were passed against the use of agencies in the civil service, and to oppose any relocations that involve job losses or compulsory transfers. Conference called for a full-scale campaign, including the possibility of industrial action, to re-unionise GCHQ, and censured the National Disputes Committee for their role in the long-running Hoxton dispute — withdrawing strike pay days before Christmas!

The NEC was censured for calling off the YTS campaign and conference voted against both YTS and ET in the civil service.

It was agreed to set up some form of campaign for workplace nurseries and cancer screening and to recruit a full-time women's officer for the union. The

union constitution was changed to make it easier to kick out fascists and pledges were given to kick out the Nash brothers — both active fascists.

An emergency motion supporting the dockers was passed, authorising a 'substantial' donation from the union.

Joke motion of the conference came from 'BL'84 (Stalinist/soft left alliance). The motion noted the decrease in the activity of women in the CPSA — then called for a rise in overnight subsistence rates for all officials! Firstly, this will in no way ensure greater activity of rank and file women — have you ever heard anyone say "I won't stand for that position, the subsistence rates aren't high enough."? Secondly, the subsistence rates are perfectly adequate. Thirdly, why do men need this rise? Has it got anything to do with officials lining their own pockets?

CPSA President, Marion Chambers, could have given Stalin a few lessons in how to run a conference. Microphones were turned off, certain delegates were constantly excluded from debates, speakers were interrupted, conference was threatened with closure!

When delegates demanded a Moodie striker be allowed to address conference, Chambers ruled conference 'choose' between a striker or a YTS debate — which included a censure motion on the NEC! It took constant pressure from conference floor to be allowed to hear the Moodie striker — who received a standing ovation.

All in all, conference was mixed. The feel from the delegates and observers was one of anger with the NEC for their actions over the past year and their undemocratic behaviour. Yet the right-wing once again won the elections.

The reason behind this is the failure of the Militant-dominated CPSA Broad Left to organise and campaign in the last year over vital issues — YTS, GCHQ, Postal Balloting, Long-Term Pay. This has effectively let the right-wing off the hook, allowed them to win the NEC and will mean another year of sell-outs and undemocratic practices.

For the left, the task is to build strikes, to intervene over OpStrat, Moodie, YTS — to give the Tories and the right-wing a hammering they want to forget.

## Stop Moodie in its tracks

Since they came to power, the Tories have been hell-bent on dramatically changing the Civil Service through privatisation, agencies and computerisation. Using casual labour, YTS and relocation to achieve their aims, the Tories' plans mean thousands of job losses and worsening conditions of service for Civil Servants.

In the Department of Social Security (DSS), the attack is two-pronged — Operational Strategy (OpStrat) and Moodie. The Operational Strategy is the name given to the mass computerisation of the benefit offices throughout the country.

The direct results of OpStrat are 20,000 job losses, compulsory transfers, compulsory detached duty, the prospect of the majority of CPSA grades in the DSS sitting behind a VDU screen all day and a worsening service to claimants.

The CPSA has been aware of OpStrat for some years now. At conference after conference, motions have been passed committing the union to fight. The response of the right-wing-led DHSS Section Executive Committee (SEC) has

been to ignore conference decisions — notably a decision taken to fight OpStrat at a Special Technology Conference last year.

The SEC eventually held a ballot on strike action. DSS CPSA members were asked to choose between accepting 20,000 job losses or taking all-out immediate unpaid strike action — without any campaign to build for this. DSS CPSA members narrowly accepted the former after a campaign in which lies and scare tactics were used by the right-wing SEC, who recommended a vote for 20,000 job losses.

At DHSS Section Conference last week, a motion heavily criticising the SEC for the running of the ballot was overwhelmingly passed. The main criticism was the fact that CPSA members were faced with no real choice in the ballot. This clearly indicates that CPSA members in the DSS did not vote for 20,000 job losses, but against having an all-out unpaid strike without any campaign.

As the effects of OpStrat are felt, CPSA members in the DSS regions are likely to be taking action against attacks on their conditions of service — despite the fact that the SEC have 'forbidden' this.

In London, Tory attacks on the DSS come in the form of a report from Margaret Moodie. The Moodie report calls for the relocation of 21 London benefit offices outside of London.

This will involve 2,000 job losses, a skeleton staff in many London offices and an appalling service to claimants. The turn-over of staff in London benefit offices is very high, due to low wages, bad conditions and high pressure. Moodie argues that relocation will overcome these problems and ensure a better service to claimants!

The real reasons are clear. Over the past few years the Tories have been forced to pay higher wages to London benefit workers in CPSA grades in order to get the jobs filled. Union activity in these offices is militant. The Tories hope to save money and break the strength of the union. Instead of employing more staff, improving conditions and paying substantial higher wages, the Tories have Moodie.

to start on 24 May.

Workers at Massey Ferguson have walked out on indefinite strike after bosses issued 21 redundancy notices.

The National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education (NATFHE) is to hold a ballot on industrial action over pay and conditions in polytechnics. Since colleges went independent of local authority control in April, bosses have launched attacks on their workforce.

A High Court injunction has stopped the university in Cardiff from sacking lecturers who are taking action over pay. Several universities are offering local pay deals encouraged by the government's wish to scrap national pay bargaining.

## IN BRIEF

Steel erectors in London voted for an all-out indefinite strike in London. This followed the lock-out of 350 steel erectors by subsidiaries of Trafalgar House.

Two 24-hour strikes last week by BBC workers over a 16% pay rise were more successful than the first one-day action. Management have imposed a 7% pay rise, and action will need to be escalated to make them back down.

Power workers have voted overwhelmingly for action over this year's pay claim. A 7.5% offer has been rejected and an overtime ban is

## Docks: danger in delay

A short article in the capitalist press — the Independent — on Tuesday 16 May discusses the 'receding' prospect of a national docks strike. It cites lack of confidence by T&G leaders and officials, and the long delay in holding the ballot as reasons.

There is little the Independent would like better than for the strike to collapse. But the point is that T&G leaders have been acting as if victory in a dispute is out of the question.

Endless delays have been longer than necessary 'body swerves' to avoid the law, and have allowed industrialists to stockpile materials.

Further delays are intolerable. Docks and their leaders must begin

## TOWN HALLS ROUNDUP

On Wednesday 17 May, NALGO members will be lobbying the negotiations of the 1989 pay claim.

The lobby, called by Islington NALGO, is in support of the £200/12 per cent pay claim.

Anger has been building up over pay. Since 1984 white collar council workers' pay has increased by 28.7%. The national average earnings have increased over the same period of time by 38%. This fall in real wages has led to demands for a substantial rise this year.

The employers have offered a derisory 6 per cent. Not only does this do nothing to bridge the gap that has opened up with other workers, it threatens to widen the gap!

The offer is even less than the rate of inflation.

The most frightening part of the employers' offer is the strings attached: they want scrapping of national grades, also the employer wants workers to lose the right to automatic annual increments: in future, any increments would be 'performance related'. They want to limit the right to regrading claims, appeals at provincial and national level will be scrapped. In addition, the employers want national agreements to allow for more local 'flexibility'. National agreements on working hours and enhanced rates for weekend working are threatened.

The NALGO leadership is rightly rejecting the present offer and unless the employers change their line, a ballot on industrial action is likely to be held in June. The offer is derisory and threats



# SOCIALIST

## ORGANISER

# China: workers join fight for democracy

### EDITORIAL

#### 70,000 steelworkers strike and join student protests

70,000 Chinese steelworkers at the Capital steel plant struck work on May 15th in solidarity with the hundreds of thousands of students demonstrating in the streets of Beijing for democracy. They struck as Mr Gorbachev paid the first official visit by a USSR leader to China in 30 years.

As many as 2,000 students had been on hunger strike for four days, demanding democracy.

Academics, journalists and other intellectuals joined the monster student demonstration, which was eventually a quarter of a million strong. They seized control of the centre of Beijing while large gangs of policemen looked on, outnumbered and helpless.

It would have taken the tanks and troops of the Chinese army to overwhelm and disperse the surging mass of young people demanding basic democratic rights, such as freedom of the press and the right to form a student union independent of the state.

The ruling old men of Chinese Stalinism decided to hold their hand. They are plainly divided on how to handle the growing unrest. So far the advocates of heavy repression have not been able to carry their policy.

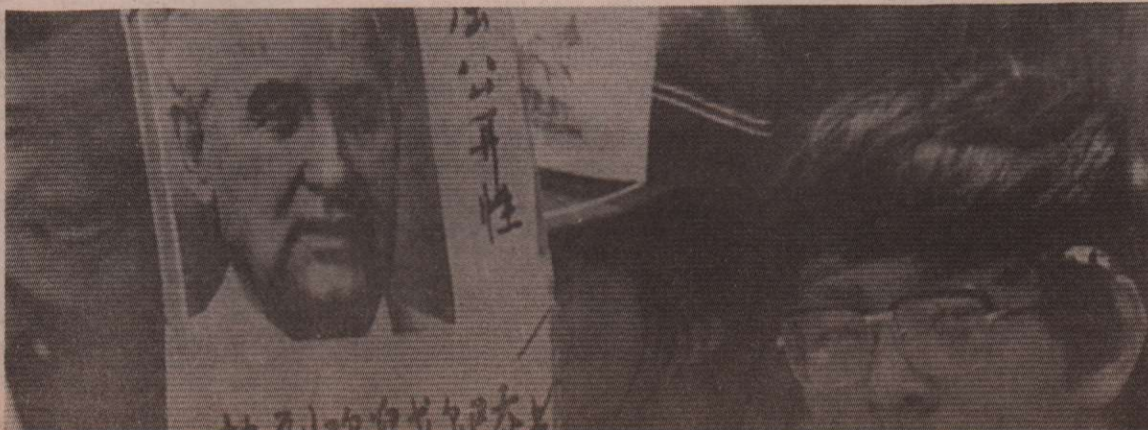
In the past repression has quickly followed after short periods of liberalisation. That's what happened 10 years ago to students who campaigned for democracy. Some of their leaders are still in jail.

It happened 30 years ago during the so-called 'Hundred Flowers Period', when the Stalinist regime of Mao licensed criticism by the intelligentsia for a few months and then arrested those who had dared raise their heads to speak out in criticism.

But the rulers won't find it so easy this time. The movement for democracy headed by the students is immense and seemingly growing. There are student demonstrators now in cities other than Beijing.

The students plainly speak for, and have the sympathy of, many millions of workers, farmers and intellectuals. As the strikes in support of the students show, it is increasingly an active — and maybe an explosive — sympathy.

And the regime is in chaos. Ten years ago sweeping 'reforms' were made in the organisation of



Chinese fighters for democracy think highly of Mr Gorbachev and his 'glasnost' in the Soviet Union though, in fact, glasnost is very far from any sort of democracy.

agriculture and industry. Where before a crude attempt was made at central planning, now a great deal of freedom was given to farmers and factory managers to decide what they produced.

Market mechanisms were given a vastly increased role in regulating the economy. Freed of the blood-squeezing grip of the central state, the farmers increased food production. For a while the 'reforms' seemed a great success, compared with the old-style full-scale Stalinist command economy.

But lately things have got out of hand, and economic chaos has crept up on the regime. There is serious inflation. Corruption is rife. Many tens of millions are unemployed.

Regional divisions have begun to re-emerge — and not only in Tibet, which is, essentially, a conquered colonial territory.

Economic changes were made

without changing the political system, which remains a heavily-repressive police state under the control of the so-called Communist Party. Workers in China have no right to organise trade unions or to express themselves freely. It is a rigid and inflexible system, ill-suited to handling the problems now facing the old men who rule China.

As a result of the economic and political problems which confront the regime, the old men have tried to put the brakes on further change. Rather feeble and half-hearted efforts have been made to restore some sort of centralised control.

The ruling old men seem unable to decide whether to try to put the Stalinist lid completely back on or to boldly press ahead deeper into market mechanisms, with all that implies in terms of inflation, unemployment etc.

But it is when such attempts are

## Defend civil service jobs!

By a London DSS worker

1989 is the 'crunch' year for both OpStrat and Moodie. DSS workers have been preparing to fight for some time now. But in the wake of the Militant-dominated Broad Left DHSS SEC's failure to lead earlier fights over other related issues, ie.

Fowler's Social Security Reviews, a right-wing dominated SEC was elected in 1988 and has been re-elected in 1989. This could not have come at a worse time for DSS workers.

The right-wing SEC have made it clear that not only do they not intend to lead a fightback, they will actually stamp on any attempts by the rank and file to do so.

The first stage of Moodie implementation came when management snuck a Regional Team into Ealing office last Tuesday, during CPSA conference. The move backfired as delegates and observers were able to use conference to give support to the fight taking place within the offices.

At DHSS Section conference, an emergency motion was passed calling for a ballot in the first 'cluster' of offices (Ealing, Southall, Notting Hill, Acton), to spread this action and for a London Reps meeting to be called at conference. News of the successful motion was passed back to London where over 20 DSS offices took part in a successful unofficial one-day strike last Tuesday.

The strike (originally planned to involve only the four 'cluster' offices), plus pressure from Socialist Caucus supporters on the conference floor, was instrumental in forcing the DHSS SEC to meet to discuss the emergency motion.

The SEC ignored the latter and recommended that the CPSA National Disputes Committee (NDC) should call for a ballot for unpaid all-out strike action of all DSS offices in the GLC area. This is an obvious attempt to prevent a fight. Firstly, as in the OpStrat ballot, members would be faced with immediate, unpaid all-out strike action, or accepting Moodie.

Secondly, most offices in the GLC area are not affected by Moodie. It is likely that they can be pulled into strike action already taking place in the 21 Moodie offices, but unlikely they will vote to strike in a cold ballot.

Throughout conference, pressure was put on the President to allow a striker from the first cluster to speak — which was eventually allowed — on the NDC to announce their final decision on strike action, and on the SEC to call a London Reps meeting.

By Thursday, when the latter two had failed to happen, over 200 DHSS observers and delegates met at an unofficial meeting. Such were the numbers that General Secretary John Ellis was forced to address the meeting and give the NDC's decision. The NDC had decided to 'negotiate', ie. do nothing.

The meeting was unimpressed to say the least, and unanimously agreed to a statement which gave full support to any unofficial action in the first cluster and pledged financial and moral support.

Last Friday this statement was taken back to the first cluster offices where meetings were held. The general feeling of CPSA members in these offices was that they were prepared to take unofficial strike action if they could be sure of financial support. Members in Southall office were feeling confident as management have backed down from sending a Regional Team into Southall DSS this week.

The cross-London ballot is now to go ahead from the 29th of May. This could prove disastrous. If it lost (and it is likely) then the Team would stay in Ealing and other teams would be sent elsewhere. Taking unofficial strike action in the first cluster and spreading it to the 21 offices gives us a chance of pressurising for paid strike action. It also means we have a better chance of winning the London-wide ballot.

Pledges of financial support for unofficial action have already come in from places such as Wales, Nottingham, Liverpool, Hull and North Fylde. No doubt there will be more. The All-London Reps and members' meeting will ensure this support is taken back to members in the first cluster of offices.

It is vital that strike action is taken quickly to build upon the mood generated by the successful one-day strike, to get the Regional Team out of Ealing. This will be our first step towards getting rid of Moodie.

Unfortunately the joint Branch Executive Committee for the Ealing cluster has voted not to take any action until the result is known. This decision makes the fight against Moodie a lot more difficult. All is not lost, however. If the arguments are clearly presented to them, then the will to fight is still there amongst the ordinary members of the Ealing cluster.

•Messages of support and financial donations to Don Street (West London BEC), 92 Clarendon Road, Holland Road, London W11 2HR. Phone: 01 272 1850.

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## Hull dockers strike

### A Hull docker talked to SO

The ballot for a dockers' strike to defend the National Dock Labour Scheme has been challenged by the employers in the courts.

Different employers — Associated British Ports, The Port of London Authority and so on — are lining up, each in turn, to put their case as to why the ballot is illegal. They say it is political. The law says that no action can take place while a hearing is taking place.

This is the first time that a general union has been taken to the courts under these laws. So we are not sure what will happen. There are 14 different Trade Groups within the TGWU and the docks dispute involves the whole of just one of them. What happens if we are declared illegal?

Are the whole of the union's funds to be sequestered because of the action of just one group? What about other disputes going on elsewhere in the T&G that are perfectly legal, are they to be se-

questered? What about DSS payments to families of such people? The DSS will deem they are getting strike pay, but if the union is sequestered, they can't be.

All these questions have yet to be tested in court. The local dispute in Hull dates back to agreements made in 1967. Then the Devlin Inquiry de-casualised the industry — all dockers were attached to a particular employer. This also had the effect of combining the employers into bigger groups — in Hull the number went down from 128 before Devlin, to about 20 after.

After our national strike in 1972, the Jones-Aldington Committee was set up and reported in 1974. It decided that the unattached register would not be used again, other than for discipline or for a few days while transferring to another employer.

On the Friday before May Day, a local employer, Cargo Superintendents, London, closed down. Its four employees were put on the unattached register while the company moved its offices to the other side of the river.

We demanded a meeting of the local board and insisted that the four men be reallocated. The employers refused. They said anyone taking them on would

made to change gear, tempo and direction, and when the rulers are divided, as they are in Beijing now, that those who have been repressed and cowed, as the Chinese masses have for decades, get an opportunity to burst out on the streets and try to shape events.

It is likely that the mood expressed in the streets of Beijing by the students and others exists also in the army, and maybe even in sections of the police. Even so the regime probably has the physical power to repress and kill the students, should it decide to.

They may well decide to. The old men are reported to feel very unhappy about the humiliation the students inflicted on them on their great day, when Gorbachev came to make friends and apologise for the USSR's great power chauvinism towards China over the last decades. Continued on page 3

become liable to pay redundancy of £17,500 (half the £35,000 the government is talking about if the Scheme is abolished).

We reported this to a ballot meeting and the 680 or so men decided unanimously to go on strike until Monday 15 May. On Wednesday 10 May Roy Garmston, the chair of the stewards committee, was served with a writ telling him to retract the strike orders, and that he was going to be sued for costs.

We reconvened the stewards committee — we could not leave him on his own — and agreed that he should comply. Roy, through the trade union as agent, said to the men that they should go back. They agreed, but said they would not go back until Monday. Thus the writ was complied with.

So far as we can tell the employers plan to reduce the labour force nationally by 10%, using the £35,000 redundancy as bait. Of course, that's not so good as you only get it if the employers decide.

The ballot is to be counted on Friday. We'll see what happens after that. Whatever happens on that issue, we've still got this dispute in Hull.