

SOCIALIST

ORGANISER

**Gorbachev
sends in
the troops**

Will the army kill glasnost?

As full-scale war erupted between two Soviet Republics, Azerbaijan and Armenia, the USSR's army this week moved centre stage.

It assumed an active central role in managing the deepening crisis in the Soviet Union, which looks like being the pattern of the future.

With the so-called Communist Party of the Soviet Union fraying and crumbling while all over the USSR long-frozen national and ethnic conflicts come back to envenomed life, the Army will increasingly be called upon to provide a scaffolding to stop the decrepit structures collapsing into bloody chaos.

For two years the conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia has been simmering and growling. Muslim Azeris and Christian Armenians have mobilised against each other, edging towards the hot war that flared last week and threatens to get completely out of control.

In the conflict between the republics, self-evident right is with the Armenians. Armenians are the big majority in Nagorno Karabakh, an autonomous region within the Azerbaijani republic, and want to unite with the Armenian republic. Armenians have been attacked and massacred in the Azerbaijani capital, Baku.

The Armenians have suffered much this century. One and a half million of them were killed by the Turks in 1915. It was the worst recorded case of outright genocide before the Nazi holocaust of the Jews. Their territory is divided between the USSR and Turkey.

The Azeris too are divided — between the USSR and Iran. They are

Shi'ite Muslims, probably sympathetic to Khomeini's "Islamic Revolution". They seem to want independence from the USSR, and to want to drive out the Armenians from "their" territory.

The USSR's withdrawal from Afghanistan has not averted the threat of Islamic fundamentalism within the USSR. Combined with glasnost, it seems to have ensured that fundamentalism would become active and militant.

The right to self-determination of the Azeris, and their right to a united state of their own if they want it, is undeniable — but not at the expense of the rights of the Armenians. The conflict has given the central USSR state a chance to reassert itself. It may prove unable to assert itself enough to stop the burgeoning Azeri-Armenian war.

Last week, too, Gorbachev seemed to promise the Baltic Republics that they could secede — or did he? It is not at all clear what the Kremlin intends. It may intend nothing clear except to gain time.

Conceding to the Baltic states the right of secession — as an actual right that can be exercised — will immediately pose the question of the secession of other republics, and not only in the south. The Lithuanians are right not to trust Gorbachev.

As the crisis in the USSR continues to deepen and spread, the main victim is likely to be the "good side" of the Gorbachev reforms — "glasnost", openness — as more and more reliance is placed on the basic state machine to keep order.

That is the significance of the use of the Army in the South. Its implications go much further than stopping the Azeri-Armenian war.



Soviet miners strike

Support Soviet trade unions!

By Eric Heffer
MP

All socialists and trade unionists should contribute to the financial appeal which has been launched for the independent trade union movement in the USSR, Sotsprof.

We should do everything possible to assist the creation of genuine independent trade union and labour movement organisations in the

Soviet Union, and this is a very practical way of doing it. We can show our support for these socialists and trade unionists in the Soviet Union.

Some people argue that you can't support unofficial movements. The fact is that the official trade unions in the Soviet Union have long been tied in to the state apparatus. Independent trade unions were abolished a long time ago.

If the workers want real trade union organisations,

they have got to create them themselves; and that is precisely what they are doing.

We have to support workers who are creating trade unions on the basis of being workers, right across the board, whatever nationality they are in the Soviet Union.

Send donations to Alice Mahon MP, Treasurer, Sotsprof Appeal, House of Commons, London SW1 with cheques made payable to 'Alice Mahon Sotsprof'.

Manchester council workers strike against poll tax

POLL TAX

By Tony Dale

A strike looks set to bring Manchester City Council to a standstill on 23 January. The strike has been organised under the banner of 'Justice for Manchester'.

The aim of the Justice for Manchester campaign is to highlight the unfairness of the poll tax, demand more resources from the Tories, and to call for the repeal of the poll tax legislation. This campaign involves the Labour Party and all the council trade unions.

The campaign has organised a march and rally on 23 January. NALGO have voted to strike on the day and the other unions are expected to vote likewise.

The poll tax will hit Manchester

residents and workers particularly hard. To maintain the present level of services through the poll tax, a poll tax of £712 per person would be needed, according to recent assessments. This figure is so high due to a number of factors.

The Tories are requiring Manchester Council to contribute £56 per resident to the national safety net. This safety net was supposed to offset the poll tax bills in high spending authorities and yet Manchester is contributing into this scheme.

Manchester Council received £175 million through the Business Rates in 1989-90. In 1990-91 the local rating of business is replaced by the National Business Rate. To replace this lost £175 million the Tories are allowing only £86 million.

For government grant purposes, five students only count as one person. This ruling particularly hits Manchester Council due to the city having the biggest student population in Western Europe.

All in all, poll tax spells disaster for the residents and workers of Manchester. As a result, the Justice for Manchester campaign will right-

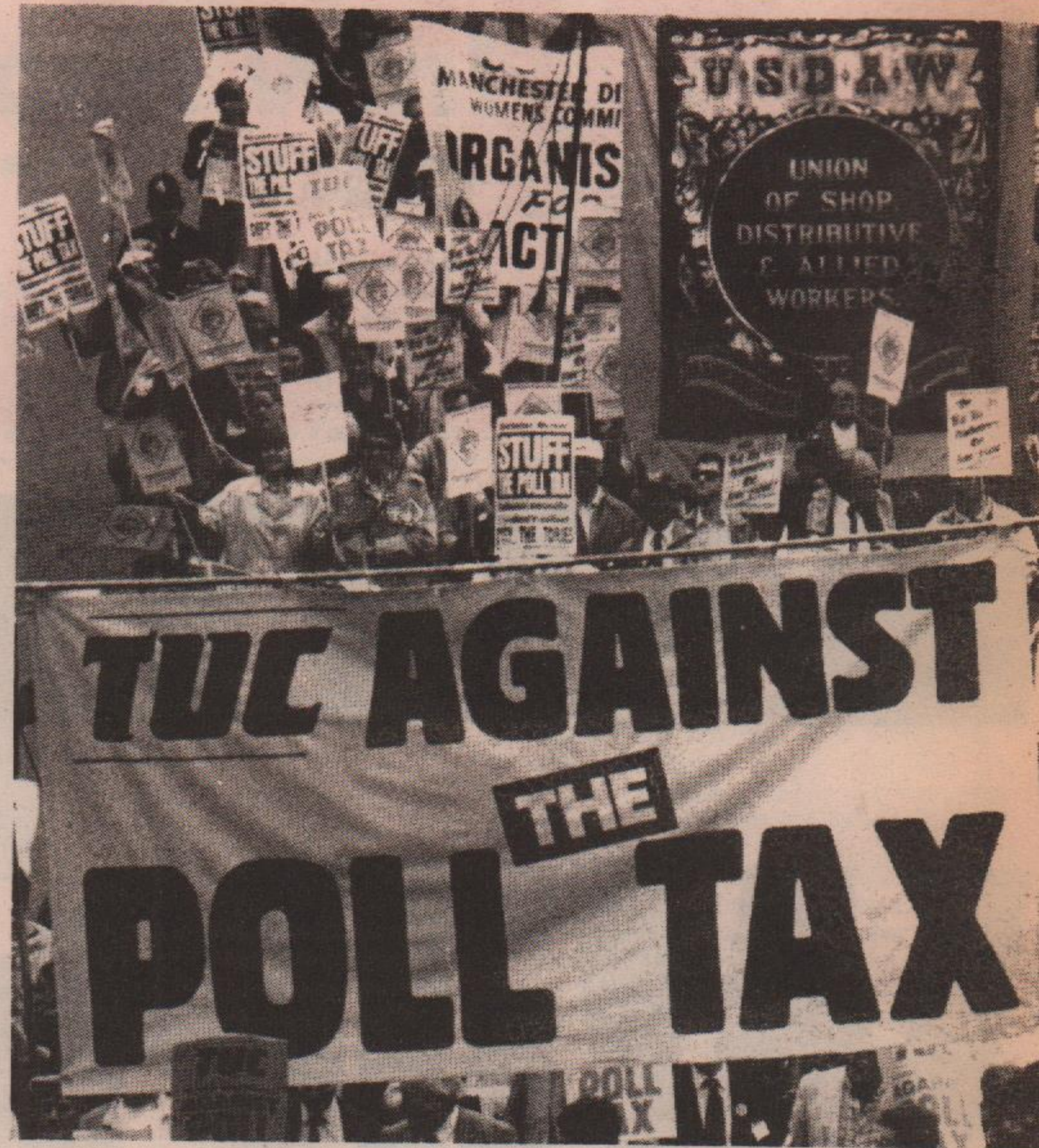
ly receive widespread support.

The big problem with the campaign is the limitations set on it. The council unions and the Labour Council has done a good job in highlighting how the poll tax is unfair and unjust. But then the Council, with the unions' support, vote to implement the tax.

Now the Council are drawing up a list of £56 million cuts. The Labour Council leadership wants to set the poll tax at £450 per person. To balance the books this could mean up to 5000 job losses. The Justice for Manchester campaign has refused to come out and oppose the job losses.

15 Labour councillors have linked up with other Labour Party members, including Council shop stewards, to form a Labour Against the Cuts and Poll Tax campaign.

This campaign opposes the Council implementing the poll tax, supports mass non-payment and will back any fight against the cuts. A conference has been called by this campaign for 3 February to link up the No Cuts, No Poll Tax opposition in the Labour Party, Council trade unions and the anti-poll tax groups.



Tories rebel over poll tax

The government faces another backbench revolt over the poll tax.

Tory MPs are worried about signs that the average poll tax is likely to be £344 — or £72 higher than the figure estimated by Chris Patten, and on which he has based the level of central government grants for local councils.

With the growing hostility to the poll tax among Tory voters as they realise how badly off they will be, MPs are worried about the prospect of losing their seats in the next election.

A recent survey of the top 20 Tory marginals shows that actual poll tax levels will be between £70 and £130 higher than that estimated by the Department of the Environment. Of 246 — predominantly Tory — shire councils, only one is likely to charge the government-estimated poll tax.

Patten's figure is based on totally unrealistic assumptions: inflation is estimated at 4%, while it is already running at 7.9%; a freeze in ser-

vices, which doesn't allow for extra education costs to come into effect next year; and 100% collection — which the experience of Scotland has shown is wildly optimistic.

Tory MPs are demanding that Patten goes back to the Treasury and demands extra money to cushion the impact of the poll tax. It is possible that the government will be defeated in its attempt to push through its grants package this Thursday.

Labour has, of course, joined the Tory rebels in denouncing the government. But they are hollow words in light of the fact that Strathclyde Labour council has just issued another 250,000 summary warrants against people who have not yet paid any poll tax, and are preparing to arrest wages and benefits of non-payers.

Weasel words are not good enough: Labour Party activists in the anti-poll tax campaigns must fight to stop Labour councils from implementing the Tory tax, and force the leadership to back our class, not tail-end the Tories.

Free Martin Foran!

In reply to a written Parliamentary question Chris Mullin MP has been told by the Home Office that Detective Inspector Paul Matthews of the West Midlands Police Force was required to resign from the Force on 23 September 1986.

The officer had been found guilty of failing to obey lawful orders.

DI Paul Matthews was named by Martin Foran as the main officer behind the fabrication of evidence which led Foran's conviction on charges of "robbery and conspiracy to rob", in May 1985.

The Martin Foran campaign understands that DI Matthews was a one time member of the now disbanded Serious Crimes Squad. As a detective constable in 1974, Matthews was involved in the interrogation of the "Birmingham Six" and obtained a confession from Patrick Hill (of the "Six") which Hill has always maintained he didn't make.

Martin Foran has been informed by officers from the West Yorkshire Force that the next step in their inquiry into his case will probably be to interview all the witnesses. It will be interesting to see if these officers are able to find the whereabouts of DI Paul Matthews.

Martin Foran ended his hunger

strike shortly after Christmas, though he still complains of not receiving medical treatment for his infected colostomy, and is still bringing his case

against two doctors from Frankland Prison on grounds of negligence. Martin Shankland (Martin Foran Defence Campaign).

According to the *Guardian* (16 January), Frank Field "is expected to be granted an official party inquiry into allegations of infiltration by *Militant* Tendency supporters into his Birkenhead constituency."

Field is a maverick right-wing Labour MP, who in the 1987 general election advised voters in the neighbouring constituency of Wallasey not to back the official Labour candidate (a left-winger, but not a *Militant* supporter). Labour lost Wallasey by fewer than 300 votes, so Field's intervention may well have been decisive.

After being deselected by his Birkenhead constituency in favour of a left-winger (again, not *Militant*), Field threatened to force a by-election and stand against Labour. For his disruption, one tenth of which would have got any left-winger expelled from the Labour Party, Field may now be rewarded with another disruptive witch-hunt.



Field has presented a "dossier" alleging "infiltration" not only in Birkenhead, but also in Wallasey, Wirral South, and the District Labour Party. It is not clear how wide the scope of any inquiry will be.

A grave digger to the party?

The new General Secretary of the Communist Party of Great Britain, its first woman, Nina Temple, acknowledges that the Party might be on the brink of disappearing. The Young Communist League already was when she joined it at the age of 13.

"Maybe we will turn out to be a party, but maybe we will be part of a movement with others or even a club within the Labour Party. Who knows?" she told the *Observer*.

The CPGB has declined to only 7,500 members. In the mid-'80s it finally split into its two distinct parts, the *Marxism Today* faction that has kept the CPGB name, and the *Morning Star* group. *Marxism Today* has essentially rejected all notions of class struggle and socialism, and in certain respects are indistinguishable from the Liberal Democrats. The *Morning Star* is an old-fashioned pro-Moscow paper — although who knows what sort of crisis they are in now?

Nina Temple is expected by many observers to be the CP's last General Secretary. If the Party finally collapses it will be no loss to anyone. Although once it was a genuine socialist party — in the early '20s — since then the

CP has been a miserable puppet of Moscow, becoming more and more reformist. Today, the CP openly identifies not with the dispossessed of society, but with yuppie culture, and openly accepts as immutable facts of the 'new times' what has been car-

ried through by Thatcherism.

The Communist Party of Australia (CPA) has meanwhile decided more or less to dissolve and help build a New Left Party (NLP) to be set up at Easter. By 3:1, the CPA voted to wind down its independent activities.

Apartheid's brown shirts

Armed strike-breakers wearing brown overalls are being used against the 10-week old railworkers strike in South Africa.

An official of the railworkers' union put it simply: "They are trying to break our union with violence."

So far this strike-breaking army has:

- Organised a bloody massacre on Germiston railway station in which at least six, but probably over 20, strikers died.
- Put one Durban striker into an

intensive care unit after 300 scabs attacked the union headquarters.

- Organised armed patrols at the railway stations to stop picketing and make it impossible to impose a rail boycott.

- Evicted strikers from their hostels, owned by the rail company.

But this violence has not defeated the workers. Mass pickets, including one of over 1,000 people in Cape Town, have been mounted to beat the scabs.

The events around the strike give the lie to Thatcher and DeKlerk's claims about the extent of change in South Africa.

Waiting for Mandela

Speculation about the imminent release of Nelson Mandela has now reached fever pitch.

"I don't think we are talking about months any longer," was how Winnie Mandela put it after visiting Nelson last week. There are still hurdles to overcome. But what will Mandela's release mean?

Firstly, if coupled with the formal ending of the state of emergency, and coming on the heels of the release of other long-term prisoners, the apartheid regime would be able to present Mandela's freedom as the latest step towards the 'normalisation' of South African politics.

Such a 'normalisation' would take place in a situation in which the balance of forces within South Africa itself is tilted decisively in favour of the regime.

Secondly, Mandela's release could well mark a new chapter in the history of the African National Congress, the largest force in the liberation movement.

Over the last few months there has been growing talk about talks. The regime clearly sees Mandela as a 'moderate' force who could be used to force a division within the

ranks of the ANC between so-called 'politicals' and 'militants'.

But so far the ANC has gone to great lengths to stress the unity within its ranks. That unity is based around the Haron declaration of the Organisation of African Unity.

That document states that the government should release all political detainees, lift restrictions on banned organisations and persons, remove the troops from the townships, lift the state of emergency, repeal all repressive legislation and put an end to all political trials and executions.

These, it seems, are pre-conditions for a 'ceasefire' between the ANC and the government, and negotiations. With the townships quiet, the government can afford to end the state of emergency — it has plenty of other repressive laws anyway — but is unlikely in the extreme to accede to the rest of the ANC's conditions.

Thus we are left with stalemate. However, if Mandela is prepared to accept a different kind of deal: the legalisation of the ANC in return for the suspension of the armed struggle, a strategy which risks alienating sections of the ANC's militant base, then things could quickly change.

Support this conference!

EDITORIAL

The extraordinary events in Eastern Europe over the past few weeks and months are only the beginning. Revolutions have begun there — especially in Czechoslovakia and Romania — but the outcome of these revolutions has not yet been decided.

There are several possibilities. Current developments within the USSR, in the Baltic states and Azerbaijan/Armenia, pose sharply the question of the USSR's survival as a single state. Years of national oppression are producing messy, nationalist struggles; inter-communal warfare has already started in Nagorno Karabakh and Azerbaijani cities. Elsewhere in Eastern Europe, chauvinist sentiments are rising. The revolutions could collapse in on themselves through national conflict and war.

The current enthusiasm for the market could stabilise, resulting in a new capitalist development in Eastern Europe — on a Third World, not a Western European, model. The bureaucracies on the one hand, and pro-market middle classes on the other, could be transformed into private capitalist classes.

In either case, the cause of socialism would be set back years, decades, even generations. But there is another possibility.

The socialist opposition, for now largely a minority voice, could grow into the dominant force in the democracy movement. The working class, emerging from years of state control, could develop an independent, political voice. And genuine, democratic socialism could be the result of the great struggles now taking place.

Socialist success in Eastern Europe would have indescribable importance for socialist struggle

everywhere. International socialism would be on the agenda.

And so, what is happening in Eastern Europe is important not only for its own sake — although no one could want to minimise the importance of millions of people finding, for the first time, a political voice. It is also important for socialism as such.

We in the West can make a big difference to what happens in the East. We can help the socialists triumph, and avert either violent nationalist degeneration or capitalist resurrection.

To do what we can to help the genuine, anti-Stalinist socialists in Eastern Europe and China is a task in which socialists in Britain must now devote themselves. It must be a priority like nothing has ever been a priority before. We can actually make a difference to the fate of humanity.

The conference on January 27, organised by the Campaign for Solidarity with Workers in the Eastern Bloc (CSWEB) is a superb opportunity to begin organising the left in Britain to make solidarity with Eastern European socialists.

Speakers will include a representative of Sotsprof, the independent trade union in the USSR, from the East German United Left, and from the Polish Socialist Party (Democratic Revolution).

Cheung Siu Ming, Secretary of the Chinese Solidarity Campaign, will be speaking on the situation in China, Adam Novotny, a student at Prague University, on what is happening in Czechoslovakia, and Bill Lomax on Hungary.

Peter Tatchell will be looking at lesbian and gay struggles in Eastern Europe and Hillel Ticktin of Glasgow University at the situation in the USSR. Eric Heffer MP and Jake Ecclestone of the NUJ will be spelling out why the British labour movement should back workers in the Eastern Bloc.

The organisers expect the conference to be large and successful. Socialists have a duty to make sure that it is.



Revolution in Czechoslovakia

Conference SOLIDARITY with WORKERS in the EASTERN BLOC

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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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Wages, inflation, and crisis

Prices have been rising fast. High interest rates, which have increased mortgage payments by over 60%, have pushed up the cost of living.

The problem which those high interest rates are supposed to solve — Britain's balance of payments and the decline in the relative value of the pound — also generates inflation. Imported goods cost more.

The balance of payments, in turn, is tilted by the decline of British manufacturing industry. Important sectors of manufacturing disappeared in Britain in the slump

of the early '80s. Since 1983 Britain has imported more manufactured goods than it exports, and the gap is increasing. For a while, the problem was cushioned by oil exports; now the cushion has worn out.

In short, the economic consequences of ten years of Tory policy are making themselves felt. But now the Tories are trying to blame wage militancy for the inflation. In truth, the recent revival of wage militancy has been a response to inflation, helped by the slight drop in unemployment. What the Tories are bothered about is not so much inflation as the fact that workers are beginning to regain some confidence.

Probably there will be a recession this year in Britain. The government wants a recession. It wants to reduce demand for imports so that the balance of payments will even out. Although there are many instabilities in the world economy, there is no clear sign of a world recession this year.

If the world economy continues to grow, then that will limit Britain's recession. It could embarrass the Tories, though: how do they explain that Britain, the country of the supposed Thatcher miracle, is doing worse than the rest of the world? The Tories are preparing the ground to blame wage militancy for the trouble. Don't believe them!

Freedom is fashion slavery?

WOMEN'S EYE

By Liz Millward

This column was going to be about media treatment of female politicians.

I was going to comment on the degrading fact that 'in depth' interviews with political women always included references to their appearance — as if they are exotic birds in an aviary whose plumage needs describing before you can tell what they are!

This, I'd concluded, is not only belittling, but horribly sexist because it never happens to male politicians. Now I stand corrected.

This month's *Marie Claire* (bought only in the interests of research — honest!) puts Chancellor of the Exchequer John Major under the fashion spotlight! Of course, journals like *Marie Claire*

seem to have only one approach, no matter who they're dealing with — fashion!

I won't bore you with man-of-the-moment-Major's dullsville sartorial secrets. Describing a politician's looks and outfits is just as silly when applied to the male politicians as to the female. If anything, it's even sillier! And this exceptionally silly approach to the man who holds the purse strings of the national economy brings out just how silly, trivialising and degrading the obsession with shopping and fashion and appearance (and pig-in-the-high-street consumerism in general) is!

Eastern Europe too is under the distorting fashion spotlight.

Notice how quickly the scruffy jeans and sweaters are replaced by Western-cut suits when the jailed rebel becomes a government minister. Contrast Havel, before and after. Notice, too, the proliferation of articles on East European women's proclaimed desire for Western fashions.

As a generation of Western

women don Dr Martens shoes and baggy pants, and the Islington set go naked-faced, East European women are (apparently) demanding cosmetics and high-heels. These women seem to want to join their Western sisters in discomfort, skin disease and degrading edgy obsession with clothes.

As George Orwell didn't live long enough to say: Freedom is fashion slavery!

Just around the corner from where I live is a brand new block of flats and houses. They are described as "one, two, three and four bedroomed luxury dwellings".

They are situated in the London Borough with the worst accommodation crisis in the capital. They are all empty. Reason?

The developers cannot sell a single one. The block has been offered to the council, but they cannot afford to buy it. So the flats will stay empty while families rot in bed and breakfasts and people sleep rough. It's sick.

4 EAST GERMANY

Don't worry Mr Tebbit

GRAFFITI

Norman Tebbit is worried about immigration. It's not that he personally wouldn't want to live next door to a black person, or a Chinese person, you understand.

In fact probably some of his best friends are ethnically diverse — or at any rate have occasionally met people who are. But he's worried about the effect of too many immigrants...on 'communities'.

Well, Mr Tebbit can rest safely in his bed. Because precious few immigrants from Hong Kong or anywhere else will be buying up property near him. The vast majority will end up, like other immigrants, in the worst bits of inner-city areas, facing all manner of discrimination, or in the Chinese case probably working for low wages in the restaurant trade.

We've heard Mr Tebbit's touching concern before, not only from Mrs Thatcher who troubled herself about cultures being 'swamped' in 1978, but also from Enoch Powell who, in 1968, warned us of the 'rivers of blood' that immigration would cause.

There has been blood as a result of racism — stoked up by the Powells and Tebbits of this world.

Meanwhile, Douglas Hurd has been spilling his pearls of wisdom all over Hong Kong which, as you probably know, doesn't actually have any democracy at all.

Questioned by Newsnight about this — er, anomaly — Hurd explained (wisely) that it was because, well, the people of Hong Kong had never wanted democracy before, and it would be wrong to rush into it.

So much for Tory liberalism. Their attitude to the people of Hong Kong is just old-fashioned colonialism: "the natives aren't ready for it yet".

Real democrats would say: the people of Hong Kong should decide their own future, through a democratically elected Assembly.

Growing literary voices are calling for Salman Rushdie, author-in-hiding of 'The Satanic Verses', to withdraw the book rather than risk further offence of Muslims.

Hugo Young and John Le Carré, both writing recently in the *Guardian*, urge this action upon Rushdie.

Rushdie himself seems determined to stand his ground: In an interview with the *Guardian* (January 14), he insists that Muslims, if they read it, would not find it unsympathetic. Indeed, one of the paradoxes of the affair is precisely that the book deals with racism in British society, and is by no stretch of the imagination itself racist.

John Le Carré's most forceful argument is that people who sell the book are put in danger by it. But that can hardly be said to be Rushdie's fault. He deserves our support in his continuing, personally very draining, stand.

Documents from the East German independent trade union movement

These documents come from the East German 'Initiative for Independent Trade Unions' (IFUG), which was set up in December with the aim of bringing together and organising rank and file workers into an independent trade union.

The first document is their founding appeal and the second is a reply "from below" to demands that the workers solve the crisis of the East German economy by working harder. The second document gives a clear picture of the economic mechanisms of "real, existing socialism" as they affect the workers. In subsequent issues of *SO* we hope to print an eyewitness account of an IFUG meeting and print more material from the IFUG bulletins, which gives an idea of the sort of struggle and demands being thrown up at factory level in the GDR today. IFUG is also currently preparing a founding document to be discussed at a conference in the next few

months.

IFUG has very few technical or material resources. The established state union federation, the FDGB, still controls massive resources, though its membership is falling rapidly and its presence in many workplaces is minimal. To ensure that a really independent union can get its views across to the maximum number of workers, IFUG requires funds urgently and has asked for support from the labour movement abroad.

We shall be setting up an account in Britain through which trade union branches, stewards' committees, etc. here can make contributions. Until that is set up, contributions can be sent via the Campaign for Solidarity with Workers in the Eastern Bloc (cheques made payable to CSWEB and clearly marked for IFUG), 56 Kevan House, Wyndham Road, London SE5.

Founding appeal

On 20 December 1989 brothers and sisters from 40 factories and establishments — partly representing other colleagues and collectives — met in Berlin to discuss future representation of the interests of working people.

An overwhelming majority was of the conviction that the FDGB cannot be adequately reformed and that we therefore need a totally new organisation.

We thus call on all workers to set up rank and file groups which will come together in an independent trade union.

We start from the existence of a conflict of interests between the workers, on the one hand, and factory management and the state on

the other. We shall only represent the interests of working people.

- We are not against an efficient economy insofar as this does not harm the environment, but we want to prevent this economic development being at the expense of working people.

- We want to jointly decide the aims and forms of production — from factory level up to the level of the Volkskammer [parliament]. This includes the right to elect and remove state and other managers.

Support this appeal! Build trade union rank and file groups! Take an active part in the foundation of an independent trade union!

We want to propose an alternative draft constitution and ask for your help in this. A founding congress should be prepared on this basis.

The workers should take control

Afavourite theme of the media, but also particularly of party and state functionaries and their managers, is once again the application of the principle of improving effort and performance — basically an old tune from the Department of Agitation and Propaganda.

Once again an attempt is being made to push responsibility for the economic crisis onto working people. If we're going downhill, if there are not enough goods in the shop, or if the GDR can offer less and less on the world market, then the workers haven't performed well enough.

At first this seems quite plausible, as it's a fact that one can only consume what has previously been produced. In brief, we live today according to how we worked yesterday, and if we live miserably, then we have only got ourselves to blame. It's true that most of us know that — apart from bad organisation of production, shortage of materials, etc. — we could achieve better results. Some people even have a bad conscience about it. Are we therefore also guilty if we're in a mess?

Seen from below, this, at first plausible argument contains a few important snags:

(1) Despite the much-vaunted "second pay packet", i.e. the subsidies for basic food, rent, etc., by comparison with others we are well on the way to becoming a low-wage country. This can be seen, amongst other things, by the fact that temporary workers from the GDR are welcome on the West German labour market — at least to the employers! For our colleagues there it means increased competition and pressure on their living standards.

If our workers get lower wages and are still supposed to make the same effort, this means that they are underpaid or, in other words, the rate of exploitation is higher for them than for other workers, regardless of whether they are employed here or abroad. If we are, therefore, less prepared to make an effort here, that only corresponds to the smaller amount we get paid for it.

If the inadequate total amount of money available for wages is just distributed differently it will only lead to envy and resentment between colleagues, particularly when

— in new models — they are supposed to decide independently among themselves how to divide it up. It may be that some of them will be spurred on to greater efforts in this way. But those who lose out will have even less reason to do their best. These effects cancel each other out; on average the total effort will remain the same as before.

So anyone demanding our full efforts must also pay for them in full. Our measure cannot be what some Politburocrat thinks out at his desk or has seen in the Third World. It must be the world average for work of a comparable type.

(2) Higher wages are only one side of the coin. There's not much point in having money if there's little or nothing one can buy for it. However, the question of whether daily necessities are produced in sufficient quantities or not depends least of all on the keenness of the workers. The planners — in the last analysis, the Party and government — decide how much of the existing productive capacity should be used on consumer goods for their own population and how much is used on means of production, export, luxury goods, the armed forces, the secret police, etc. In deciding that, the needs of the rulers come right at the top of the list and those of the workers right at the bottom.

Thus if less is achieved than is possible here, this is not just because of inadequate payment but above all because of the miserable level of provision. Further, nobody should be surprised if part of working time is lost to reduce the enormous extra expenditure required by a GDR citizen — in comparison with other industrial countries — if s/he is to get hold of food, clothing, repairs, etc.

(3) The quantity of available consumer goods is not however decisive on its own. The quality is decisive — and leaves a lot to be desired. Nobody is prepared to perform exceptional work in order to be palmed off with shoddy goods and rubbish for their wages, because everything that is at all usable is exported or frittered away by the rulers themselves. One cannot therefore continuously demand of the workers that they produce according to the best standards in the world and consume according to the standards of pre-industrial yokels.

(4) There have now been attempts for years — particularly in important economic sectors — to improve

inadequate willingness to work by so-called economic incentives. More money came into circulation through special payments and direct wage rises without a corresponding increase in quantity of consumer goods in the plan or on sale. When more money than goods are around, the money loses its value. For a long time we've been paying the bill, as prices have gradually risen. Yesterday's increased wages are "eaten up" by today's hidden inflation. What is even worse: prices gradually begin to rise more quickly than wages and that means that living standards fall.

Application of the principle of performance can thus only mean drastic improvement of the supply situations and matching the reward to the effort demanded by the state but correctly refused by the workers. In any case, this would only be a first step to ending the paralysis of the political and economic situation. On the contrary, these measures still having nothing to do with socialism, as long as working people have no alternative but to sell their labour power, regardless of whether the buyer is called a private capitalist or purely and simply the state.

The preparedness to put one's full abilities into social production could in any case be brought about in a different way; namely if we developed an interest of our own in

our activity, i.e. if our free initiative was given free play and the resulting changes were of direct benefit to the workers themselves (eg. in that growing labour productivity always led to falling working hours). But this is the big dilemma of this self-styled socialism, that every initiative which doesn't come from above is consistently strangled — that is the fundamental experience that everyone here repeats time and again from their mother's knee until they either lose the habit of showing initiative or leave this behind by "voting with their feet".

Without a fundamental change in this problem, i.e. the position of working people in the process of production itself, the GDR doesn't have the slightest chance of weathering the storm, but will fall into the hands of international big capital like a developing country, to be squeezed like a lemon. If, however, it was successful in winning the necessary room for the complete unfolding of the initiative of every individual, it would be clear how superfluous the whole Politburocracy is even for today's, but still more for a future, mode of production and what fantastic growth in production would flower from an overcoming of the master-and-slave relationship. In this way workers could in reality take over responsibility for the further development of the country.



East Berlin workers celebrate their freedom — but for how long?

Unite for East Europe campaign!

By Mark Osborn

British students are mobilising in support of the new Independent student unions and trade unions in Eastern Europe.

British student unions and Area organisations are already "twinning" with Czech and East German independent students organisations.

All this is being done without any positive help from the National Union of Students. There has been nothing from NUS to encourage unions to help the independent student unions in Eastern Europe. NUS's national magazine does not even mention the upheavals in East Europe in its second term issue.

For years, NUS has maintained links with the 'official' student organisations, which were little more than police state fronts. These organisations are thoroughly discredited. But NUS has given assurances that it will break 'most' links with these 'unions' only after the revolutions of East Germany and Czechoslovakia.

Ceausescu's official Romanian student union is, for example, credited with official status in this year's NUS diary. NUS has broken links with these unions years too late.

Not only the Kinnock supporters who lead NUS are dragging their heels. One left-wing group, *Socialist Outlook*, has refused to support the *Solidarity with Workers in the Eastern Bloc* conference on 27 January.

The one Area NUS where this group has influence, NUS London, refused to support the conference because the conference appeal calls for freedom of speech and association in the Eastern Bloc.

The argument was that any support for freedom of association in the Eastern Bloc meant support for the fascist and nationalist organisations which are growing in some countries! That was what Alistair Chisholm said, anyway. He is general secretary of NUS London (and god help NUS London!).

It was a transparent excuse for sectarianism. *Socialist Outlook* seem to be unable to think objectively about anything *Socialist Organiser* is involved in.

At the Socialist Movement trade union conference last November, Alan Thornett of *Socialist Outlook* insisted that his colleagues vote against amendments proposed by *Socialist Organiser*. The amendments were uncontroversial but Thornett insisted: anything from *Socialist Organiser* must be opposed.

A number of trade unionists opposed this stupidity in the *Socialist Outlook* caucus, and at least one of them subsequently broke his links with *Socialist Outlook* in protest.

In the student movement *Socialist Outlook* supporters have split away from Left Unity — again because of irrational hatred for *Socialist Organiser*. And now we have this rubbish about supporting fascists as an excuse for *Socialist Outlook* to refuse to back a conference aimed at organising support for the renaissance East European and Soviet workers' movements! Grow up, comrades!

LEFT UNITY



Solidarity with the East European
REVOLUTION!

New Left Unity broadsheet: 30p from Left Unity, c/o 56 Kavan House, Wyndham Road, London



Power still lies in the streets

Shift to the right in East Germany

By Bruce Robinson

The rapidly changing course of events in East Germany is increasingly outside the control of both the government and the organised opposition.

Since the start of December the political mood has shifted a long way to the right. A recent West German opinion poll showed 67% in favour of immediate reunification, an increase of 8% since the start of November. The mass demonstrations in Leipzig and other cities have become increasingly dominated by nationalist slogans.

While there clearly is a base for nationalism in the GDR, this shift is neither a necessary consequence of democratisation, nor just a result of the intervention of West German politicians — though Kohl's Ten Point Plan for a Confederation of the two German states doubtless raised expectations of short-term reunification.

It reflects the deep-seated hatred felt by people for the old regime — particularly, following the revelations of corruption amongst the SED leadership, and the exposure of the extent of Stasi (secret police) activity. This hatred often expresses itself in an identification of all socialism with Stalinism. There is also a widespread feeling that reunification is a quick way to a higher standard of living.

In this vacuum, fascists, such as the West German Republican Party, have already begun to organise. Though they were thrown off the most recent Leipzig demo and their strength has been exaggerated by the East German government for its own purposes, in the longer term, frustration and the growth of nationalism could provide them with a breeding ground.

In short, the move to the right expresses the deep crisis of East German society and the fact that none of the major political forces, whether the SED (Communist Party) and its previously docile satellites or the main forces of the opposition, appear able to solve it.

The SED lacks any credibility, particularly since the revelations of the corruption of the Honecker leadership — which was not merely a question of them lining their own pockets, but also of selling arms to countries such as South Africa to do it. Nearly a million members have left the SED since October, some no doubt rats leaving the sinking ship, but other genuinely

disgusted at what was done in their name. Many of the institutions which had semi-state functions, such as the official unions, are now shells, trying desperately to regain some credibility by trying to keep up with the mass movement through drastic reforms.

The state machine is also unreliable for the government. Though the normal police and the — largely conscript — army are still in place, the Stasi apparatus, which maintained massive surveillance of the whole population, has formally been disbanded and disbanded after the invasions of its buildings by demonstrators at the beginning of December.

Although only about one third of its members have been dismissed, it is unlikely that the government will be able to prevent the whole organisation going, at least if they are concerned to maintain a democratic face. The Prime Minister, Hans Modrow, this week abandoned his attempt to create a new secret police force because of threats of resignation by ministers from the other official parties (who now sit in a coalition government) and, more importantly, because of threats by New Forum to withdraw from Round Table talks with the government and call demonstrations and strikes.

A whole range of opposition groups, including both movements such as New Forum and Democracy Now and parties such as the Greens and Social Democrats, have been taking part in Round Table talks with the government since December. These talks have no formal status but supposedly give the opposition groups an input into what the government does without having seats in the Volkskammer (parliament).

Threats to withdraw have, on several occasions, won concessions from the government, and, so far, attempts to coopt the opposition through the talks seems to have failed. This de facto veto exists, in the last analysis, because of the government's fear of the movement on the streets and also because the SED needs to appear serious about reform and power-sharing if it is to win a sizeable vote in the coming elections on 6 May.

Until then, the government is only able to rule with the agreement of the opposition groupings, which are in turn increasingly unable to lead the movement on the streets. However, when it comes to measures where it expects little organised opposition, the government is able to get its way. For example, the clause in the constitution forbidding foreign investment has

been removed, state subsidies for basic goods are being dismantled and other steps towards a market economy introduced. This is taking advantage of the fact that the organisation of independent unions is still at a very early stage.

The opposition itself faces a number of problems. The first is that of material resources, access to the media and political organisation generally.

New Forum, with 200,000 supporters, was only able to publish 5,000 copies of a duplicated newsletter containing its draft programme. The SED still has influence in the media and printing plants of its own, while the official 'bloc' parties also have their own papers, offices, etc. The opposition has little chance of direct access to TV or the press and little money to develop its own press.

There is likely to be a lot of argument about a clause in the draft electoral law forbidding financial help from abroad, though it is no doubt intended to stop the domination of the elections by parties with rich sugar-daddies in West Germany. Although Modrow has said that he will make concessions on access to the media and funds, it remains to be seen whether the SED will use its advantages to try and rebuild its base in the elections. The smaller opposition organisations will probably have particular problems getting heard.

To counter this, six organisations — including New Forum, Democracy Now, the Social Democrats and the United Left — set up a joint slate for the elections. The political basis for this must have been confused as the United Left (explicitly socialist and for workers' democracy) pulled out after one day as a result of a dispute with the Social Democrats. The latter have since effectively merged with the West German SPD and are now calling for immediate reunification.

The coming elections have also caused an increasing split within New Forum about whether the movement should become a political party.

Several branches which declared themselves a party have been rapped over the knuckles by the leading committee and their delegate conference rejected becoming a party by 121 to 16. Despite this, New Forum has also stated that nobody who is a member of any political party can be a candidate of their organisation and are preparing a detailed political platform. This seems to reflect a widespread suspicion of political parties as being less democratic or representative than

broader 'citizens' movements.

New Forum's programme is perhaps typical of the mainstream of the organised opposition. It is a programme for a radical democratisation of the GDR, within the framework of a decentralised rank and file democracy and a mixed economy. The market is restricted where it "damages workplace or society-wide democracy or undermines the solidaristic or ecological foundations of our society. To prevent the dictatorship of the plan slipping over into the dictatorship of the market, we support strong non-party political unions and the real control of fundamental economic decisions of the management by democratically elected factory councils."

These councils are set up at factory level, where they have a veto, while at a national level Keynesian-style policies should be used to control the market. The right to a job is to be maintained, and a 40-hour week with no loss of pay introduced.

In reality the introduction of the market to the GDR is likely to take place under rather less pleasant circumstances and these rights will be opposed equally violently by the Stalinist bureaucrats and managers and by Western investors.

Increasingly it looks as if the parliament elected in May will already face a legal fait accompli about the conditions under which foreign investment will take place.

To win these demands will require a high level of workplace organisation and struggle, which has still to be built from the ground up. Both the United Left and the independent trade union organisations are focusing on organising in the workplaces, emphasising the need for independent representation of the workers' interests. But time is short and they face both legal and material difficulties.

The political vacuum in the GDR has meant a widening gap between the organised opposition and the mass of the population. As well as the political and organisational weakness of the left, this may also be because they often appear utopian and not to be proposing any immediate way out of the social crisis.

If reunification is not to take place on a capitalist basis, the left has to start from the immediate concerns of the workers that make it seem a real alternative to a discredited Stalinist system. The opportunities to do this still exist. The shift to the right is far from definitive.

But time is running out.



Czechoslovakia 1989: workers demonstrate for democracy and freedom



Germany 1919: workers defence guard

Socialists and

From Berlin to the Baltic, and east to the borders of the USSR, the peoples have risen in revolt against the Stalinist police state tyrannies.

Everywhere the rallying cry of the revolution has been democracy — undifferentiated, classless democracy. It is as if we are watching an enlarged reenactment of the 1830 revolutions in France and Belgium, or of the democratic revolutions which spread through France, Germany, Austria, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia in 1848.

It is a magnificent and inspiring movement, but it is also a naive and politically underdeveloped movement, a movement for which the long West European experience of democracy does not seem to exist.

Yet, the history of democracy is nothing but the history of more or less open class struggle. And whatever the people of East Germany or Czechoslovakia may want, the future history of the mass popular movements in Eastern Europe of "society" against "the state" will also be a history of class struggle.

The consequences of market economics and foreign capital will inevitably be social differentiation and the fomenting of class struggle.

The all-inclusive mass movements — typified perhaps by the East German New Forum, which stubbornly refuses to become a political party because it wants to be a broad popular movement — will break and divide, and their class components will make war on each other. Nothing could be more certain.

It would be better if the workers who are enmeshed in the great would-be supra-class movements understood that now, and began to fight for their own class interests. Instead, they are locked into movements which are dominated by pro-capitalist intellectuals, priests, and liberalising bureaucrats.

Working-class differentiation does exist, but it is at an early stage. Nowhere yet has the working class created its own class organs of struggle, such as were the Hungarian workers' councils of 1956, and the great workers' parliament centred around the Lenin shipyard at Gdansk during the strikes of August 1980.

Caught up in the great "classless" movements, the working class masses look now to the old Stalinist fake parliaments, which have taken on a life autonomous from the old ruling bureaucrats, and for the future they look to the creation of genuine parliaments on the model of Western Europe.

Whereas socialists in a country like Britain have had long decades of painful experience to help us understand the crippling limitations of the existing parliamentary system, and to learn that normally it is little more than a glove puppet within which works the grasping, stifling hand of the bourgeoisie, the East Europeans approach it from a different angle, almost from a different side of history.

For them, even the flawed *bourgeois* democracy we have in Western Europe would be a tremendous advance.

Absent are powerful working-class socialist organisations able to act as educators and as the historical memory of the working class, custodians of the lessons of our long world-wide class experience. This means that for the masses of workers newly awakened to political life in Eastern Europe, only experience with bourgeois democracy — experience from which earlier generations of socialists formulated a programme of *working-class* democracy, and counterposed it to bourgeois parliamentarism — will suffice to convince them that the democracy we have in the West, and to which they aspire in the East, is not enough, nor anything like enough.

In the East, Stalinism has dirtied and distorted the words, symbols and ideas of socialism and genuine communism, covering them in filth and blood. Decades of blood and terror perpetrated by privileged Stalinist bureaucrats who said they were socialists, and who used the old socialist criticism of bourgeois democracy to try to justify something far worse, now stand between the mass of East European and Soviet workers and an understanding of the ideas and aspirations of unfalsified socialism and genuine democracy. Experience will teach them — and perhaps quickly.

The following article, by John O'Mahony, first appeared in *Socialist Organiser* early in 1982 as part of a series debating democracy with Michael Foot and Neil Kinnock.

There are two distinct but interwoven strands in the attitudes the labour movement has taken to parliamentary democracy.

The first was and is ardent champion of parliamentary democracy and democratic liberties. In varying alliances with sections of the middle class, workers and early labour movements fought to extend the suffrage and enlarge the power of Parliament — often by revolutionary means.

The first mass political labour movement, Chartism, took shape around demands for the reshaping of the existing parliamentary system so as to admit the working class to the suffrage and make it possible for workers to be MPs.

In Britain, as late as 1917, the Workers' Socialist Federation, led by Sylvia Pankhurst (emerging out of the Workers' Suffrage Federation, which in turn came out of the left wing of the suffragette movement in the East End), based themselves on an extremely radical programme of democratic reform attempting to graft on to the British parliament features of the workers' council system that had just emerged in Russia.

In 1934 Trotsky suggested a united front with reformist workers in France for a similar programme.

The second strand has been the drive to create new, different, specifically working class organs of democracy — either by converting old forms for the purpose, or by establishing completely new ones.

The Paris Commune in 1871 was an example of the taking over and transformation of old forms. The creation of new forms began in Petrograd, Russia, in 1905, when striking workers who did not have political rights elected their own local parliament or council of workers' deputies — the 'soviet'.

After the overthrow of Tsarism in February 1917, a vast network of soviets developed, with pyramids of city, district, and all-Russian gatherings.

In their own way, from the ground up, the soviets realised such old working class demands as direct control of the legislature — delegates could be recalled and replaced.

The soviet network showed itself to be a uniquely flexible and responsive system of democratic self-organisation and increasingly, of self-rule by the Russian masses. Whereas even the most democratic parliamentary system was tied to the bourgeois military/bureaucratic structure, the soviets were counterposed in toto to the surviving Tsarist military/bureaucratic state structure.

"...the drive to reform and develop the existing parliaments gave place...to a commitment to soviets as the highest form of democracy..."

In 1917 the Congress of Soviets (with the Bolshevik Party majority as its driving force) seized state power.

Thereafter the drive to reform and develop the existing parliaments gave place, for millions of revolutionary workers throughout the world, to a commitment to soviets as the highest form of democracy, as the specifically working class form of democracy.

This commitment became a central part of the programme of revolutionary socialism.

In the hands of the right wing of the international labour movement the commitment to perfecting democratic institutions of capitalist society became a commitment of the bourgeoisie against the revolutionary workers. In Germany the 1918 revolution created a bourgeois democratic regime, with the right wing socialists in alliance with Junkers against the revolutionary workers.

In the mid-'30s the Stalinists dropped soviets from their programme and pursued alliances with the right of the labour movement and with Liberals to serve Russian foreign policy interests, becoming uncritical worshippers of the existing parliaments. At the same time they pushed the debilitating lie of Stalinist totalitarianism as a form of workers' democracy.

The result was to banish connection with democracy and to falsify very language and concepts.

The basic idea that socialists must continue the struggle for human liberty and freedom was expunged from the programme of 'communism'. 'Democracy', 'socialism', became cynical cries, shot through with doubt, think about the spurious democracy of the society where the Stalinist bureaucrats ruled.

Trotsky noted the corrupting effect of this on the labour movement itself when he commented on the Norwegian Labour Party: "I had occasion to become convinced by experience, that the bourgeois functionaries sometimes have a broader viewpoint and more profound sense of dignity than Messrs 'Social Ministers...'"

Since 1917, soviets — workers' councils elected from factories and districts — have been thrown out of a large number of countries in conditions of large-scale working class struggle.

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Defend and
deepen
parliamentary
democracy!

By Leon Trotsky

As long as the majority of the working class continues on the basis of bourgeois democracy, we are ready to defend it with all our forces against violent attacks from the Bonapartist and fascist bourgeoisie.

However, we demand from our class brothers who adhere to 'democratic' socialism that they be faithful to their ideas, that they draw inspiration from the ideas and methods not of the Third Republic but of the Convention of 1793.

Down with the Senate, which is elected by limited suffrage and which renders the power of universal suffrage a mere illusion!

Down with the presidency of the republic, which serves as a hidden point of concentration for the forces of militarism and reaction!

A single assembly must combine the legislative and executive powers. Members would be elected for two years, by universal suffrage at eighteen years of age, with no discrimination of sex or nationality. Deputies would be elected on the basis of local assemblies, constantly revocable by their constituents, and would receive the salary of a skilled worker.

This is the only measure that would lead the masses forward instead of pushing them backward. A more generous democracy would facilitate the struggle for workers' power.

We want to attain our objective not by armed conflicts between the various groups of toilers but by real workers' democracy, by propaganda and loyal criticism, by the voluntary regrouping of the great majority of the proletariat under the flag of true communism.

Workers adhering to democratic socialism must further understand that it is not enough to defend democracy; democracy must be regained.

The moving of the political centre of gravity from parliament towards the cabinet, from the cabinet towards the oligarchy of finance capital, generals, police, is an accomplished fact. Neither the present parliament nor the new elections can change this.

We can defend the sorry remains of democracy, and especially we can enlarge the democratic arena for the activity of the masses, only by annihilating the armed fascist forces that, on February 6 1934, started moving the axis of the state and are still doing so.

From the Action Programme, 1934

democracy

Hungary in 1918, and Hungary again in 1956, through to Gdansk in 1980, soviets have emerged as flexible forms of working class democratic self-organisation — factory committees generalised to the whole of society.

"The word 'soviet' has been utterly debased by association with the totalitarian bureaucracy of the USSR..."

The historical experience of soviets as a form of social rule is of course limited. As early as the end of 1918 the soviets in the USSR were being undermined as freely functioning democratic organs by the exigencies of civil war, and they were shortly to be gutted of all real life. This process culminated in the ban on every party but the Bolsheviks in March 1921. Intended as a temporary measure, it became fixed as the norm of the Stalinist political counter-revolution.

Nevertheless, it is clear:

- That these soviets, which have emerged in vastly different conditions and countries, are not accidental forms. At the very least, they are valuable organs of working class self-organisation in struggle.

- In Russia before they were blasted by civil war, they were a form of democracy more flexible, adjustable and responsive than any parliamentary system.

- Being independent of the existing bureaucratic military system to which capitalist rule is tied, they

are — to go by experience so far — the best form of organisation for a workers' movement that is seriously setting about transforming society against the will of the ruling class

- That they are more appropriate than any other known form of democracy to the socialist rule of the working class, in so far as it involves a qualitative expansion of the direct exercise of democracy.

- That they can and will re-emerge at intense levels of mass working class action, when the struggle overflows the channels of the existing system. We probably came close to it in Britain in 1972.

That is why workers' councils are a central part of the programme of revolutionary Marxism.

The word 'soviet' has been utterly debased by association with the totalitarian bureaucracy of the USSR — which as the sour old joke has it, contains four lies in its name: it is not a union, there are no soviets, it is not socialist, and it is not a republic.

But Marxists remain committed to soviet democracy. We continue the old socialist commitment to expanding democracy in a qualitative way. We explain the limits of existing democracy and the possibilities of a different democracy.

Is this Marxist commitment counterposed to the basic labour movement commitment to parliamentary democracy? Not at all.

Socialism is not possible until the mass of workers want it and are prepared to realise it — neither is an extension of democracy beyond the level already attained.

It is in the direct interests of the working class to defend the existing system against anti-democratic attacks. It is in our interest to extend it and better it (for example by making the next Labour prime minister subject to election by the labour movement, outside of Parliament;

by freeing the existing system from the dead grip of the parliamentary oligarchy of the PLP; and by ensuring that there is some relationship between what aspirant MPs and aspirant majority parties say they will do and what they actually do). All this is the difference between good and bad circulation in the existing body politic.

Thus Marxists have much in common with people in the labour movement whose best notion of democracy is parliamentary democracy. We can agree to fight to rejuvenate the existing system; we could agree to defend it with guns against, for example, a military coup.

Marxists can and do form such alliances with honest 'non-soviet' democrats. The reason why we cannot and do not form such relations with the right wing and the soft left is not because we are not democrats, but because they are very bad democrats.

They worship the miserably inadequate system that exists.

They have done more than any Marxist to educate sections of the labour movement about the limits of parliamentary democracy: they have even exaggerated those limits and made them far more narrow than they would be for a fighting

labour movement intent on defending the working class interest. They have, in successive Labour governments and especially since 1964, done more than anyone else to discredit parliamentary democracy and render cynical large sections of the labour movement.

The cynicism has corroded not only democracy but the political consciousness of the labour movement. Marxists, while we tell the workers who listen to us that they should rely only on their own strength, see no advantage or gain for our politics in cynicism.

While small groups can advance to a higher understanding by way of such disillusionment, the great mass of the labour movement is thrown back by it.

The mass of the labour movement will advance to a better understanding of the limits of parliamentary democracy, not by pure disgust with the Labour right — politically, that is a passive response, and politically limited even when it helps generate industrial direct action — but most likely by struggle, and by attempting to use to the maximum the existing institutions of the labour movement and of British bourgeois democracy.



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Left Oppositionists demonstrate for workers' democracy in the 11th anniversary of the Russian Revolution

Trotskyists versus the Gulag

By Hayden Perry

Now that Trotsky's name is heard openly in the Soviet Union, there is renewed interest in the fate of his followers in the Left Opposition. Survivors of Stalin's prisons are emerging to tell part of the story of the Gulag, that vast system of prisons and labour camps stretching from the Arctic to the Pacific.

On March 5, 1989, the 36th anniversary of Stalin's death, Moscow citizens rallied in Gorky Park to demand that a monument be erected to memorialize the millions who died in Siberia from hunger, cold, or the executioner's bullet.

Unable to answer the Left Opposition's political arguments with logic, Stalin was determined to deal with his opponents as the Czars had dealt with theirs. "Send them to the Arctic wastes of Siberia!" Stalin knew the way there. He had been there himself. So had many of the Trotskyists who were once more to face the hunger and cold of the Russian penal system.

What were the thoughts of these veterans of the Czar's prisons as they found themselves once more on the road to Siberia? Reports from survivors tell us they had one overriding concern — to continue the struggle against Stalin by any means necessary. This meant to use the exile system as a political university and organising centre.

The political centre of the Left Opposition had to be located outside of Russia. Germany, which was convulsed by the struggle against Hitler, was the logical venue. Trotsky wanted to settle there, but he was denied permission.

Trotsky's son, Leon Sedov, was able to enter Germany as a student in 1931. He pursued his studies, but his main task was organising the international centre of the Left Opposition. Soon from Berlin came issues of the *Bulletin of the Opposition* which, like Lenin's *Iskra* before, had to be smuggled into Russia and the Siberian prison camps.

The remnants of the Siberian exile system were still run by Czarist holdovers under the old rules. Although termed 'isolators,' these camps scarcely isolated Trotskyist inmates from political life and

thought.

A Croatian revolutionist, Ciliga, described the isolator of Verkhneodra in 1930. "It became the only free university in Russia," he said. Trotskyists were able to receive the *Opposition Bulletin*, write articles themselves, and circulate them in other camps through the waves of political prisoners passing through.

Within limits, the political prisoners could bargain with the camp authorities. They were tightly organised and could exert collective pressure. Their ultimate weapon was the hunger strike. In 1929, 1930 and 1931, Trotskyists staged successful strikes. But this situation was to change dramatically.

In 1933, German Stalinists and Social Democrats let Hitler take power virtually without a fight. Stalin turned to pacts with capitalist states to shore up his regime. All talk of 'permanent revolution' had to be silenced, its advocates eliminated, and all opposition cowed.

The Moscow trials of 1937, where old Bolsheviks were forced to confess to monstrous crimes against the revolution, was the public stage on which the remnants of the Bolshevik leadership was destroyed. The Siberian exile system was regenerated to crush every citizen who raised a dissenting voice.

Now titled Chief Administration of Corrective Labor Camps (GULAG) the system became a vast processing plant geared to break down the body and spirit through overwork, malnutrition, and exposure. The Gulag was vast enough to accommodate millions of prisoners toiling on projects from building railroads to sewing work gloves. Work quotas and food rations could be so finely tuned that life expectancy was gauged in months.

Four hundred Trotskyists confronted the Gulag in 1937. They were in Vorkuta, a series of labour camps stretching along the route of a railroad being built in the Siberian Arctic.

Goaded by inhuman conditions, the Trotskyists and others confronted the authorities. They presented the following demands: 1) separation from criminal elements; 2) reuniting families in different camps; 3) work according to specialties; 4) permission to receive books and periodicals from

outside; 5) improvements in food and living conditions.

To enforce their demands, the 400 went on a hunger strike. This time the authorities would not yield. They exerted counter pressure. They cut off their heat in 40-below-zero weather. They resorted to forced feeding. For three months, the prisoners held out — even as individuals began to die.

Then suddenly, the authorities gave in. They granted every demand. They even fed the emaciated Trotskyists special rations to restore their strength. But, actually, they were only being fattened up for slaughter.

We have eyewitness accounts of what happened next. Maria Joffe, a Left Oppositionist and veteran of eight years in the Gulag, was in one of the Vorkuta camps. In her memoirs, "The Long Night", published in 1977, she graphically relates the fate of the Vorkuta Trotskyists.

She and her fellow prisoners had followed the progress of the strike, and rejoiced in their apparent victory. Then terrible rumors began to ripple through the camp. Joffe writes: "A duty overseer came into our large tent and unfolded an order paper... my eyes saw every one clambering down, walking along passageways, rising from benches. Every one was standing up, standing stiffly, as if paralysed.

"The following have been shot..." The first lines contained the names of all those who had been leading the hunger strike. And then names, names and more names."

A camp doctor gave details of the executions which he witnessed. In an abandoned brickyard nearby there was a huge pit. All the hunger strikers and all the Trotskyists, even those who had opposed the strike, were marched to the pit. As the condemned men and women reached the edge of the pit, their lifeless bodies tumbled in, riddled by machine gun bullets.

In a last gesture of revolutionary élan, the line of prisoners approaching the pit broke into the revolutionary song. "Whirlwinds of danger".

Open, collective challenge of the prison regime was henceforth impossible while Stalin lived. But throughout the vast reaches of the Gulag, men and women individually resisted the relentless pressure grinding them down. To succumb

meant to betray one's comrades or to die.

Maria Joffe vividly describes the torment and terrors the women political prisoners endured. The position of the Trotskyists was at the very bottom of the convict hierarchy she writes.

Common criminals were told that the Trotskyists were the vilest scum. "We call upon you Soviet citizens to help fight these counter-revolutionaries", they were exhorted. Then the criminals were given license to rob and brutalise all political prisoners.

What the authorities wanted from the surviving Trotskyists and others were confessions and names of accomplices. The most dreaded figure in the camps was the interrogator. He held the power of life — or mutilation and death.

Maria Joffe describes her reaction to her first interrogation. As her name was called out she thought, "Why me...why first?... terror, abject, absolute terror stangled all thoughts and feelings, swelled, expanded and then poured through every opening, every twist and turn of my being. I felt numbed and deafened with fear from head to foot".

But when she confronted Kashketin, the dreaded interrogator, she saw, "A very ordinary nondescript man, sent to do an ordinary, unremarkable, routine job; to destroy human beings". With this insight, Maria recovered. Despite three rubber clubs on the table, she felt the inner strength to resist.

After endless interrogation interspersed with threats of the 'brickyard' where executions were carried out, a paper was put before her. She read; "Joined the party to carry out subversive activities...conspiracy...plot to organise killing...a group containing the following... names, names, names." She would read no further. She refused to sign.

The penalty was the punishment cell. Maria gives a glimpse of this hellish form of coercion when she was thrust into a tiny cell. "An enormous latrine bucket... with strings of wood lice all over it, all over the walls, ... the floor covered with human excrement with white maggots crawling out of it...no air... only unbearable stench, stifling my throat...I thought I was dying".

For seven days and seven nights

she stood in that filth. Leaning against the door, her nose to gaps where she could breathe outside air, she was allowed no sleep, jerked awake every time a guard peered through the peephole. "Back! Do you hear? To the back of the cell. Back!"

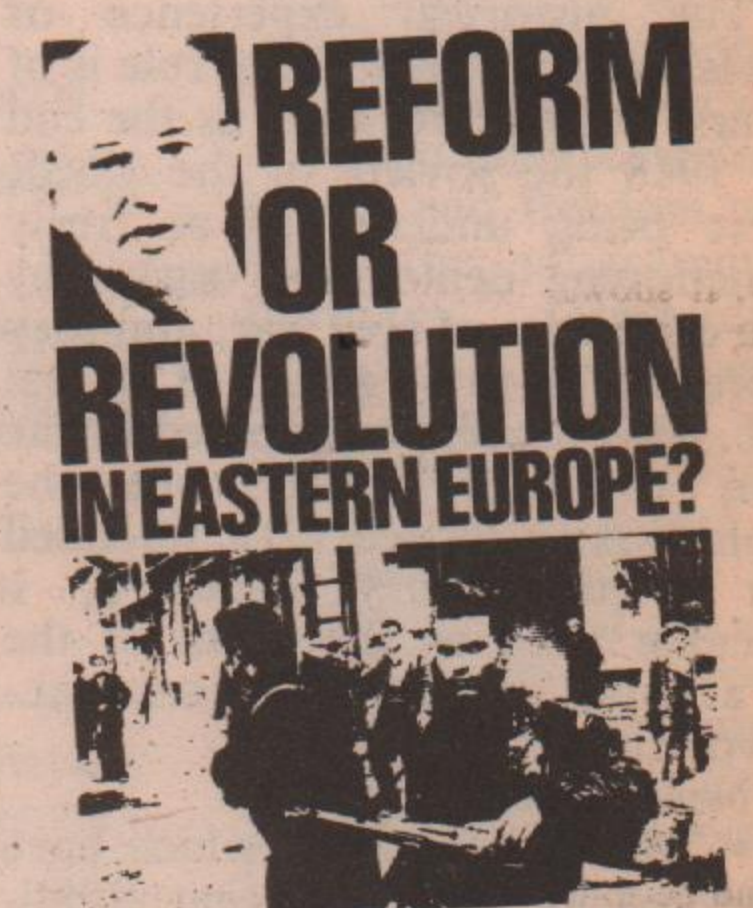
Joffe endured the week of hell and was returned to the company of her fellow prisoners. They cheered. "We knew they would not get anything out of us!"

Joffe reports: "I went over in my mind the day-nights of 'my cell' — and a warm feeling of satisfaction kindled inside me. I had managed to climb the first difficult and slippery slope. I must continue to work on those tasks that life had set me".

Her task was to remain true to the goal of revolutionary socialism, under the most difficult conditions possible. Maria Joffe endured the 28 years of the long night, and survived unbowed.

Reading her memoirs, we who have never been tested as she and other Gulag victims, we can only be inspired. Our task is to rid the Soviet Union and the world of Gulags and the exploiters who make use of them.

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A political movie without politics

CINEMA

Mick Ackersley reviews "Fellow Traveller"

Fellow Traveller" might have been called "The Singing Blacklisted Screen-writer", so close in type and pattern is it to Dennis Potter's "The Singing Detective" — fantasies that take on a life of their own, dreams and memories of mummy copulating, and so on, and so on. Except that nobody sings!

It is the latest British-made movie to be given exaggerated, and not entirely deserved, praise by a British press doing its bit in the praiseworthy cause of reviving the British film industry.

Though it is quite good and well worth seeing, "Fellow Traveller" doesn't deserve its rave reviews. It is that contradiction in terms, the political movie without politics — almost without politics anyway.

It is 1954, and Joseph McCarthy's "anti-Communist" witch-hunt has cut down some of Hollywood's most talented writers, directors and actors. "Fellow Traveller" deals with a refugee from McCarthyism (acted by Ron Silver) who holes up in Britain — as in fact men like Joseph Losey and Carl Foreman did — and works without a permit, scriptwriting for a kids' TV show about Robin Hood.

Meanwhile, back in Hollywood, his best friend, under pressure from the witch-hunters, shoots himself. The writer does not quite get involved with the dead friend's one-time girlfriend (Imogen Stubbs), now a school teacher in Britain and a CP "activist for peace". He breaks up a lecture on "Marx and Freud" given by his old Hollywood psychoanalyst (Daniel J Travanti), a CP supporter, whom he accuses of being an informer.

Finally, he brings his wife and children over.

We see the threadbare, dowdy early post-war Britain, just as rationing is ending and prosperity is rearing its multi-faceted head. Britain too has its political police. They "visit" the writer to ask what he's doing there. They obviously know all about him. But they are not very threatening, or even intrusive.

The "Communists" we see in Britain are nothing but peace activists. This is true, as anyone who mistakenly went looking for revolutionary politics to the CP in the '50s soon found out. But it is very one-sided. The CP was a real power in industry, and there, though it was a long way from revolutionary ideas, its working-class militants did not just peddle peace petitions.

The Hollywood CP we see in flashback to 1943 is a super-patriotic all-American organisation: fight fascism, support our gallant Russian allies and Uncle Joe Stalin! Though you wouldn't know it from "Fellow Traveller", that CP was the organisation that broke strikes — advocating in 1944 that striking US miners be conscripted into the army and forced down the pits at gunpoint under military discipline. It sold out the black struggle for equality, and vigorously initiated and supported the witch-hunting of anti-war leftists.

"Fellow Traveller" shows you people involved in this organisation, prosperous and enthusiastic, in tune with the US government and the US majority. It shows you some of the same people stranded and demoralised, on the wrong side of the Cold War divide when the wartime allies fell out.

Was that all "Communism" was? Was that all they were? Nothing is explained or explored. The protagonists could belong to any one of a vast range of categories of people at loggerheads with any one of a number of states.

Even the witch-hunt is not properly pictured or even etched in. For the high-publicity "McCarthy" and "Hollywood" aspects of it were late and peripheral. The real witch-hunt was initiated by the US government in 1947, and its main victims were tens of thousands of ordinary working class people.

Worse than that is the episode concerning the Hollywood psychoanalyst. Accused of passing on information, he is goaded into defending himself by saying that it is in Stalin's interest that the Hollywood witch-hunt should rage, because it discredits the US in Europe

and helps distract attention from what is going on in Eastern Europe and the USSR.

True enough! But the idea that the witch-hunt was fomented or fed by Stalinists to discredit the US resembles: nothing so much as some of the McCarthyite movies produced in the early '50s. "Trial", for example, a powerful courtroom drama of 1954, showed a Mexican boy wrongly accused of murder, a big radical campaign to save him, and his chief defence attorney deliberately trying to get him martyred so as to discredit American justice.

Part of the problem with any drama dealing with the US witch-hunts is the nature of the hard-core victims, the Stalinists and their fellow-travellers. It is not just that they were American supporters (though usually unwitting, ignorant, starry-eyed supporters) of a regime overseas compared to which the American system was the unsullied liberal ideal. Nor that they had themselves been among the most unscrupulous pioneering witch-hunters, though they had.

Fundamentally, the problem lies in the way they behaved under pressure and at bay. James P Cannon, Farrell Dobbs, Felix Morrow and the other American working-class socialists hauled into court during the repression of the early 1940s, were proud and valiant militants in their own cause. They stood their ground and eagerly explained what they were and what they stood for.

They used the courtroom to indict the ruling class, and as a forum for propaganda and agitation against it. They behaved as self-respecting revolutionaries of varying hues have behaved in many ages and countries.

The Stalinists didn't. After the first jailings — the "Hollywood Ten" — they uniformly followed a Party line of "taking the Fifth". They pleaded the Fifth Amendment to the American Constitution, which allowed them to choose not to "incriminate" themselves. They hid, lied, and evaded.

The CP USA was a very powerful organisation, with 100,000 members in 1945. It had built its influence in the labour movement on corrupt and bureaucratic backscratching, using even gangsters as allies. Under the pressure of the government offensive after 1947, its power and influence collapsed spectacularly. The US Stalinists slunk into their political graves and boltholes.

Hard-core members like John Williamson, Gus Hall, and Alex Bittelman willingly faced jail and deportation. The periphery built in the days of bootlicking for President Roosevelt suffered an immense moral collapse. The rats trampled each other to death in their stampede from Stalin's stricken US merchantman.



Daniel J Travanti

To make good, satisfying drama out of that, drama dealing with the substance of the matter — the politics — you would have to deal with the absurdities and grotesqueries which destroyed a generation of would-be socialists and, more importantly, were a major factor in politically derailing the US labour movement for (so far) half a century.

In fact, surviving participants in that awful experience have shown that they cannot come to terms with it. They either lie or fantasise about it.

Thus Lilian Hellman, who apparently died an unrepentant Stalinist, wrote best-selling memoirs in the '70s ("Scoundrel Time"), showing herself in a good light — and has since been shown to be an outright liar. She also ducked out, "taking the Fifth".

Symptomatic is perhaps the 1977

Woody Allen movie, "The Front", dealing with the witch-hunt and made mainly by victims of it. It has the Allen character telling the witch-hunters in court to "go fuck yourselves". But none of them did that, or anything like it. It's the fantasy about his youth of the old man who ran away from the war he should have fought.

Artistically, the witch-hunt sterilised Hollywood, silencing immensely talented people, like director Abraham Polonsky, who didn't make a movie for 20 years. Politically, however, there is never any very noticeable socialist content in the work of the Stalinists and their fellow travellers. The moguls saw to that.

On TV you'll maybe catch Barbara Stanwyck in an old movie saying that someone is "as angry as the *Daily Worker*" — but that's sneak advertising, not politics. What politics there was

in '30s and '40s Hollywood films was mainly glorifications of bourgeois democratic liberalism — about Thomas Jefferson, or Benito Juarez, or Abraham Lincoln.

Though such things were targeted in the early '50s, they were not just the work of Stalinists. And, paradoxically, some of the very best of Hollywood radical movies were made by self-prostrating turncoats who sang their heads off for the McCarthyites — for example, the fine movie about the Mexican Revolution, "Viva Zapata", was made by Elia Kazan in 1952 or '53 just after he had been a "friendly witness" for the witch-hunters.

It's a messy story from any point of view, with all the colours and lines blurred and smudged and unsatisfying. "Fellow Traveller" is worth seeing, but it doesn't even begin to get to grips with its proper political subject.

Rhino rescue

LES HEARN'S SCIENCE COLUMN

The wanton slaughter of the elephant is more well known than that of the rhinoceros, although both have the same cause — stupidity and greed.

The elephant's tusk is at least made of a material with useful properties, though this by no means excuses driving them to extinction. However, the rhino is being poached out of existence for a horn made out of nothing more than plain old keratin, the protein that makes up hair, skin, claws and nails in all mammals.

One use is to make ornamental dagger handles for Arab sheikhs, a trivial enough reason for killing one of the most impressive of animals. But the major use is grinding them up to make a powder used in "aphrodisiacs" for rich, insecure and gullible men. Rhino horn has, of course, no effect on a man's "potency", apart from a psychological one.

Attempts to protect rhinos have

so far met with limited success. One method, translocation, involves sedating the animals and transporting them to areas where they can be more easily protected. Unfortunately, translocation has an associated death rate of 15%, mainly due to problems of feeding.

Rhinos live on a low energy diet and must eat massive amounts to get enough nourishment. They depend on bacteria in their guts to ferment their food to release that energy, like cows. The balance of bacteria is related to the diet of the rhinos. Moving them interrupts their feeding, causing incipient undernourishment. The new diet in their changed habitat then causes an upset in the balance of bacteria with accompanying digestive problems.

Coupled with this is the problem of establishing themselves in a new environment. Young rhinos are taught what to eat and where to get water by their mothers. Having established them in a territory, their mothers then move away. When translocated, they have to establish themselves in an unfamiliar habitat as well as adapting to a new diet.

In one case, a rhino died after eating poisonous plants and another died after falling over a cliff, such geographical features having presumably not been present

in its former habitat.

Conservationists in Northern Namibia, faced with acute problems in trying to save the **desert black rhino**, have tried a different approach. They have simply removed the source of the rhino's value, its horn.

I say "simply" but of course nothing is ever as simple as it sounds. A rhino will hardly submit willingly to what it sees as a vicious assault. It has to be "knocked out" first and, being a fairly massive animal, it takes a fairly hefty dose of a powerful anaesthetic.

Tracked down by helicopter, the rhino is shot with a dart containing a powerful opioid (morphine-like) drug and a sedative. Like all opioids, this drug causes respiratory depression (a slowed rate of breathing), so as soon as the helicopter lands beside the comatose beast another drug to stimulate breathing has to be given.

The problem is that the rhino has been sprinting certainly from the time that it got the dart in its backside and has built up an oxygen debt. It will be in some respiratory distress as well as suffering some hyperthermia (overheating). If the rhino's temperature is too high, the de-horning must be abandoned and the antidote to the opioid given.

Throughout the operation, buckets of water are thrown over the rhino to keep its temperature down in the baking sun. The horn is cut off about 2½ inches above the skin, just above the quick. The stump is filed smooth with the rhino equivalent of a nail file and painted with antiseptic.

Then the antidote is given and the team beat a hasty retreat. After a minute the rhino is up and after someone's blood.

The question conservationists will want answered is "Will this save the rhino?" It is no use rendering the animal unattractive to poachers if it is thereby unable to defend itself against its predators or against other rhinos. Neither is any use if the de-horned rhino is unattractive to potential mates and can no longer breed.

Happily, no ill effects have been observed with the pioneer rhinos and poachers have left the area.

The question is now "Could this technique be adapted to saving the elephant?" Undoubtedly, the problems are greater: for one, elephants live in herds, not in ones and twos. But it seems at present as though desperate measures may have to be considered to defeat those driven by prospects of extraordinary financial gain.

The hidden hand

By Colin Foster

The free market hauls down the slothful and complacent from their seats and exalts the industrious, efficient and enterprising. Risk keeps the capitalists on their toes. Or so the theory goes.

And surely the current collapse of the business empire of the Australian capitalist Alan Bond must be a case in point.

Only it doesn't work like that. The punishment meted out by the free market may be dramatic, but it is not well targeted.

Even if the Bond empire collapses completely, Bond will remain prosperous and powerful. As the *Economist* magazine reports, "Mr Bond looks sure to emerge from the fracas a well-yachted and well-housed man."

Bond has been drawing A\$3 million (£1.5m) a year in "salary" from his loss-making empire. On top of that the business spent A\$6 million (£3 million) a year for Bond's personal office suite.

Bond's private company, Dallhold, seems certain to survive the collapse of the wider empire. His personal property will be untouched. No-one can recover the millions that Bond hived off from his businesses.

So when the free market decides that punishment is due, who does it punish? Individual shareholders in Bond's empire will lose out; but they were unlucky rather than slothful or inefficient. Banks who lent Bond money will take losses; but no top banker will suffer personally. The losses will be spread out among bank customers in fractionally higher charges and interest rates.

Most of all, workers in the companies Bond owned will be punished, as those companies are carved up and asset-stripped in order to repay at least part of Bond's debts. But the collapse has not come before workers in Bond's breweries are lazy or incompetent, or even because those breweries are ill managed or Australians' thirst for booze has slackened. Not at all: the workers are being punished by the free market because Bond gambled too riskily in the debt-financed takeover circus.

Another example of "market discipline" is the fiasco of America's savings and loans companies ("thrifts"), summarised in a recent article in the *New York Review of Books* by JK Galbraith.

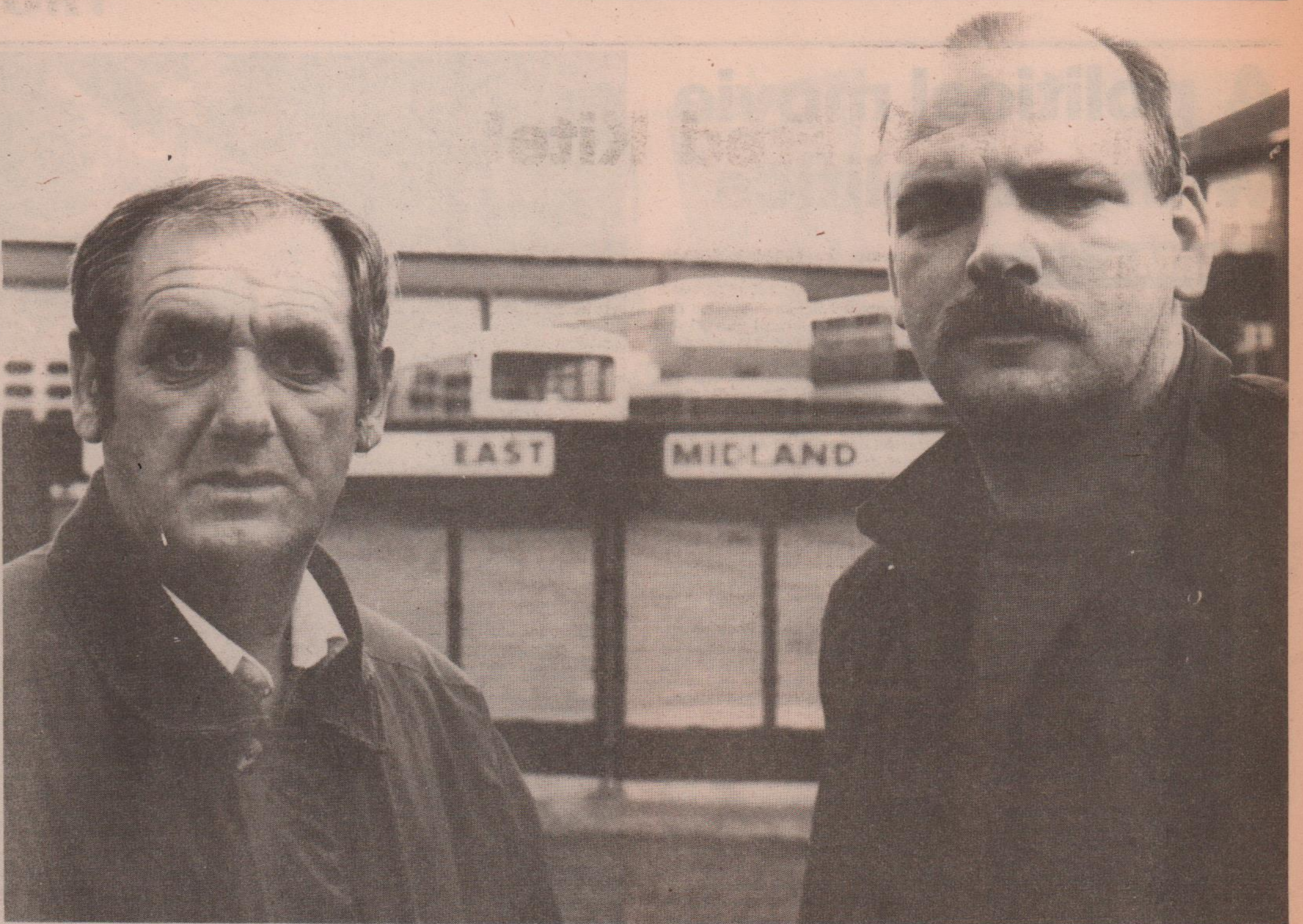
The "thrifts" were a sort of American equivalent of building societies. They were mostly small businesses, taking in small savings and making small loans for mortgages.

In the 1980s the free-market Reagan administration deregulated them, allowing them to move into hectic property speculation. Since the "thrifts" still took money from small savers, the US government continued to underwrite them.

While the going was good, the bosses of the "thrifts" siphoned off millions and billions of dollars into their pockets. "There were huge salaries and bonuses...loans to shadow figures identical in interest with those authorising the loans...Much money went for entertainment and lavish personal expenditure, including obviously obscene and extravagant local celebrations, parties in Las Vegas...company jets, Rolls Royce cars, and appalling personal dwellings."

Then the property speculation went bad. The "thrifts" collapsed. The bosses escaped scot free. They remain prosperous and powerful people. The federal government bailed out the small savers. The taxpayer foots the bill — an almost unbelievable bill, "upward of \$200 billion, or several thousand dollars for every taxpaying American family".

The "hidden hand" of the market does not work impartially. It is a fist beating down the poor and the working class, and an open hand for the rich and powerful.



Sacked union activists: left Dave McCann, right Dave Edinboro. Photo: John Smith (Profile)

Reinstate McCann and Edinboro!

By Rob Dawber (Secretary, Sheffield and Chesterfield NUR District Council)

Thought crime' is now a sackable offence at East Midlands Motor Services!

Dave Edinboro, a workshop representative at Chesterfield Bus Garage and an NUR member, was accused of stealing some anti-freeze. Of course he hadn't, and of course there was no evidence. But management decided that he had intended to, and he was sacked.

The real reason is that Dave Edinboro is a union activist and the union had successfully resisted a second batch of redundancies after Stagecoach Holdings took over the company less than a year ago.

The first batch of redundancies had been done through voluntary redundancy and natural wastage, but Stagecoach Holdings wanted more, by whatever means. A ballot of the 750 members in the various East Midlands depots produced a majority for an overtime ban to resist further cuts. The ban never happened — the company backed off. But they obviously backed off only to gain time to work out a new strategy.

Without warning, Dave Edinboro was accused. The accusation fell apart but management went ahead and pronounced the sentence anyway. He was sacked. That had been decided long before the accusation was made!

Dave was sacked in November 1989. His first appeal upheld the sacking. He was refused permission to make a second appeal to a higher level of management — the agree procedure.

Reluctantly, and after much pressure, NUR full-time officer for buses, Brian Arundel, agreed to allow a ballot for action. The result announced on 6 December failed to get a majority for 24-hour strikes (it got 43%), but there was a majority for an overtime ban (70%).

This began on Sunday 17 December, after a needless two weeks' delay while the result was reported, the NEC met, the NEC decided, permission to begin was

given and a date set.

Unlike the union, Stagecoach Holdings had not been wasting their time. Scabs had been bussed in from Scotland, billeted in bed and breakfast, and shown the routes. (Other drivers from Devon who had been asked to come and cover for "a bout of influenza" went home when told the real reason).

When the ban began, it was obvious that it would not succeed unless the scabs were physically restrained. The branches met in the Bus Central Committee and decided that the only response was to step up the action, to ask members to refuse to work with scabs and walk out.

Preparations were made. A personal letter to each driver was to be handed out from 4.30am Monday morning. The big mistake was to tell the Divisional Officer of this! He reported it to Arundel, who told him to instruct the branches that they could not call a strike.

At 12.45am, less than four hours before the letters were to go out, Dave McCann, Chair of the Central Committee, was fetched from his bed to the phone and asked to ring round the branches. He refused.

Nonetheless, the branches were instructed by the Divisional Office and they obeyed.

By the time Dave McCann reported for work at 7.30am on the Monday morning, the overtime ban was showing its cracks. At Mansfield depot they felt that, since they couldn't act against the scabs, then the only way to keep them out was to work as normal.

Management knew this when they decided to go for Dave McCann.

As soon as he clocked on they told him that he should take a bus out instead of doing his job of 'cash witness' — this is checking money brought in by drivers as their protection. It is an agreed duty. McCann was told that he had to take the bus to cover for another driver refusing to work overtime. Of course he refused. He was suspended.

Later that day they sacked him. The Divisional Officer then told them to call the whole ban off on

Tuesday. The next day, Wednesday 20th, management put up notices at all depots.

Henceforth, the notices said,
 • there will be no more time off for trade union duties without management's express permission;
 • the regular surgery days for union secretaries to find out about, and deal with, members' problems are ended;

• the joint negotiating machinery is finished — management will announce a new procedure of some sort at some time in the future;

• and from January 5th the company will no longer collect NUR dues.

And that is how things stand now. Two union activists victimised, others intimidated, many frightened to speak out, and the union effectively derecognised.

It was a terrible mistake to call off the overtime ban at any of the depots without a joint decision of all depts to go back to normal working together.

The price of this mistake is the sacking of Dave McCann.

But the real responsibility rests with the full-time officers who blocked escalation of the action. They didn't even respond to the provocation of the scabs. Instead, they kicked the feet from under the union activists.

No doubt they would protest. That they could do nothing else as the union could be sued for any action not specifically sanctioned by a ballot. And no-one wants the union to be sued, do they?

But what is the result of this extremely cautious attitude? No union! And in any case, with a proper lead from the officials a majority for effective action could have been won in a new ballot.

Now the management are going all out to smash up the union, and they won't stop until they have succeeded. Much of their success so far can be laid squarely at the door of these full-time bureaucrats.

But they will blame the rank and file. "In the ballot on 6 December they didn't want a strike, but on 17 December they did!" This has already been said as if to show how unreliable and untrustworthy the

rank and file is.

But circumstances, and therefore moods, change. And the activists are far better at judging what to do and when, because they are in touch with the rank and file. The full-time bureaucrats aren't — they are out of touch and living comfortably somewhere else.

The decision to step up the action in response to the scabs was absolutely correct. The instruction from the full-time officers to call it off was treacherous, unnecessary and helped management.

We should turn the situation around and remind these bureaucrats just who are the union and who pays their wages.

We need a rank and file movement that can respond flexibly and immediately where the need arises. And we need a rank and file that holds these bureaucrats to account rather than taking orders from them.

We know the situation best, we know which tactics will work and when to use them; we have the strength to win.

Even without the anti-union laws the trade union bureaucrats sold out many a dispute. Ironically, Brian Arundel himself, in his militant days, wrote with justified bitterness about how full-timers couldn't be trusted and would not look after the members' interests. And article he wrote when he was a Trotskyist, back in 1960, arguing for the rank and file to take control themselves is now circulating among East Midlands Motor Services busworkers.

In East Midlands Motor Services we have to turn the situation around. The local branches have set themselves the following aims:

1) Full reinstatement of the two sacked union activists with no loss of pay or service.

2) Reinstatement of the negotiating machinery and all union facilities.

3) Agreement by the company to continue collecting union subs.

These aims will only be achieved if the rank and file run the dispute themselves, rather than leaving it to sweet-talking, do-nothing NUR bureaucrats.

Come back Fred Kite!

INSIDE THE UNIONS

By Sleeper

Everyone agrees that the union side in the ambulance dispute has won the public relations battle hands down.

The five unions involved spent a lot of time and effort preparing their media campaign, pooling all their specialist press officers and putting NUPE's Lyn Bryan (who once worked for the Engineering Employers' Federation press department) in overall charge of PR. It was agreed at the outset that there would be a single "public face" for the union side and a single, simple message. The face is, of course, that of Roger Poole and the message is "arbitration".

Mr Poole is almost an identikit modern union bureaucrat: well groomed, young (well, relatively young) and, above all, reasonable. Under Ms Bryan's tutelage he has mastered the art of speaking in easily-digestible "sound-bites", ready made for the TV news. He avoids Fred Kite-style trade union gobbledegook like the plague. He has run

rings around the bumbling Duncan Nichol and the fatuously complacent Kenneth Clarke (who, one remembers with incredulity, was originally appointed largely on the strength of his alleged "communication skills"!).

The Nichol/Clarke act got the bird from the Great British Public early on in the dispute and has wisely decided to steer well clear of TV cameras for the duration.

Sections of the left tend to be a bit sniffy about any sort of concern for presentation, public opinion and suchlike; as though a "proper" industrial dispute ought to be unpopular. In reality, the knowledge that your union officials are doing a good job of putting your case across and that "public opinion" is behind you, is good for morale and can only strengthen the resolve of the rank and file. I, for one, have no criticism of Roger Poole's suits, haircut or his ability to come over as the Voice of Reason.

The problem is that the union side seems to be intoxicated by its media success and patently has no strategy for actually winning the dispute. Roger Poole has gone so far as to announce to rallies of ambulance workers that they have, in fact, already won the dispute. By which, presumably, he means that they have won the battle for hearts and minds — a moral victory. But moral victories don't put the ackers in the pay packets or red

meat on the table.

One word that Mr Poole (no doubt on the advice of Ms Bryan) has studiously avoided using throughout the dispute is "solidarity". Instead, we hear talk of something called "People Power", a novel concept in industrial relations, which is perhaps intended to conjure up some sort of identification between the ambulance dispute and recent events in Eastern Europe. If so, someone should remind Mr Poole that "People Power" in Poland, East German, Czechoslovakia, Romania, etc. took a rather more dramatic form than petitions and fifteen minutes of management-approved thoughtfulness.

It might also be pointed out that the unprecedented level of public support for the ambulance workers is not simply the result of Mr Poole's undoubted presentation skills: public attitudes towards trade unionism in general and industrial action in particular has been changing. Last summer's outbreak of strikes in local government, the London Underground and British Railways enjoyed considerable, though passive, popularity. When the workers in dispute are known to be poorly-paid and have a reservoir of public good-will to call upon; when the government itself is generally unpopular and particularly so on questions concerning the health service, it is hardly surprising that the ambulance workers are popular.

Poole's mistake is not that he has deliberately nurtured public opinion, but that he has not built upon it sufficiently. The day of action called by Hackney Council Joint Shop Stewards and North London ambulance workers on 6 December, won an impressive level of support in workplaces across London despite having no official backing from NUPE or any of the other unions involved.

There is little doubt that a clear call for solidarity action from the five unions and/or the TUC, would command massive support. In the absence of such a call, Poole's "People Power" approach is leading the dispute into an impasse. The result could very well be some ambulance workers becoming demoralised and throwing in the towel, while others (as has already happened in Crawley and nearly happened in Manchester) become desperate and withdraw emergency cover. Meanwhile, Kenneth Clarke (who seems to have a better grasp of the limits of "People's Power" than Roger Poole, even if he's not as good on telly) will sit tight, and wait for the dispute to crumble.

That needn't happen, but it will take more than slick presentation and passive public support to win this one. It will take something very old fashioned, called solidarity. Fred Kite would understand that, even if Ms Bryan and Mr Poole don't.

BAe stewards meet

We won't accept a deal like the one at Rolls Royce Hillingdon, with a 42-hour week every other fortnight and loads of strings.

"As far as we are concerned, this strike is for a 35-hour week and we're staying out till we get it, we won't settle for anything less, there's no point in going on strike twice for the same thing."

That's how one MSF steward summed up the mood of the British Aerospace Kingston strikers.

A lively group of Kingston strikers were lobbying a meeting between the National British Aerospace stewards combine and the CSEU — Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions — strategy committee which is in charge of the engineers' 35-hour week campaign.

The Kingston lobby was pressing for an escalation of the dispute through an overtime ban throughout BAe. They also want to see the national levy payments increased.

As we go to press on Tuesday 16 January, the meeting is still taking place.

The signs are that the strategy committee may well support an overtime ban across BAe and also move to ballot a small number of plants from the 'hitlist', which includes LUCAS, GKN and Weir Group factories.

The Kingston strikers were also keen to take the dispute back into a national campaign. As one striker on the lobby put it: "We're out for a national agreement, not a local deal."

The best way to rebuild the action would be to push for a one-day national engineering strike. As the first step towards the kind of sustained action that will be needed to win a national 35-hour week.

Workers are taking heart

WHETTON'S WEEK A miner's diary

Our branch, Manton pit, sent down a busload to the demonstration on Saturday in support of the ambulance workers.

Under the new Public Order Act we couldn't take our banners down and we couldn't march, but it was still a tremendous turnout by the ambulance workers and a lot of support was obviously there from many other trade unions.

Ambulance workers don't traditionally take industrial action, but they have been forced beyond the limit. It shows the extent to which the government is prepared to go, and the way workers are prepared to reply.

At the same time we have got car workers, for many years regarded as the vanguard of industrial action, now taking up the challenge again after a hammering in recent years.

At our pit outside contractors are being introduced, and the branch has taken action. It is the very least form of industrial action, an overtime ban, but it is action. It is a tremendous step forward in a branch that has not traditionally been regarded as one of the most militant in the Yorkshire coalfield. It is prepared to stand and show the management that we will fight this sort of privatisation by the back door.

When you look round the industrial scene, people are prepared to fight in many areas. I only hope that there is no sell-out of the ambulance workers. They are not just fighting for themselves. They are also an example for the rest of the trade union movement.

I hope the rest of the trade union movement takes heart and is prepared to stand up and fight against this government, not just on the wages front but also on other fronts.

TWGU: Vote Broad Left

By a London busworker

We are now involved in what could be the most important election campaign in the history of the Transport and General Workers Union.

The hard right-wing are on the offensive. Determined to win control of the union executive, they are waging a militant campaign against the Broad Left majority. Not surprisingly, the right-wing are being helped along by the gutter press. This week the *Star* printed the 'moderate' slate in full.

Nobody should underestimate the significance of a right-wing victory in the ballot. It could mean a return to the days of Bevin and Deakin when the union was run as a monolithic right-wing machine.

A victory for the right-wing in the union will further strengthen Kinnock and his allies in the Labour Party. For instance, the TGWU under its present leadership could be an important focus for opposition to Kinnock's attempts to keep the Tory shackles on the unions.

While campaigning for the Broad Left slate, activists should not feel obliged to defend their record on the executive or their ways of organising.

Unlike the right, who are campaigning boldly, the Broad Left remains a secretive organisation. For instance, it has proved impossible to obtain a full national Broad Left slate despite requests to prominent BL activists.

In London, the Broad Left control the London Bus Committee and were able to transform a 6:1 vote for strike action into a 3:1 vote for acceptance of an only slightly modified pay deal. This feat was achieved in the middle of the tube and rail strikes which paralysed the capital!

On the National Executive, Broad Left supporters have even voted to massively hike up union dues rather than dispose of some of the union's less necessary assets such as a rather plush hotel in Eastbourne. In fact, the Broad Left majority, despite the advice of Ron Todd, even voted to spend extra money on refurbishing it!

Nevertheless, despite these failings it is vital to mobilise the biggest possible vote for the Broad Left and to stop the right in their tracks.

Important note

All voting papers must get to the scrutineer by 9 February. If you have not received a voting paper by 27 January then phone 100 and ask for Freefone TGWU.

CPSA: jobs fight sabotaged

The DE Section Executive of the CPSA met last week to discuss action that has been taken around the country in favour of more staffing and a better service for the unemployed.

The strikes have been solid since spontaneous walk-outs began in the summer of last year. Since that time the CPSA Section Executive Committee has failed to draw these strikes into a national campaign. Most of the ornaistaion of the strikes has been done by rank and file militants in the face of, at best, hostile union officials, and at worst, the recent sabotage of the strike by officials who had declared that the strikes should end.

In Sheffield, two UBOs have been on strike since October. *Socialist Organiser* talked to a group of strikers about the climbdown by the union and how they felt about it.

What happened with the strike?

Simon: We're not going back, there's been no decision to return to work. People don't believe we've achieved anything as regards the claim on staffing.

Sally: The SEC passed a motion on staffing, saying that there should be a return to work on the basis of the gains made so far. In Sheffield that means ab-

solutely no more staff. The strikers are extremely unhappy. Basically the union has sold them out.

What do you think to the SEC case that the union needs to regroup its forces to fight Agencies?

Simon: Crap.

Sally: They said "Keep the powder dry" to fight Agencies. But that's nonsense, because they'll never get anyone out again on Agencies. That was said by the very man who came to Sheffield before Christmas and claimed that this strike was a fight over Agencies and we're fighting for the future of the union. That was part of the reason why we all came out before Christmas; we thought we were fighting Agencies. People accept that it's part of the struggle.

Simon: We got people out on that basis in Sheffield.

What does the rest of the membership think about what the SEC are now saying about Agencies?

Simon: Everyone is worried about the implication of the move to agencies. They see that it gives management an opportunity to attack the union.

Sally: The membership think that it's a nonsense that we're asked to go back to fight Agencies at a later date. They want to fight against Agencies as part of the present dispute. The officials proposed the return to work on the basis of a fight against Agencies, but had come

Islington CDC: 'We won'

By Nik Barstow
Islington NALGO

The indefinite strike by Islington childcare workers has now been settled. Agreement has now been reached in the dispute which started on October 7 last year — with workers back at work on January 5.

The strike was caused by the Council suspending the Childrens Day Centre managers who had been refusing to admit extra children above a 1:4 ratio of staff to children. The total figure the Council wanted in the centres was 680 compared to the 1:4 figure of 536.

In the dispute NALGO members had massive support from the users of the centres, the Branch, local groups, and many NALGO Branches nationally. With this pressure they got the Council down to a figure of 600, which equals a ratio of 1:4.4, which our workers in the centres have now settled on.

Pepita Willis of the Strike Committee said: "This is a significant victory. The Council was determined to use us as a test case for further cuts this year. We've knocked them down by a larger amount. The solidarity and organisation, built up in our section and throughout Islington Branch, is a basis for greater confidence and the ability to fight back in the future."

The Council's climb-down was a huge slap in the face for Council Leader Margaret Hodge — who had, almost single-handedly, kept the dispute going against the wishes of the local Labour Parties and advice from other councillors to settle.

For the local Labour Parties, and many councillors, it was the realisation that over 90% of the parents supported the strike — despite the effects it had on them — that really helped tip the balance.

Jo Thwaites, a member of the parents committee whose daughter Sophie — aged 4 — was locked out for three months too, said: "I hate Hodge — and probably will to my dying day. My daughter was chanting 'Margaret Thatcher, Margaret Hodge: what's the difference? — not a lot!' and I agree with her. It's about time people in the Labour Party decided who they want in charge...and get rid of people like her!"

The childcare workers were out on strike for over 15 weeks and donations played a vital part in enabling them to stay out. The Branch funds are extremely low with CDC workers still needing hardship payments. If your branch can donate to the fund please send cheques to Islington NALGO, 2 Orlestone Road, London N7 8LH.

The Branch also wishes to express its thanks to all those who donated to the dispute — a magnificent total, so far, of over £20,000.

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STRIKE ON 30 JANUARY!

Ford workers can win!

The Ford unions are traditionally pace-setters in the annual pay round.

Two years ago Ford manual workers struck for two weeks and achieved a deal worth 7% in the first year and "inflation plus 2.5%" in the second — triggering an 8.9% rise in November 1988. The settlement fell well short of what many rank and file Ford workers

had hoped for, but elsewhere in industry it was seen as a major breakthrough, and sparked a revival of militancy throughout industry.

This year, Ford workers could well achieve an even more spectacular breakthrough. The Ford Joint Negotiating Committee — headed by Jack Adams of the TGWU and Jimmy Airlie of the AEU — submitted a claim for an unspecified "substantial" pay increase plus a 35-hour week in October. Ford's initial offer of 9.5% was thrown out by 4:1 in a strike ballot at the end of last year.

However, the strike was postponed by the officials and Ford came back in the New Year with an improved offer of 10.2%. The Negotiating Committee rejected this last week, but put off a strike call until at least this Wednesday, when negotiations resume. This means that under the Tories' 28-day time limit for action following a ballot, another vote will have to be taken before any legal official strike can be called.

Nonetheless, the rank and file have already shown their willingness to fight: unofficial strikes have broken out at Halewood (where an indefinite walk-out by maintenance engineers has laid off 1,000 workers) and the Bridgend engine plant. The main Dagenham plant is likely to be hit by a 24-hour strike of skilled grades this Wednesday. In all cases the action has been led by skilled workers who will not benefit from Ford's offer of extra payments for electricians and for production workers joining "integrated manufacturing teams".

However, the Bridgend strike was immediately supported by all production workers and the Dagenham action is expected to be supported by all grades.

There is no doubt that Ford workers are ready and willing to fight and there is no doubt that Ford can afford a significant improvement on its present offer: pre-tax profits per employee have risen from £6,744 in 1987 to £14,020 in 1988 while Ford UK total profits for 1989 topped £700 million.

The main danger for the 32,000 workers across Ford UK's 22 plants lies in the prevarication of Adams, Airlie and the Negotiating Committee. Ford workers will remember how they were sold short in '87/'88, when the officials agreed to an "improved" offer worth just ½% extra, and called off the strike. This year there must be no back-room deals: Adams and Airlie must be kept accountable by the rank and file, through a regular delegate meeting of stewards from all the plants.

People have been coming up to our members in the street to ask what they can do besides signing a petition and giving money."

So spoke Roger Poole, describing the massive public support that exists for the ambulance workers.

But after the magnificent turnout on last Saturday's demonstration the key question is: how do we build on that support? What kind of demonstration, of what the TUC has called "people power", will get the Tories on the run and ensure a victory for the ambulance workers?

The 15-minute protest planned for 30 January is a first step, but something more than token action is required:

- The speaker from the Fire Brigades Union at Saturday's TUC rally got it right: "We should turn January 30th into the closest thing to a general strike we have seen since 1926."

- We should fight to turn January 30th into a proper TUC day of action. Activists should put resolutions to that effect in their union branches, stewards' committees, etc. If the TUC won't act then we need to do what is necessary at a rank and file level. Trades councils, ambulance support groups, shop stewards' committees and local Labour Parties should call meetings to discuss how best to organise solidarity action.

- There should be marches and rallies at lunchtime in every major town and city. These can then become the focus for walk-outs.

- Activists should push for

Solidarity with the ambulance workers!

solidarity strike action, preferably for the full day.

- Ambulance workers should visit the major workplaces in their area to get over the arguments for strike action.

With polls showing 80% of the population behind the ambulance workers, and 30% of Tory voters prepared to strike in support of the ambulance workers, a clear lead from the TUC could turn this passive support into a massive show of working class strength.

If the employers threaten the ambulance unions or the TUC with legal action to stop ordinary trade unionists demonstrating their support for the ambulance workers' case, then we must refuse to back down.

The Tories will not attack us if we stand firm, they feel that they are on weak ground. Remember that the Tories did not dare use the law against the car workers, bus drivers, miners, engineers, civil servants, town hall workers and many others who struck alongside the health workers in 1988. And today the Tories are in a much weaker position.

Solidarity strike action on a massive scale is the best way to pile up the political pressure on Clarke, Nichol and Thatcher and make them back down.

Such a course of action has a lot to recommend it to our side.



Photo: Geoff Ward

The alternative, of going for an all-out strike, has too many dangers.

It may well be true that the Tories would panic like mad if all the crews just walked out but they would only use the inevitable human casualties as ammunition against the ambulance workers.

This could backfire on the Tories, but it's not difficult to picture that hypocrite Thatcher appearing in soft focus on TV to appeal — for the sake of saving lives — to the ambulance workers to go back to work. Would anyone really want to give the Tories such a chance to get themselves off the hook?

No. Those ambulance workers who, like those at Crawley, out of sheer desperation, anger and impatience, are contemplating or have gone on all-out strike should re-

think. It makes much more sense to go out and campaign for supporting, solidarity strike action from other workers.

Every worker has an interest in defending the NHS, and every worker has an interest in smashing the Tories' unofficial pay norm.

Victory to the ambulance workers!

At the time of going to press, North West London ambulance workers were attending a meeting to discuss the result of their ballot on strike action. It was unclear what sort of cover the workers would like to organise if the ballot went for strike action. The North East District stewards called for a London-wide ballot to find out the feeling for strike action across London.

"We should stay out on strike"

Socialist Organiser spoke to John, TGWU steward at the Ford PTA plant, Halewood

We've just voted to go on strike from tomorrow, and I can't see us going back until we get an offer we're happy with.

We really should have come out last Friday, after the pay deal was rejected by the National Joint Negotiating Committee. The Committee agreed to postpone action until another meeting with Ford this Wednesday.

We let our convenors know we weren't happy with this, but agreed to follow the national decision. Since then, of course, we've had Bridgend, and our own maintenance staff out, and a large number of us have been laid off.

All we're asking for is a slice of Ford's ever-rising cake. Ford have made massive profits in the two years of the last pay deal, and even more are expected next year.

With union agreement, they've introduced greater efficiency, a reduction in demarcation and cut-backs in the workforce. The workforce is near half the level it was 10 years ago, and we're now producing more cars.

Thatcher has said the company should pay workers what it can afford, and that's all we're asking for.

Crawley strikers' own story

By Dion D'Silva

Our action is not aimed at anyone except Mr Clarke," Andy Lawrence, CoHSE steward at Crawley Ambulance Station said.

Crawley have been on all-out action since last week. They are refusing to answer phone calls and have advised the public to come direct to the station.

Beforehand, Crawley had been on full pay. To show solidarity, particularly with the London crews, they voted at a station meeting by a large majority to not answer phone calls. If their pay was docked they

would walk-out. This is what happened.

Nevertheless, the Crawley ambulance workers are still on the station 24 hours a day. On Monday 15 January, a consultant paediatrician from Crawley Hospital came to the station and requested that a premature baby be taken to St George's Hospital in London, which was gladly done.

There has been a lot of publicity about the man who died before reaching hospital. All the ambulance workers expressed their condolences to the family. Andy Lawrence felt that the post mortem findings had cleared them of any blame.

The public support for the

Crawley workers seemed to be as high as ever. The local St John's Ambulance have promised not to strike-break. Andy said they were "cheered senseless" by the public and other ambulance workers at

last Saturday's rally.

Andy Lawrence felt that all action, including solidarity action, should be taken if it could bring a quick end to the dispute.

Strike for your own safety

The Transport and General Workers' Union's oil industry committee has discussed putting pressure on the oil bosses over the question of safety, in order to get the employers to pressurise the

government to settle with the ambulance workers.

This is a gesture in the right direction, but much more is needed.

In the interests of their own safety, workers in dangerous jobs should strike in protest at the threat to their lives posed by the Tories' lock-out of the ambulance workers.