

# SOCIALIST

## ORGANISER

**Vote Labour in Mid-Staffs!**



Tony Benn MP

### Benn calls for civil disobedience

# GET THE TORIES

# ON THE RUN!

#### By Tony Benn MP

Britain is now witnessing the first major civil disobedience campaign since the Suffragettes demanded votes for women before the First World War, and in both cases the issue was the same — the demand for, and defence of, democratic rights.

For the real purpose of the poll tax is to destroy local democracy, and to enforce a tight central con-

trol from Whitehall in order to widen the gap between rich and poor, and to punish those who cannot afford to pay it, or, on principle, have decided to refuse to pay.

Non-violent civil disobedience has a long history in the politics of Britain and other countries, and we had better understand that if we are to respond to what is happening.

The American Colonists broke with King George III over the tax on tea that triggered off the Boston Tea Party, Mr Gandhi led a huge national campaign in India over the hated Salt Tax and we are also see-

ing the same process at work in Eastern Europe and South Africa.

Many of our most precious religious and political rights in this country were won by conscientious law-breaking which compelled parliament to make the necessary concessions to justice.

There is no moral obligation to obey an unjust law, but those who decide to defy such laws, on moral grounds, must expect to be punished, believing that their sacrifice may help others, later, when the judgement of history confirms their stand.

Many people, including some Labour MPs, do not intend to pay the poll tax and the labour movement must defend all those who are, for whatever reason, refusing to pay and pledge itself to an amnesty to lift all the penalties which may be imposed on them.

The vicious campaigns against non-payment which are now beginning in the Tory press show how frightened they are by the extent of the popular resistance that is emerging, which is why they are desperately trying to suggest, against all the evidence, that it is all

being orchestrated by a handful of dangerous and violent people.

If enough people stand firm against the poll tax, we can compel the government to withdraw it, and then repeal this wicked law by using our votes in the next general election.

**Tony Benn was speaking at Ilford. More on the poll tax pages 2 and 12.**

**Stop the Poll Tax! Don't Pay, Don't Collect!**

## 2 POLL TAX

# Building the campaign in Manchester

By Nick Clarke

**M**anchester Labour Against the Cuts and the Poll Tax held its second conference on Saturday 17 March.

Supported by 12 Labour councillors, the conference brought together about 75 people, drawn from Labour Parties, trade union branches, Anti-Poll Tax Unions and student organisations.

Unfortunately, the conference hardly reflected the extent of local people's opposition to the poll tax in terms of both size and representation. There were very few representatives of tenants associations, for example.

There has been an upsurge of protest over the last two weeks. We have witnessed masses of ordinary people showing their fear and anger towards the poll tax. It is against this background that the conference seemed disappointing.

However, this is perhaps indicative of the situation in Manchester. The Labour council set its £425 poll tax level early, before the nationwide show of discontent. To a certain extent this has undermined the local protest movement, albeit temporarily, by depriving it of a rallying point.

However, despite these problems, the conference passed the following

policies, which hopefully will redress the balance and give new vitality and confidence to the local campaigns.

The conference restated its commitment to mass non-payment and non-collection. Support was extended to local housing workers who have recently taken a firm stand of non-implementation when the housing office is to be used for collection.

It was agreed to build for the national demonstration on 31 March, and to build support for a lunchtime May Day demonstration in Manchester.

The conference also agreed to extend active support to Manchester's 130 tenants' associations, encouraging tenants occupations of the administration offices, and to organise mass support for any worker victimised as a result of refusing to pay or implement the tax.

The most important position adopted involves the forthcoming council elections. In seven wards of the city the Labour candidates support Labour Against the Cuts and Poll Tax. It was stressed that they should stand on a Don't Pay, Don't Collect platform. This provides a great opportunity to build and strengthen the protest movement in the trade unions and the local community.

It is vital that they stand on such



a platform now. The Labour Party leadership has once again turned its back on the working class. While Kinnoch proclaims his 'agreement' with Thatcher in the House of

Commons, it is fundamental that party activists work to convince people to exercise their democratic will and fight the poll tax now.

Kinnoch's electoral politics will

take at least four years to replace the poll tax. A mass, democratic campaign of non-payment and non-implementation will defeat the poll tax now.

## Angriest meeting ever in Northampton

By Pat Markey

**T**he Northampton Chronicle and the Echo said more than 500 people, BBC Radio Northampton said 700, but the town hall keeper who supports us and was present at the meeting reckoned there were between 800 and 1,000 people at the recent anti-poll tax public meeting called by St Crispins Residents Against the Poll Tax (SCRAP) at Northampton's Guildhall.

Someone said it was the largest public meeting in Northampton since the 1953 rent rises! It was almost certainly the angriest.

Speakers from anti-poll tax campaigns in Bedford and Birmingham outlined their experiences and we had contributions from SCRAP and from the secretary of Northampton Trades Council, and the leader of the Labour group on the borough council.

The last two speakers, whilst lending their support to the campaign, were left in no doubt as to the feeling of the meeting when they failed to add their weight to support for mass non-payment of the poll tax.

However, it was also pointed out that while we supported mass non-payment it was important not to exclude those who were against the poll tax but wouldn't commit themselves to non-payment. They could still play an important role in building a mass campaign.

And also when non-payment is being discussed, it should be done so in an honest way. Only by being honest about the pitfalls of non-

payment can we effectively attempt to organise mass non-payment.

The meeting also gave a platform to a local van driver who had been sacked for refusing to deliver poll tax literature. We are now organising a follow-up meeting to set up local estate campaigns, to get support for a demonstration and rally in April, and to discuss solidarity for the sacked van driver.

# PAY NO POLL TAX

All Britain Anti-Poll Tax Federation

# the DEMO

## Sat 31st March

Meet at Kennington Park at 12 noon

## Danger — women at work

### WOMEN'S EYE

By Liz Millward

**C**an women lift desks, safes and filing cabinets? Can women re-wire a house or do heavy building work? Yes, but only if they are butch lesbians! At least that was the verdict of the men who moved (or rather didn't move) our photocopier.

My department moved offices last week. We got a leaflet from 'Women's Moves' when we were looking round for removal firms to give us estimates, and asked them to come round. There are two men in our office, both of whom appeared genuinely puzzled: "Women can't move furniture!" they said.

The women from 'Women's Moves' would have got the job on charm alone. Unlike the many male contractors whom we deal with every

day, she listened to us, discussed our requirements sensibly (and gave us the lowest quote).

The first thing to arrive at the new office on the day was the photocopier. That was brought by the two blokes who had sized it up before (they said) and then couldn't get it through the door when — quite literally — it came to the crunch. Until that point they had known best. But, despite their 100% failure rate they still had a word to say about 'Women's Moves' — "They don't look like women to me!"

20 minutes later (well ahead of schedule), 'Women's Moves' arrived, took the offending door off its hinges, moved the furniture in without apparent effort, helped us arrange the new office, put the door back and departed, all smiles. They looked a bit dusty, but definitely like women.

Throughout the preparation for the move several of my female colleagues could not wait for the "butch dykes" to come. They wanted to see a real live lesbian and here was their chance — because only lesbians would take a job mov-

ing furniture, everyone knows that, don't they?

The men weren't quite as keen to see the strange animals (oo-er) but they did want to see if women could really lift furniture.

Some really unpleasant ideas crawled out from under the filing cabinets. It's a bit of a shock to find that the person you sit next to sounds like a Sun editorial when it comes to sexuality.

I'd like to say that those attitudes have gone now that people have seen what women can do if they want to. Most people agreed that it was good not to be called "love" and to be listened to.

But I fear it will take lots more 'Women's Moves' before some of my colleagues stop being afraid of being out of step if they do not subscribe to the idea that women who do certain jobs must be lesbians, and that lesbians must be butch, ugly and predatory.

What a miserable society we live in where people are force-fed such ideas and attitudes and what terrible restrictions those ideas place on people.

## Revolt in the Tory shires

By Tony Serjeant, Priorswood APTU, and Nathan May, Holway APTU

**O**ne heartening thing about the poll tax is the way that vehement protest against the tax has not been confined to the urban Labour strongholds.

Take Taunton, for example. This county town of a Tory shire county witnessed its biggest demonstration possibly since Monmouth's pitchfork rebellion of 1685.

Around 5,000 marched through the town at the beginning of March. Since then, anti-poll tax groups have gained much ground in the

town.

The march was called by an organisation calling itself the 'Anti-Poll Tax Alliance'. Unfortunately, the Alliance has no membership or democratic structures, and worse, is against mass non-payment. That is why there is a blossoming of small community-rooted anti-poll tax unions supporting those that can't pay and organising the people that won't.

One such is Priorswood and District APTU, based on an area of North Taunton. In the space of two weeks, 4,000 leaflets have been distributed, two public meetings held and 30-40 members recruited to the union.

The Priorswood APTU plans to meet regularly every Tuesday and is organising a canvass to gain members in every street throughout the area. If it can happen in Taunton it can happen anywhere!

## Extraordinary meeting

By Ivan Wels

**I**t was meant to be an ordinary business meeting of the Clifton Anti-Poll Tax Campaign, the second in its short existence.

The sort of meeting where a few people would discuss a few mundane details about the Saturday stall, door-to-door canvassing, leaflets and so on.

What we had was a room crammed with 120 people, ranging in age from children to pensioners, trade unionists and unemployed, ex-Tory voters, Labour voters and those

who don't bother voting at all.

Some came for information: "Would I the bailiffs take away all my furniture?", "Would I go to prison?" Others were proposing events such as a march through the Clifton Estate, collection of poll tax bills and sending the bills to Maggie Thatcher.

At the end, a committee of 15 people was set up and a public meeting for 28 March was organised so that people could be mobilised for the demonstration on 31 March.

60 new members were signed up and everyone felt that this campaign, properly organised, could grow into thousands of members committed to non-payment.

# Hands off Lithuania!

## The dupes get wise

### EDITORIAL

Armed with the dictator's power voted him by the largely unelected USSR parliament last week, Mikhail Gorbachev has been quick to show how he intends to use that power.

He gave the elected Lithuanian parliament an ultimatum to withdraw its declaration of independence from the USSR. When the Lithuanians refused to surrender Gorbachev started a systematic campaign of political, economic, and, increasingly, military pressure to bash them into line.

USSR troops and police have taken control of the border between Lithuania and the USSR, of power stations, and of other key installations. Outgoing Lithuanian broadcasts have been jammed by Moscow. The Russian army is doing heavy "manoeuvres" around Lithuania.

All in all, Gorbachev is mounting an old-fashioned campaign of threats and intimidation against a country of three and a half million people.

Gorbachev's problem is that Lithuania will be the first of many, if it is allowed to secede. The two other Baltic republics, Estonia and Latvia, annexed by Stalin in 1940 as part of his 1939 deal with Hitler, would quickly follow.

Then the Asiatic and Transcaucasian republics, Georgia for example, would go. And soon the Ukraine, with its 50 million people, the most industrially developed part of the USSR, would follow. The USSR would break up.

No Russian government other than a democratic socialist government committed to internationalism and to the freedom of the long-oppressed minority nations within the USSR — where they add up to the majority of the population — will allow the Great Russian empire that is the USSR to break up. No other government could survive such a collapse of the Russian state.

Gorbachev and his associates are not so weak that they have no choice but to let the USSR break up. They have tremendous reserves of strength and can mobilise them in such a cause.

Faced with massive intimidation, the Lithuanians now say that they see the move to independence as a longish process about which they want to talk to the Russians. If he feels it necessary, Gorbachev will use all-out force to avert the beginning of the break-up of the USSR. That is the unmistakable message of the campaign of intimidation against Lithuania.

The bourgeois leaders in the West signal their willingness to look away as Gorbachev asserts Moscow's muscle against the tiny breakaway republic. They aren't going to let Lithuania disrupt their semi-partnership with Gorbachev, out of which they hope to gain the chance to asset-strip Eastern Europe and the USSR itself.

Gorbachev, the new-minted dictator, combines getting tough on the Baltic — and, by implication, with the other oppressed nationalities — with a firm commit-



ment to introduce free market economics into the USSR on the Polish model *within four months* — by July. The rouble is soon to be made convertible, and the USSR opened up to exploitation by international capital. Gorbachev is his own man, but he is also — so the Western capitalists hope — theirs.

Socialists need to be clear that we give our outright support to the right of the oppressed nations in the USSR to secede if they want to, and that we condemn all threats and all coercion against them.

What such socialist politics mean for the USSR now is very well expressed in the words Vladimir Lenin addressed to the "April conference" of the Bolshevik Party

in 1917. That was the conference at which Lenin oriented the party towards the struggle to take power, one of the turning points in the history of the international socialist movement.

Here Lenin passionately denounces the then liberal Russian government for not recognising the right of countries like Finland, Poland (then still parts of the Russian empire) and the Ukraine to secede. The Bolshevik party had championed the rights of small nations all through its history, fighting both Great Russian chauvinists and comrades such as Rosa Luxemburg who opposed — from a socialist point of view — the independence of Poland.

We print this edited extract from Lenin's speech — some now obscure polemical references have been cut — not only because we agree with his ideas on the question, but because it is necessary now to insist, amidst the howls that Lenin was the real founder of Stalinism, that the opposite was true. Lenin's ideas, here as elsewhere, were the very opposite of Stalin's.

And now Lenin's ideas are the alternative to both the politics of the post-Stalinist dictator Gorbachev and his cynical collaborators like Margaret Thatcher and George Bush. Hands off Lithuania! Freedom for all those nations within the USSR who want to have it!

## "We Russians must emphasise the right to secede"

**Excerpts from Lenin's speech on the national question at the Bolshevik party conference on 29 April 1917.**

**S**eparatism is growing in Finland. There, a crisis is maturing: dissatisfaction with Governor-General Rodichev is rife, but [some socialists] insist that the Finns ought to wait for the constituent assembly, that then an agreement will be conducted between Finland and Russia.

An agreement: what about? The Finns must maintain that they are entitled to determine their own destiny in their own way, and any Great Russian who denies this right is a chauvinist.

The method [suggested by the 'ultra-left' Bolshevik Yuri Pyatakov] of accomplishing a socialist revolution under the slogan "down with frontiers", is utterly absurd. What does the "method" of socialist revolution under the slogan, "down with frontiers", mean?

We maintain that the state is

necessary, and the existence of a state presupposes frontiers. The state may, of course, be ruled by a bourgeois government, while we want Soviets. But even Soviets are confronted with the question of frontiers.

What does "down with frontiers" mean? This is the beginning of anarchy... The "method" of socialist revolution under the slogan, "down with frontiers", is a hodge-podge.

When the time is ripe for a socialist revolution, when the revolution finally occurs, it will sweep across into other countries, and we shall help it to do so, but how, we do not know.

"The method of socialist revolution" is a mere phrase, devoid of content. Insofar as the bourgeois revolution has left some problems unsolved, we stand for their solution.

As regards the separatist movement, we are indifferent, neutral. If Finland, if Poland, if the Ukraine break away from Russia, there is nothing bad about that. What is there bad about it? Anyone who says there is, is a chauvinist. It would be madness to continue the policy of Tsar Nicholas.

Once upon a time Alexander I and Napoleon traded peoples, once upon a time tsars traded portions of Poland. Are we to continue these tactics of the tsars? This is the repudiation of the tactics of internationalism, this is chauvinism of the worst brand. Suppose Finland does secede, what is there bad about that?

Among both peoples, among the proletariat of Norway and that of Sweden, mutual confidence increased after separation [of Norway from Sweden, in 1905]. The Swedish landlords wanted to wage war, but the Swedish workers resisted this and said: we shall not

go to such a war.

All that the Finns want now is autonomy. We stand for giving Finland complete liberty; that will increase their confidence in Russian democracy, and when they are given the right to secede they will not do so. While Mr Rodichev goes to Finland to haggle over autonomy, our Finnish comrades come here and say: we must have autonomy. But fire is opened on them from the whole battery and they are told: "Wait for the constituent assembly".

We, however, say: "Any Russian Socialist who denies freedom to Finland is a chauvinist."

We say that frontiers are determined by the will of the population. Russia, don't dare fight over Courland! Germany, withdraw your armies from Courland! This is our solution of the problem of secession.

The proletariat cannot resort to violence, for it must not interfere with the freedom of peoples. The slogan, "down with frontiers", will become a true slogan only when the socialist revolution has become a reality, and not a method. Then we shall say: comrades, come to us.

He who does not accept this point of view is an annexationist, a chauvinist. We are for the fraternal union of all nations.

If there is a Ukrainian republic and a Russian republic, there will be closer contact, greater confidence between the two. If the Ukrainians see that we have a Soviet republic, they will not break away. But if we retain the Milyukov republic, they will break away.

Any Russian Socialist who does not recognise the freedom of Finland and the Ukraine is bound to degenerate into a chauvinist. And no sophisms, no references to his own "method" will help him to justify himself.

### PRESS GANG

Daily Express

The Guardian

By Jim Denham

The entire British media is controlled by Tory Central Office and the public are hopeless dupes who will believe whatever is fed to them.

This depressing scenario was, in more or less sophisticated versions, the common wisdom of much of the left during the 1980s. The first part of the proposition is, of course, largely true as far as the press goes. But that second bit — about "the public" being dupes — always struck me as very dubious. If the masses are so gullible, how do you explain any past Labour election victories...and what hope is there for the future?

Anyway, now that the Dark Days seems to be drawing to a close and the Kinnockite dawn beckons, the power of the Tory press is beginning to look a little less all-pervasive.

Take the Great Anti-Poll Tax Conspiracy, for instance: if you depended upon the *Express*, the *Mail*, or the *Times* for your information, you might be forgiven for believing that the recent spate of angry demonstrations outside town halls up and down the land was the work of a tightly-organised group of anarchist Militant Labour Party squatters operating from local authority-funded headquarters under orders from Tony Benn with the tacit approval of Neil Kinnock.

Whether this version of events was a tale agreed upon by Central Office, Bernard Ingham and the editors of the Tory press, or whether it emerged spontaneously, is a matter for conjecture; what is a matter of record, is that almost no one believed it. According to a NOP poll for the *Independent* after the press campaign, "the total number of losers who blame the government remains constant at about one-third of the electorate. And if we add in people who blame councils and government equally, the proportion rises to well over half the NOP's total sample."

Then came the 'Rally Round the Supreme Ruler' campaign, spearheaded by Lord Stevens of Express Newspapers: "there is only one person fit and able to lead the party and the country at this juncture...while she is in 10 Downing Street, Britain is in safe hands and has an assured future," gushed the noble Lord in his own paper.

The *Daily Mail* ran a front-page story describing Tory MPs who questioned Mrs Thatcher's leadership as a "Jittery Fifth Column". Guess who gave Lord Stevens his life peerage and who also knighted Sir David English, editor of the *Mail*?

Despite this week-long chorus of loyalty, Saturday's *Telegraph* had to admit "there has been talk among Tory MPs that if the party's fortunes decline further...then Mrs Thatcher could face a renewed leadership challenge...one theory being touted is that she could take advantage of her 65th birthday in October to announce her retirement and make a triumphant exit at the Tory party conference."

It seems that even with the vast bulk of the national press on your side, you can't fool all of the people all of the time. Still, I think Lord Stevens deserves 'A' for effort and the Order of the Brown Nose.

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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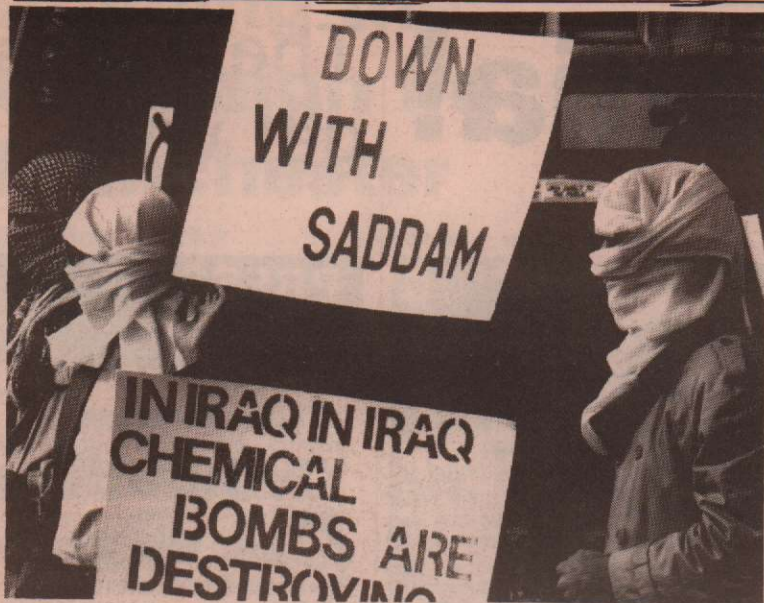
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# 4 LABOUR PARTY



Demonstration against the Iraqi regime after the hanging of Farzad Bazoft (Photo: Paul Herrmann, Profile). Healy's WRP publicly justified Saddam's executions of Iraqi CP members.

## Ken mourns Gerry

### GRAFFITI

Ken Livingstone told the Redgraves' recent wake for Gerry Healy, the former leader of the Workers Revolutionary Party, that the 1985 split in that party was the result of a 'deliberate decision by MI5', according to *Workers Press*.

When Geoff Pilling of *Workers Press* telephoned Livingstone to ask where his evidence was for this wild accusation, Livingstone asked him "Don't you think MI5 agents were involved?" "No" said Pilling. Quick as a flash, Livingstone responded, "You must be one then" and hung up the phone.

Apparently Livingstone had told the assembled multitudes at the 'Tribute' to Healy, held in London a few weeks ago, that MI5 decided to split the WRP because it was becoming 'too pivotal' in linking British and international struggles — whatever that means.

Why Livingstone should be so chummy with Healy is indeed a bit strange. Healy was kicked out of the WRP in 1985 after completely dominating it, and its organisational predecessors since the early 1950s; before that he was one of the most prominent individuals in the movement that also spawned Ted Grant and Tony Cliff (of *Militant* and the SWP, respectively).

Healy's expulsion was on three charges: the main one was the sexual abuse of young women members of the party, apparently over a number of years. Healy never answered the charges. Left with only a rump organisation, consisting of little more than the Redgrave siblings, he became, in his last years, a devoted supporter of Mikhail Gorbachev. Healy would surely have approved of Gorbachev's new powers with characteristic gusto — and empathy.

In the early 1980s, a section of the mainstream Labour left linked up with Healy through the newspaper *Labour Herald*, which was edited by a known Healyite, Steven Miller, at that time a member of the central committee of Healy's WRP, and printed on the WRP press. This current included, prominently, Lambeth Council leader Ted Knight, and Livingstone, who were its public 'editors'.

About the time he set up *Labour Herald* for Knight and Livingstone, Healy set about trying to bankrupt *Socialist Organiser* by hauling us through the libel courts.

At that time, too, Healy was linked by golden threads to a number of Arab regimes — Libya, Gulf sheikhdoms, and Saddam Hussein's butcherous Iraqi regime. Healy got money in return for supporting those regimes in his press and spying on dissident Arabs in Britain and on prominent Jews.

For example, the WRP brought out a flashy pamphlet telling the life story of Saddam Hussein as a paid public relations agency might tell it. All this came out when the old WRP blew apart. But it was pretty obvious at the time from the Healyite press, which indulged in blatant anti-semitic agitation.

These were — and, it seems, still are — Ken Livingstone's friends. Somewhere along the line during this

period, it would seem, Healy and the Redgraves developed a personal relationship of some cordiality with Red Ken.

In return, he spoke at WRP rallies, and finally, when Healy was dead, was prepared to come out with any old rubbish for their benefit.

*Labour Herald* was an immediate casualty of the WRP collapse: the staff divided pro- and anti-Healy, and 'Ken Livingstone's' public organ ceased publication. Maybe Livingstone believes that such a thing could only be explained by an MI5 plot against...Ken Livingstone!

*Workers Press* is the most rational fragment of the WRP, which inevitably detonated very soon after Healy's expulsion, its various particles zooming off to the four corners of reality. The claim that the WRP was deliberately split by MI5 amounts to the claim that *Workers Press*, which includes a fair few then-WRP Central Committee members, is an MI5 front.

If the *Workers Press* account is accurate, and they assure us that it is, and Mr Livingstone really believes that they are led by a bunch of police agents, he should let the labour movement see his evidence. *Socialist Organiser* would certainly like to know, as we have on occasions staged public debates with *Workers Press*. If, on the other hand, as seems more plausible, the MP for Brent East is just parroting the usual Healy gobbledegook, he should shut his slanderous gob.

Still on the theme of prominent Labour councillors we have known and loathed, Derek Hatton has acquired one third of a half-million pound golf course on the outskirts of Liverpool. He has bought it in partnership with Everton soccer star John Gidman, and businessman Ray Stewart.

Oppression is spelt 'childhood in Brazil'. Following recent reports that

children are literally being gunned down in the streets of big Brazilian cities, where homeless orphans number in the tens of thousands, there is a new scandal.

Kidnapped Brazilian children are murdered and their vital organs removed for sale to the wealthy in Europe.

Writing letters to the press can be a risky business. A Mr David

Roddy from Royton, near Oldham, reminded the Oldham Evening Chronicle that after the peasants' revolt against the fourteenth century poll tax, the Chancellor and Treasurer were executed.

He soon found himself visited by police, sent by local councillors anxious that he might actually mean it. He had to write a second letter to the paper, promising that he was not actually advocating such drastic measures in the local councillors' case.

## Where we come from — and where he comes from

### Alan Johnson spoke to the Socialist Organiser AGM

The Labour Party Policy Review commits the Labour Party to managing the profit system. To making capitalism fair, to making capitalism efficient, to making capitalism work for the workers.

We think that it is a dream. It's a dream which, every time a Labour government has tried to make it a reality, has turned into a nightmare for working people.

Supporters of the paper *Socialist Organiser* do not stand alone in this view. We did not stand alone in the seventies when the last Labour government was acting out the last nightmare.

In those awful years of Wilson and Callaghan, of IMF diktats and cuts in social services, of a Labour government and Tory policies, in those years voices more influential than ours protested.

I can remember how a Labour MP reported back to his Constituency Party — in Bedwelty, I think it was, in Wales — he said:

"It is not the task of Labour to salvage and re-establish capitalism." The cuts in public expenditure, including in the health service introduced by Healey, were denounced by this fiery Welsh MP as "one of the most reactionary ever by a Labour government".

This MP — predicted to go a long way in the party, if a little long-winded — was especially mocking of the Labour government's policy towards the City. He spoke in words I think John Smith and Gordon Brown would do well to listen to today:

"They treat the City of London as if it were some kind of winnable Tory marginal constituency. They think, generation in, generation out, that there is some deal that can be reached with people who are our sworn ideological enemies. The sooner my right honourable friends understand that, the sooner we shall have policies we need if we are to have a Labour government we can be proud of."

But his words were not heeded. And this Labour government staggered on from one crisis to another — cutting social services, holding down pay, doubling unemployment — all the bitter fruits of trying to manage the profit system.

Well, our Labour MP, a member of the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy, could hardly contain himself: he regularly broke the



Neil Kinnock campaigning with Sylvia Heal in Mid-Staffordshire. Photo: John Harris

Labour whip, and said: "We have a government totally operating Tory policies."

Our man, who used to amuse the left with his witty speeches at the Tribune collection was especially furious when Captain Callaghan advised workers to cross picket lines: "the only reason we've come so far, the reason that children stay in school after 9 and we are educated is that we had picket lines. The party must remind the leadership of where we come from or we die as a movement."

Well, the party did remind the leadership as our Labour MP advised — the movement for democracy, the campaign for Tony Benn, these were not the inventions of papers like *Socialist Organiser*, they were the organised explosion of a gaping wound in the Labour Party, a wound inflicted by a Labour government unaccountable and out of control, and making the working class pay for the crisis of the profit system.

When the SDP split from Labour it wasn't just *Socialist Organiser* who said 'good riddance to bad rubbish'. Our MP, who by now had risen high indeed, was poised to be party leader, said the same: he ridiculed the Gang of Four. He said: "They want a kindly capitalism, a gentle market economy, an air-conditioned jungle." Listen to that phrase — an "air-conditioned jungle". It's a very good phrase, but here's the rub — doesn't it just sum up the

Labour Party's Policy Review; the jungle of the free market, of the monopolies and the junk bonds will be air-conditioned by a few grants here...a few penalties there...a bit of R&D money.

It's the same old dream...the same old nightmare.

But our MP — by now Party leader — has undergone a remarkable Road to Downing Street conversion; now he wants us to embrace the profit system and make it work. He wants to do that which he once said was an idle dream — to salvage and re-establish capitalism.

Now Neil has every right to change his mind, every right to disavow his past, but he does not have the right to harry and chase and ridicule those who have not renounced their ideas.

Many in the Labour Party continue to believe in a fundamental transformation of British society, a revolution in the distribution of power and wealth in the interest of working people and their families. It must remain possible for those party members to retain these beliefs whilst working for a Labour victory.

The party leader would like those voices to be stilled, he allows Frank Field to push him into silencing those voices. For our part, we will quietly remind Neil of his own words to Callaghan: "The party must remind the leadership of where we come from or we die as a movement."



Tories on the run in Mid-Staffordshire. Photo: John Harris



Socialist Organiser supporters sing the Internationale to round off our Annual General Meeting

## Fighting for a Labour victory!

**T**he witch-hunt on the Wirral is diverting the energies of Labour Party members from the urgent task of winning the next election. That was the message from Gail Cameron, of Wallasey Labour Party, to



Gail Cameron

the Annual General Meeting of Socialist Organiser supporters, held last weekend (March 17-18) in London.

Frank Field's dossier is nothing more than tittle tattle. It is a disgrace that the Labour Party NEC has agreed to carry out an investigation on the basis of its flimsy evidence. What is needed is not an investigation into Labour Party members, but a real campaign against the Tories.

Alan Johnson quoted the words of Neil Kinnock, then younger and more radical: "We have to remember where we came from, or we die as a movement". We have to fight for the interests of working class people, or we will never translate the current anti-Tory mood into a firm pro-Labour one.

Other speakers echoed this idea. Ruth Cockcroft summing up the discussion on fighting for a Labour government, added

that Socialist Organiser had a distinctive contribution to make. Addressing 'Newsnight' cameras that had been allowed into the meeting, she said: "We are not just another Militant. We have never believed that nationalisation in itself was socialist. We are for socialism from below".

The AGM also discussed the poll tax. Cate Murphy, introducing, sharply criticised the Labour leaders. Here was the issue that was destroying the Tories, and Neil Kinnock was spending his time denouncing 'violent' demonstrators, rather than supporting working class people who simply cannot pay this tax.

Most of the first day of the AGM was devoted to a discussion of the struggles in Eastern Europe. Ten theses on the 'coming class struggles in Eastern Europe' were passed overwhelmingly; an alternative resolution, derived from a view

that the Eastern bloc are 'workers' states', was heavily defeated.

Eastern Europe is not due to see stable, harmonious bourgeois democracies, the AGM agreed. Instead, already we are seeing a period of intense struggles — of the working class and national minorities.

Four issues are especially important from a socialist point of view. First, we must not be sec-



Ruth Cockcroft

try to approach democracy on the national question as internationalists.

Fourth, we support German reunification. The question is not whether Germany should reunify, but what sort of united Germany it will be. We support those fighting for workers' rights within a united Germany.

The AGM also discussed the theoretical issues underlying our analysis of current events. A resolution describing the Eastern Bloc as 'workers' states' was defeated, along with an amendment supporting the 'Critique' theory that there is no ruling class in these societies and there are no laws of motion.

The meeting reaffirmed the position taken at the last AGM, that these are class societies broadly parallel to 'normal capitalism'. This view does not foreclose on debate about the best term to apply (be it 'state capitalism', 'bureaucratic collectivism', or something else), but establishes a political framework.

The AGM also discussed Women for Socialism, concluding that Socialist Organiser supporters should continue their involvement in this organisation.



Cate Murphy

The AGM unanimously passed a statement from the outgoing NEB, 'The prospects for Workers' Liberty'. We have to stand firm in the face of the capitalist propaganda that socialism is finished. In fact, we should be optimistic. Socialism is not a utopian ideal, and genuine democratic socialism can be achieved.

## A message from Eric Heffer

As far as I am concerned, and I have long argued over the years, all those who are left wing socialists and have their own newspapers ought to be members of the Labour Party, and in my opinion are fully entitled to organise around the journal and paper which they support and publish.

I believe it is very important to the Labour Party to have various groups around papers inside the party working as party members for the benefit of creating a socialist party and a socialist movement which will ultimately lead to a socialist government.

Therefore I welcome the fact that Socialist Organiser has been doing this for a number of years and I think very beneficially to the party; therefore I think it is absolutely wrong



that there should be any attempt on the part of anybody to either close down the paper or take action against people who support the paper.

I thought it was wrong in relation to other journals such as Militant and so on

in the past, and I argued then that it wouldn't stop there, and it would ultimately, if it went on, end up with the Tribune itself being closed down if this is the trend within the party. Therefore, as far as I'm concerned, I trust there will be a mobilisation of the membership to stop any further witchhunts and in fact to reverse the witchhunts that have already taken place.

So I definitely give my greeting to the Socialist Organiser conference; I hope that it is a great success and in particular I hope that it will also broaden the contacts of Socialist Organiser with those in Eastern Europe of like-minded socialist views so that we can work for a genuine democratic socialist society, based in the East and the West.

tarian towards the movements for parliamentary democracy. We want parliaments, and want to help socialists in Eastern Europe make them as thoroughly democratic as possible, whilst also taking up issues of control over production. Socialist democracy should not be counterposed to democracy as it is understood by the peoples of Eastern Europe.

Second, socialists should not oppose all market mechanisms being reintroduced into Eastern Europe. We are opposed to the exploitation of the working class by western or 'native' capital; but a real socialist democracy would have to use the market to provide information and feedback. It could not just be a revamped version of Stalinist ultra-centralism.

Third, socialists need to fight for the right of nations to self-determination. We want to see socialists in Eastern Europe leading the movements for national independence from Moscow — in competition with the often reactionary nationalist movements. We call for a democratic attitude towards the movements in these areas, breaking away from the doctrine of

# The left debates German unity

**Colin Foster surveys the debate on the West European left about German reunification**

**L**eftists in West Germany, with a gale of German nationalism whistling around their ears, are fiercely and desperately against reunification.

A coalition of leftist Greens and feminists, the 'United Socialist Party' (neo-Trotskyist/Mandelite), the 'Communist League' (ex-Maoist), and sections of the West German Communist Party, has put out a declaration, "Never again Germany!"

"From one day to the next, the Federal Republic has plunged into a German-national delirium unparalleled since the World War.

As the Wall was opened, the politics of the Federal Republic put reunification on the agenda. In Parliament a great-German all-party coalition sang the Deutschlandlied — just like on 4 August 1914, after the beginning of the First World War, and just like on 17 May 1933, on the confirmation of Hitler's declaration of foreign policy.

And the nationalist delirium is tied in with triumph over the 'Evil Empire'.

It is true: the system called 'really existing socialism' is finished. Many people, who certainly did not identify with the specific social form of the GDR, the USSR, and so on, but nevertheless had committed themselves to a socialist society and against capitalist exploitation and oppression, feel in their own work and in the public climate the offensive of the right. A massive, partly overt, partly covert campaign is under way, with the message that 'socialism' of any sort, or planned economy, must be excluded from social discussion.

In its place the praises are sung of the performance-oriented society and the market — that is, of an economy where the strong

prevail. At the same time we see the revival of a new great-German nationalism, revanchism, anti-semitism, and increased racism, together with continuing sexism.

Capitalism has been proved victorious in its conflict with the non-capitalist social order of the Eastern Bloc. The strategy of imperialism to do away with that social order has succeeded.

That victory results, however, not only from the strength of the capitalist system, but also from the inner fragility of the bureaucratic regime in the Eastern Bloc states.

*"No unification of Germany in the foreseeable future can be turned into a socialist unification by a bit of pressure from militant East German workers... To be against any capitalist unification is to be against unification for now at least."*

Every attempt to overcome capitalism — from the communist communities in the USA in the 19th century, through the Paris Commune of 1871, to the non-capitalist societies in the Eastern Bloc today — every attempt so far, capitalism has been able to defeat...

This system has a sweet side only in its metropolises — and even there not for everyone. The problems of capitalism — its conjunctural and structural crises, unemployment, tendencies to impoverish some while yielding maximum riches to others — will remain, even after the social model of the GDR, the USSR and other Eastern Bloc countries is wrecked...

Doubtless similar and identical problems exist in the GDR as in the Federal Republic — and many specific ones, too. But those problems can fundamentally be solved better in the framework of a GDR society, and without interference by the West German government and corporations...

The anti-colonialist right of self-determination cannot be claimed by the Germans, for they are no one's colony. They should renounce the formal right... in view of the damage caused by the German robber empire of 1871 to 1945. If a new German imperialist colossus should arise, none of the other peoples of Europe, and especially of Eastern Europe, will be able to protect themselves from it.

We propose a demonstration against reunification, for the recognition of the statehood of the GDR and for radical disarmament in the whole of Europe...

Winfried Wolf, writing in the paper of the United Socialist Party, is bitter about the softening of the East German left's attitude to reunification.

"Many people are bowing the knee before the national wave..."

With the exception of the United Left, the Independent Women's Federation, and the Green League, all the other formations have bowed to the general opinion and the enormous agitation against anyone who holds to the two states formula or even proposes a socialist perspective. The majority of New Forum is now swimming with the stream...

It has been, and will be, often said against us that 'only saying no', 'only being against', is 'not a meaningful position'. That argument sounds nice, but that is all.

There are projects which one must simply refuse. There are situations in which a socialist and a Marxist must simply be a naysayer — against the majority of the population...

Thus it was at the start of the First World War... It is not quite so bad now, not yet..."

So Wolf and his comrades come out for the slogan "Never again Germany! Against the 'reunification' or 'unification' of the Federal

Republic and the GDR!" Why not "Against a capitalist united Germany, for a socialist united Germany"? Wolf's comrade Manuel Kellner explains in a letter to the French socialist weekly *Rouge*.

"The slogan of a 'united socialist Germany' has absolutely no grip on the political situation, since the only German unity which is realistic today is the creation of a new imperialist and capitalist state, to the detriment of what remains of the social gains in the GDR, and to the detriment of the interests of the working class and the dispossessed on a world scale".

What if a revolutionary working-class movement develops in both parts of Germany? "That is remote", replies Kellner. And even then: "The slogan 'united socialist Germany' will be no more progressive then, for it would be necessary to propose the perspective of the withering-away of national states from the start..."

Kellner was responding to a debate in *Rouge* in which three positions have been expressed. Daniel Bensaid and the editorial majority argue "for the unconditional recognition of the right of self-determination for the German people, its right to live in a single state if it so decides... the withdrawal of all foreign troops... for a socialist united Germany".

"It is just and legitimate that the East German workers should define their own conditions for unification: the demilitarisation of the GDR and the Federal Republic, the socialisation of the multinationals... a common system of social welfare and social rights — beginning with the right to work for all — and powers of control and decision of the workers on the orientation of a united Germany.

This approach links our response to the German national question inextricably with the programme of the anti-bureaucratic revolution. It is opposed to any capitalist unification of Germany..."

As Kellner indicates, and as must be clear now even if it was not in December when those words were drafted, they reconcile contradictory impulses through wishful thinking. No unification of Germany in the foreseeable future can be turned into a socialist unification by a bit of pressure from militant East German workers!

To be against any capitalist unification is to be against unification, for now at least. To uphold the right of the German people to unite if they wish is to accept capitalist unification.

However, one of the other positions expressed in *Rouge* is even more optimistic about socialist unification. Gerard Filoche and his co-thinkers declare:

"No-one should imagine that it is necessary to compromise with the bureaucrats for fear of a restoration of capitalism. The bureaucrats are the best allies of the capitalists!

Like their brothers in Poland and Hungary, they are selling the nationalised economy to themselves and to foreign capital. Only the workers, by their mobilisation and self-organisation, can oppose this, defend their gains, and open the way to real socialism...

The mass movement has put in



Right-wing victory: Lothar de Maizière, Germany's Prime Minister

question the division of Germany into two states. The whole order decided at Yalta is threatened.

So much the better! We are against that order... The task of revolutionaries is to be with the masses for German unity, working so that it will put into question not only the Stalinist order in the East but also the capitalist order in the West. Thus can be created a dynamic to unify Germany on an authentic socialist basis.

The right to German unity is unconditional: Kohl is for it only on condition that capitalism be safeguarded..."

Probably the whole of the left — *Socialist Organiser* included — had exaggerated hopes in November. Then, there was a mass mood in East Germany for a "better socialism". But it produced no strong workers' self-organisation; a large part of the mood, evidently, was illusions in the possibility of new leaders like Modrow reforming the system from above.

*"...we firmly reject the notion of so-called fundamental gains which confer on the Stalinist regimes some superiority in relation to the overall capitalist system."*

When those illusions were shattered, the East German workers quickly turned to the other available and 'realistic' way forward: union with West Germany. Only three months later, Filoche's position piece reads like the word



Demonstrators tear down an East German flag

# GERMAN REUNIFICATION 7



of the CDU becomes East

of delirium.

Helene Viken and Francois Dietrich have a third view. They argue — rightly, I think — that the German left has allowed its thinking to be depressed and distorted by its justified hatred and fear of German nationalism and German capitalist triumphalism. They go on "Some people reckon that German unity would put into question the 'social gains' of the GDR regime and would reduce the country to the state of an underdeveloped country.

In the first place, we firmly reject the notion of so-called fundamental gains which confer on the Stalinist regimes some superiority in relation to the overall capitalist system. Such a notion can only lead to serious disillusionment in face of the first autonomous movement of the population against the horror of the remaining Stalinist regimes, of which some (Romania, for example) are not much different from past fascist forms of bourgeois domination...

Combatting unity on the capitalists' conditions can be done effectively only on two conditions: understanding that the demand for unity by the German people is, as of now, one of the bases of the movement as it has developed in the East against the Stalinist regime; and thus, as on any national question, that we should be on the offensive to give it a revolutionary programmatic content...

So it is up to us to give it a class content, in the East and in the West, which cannot be reduced to an abstract affirmation of a general objective of a socialist united Germany... a common struggle for the withdrawal of foreign troops... for the satisfaction of workers' demands".

The idea that the Stalinist GDR

was some sort of "workers' state" seems to play a part in German leftists' feeling that they are in the midst of a terrible debauch of reaction, where the only honourable socialist course is to say *no* clearly and sharply. Yet some left tendencies who believe that the GDR was never any sort of "workers' state" have also been sharply against reunification. The French magazine *Lutte de Classe*, associated with the weekly *Lutte Ouvriere*, has written:

*"Isn't the evidence that many East German workers see the 'national' demand for unification as an answer to some of their 'social' problems? And not just because of illusions... integration into West German law and conditions may well give at least some protection."*

"For the great majority of the East German population, the idea of reunification simply involves the hope or the illusion of an improvement in the material and mental conditions of life. The movement's determination and consciousness do not seem to be very great, and it is not spilling over into forms of self-

organisation of the popular masses... In this context, it is understandable that the prospect of German reunification, in one form or another, is a popular one...

Militants who stand for the proletarian revolution working in the present situation in East Germany should not, however, campaign for reunification. They should have a quite different policy to propose.

The state of the Federal Republic is just as much an instrument of oppression against the working class as the East German state. In the current situation, however, it has far greater power, resources and solidity.

Revolutionary militants should not therefore perpetuate illusions within the East German working class as regards the reality of reunification which would only consecrate the domination of the West German state over the two existing Germanies...

It is certain that if at least a section of the working class found the road to political consciousness... reunification would constitute a trap, a means of depriving the working class of the gains resulting from its fight on a class basis — or even a means of bringing it under control.

The working class would then have to openly oppose reunification with West Germany..."

This argument seems to parallel another slogan of the West German leftists: "Social, not national!" But if socialists avoid the national question, doesn't that give it to the right? Or give it to the right more completely and entirely than they would otherwise have it?

Isn't the evidence that many East German workers see the 'national' demand for unification as an answer to some of their 'social' problems? And not just because of illu-

sions: East German workers will face the depredations of West German capital without reunification, and integration into West German law and conditions may well give at least some protection.

*Socialist Worker* in Britain

started by not mentioning the question of reunification at all; then came out *against* reunification (or seemed to do so); and now has a position 'neither for nor against'.

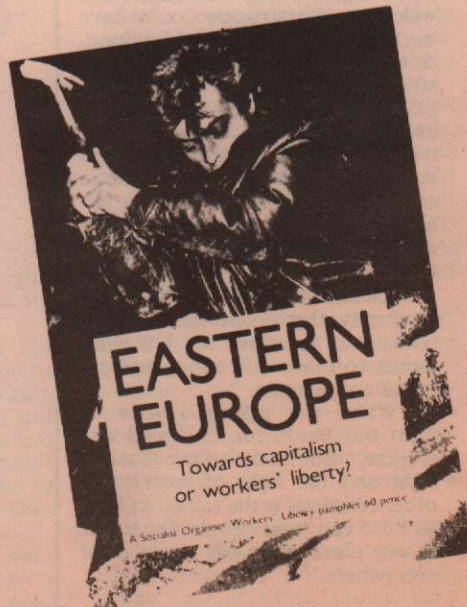
*SW* of 23 December criticises the New Forum of "failing to give a lead to the 50 per cent of demonstrators still opposed to reunification", and approvingly quotes an East German socialist: "We are against reunification because it will bring unemployment and homelessness. But we are not against a united socialist Germany under the workers".

More recently, however, (*SW*, 17 March) *Socialist Worker* has argued: "The left needs a strategy along the lines of 'neither Kohl nor Modrow, but the class struggle', because whether Germany remains divided or becomes unified the ruling class will try to make workers pay for the further integration of the economy into the world market... The defence of workers' rights and conditions should be the main question, not unqualified opposition to unification".

*Socialist Organiser* wrote back in November: "Should Germany be reunified? Yes". But: "To win democratic rights the East German workers should look to their own struggle, not to what the West German capitalists may grant them.

Therefore, while we say reunify Germany, we say more than this: we say, reunify Germany on the basis of workers' liberty East and West!" In a more recent summing-up (*SO*, 1 March) we called "for workers' unity, defence of workers' living standards, democratic rights throughout Germany, and levelling-up of workers' gains across Germany".

## More on Eastern Europe



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## 8 EAST GERMANY

# Fordism Mexican-style

By Matt Witt

**A** month-long work stoppage following a brutal armed attack against workers at a Ford plant in Mexico has become a new symbol of both exploitation by US corporations in the Third World and the possibilities for resistance.

It also points up the need for more concrete support from US unionists whose own job security depends on helping workers in countries like Mexico who are fighting to improve working conditions.

The latest round in a long battle between Ford and workers at its Cuautitlan plant near Mexico City reached a crisis on 8 January when gunmen equipped with company uniforms and identification passed through plant security and opened fire on unarmed workers.

The assault left one worker, Cleto Nigno, dead, and many others injured. Nigno is survived by a wife seven months pregnant.

Two years before, the company had cancelled the existing union contract — cutting wages to the current level of \$165 per month for most workers, speeding up production, and erasing the seniority workers had accumulated.

The union — part of the government-affiliated Confederation of Mexican Workers (CTM) — defended the changes. When rank and file workers resisted, their leaders were fired.

Then, last December the company announced it would reduce year-end profit-sharing payments and bonuses, despite increased production. Again, CTM leadership defended the cuts.

The 3,800 workers began organising for a possible work stoppage to win control of their union and full payment by the company. At that point, the armed attack on workers was organised by union leaders, according to three gunmen who were captured.

With one brother dead and others in the hospital, workers stopped production. The government responded by bringing in state police to remove them from the plant.

Ford announced that, because of the work stoppage, it was renouncing what was left of the union contract. In the face of worker solidarity the company changed its mind, but said it planned to fire 2,200 workers. When that threat failed to scare any significant number of workers into breaking ranks, it was retracted as well.

"We have skills; we're not that easy to replace," said Jorge Noyola, a 13-year veteran. "For our part, sure, we're worried about our jobs, considering all the unemployment we see around us. But there comes a point when you have to insist on respect."

Though without the resources to pay strike benefits, workers maintained nearly unanimous participation in spirited daily rallies at the plant gate and at offices of government officials, the CTM, and the major TV network.

Finally, with a promise that Ford and the CTM would recognise their elected rank and file representatives, workers offered to return to work February 12. They noted with satisfaction that, because of their pressure campaign, ten CMT thugs had been arrested. They said, however, that they would walk out again if the company and CTM failed to fully resolve the issues of union democracy, the year-end payments and no reprisals as a result of the work stoppage.

Workers hope that in the long run, control of their union will

allow them to improve the conditions under which they produce Ford pick-ups and Taurus, Topaz and Thunderbird, and Cougar cars:

- They now have only one break per shift — 30 minutes for lunch.

- Workers in areas such as the foundry and paint shop say they are tested for lead exposure but are not provided the results.

- Workers are often assigned to tasks in a higher classification but without the higher pay required by the contract.

- The coupons workers receive as a fringe benefit in order to buy food at selected stores have been reduced to only \$5.90 per month — enough

**"Gunmen equipped with company uniforms and identification opened fire on unarmed workers!"**

to buy only two pounds of cheese or low-grade meat!

Ruben Ojeda, a Ford worker for 28 years, said that, as a result, his buying power is now about half what it used to be. In an interview conducted as he completed a six-hour, 21-mile march from the factory to the offices of Mexican president Carlos Salinas, Ojeda said the company now considers him to have only two years' seniority.

The strong resistance at Ford's Cuautitlan plant may have helped workers win raises of 27% at a smaller Ford plant in Chihuahua and 20% at a GM plant in Mexico City. Those pay increases will not, however, make up for workers' lost buying power in recent years as a result of runaway inflation and the decline of the Mexican peso.

Workers at Chrysler, meanwhile, have presented management and the CTM with demands almost identical to those of the Ford workers regarding union democracy and payments of year-end bonuses.

Despite all their sacrifices, the Ford workers say they did not have the resources to win a clear-cut victory over one of the world's largest corporations, the Mexican government, and its affiliated labour federation.

More pressure from US workers could have helped. While letters and telegrams that were sent were welcome, the struggle could have been greatly strengthened by donations for communications and strike support and by a visit from US auto workers to boost spirits and spur publicity in both countries. Several Ford-Mexico workers wondered whether US workers could be convinced to conduct job actions such as refusing overtime until the Mexican situation was settled.

Such solidarity actions would not be charity, they noted, since helping reduce the incentive for US companies to move operations and demand concessions.

"We're not asking anyone to fight our battle for us," said one worker. "But we do believe that our fight and the fight of workers in other countries is the same. As long as Ford can treat people like slaves in one place, they will try to do it everywhere."

**From Labor Notes. Copies available from PO Box 2001, Detroit, Michigan 48220, USA.**

# Never again Germany?

By Stan Crooke

**T**he predominant response of the West German left towards the question of German unification was summed up by an 8,000-strong demonstration and rally jointly organised by the West Berlin left last Saturday, the eve of the parliamentary elections in East Germany.

The appeal publicising the demonstration called for an independent German Democratic Republic (GDR) and for opposition to the 'Anschluss' of the GDR to the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG). ('Anschluss' is the term used to describe the incorporation of Austria into Nazi Germany in 1938.)

Hundreds of the demonstrators waved the flag of the GDR. The slogan most often shouted on the demonstration was 'Never Again Germany!' (At the moment there is no such country as Germany — there is only the GDR and the FRG).

The first speaker at the concluding rally was a survivor of Auschwitz. For the audience he was the living symbol of what a united Germany would mean — concentration camps and war.

The message from the demonstration, from the concluding rally, from the leaflets distributed during the demonstration, was crystal-clear: fight tooth and nail against German unification.

Sections of the German left might argue (and, in fact, do argue) that it is not really unification itself which they oppose but the negative results of unification. But when demonstrators wave the flag of the GDR and cry out 'Never Again Germany!', how can this be interpreted other than as opposition to unification itself?

It is certainly true that the result of last Sunday's elections in the GDR will result in German unification in the immediate future, and that many workers, and particularly foreigners and women, are going to be in for a rough time as a result.

Unemployment has already become a reality in the GDR and is going to get a lot worse in the immediate future — by capitalist stan-



'No to greater Germany!' The West German Left marches against unification.

dards, staffing levels in German workplaces are twice as high as they should be, and most GDR factories lag way behind the West in terms of technological innovation and modernisation.

The approach of the GDR elections was accompanied by a wave of German nationalist fervour, in both the FRG and the GDR, of which non-white foreigners have been the principal victim. A Pakistani resident in the FRG was recently stabbed to death by a visitor from the GDR who believed in "Germany for the Germans — foreigners out!"

Women in the GDR are arguably not as disadvantaged as in the FRG. There is more childcare provision available, there is no mass market of pornographic material, and there is no ideology that a woman's place is in the home rather than in the workplace. All this could easily disappear in the immediate future.

However, to recognise what unification right now could mean (and will mean, in the absence of an adequate fightback) is no reason to launch a campaign against German unification.

Even allowing for local different cultural traditions and dialects, there is a German nation. The German nation-state was divided up in 1945 between Western and Soviet imperialism. In the West, a "typical" capitalist state was reconstructed.

In the East, a typical Stalinist police state was constructed. Trade unions and political parties were banned. The economy stagnated, at the same time as wreaking ecological havoc. Attempts to flee (and no other word is appropriate in this context) to the West meant imprisonment or even worse.

It was the flag of such a state

which the Berlin left waved on last Saturday's demonstration.

Despite the barbed wire, machine guns, and watchtowers at the border a single German nation continued to exist. Like every other nation in the world, it has a right to self-determination (and only the politically blind could deny that self-determination in the GDR was negated by the imposition of a Soviet-backed government).

It was hardly surprising, therefore, that last Sunday's elections saw a victory for those parties promising loudest of all German unification.

By focusing on opposition to unification in itself, the East German left merely allowed itself to be marginalised. For the majority of the East German electorate, the alternative to unification was a perpetuation of the stagnation which characterises the GDR. And they had more than enough of that already.

Confronted by German unification under the control of the West German ruling classes, socialists in Germany must fight for (and should have been doing so all along) unification of the working class, on the basis of opposition to the new offensive of West German capital which will be unleashed by German unification.

No-one should underestimate the problems.

A combative labour movement will not re-emerge overnight. It may well prove to be a slow and painful process. But the task of socialists in Germany — with the support of socialists abroad — is to turn away from a futile opposition to German unification and to fight instead for the resurrection of a genuinely socialist political tradition in an all-German workers' movement.

## WHERE WE STAND

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

**We want public ownership of the major enterprises and a planned economy under**

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

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

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

**We stand:**

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

**Against racism, and against deportations and all immigration controls.**

**For equality for lesbians and gays.**

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

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

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

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## The stench of Stalinism

One of the first things that any visitor to the German Democratic Republic (GDR) notices is that large tracts of it stink. Quite literally.

Post-war industrialisation in the GDR was carried out without any consideration for the environment. Chemical factories and other industries belch out fumes, and highly pollutant brown coal is a major source of energy in the GDR. As a result towns located in industrial areas stink. All day and every day.

Buildings in such areas are in an advanced state of dilapidation. Poisonous fumes have eaten into the brickwork. A lack of ongoing renovation has made things even worse. On the rotting hulks of the buildings lies a thick sediment deposited by the fumes.

Doctors report of frequent complaints by their patients about headaches, dizziness and aching limbs. Backward mental and motor development amongst children is common.

Industry in the GDR, with a few exceptions, is a generation out of date, at least. Antiquated machinery, bad quality raw materials and a workforce lacking in any incentive, produce poor quality commodities at great expense. People are employed to ensure — on paper — 105% fulfilment of the plan target, irrespective of the real level of output.

Queues are everywhere. They are not as long as in the Soviet Union. But you still have to queue for everything. The ongoing flight of East German workers to West Germany has resulted in longer queues — there might be less people now to stand in a queue, but there are even less people to serve them.

Little or nothing works properly. If something does work, it's only a question of time before it breaks down. Trying to get something fixed without resorting to the black market is a futile endeavour.

Less than 10% of homes in the GDR have a telephone. Trying to make a phone call can be a test of human endurance. To phone abroad you have to go through the operator, but the line is always engaged. To phone from West Berlin to East Berlin can take up to five hours.

Local public transport is often still in the form of ageing trams which clank slowly through the streets with a maze of tram wires criss-crossing overhead.

Hundreds of thousands of GDR citizens have already abandoned the so-called workers' state. And who can blame them?

For many of those that remain, the future is uncertain. Factories face closure. Landowners expropriated in the late 1940s are returning to claim back their land and property. West German business people tour the country looking for anything worth buying up.

But the response to this has not been to rebuild trade union organisation and a socialist political movement. For many the response has been to keep their heads down.

Organising a trade union in the workplace might scare off new investment — so better just to lie low and hope that things turn out OK in the end.

After last Sunday's elections the end has clearly arrived for the GDR. It might not have been a happy end, but it was an inevitable one.



Demonstration against 'colonisation' of East Germany

# Why the right won the East German polls

Stan Crooke reports from East Berlin

On the eve of last Sunday's election in the German Democratic Republic (GDR), the left-liberal *Tageszeitung* described them as "the first and last free elections in the GDR." The election results have merely confirmed such a description.

By the usual GDR standards the elections were not just free but super-free. There was no limitation on the right of parties to organise and put up candidates. (In the past, only the ruling Socialist Unity Party and its satellite parties existed — all other parties were banned.) And all voting was in secret. (In the past, voting papers were usually marked in the open, in the presence of an election official.)

Election expenses of the parties participating in the election were paid for by the state. But the parties backed by the West German political parties — the CDU, the CSU, the SPD and the FDP (the West German Tory, Labour and Liberal parties) — enjoyed additional massive resources pumped in by their Western partners.

The elections were therefore "free" in both senses of the word. Any party was free to stand, but the wealthy West German parties also enjoyed the freedom to pump large amounts of money and other material resources into the election campaign.

That the right-wing parties (grouped together in the 'Alliance for Germany') came out on top is hardly surprising.

They had a simple message to get across: "Socialism" had failed, the answer was the "social market economy" which had transformed West Germany into a flourishing

country. And they had plenty of money to get across such a message.

There were hiccups in the campaign of the Alliance for Germany. One of its leading figures resigned in the week before the elections when it was revealed that he had been an informer for the secret police. A similar shadow was cast across the record of other leading figures in the Alliance on the eve of the elections. And a secret bank account in Luxemburg for one of the parties in the Alliance was also uncovered.

Apart from the wild rhetoric of the Alliance about the alleged virtues of capitalism, a particularly nasty element was added to the Alliance campaign by verbal and physical attacks on left-wingers.

When the West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl spoke in Leipzig on the Wednesday before the election, a mob attacked left-wing students who had been forced to take shelter in the student union of the local university.

Only marginally to the left of the Alliance was the SPD, the German equivalent, albeit a more right-wing one, of the Labour Party. It too promised German unification and praised the avowed merits of capitalism.

However, it argued for a more drawn-out process of unification and pointed to some of the problems which the extension of capitalist norms to the GDR would involve. As a result, it lost its earlier leading position in the opinion polls: if German unification was the answer, then those who promised it speediest (ie. the Alliance) had the most to offer.

The Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS — the descendant of the old Socialist Unity Party which had ruled the GDR for 40 years) polled some 15%. It accepted defeat in advance. ("A strong opposition for the weak" was one of its main slogans) and picked up support on the basis of the need for a strong parliamentary voice to defend the rights of the socially disad-

vantaged.

It ran a particularly clever campaign, stressing that it was a new party in an attempt to throw off the burden of its past. It successfully focused on the fears that many (albeit a minority) of Germans felt about the likely consequences of German unification.

The 'Alliance 90', many of whose leading figures had figured prominently in the upheavals of last year, polled badly, scoring less than 3% in the elections.

The mass demonstrations of last year were no longer in evidence. It lacked the backing of wealthy supporters in the West. And it refused

*"Forty years of repressive rule by the Socialist Unity Party, a stagnant economy, and massive ecological damage, were equated by the majority of the electorate with 'socialism'."*

to have any truck with the right-wing inspired jingoistic fervour for German unification.

Further to the left were the Greens and the Independent Women's Association (working together on a single platform) and the United Left. Both lacked human resources, and were squeezed out by the PDS in an attempt to win votes from the left of the electorate.

In the realm of the surreal were the Spartacists. The elections were a question of "the existence or non-existence of our (sic) workers' state (sic)", declared the Spartacists.

Like the rest of the world's population, the electorate in the GDR regarded them as completely mad.

Why did the right wing parties not merely win the elections, but achieve a landslide victory?

First and foremost because they pointed to the abyss in living standards between West and East Germany and were able to present capitalism as the solution. Hundreds of thousands had already voted with their feet. Now millions more voted with their ballot papers.

Secondly, because of the massive resources at their disposal as a result of the intervention of West German political parties and politicians.

Thirdly, because the East German left (in the broadest sense of the word) lacked a clear alternative to the easy slogans of the right wing, suffered from poor organisation, and impaled itself on the question of German unification.

The dominant mood of the electorate was summed up in statements such as "We don't want any more experiments" and "Why invent the wheel a second time?" — in other words, the capitalism of West Germany seemed to work okay, so why try and invent an alternative?

It is a commonplace to say that oppositions do not win elections, governments lose them. Despite the peculiarities of East Germany in the run-up to the polls (the recent emergence of an opposition, the effective absence of a functioning government), this applies to last Sunday's elections as well.

Forty years of repressive rule by the Socialist Unity Party, a stagnant economy, and massive ecological damage were equated by the majority of the electorate with "socialism" — they had, after all, always been told that they lived in the land of "real existing socialism".

It was hardly surprising, therefore, that once the population had a chance to vote for an alternative, the elections should have produced the results which last Sunday's elections did.

# A take off of a remake of an old story

## CINEMA

Edward Ellis reviews  
'Jesus of Montreal'

A modern-day re-enactment of the Jesus story is not a very original idea; nor is focussing on the last days of Jesus's life.

Indeed it strikes me as so hackneyed that anything based on it would have to be very, very good in order not to be really quite excruciating.

'Jesus of Montreal' is not excruciating. Its Jesus is an actor, playing Jesus in a slightly surreal remake of an old mystery play, performed on a hillside in Canada, in French. He gathers four disciples — a Jesus rather down on his luck, it would seem — who are deeply affected by his Strong Silent, and of course, terminally doomed, personality.

There is a pharisee businessman, promising to make a media star out of him, offering ghost writers for his autobiography (which will be nine-tenths invented).

There's a bit where Jesus turns over the tables, and in this case camera stands, because the auditioners for a TV advert are being very nasty indeed to his Mary Magdalene figure. That's the temple of Jerusalem, in case you don't know; (kicking over the tables, that is; presumably not the part where Mary takes off her jeans).

There is, in the end, a crucifixion, predictably enough, with

'Jesus' played out on an operating table, being relieved of vital organs which will — you guessed — be resurrected, in very twentieth century fashion, in someone else's body.

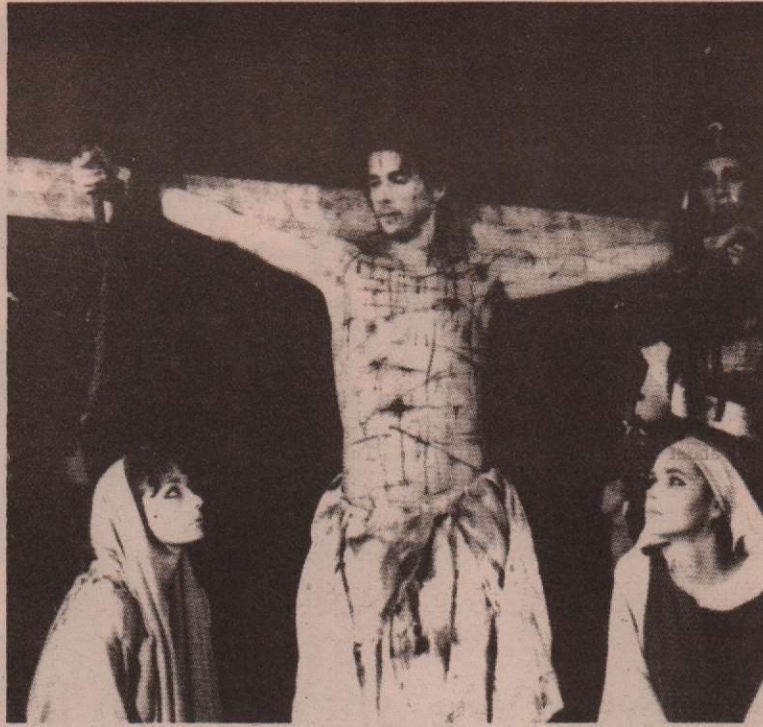
There is not, thank God — whoops — a Virgin Birth, but probably only because the film deals with the wrong end of Jesus's life. Given half a chance, I'm sure they would have gone for it, thus ineluctably reminding me of Jean Luc Godard's appalling 'Hail Mary' in which a modern-day woman conveniently has a virgin pregnancy, and the audience falls instantly asleep.

'Jesus of Montreal' is not as bad as that, and does indeed have a few laughs in it. Quite a few actually, and probably more if you're able to catch all the religious references, which thankfully I was not.

In line with contemporary practice, of which I by no means disapprove, the film makes no attempt to square its story with plausibility. The performance given by the five actors would indeed be pretty astonishing open-air entertainment, were it remotely possible to change from one elaborate costume to another, and move from a tree top to the centre of a lake, in less than two seconds.

Equally, it is hard to swallow that the priest responsible for commissioning their production would never have seen it, and registered its sacrilegious content, in rehearsal. Still, since the prototype story is somewhat fantastic too, that's legitimate.

Their performance is, in fact, based around a narrative giving possible explanations for Jesus's



miracles, including the resurrection. To emphasise the imperturbability of faith, a woman in the audience, convinced that the actor is the real Jesus keeps interrupting the action to warn him of his enemies' plans.

Later, in contrast with the Biblical Jesus's eventual relationship with the mob, the audience rushes to the actor's defence, when the police appear to enforce church orders that the show be stopped. Ironically, this spirited defence leads to the death of 'Jesus': he is badly concussed while strapped —

need you guess? — to the cross.

As I say, not excruciating. As I say, I laughed. But Matthew, Mark, Luke and John must be owed a fortune in royalties by now and it will be bad news for lots of film directors, novelists etc if there ever is a day of Judgement. They are sure to sue for breach of copyright.

I'm sure when they first worked the plot out it was bloody good. But even the best plots lose something when they're done to death for two thousand years.

## More than one way to write history

## TV

By Vicki Morris

TV's "Stalin" is a long overdue examination of the crimes of Stalin, illustrated by historic footage and interviews which have only become available now because of the opening up of discussion of the past in the USSR itself.

What is the argument? Who was responsible for the crimes of Stalin's era? Stalin himself? Those who went along with him? Or those who went before (for which read "Lenin")?

Stalin is portrayed as ruthless and megalomaniacal, while "those who went before" are understood as acting in defence of the 1917 revolution which at least promised to put an end to the horrors of the time.

However, the history is still portrayed in terms of "the biography of great men". Even a dictator needs a constituency, at least before he establishes his control. Yet there is no analysis here of the people who supported Stalin's rise to power, nor of those people who while "being nothing much in themselves" carried out his orders. The director leaves one element out of his equation altogether.

It was explained how Lenin established the mechanisms through which Stalin came to rule — the one-party state, the Cheka, at first necessary for the dictatorship of the proletariat, later capable of repressing the whole country in the interests of layers of the "Communist" bureaucracy.

There was an attempt at evenhandedness. Lenin's disillusionment with Stalin was documented, and his attempt to have him removed as General Secretary.

But the political battles for control of the Party were dealt with superficially. There was no explanation of the alternative economic strategies put forward in the '20s, and no discussion of the international context for events in the USSR, beyond the difficulties created for the Bolsheviks in the early days by the foreign intervention in the civil war.

No credit was given to the Bolsheviks' expectation that the Russian Revolution could only be consolidated by revolutions in advanced Western countries, and how their disappointment compounded the economic problems they faced. There was nothing about Stalin's disastrous role in the Communist International.

The greatest omission in the programme was not explaining the ideology of the Bolsheviks. A historian really must explain people's motivations; but all we had was a few people's word that the early Bolsheviks stood for something completely different to Stalin and the people who joined the Party when conditions got a bit easier and there were perks of membership.

Lenin's dissolution of the Constituent Assembly in 1918 was seen as his attempt to keep all power for the Bolsheviks and put off the chance of real democracy in Russia.

The narrator put on an ironic tone when he described the "bourgeois" parliament which Lenin did away with. Only a well-read person would know that it was Lenin's description of a form of democracy which was inferior to the form of democracy which had emerged in 1917, the Soviet. There was no description of those "Councils of Workers, Soldiers and Peasants' Deputies" which constituted the power base and democracy of the Revolution.

A writer who depicts Lenin sympathetically, even assigning to him "heroic" intentions, yet ignores the idea of soviet democracy, is being disingenuous. He rejects the theories without even discussing them so the viewer gets the impression that Stalin was just a more rigorous Lenin.

The programme is on the side of the people, and we should welcome it on that level.

Odd moments were astonishing, like Stalin's daughter saying she is proud that her father was initially opposed to the Bolsheviks' plan to take power in November 1917, and passing no judgment on his appalling crimes.

But I can't help being irritated by the omissions which have the effect of equating Leninism with Stalinism.

## Chickens' lib

### LES HEARN'S SCIENCE COLUMN

Much of the concern about battery farming is based on a human-centred idea of what it would feel like to be stuck inside a little cage, unable to stretch your wings, just eating, excreting and laying eggs.

It seems obvious that this would be a most unpleasant existence but is it? Drs Christine Nicol and Marian Stamp Dawkins are among those who have been finding out exactly what is important to hens.

Wild jungle fowl, the ancestors of the domestic chicken, live in groups of 4 to 6. They are highly active during the day: walking, running, flying, preening, pecking, and scratching for food. At night, they roost together in the trees.

Domestic chickens have been selected for their egg-laying ability but studies of chickens released into the wild show that their behaviour is very similar to that of their wild relatives. Thus it seems that this behaviour is very firmly laid down in the genetic make-up of the chicken.

A truly "free range" existence for chickens would be very similar to the above, with small groups of birds living semi-wild amid a rich variety of vegetation, though with protection from extremes of climate and from predators. However, many "free range" farms fall a long way short of this.

In many cases, thousands of

birds share a central house with perhaps less room each than a battery hen. They are free to go out but many rarely do. This may be for several reasons: they may not know where the exit is; dominant birds may prevent them from doing so; or the outside may not have much to offer or may seem threatening.

The latter point may be the most important. Many farms offer open grassland where the birds will not find a mixture of food sources and where they may feel exposed to the attentions of predators.

Perchery systems also pack birds in closely but without the access to the outside. Eggs can be described as "perchery" or "barn" even if the birds have as little as 64 square inches of floor space or six inches of perch. This is less than the room in a battery cage. Perches are more comfortable for the birds than the wire mesh floors of battery cages but the more timid birds often may not get access to them or to the nests or dust-bathing areas.

Thus, free range or perchery chickens may spend a lot of time in densely crowded conditions, pecking at the ground which is covered with faeces, often contaminated with parasites or disease-causing bacteria. Battery hens may actually be cleaner and less prone to such problems. However, battery birds do show other signs of distress, such as pecking each other's feathers. This can lead to severe loss of feathers, damage to skin, infections and death. The problem of cannibalism, found where chickens are overcrowded, may be a result of feather pecking.

Assuming that, for economic reasons, chickens are likely to be kept in large numbers, Nicol and Dawkins look at the evidence for what chickens really need, ie. what

is really important to them. Studies have already shown that chickens prefer large cages to small ones; the company of birds they know to that of strangers; floors covered with litter to wire floors; loose material such as straw for nesting, rather than mixed artificial grass.

The next step is to find out how strong these preferences are so as to have a measure of how much the birds suffer by their denial. This is done by imposing a "cost" on the use of a facility and seeing if this affects the bird's determination to use it.

It has been found, for example, that chickens will "run the gauntlet" of water-filled foot baths, unpleasant blasts of air or weighted swing doors to reach a nest box. They will enter a nest box the same number of times whether they have to squeeze through a narrow gap first or not, though this affected their willingness to reach other goals.

Nicol and Dawkins conclude that use of a nest box really "matters" to chickens and its denial to battery hens represents a real hardship. Pecking and scratching are activities that seem to be "programmed" into the behaviour patterns of chickens. Jungle fowl at Whipnade Zoo spend more than half their time pecking the ground. This activity is obviously connected with the need to find food but chickens don't do it in order to find food: they do it because they have an instinctive urge to do so. This is provided by comparing the behaviour of chickens who have to search through litter to find their food with those who can obtain their food quickly from a food hopper. Both spent the same time "foraging" even though the

hopper-fed birds had already eaten their fill and were no longer hungry.

Chickens also react badly to forced contact with strangers. In experiments, this has been found to cause increased heart rate, enlarged adrenal glands, raised levels of the stress hormone corticosterone and increased aggression and fearfulness. This is no doubt a significant factor in the mortality of battery hens. Research is going on to see if other aspects of chickens' behaviour, such as dust-bathing, are similarly important.

Work is also going on to redesign cages to accommodate relatively small numbers (20-60), allowing nest box access, dust baths and split-level perches so the birds can get away from each other. Other designs allow the birds to scratch around once they have fed and laid their eggs. Material for pecking is also being provided to discourage feather pecking. This results in better plumage.

Still other ideas involve the sort of environment enrichment now being introduced in some zoos. Making the chickens "work" for their food, by having to press a lever for example, provides a more "natural" situation. Indeed, the chickens will do this even when food is freely available.

Does any of this matter? Most people are concerned that animals they exploit for food should not suffer unduly and there may be something in the idea that a society that cares for its members will also care for the animals that it uses for food. And would the poultry workers prefer to work in a battery farm or in a more humane alternative? The eggs will cost more no doubt, but they may well taste better (or at any rate seem to!).

(Info from *New Scientist*).

# A strange case of ballotitis

## INSIDE THE UNIONS

By Sleeper

There were angry scenes at British Aerospace, Preston, earlier this month. A mass meeting was judged by senior stewards to have voted to accept the company's offer of a 37-hour week tied to a 19-page package of strings.

But it took no less than three shows of hands before the stewards announced the vote as being narrowly in favour.

Militants were furious: not only was the deal well short of their demand for a 35-hour week with no strings, but it was widely felt that the stewards and officials had "done a Nelson" from the platform — that is, had turned a blind eye to what was actually a majority for

rejection and staying out.

Now, there is nothing terribly remarkable about any of this — I have been at dozens of mass meetings where the rank and file's assessment of how the vote went and the platform's decision did not coincide. Sometimes the rank and file are simply wrong: on the whole, the platform has a better view of things whereas standing in the middle of a field or car park amid a few thousand other workers is not the ideal vantage point from which to assess the outcome of a close show of hands.

After a series of contentious hand votes at British Leyland in the 1970s, the BBC and ITN even took to hiring helicopters from which to film the proceedings — thus giving BL workers the opportunity to second-guess the platform in much the same way as boxing fans study slow-motion playbacks and argue about the ref's decision.

What was more remarkable about the Preston row was that rank and file militants were demanding a ballot whilst the senior stewards and officials like Bill Jordan were insisting that the show of

hands decision must be sovereign. Now there's a funny thing.

Wasn't it Bill Jordan who told last year's Labour Party conference, "workers have got used to ballots and they're not going to give them up"? And haven't most of the hard left been arguing for years that something called "ballotitis" (an unhealthy addiction to putting crosses on pieces of paper instead of exercising the right arm in time-honoured fashion) was evidence of the dreadful decline of rank and file militancy, conclusive proof of the "Downturn", etc, etc?

Don't get me wrong: I've always believed mass meetings are a Good Thing. But what is good about the traditional mass meeting is the opportunity it gives workers to hear all sides of the argument and have a proper debate, free from press and TV interference. There is nothing especially wonderful about the show of hands itself as a means of counting the vote — indeed, on contentious matters it can often be a very bad way of voting, causing all sorts of unnecessary problems and giving the

losing side the opportunity to cry "foul" and even defy the decision.

It has to be said, as well, that all too often the good old fashioned mass meeting wasn't actually conducted all that democratically: for instance, the platform seldom allowed dissident speakers to get to the mike.

At British Aerospace Chester (where a mass meeting was held the same day as Preston) a majority of stewards favoured rejection, but were prevented by the officials from recommending it from the platform!

Of course we need to get back to mass meetings as the natural, elemental form of workplace democracy. And of course, secret postal ballots are not an appropriate (or democratic) way of calling a strike (or even calling off a strike), but then the Tories have never suggested that, have they?

What's wrong with having a ballot at the mass meeting, after all sides of the argument have been aired? That way, you'd at least avoid the sort of shambles they had at Preston. Or am I suffering from that dread ailment, ballotitis?

## Engineers: keep up the pressure in hours fight

By Pat Markey, AEU steward, British Timken, Northampton

Eight months into the Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions (Confed) 'Drive for 35' campaign and the number of workers winning a reduction in the working week ranges from 19,000 according to the Engineering Employers Federation (EEF) to the Confed's figures of 66,000 (which even the *Financial Times* thinks closer to the truth), plus another 20,000 workers in the Scrap Metal Federation, who have just won a 37-hour week with no strings.

A shorter working week is now firmly on the agenda. But any successes have to be set against the scandalous role of the Confed leadership.

Back at the start of the campaign in the glossy leaflets put out by the AEU we were given figures about the massive rise in productivity in engineering over the last 10 years. Thus the reduction in hours was couched in terms such as "we've earned it!" The implication was that the campaign to reduce the working week (to 35 hours brother Bill!) would be without any strings.

The reality is that the deal recommended by the Confed leadership at British Aerospace (where sections of workers have been on strike for five months, and which the Confed leadership sees as 'pivotal' — if BAe cave in "then the rest of the engineering employers will be easy. It will be like robbing old ladies, or taking sweets from children") is almost identical to the kind of flexibility proposals put forward by the EEF in 1987 which Jordan wanted to accept, only to be met by a rank and file revolt.

Back in January, an issue of the Confed's Strategy Committee (!) weekly 'Update' bulletin commented: "We hail the absolutely magnificent dedication and determination of the 7,200 men and women, manual and staff, who are on strike in British Aerospace plants in Chester, Preston and Kingston. We pay tribute..." etc, etc. Oh spare us, spare us.

That's not the situation at BAe now. There is a deal with bad strings at Chester (accepted after pressure from Jordan and Airlie); continued strike action at Kingston, where the stewards are recommending rejection of the company's "final documents". At Preston, the Strand Road site has accepted a deal with strings, and at Wharton and Salmesbury sites the deal has been rejected and they are working to the old 39-hour week agreement.

If the Kingston plant throws out the deal yet again this week and the situation in Preston remains open then it further adds to the need for the rank and file to regain the initiative in this campaign.

So far the Confed leadership has pulled (and agreed to) the strings. With ballots due at the end of March at 12 Lucas plants, Weir pumps, Dowty, GPT, William Press, and Vickers, the time is ripe for Confed stewards to get together and discuss the strategy of the campaign so far and the way forward.

What is the best way to collect the levy? How do we turn the campaign from one run by the Confed leadership a million miles away from the shop floor to one where the membership is actively involved in? How do we get the EEF back round the tube to negotiate on a national basis? Surely the most effective way would be to support calls for a national campaign for a 35-hour week and no strings. This would not go against the more localised action so far seen in the campaign. In fact, quite the opposite. It would help secure those local deals more efficiently and favourably to our side, and be a basis for uniting the stronger and weaker sections in engineering, in pursuit of our national aims.

## Ambulance workers: 'We must keep links'

Merseyside Ambulance stewards Ray Carrick and Ross Walsh spoke to Socialist Organiser

The settlement didn't achieve any of the five or six original aims of the dispute. The pay formula that was at the centre of the dispute, hasn't been achieved.

The internal mailing Roger Poole's sending round seems to imply that there's some suggestion by the government that they'll honour the levels of pay achieved this year. That was said in the '86 salaried agreement and nothing of the sort happened.

Most of the rank and file membership don't expect anything of the sort to happen now. What's more, if we'd have accepted the April 1989 pay deal and April '90 deal, we'd have got the same levels as we have now. Those deals, in those two years, would have been in the region of 6-7% and that's all this new deal has achieved for us. Not a single one of the original points was gained.

Perhaps more alarmingly, there is the spectre being raised of local pay negotiations. That's going to cause real problems for services furthest away from the South East of England. The South East has a serious problem recruiting staff therefore if it can incorporate into the pay scales a local element, then the scales will go considerably higher than in other parts of the country. That was a fact Scottish crews started to take on board only very late on in the balloting. Quite a number indicated to us that they would have voted differently had they had more time to chew this issue over.

It's hard to know exactly what was in Poole's mind, calling for acceptance. There are two schools of thought. One, that Poole decided this was a deal worth accepting and the other that the leadership of the five unions informed Poole that the time was right to accept the deal, that the unions weren't prepared to go on funding the dispute any further — the time, the allocation of resources

had expired. Therefore Poole was basically instructed to reach an agreement with management and recommend acceptance to the staff. We feel that's what has happened. One of those two actions — both of them are thoroughly dishonourable.

Repeated calls were being made, in every major city, for a 24-hour show of solidarity, in terms of an all-out general strike, and those calls were being well received by rank and file trade unionists. An escalation of the dispute was very much on the cards following the demonstrations all over the country at the end of January. We had a tremendous day of action up here, people didn't bother with just the 15 minutes, they took the whole day off. We spent a lot of time going round talking to rank and file members after those rallies and demonstrations and the response we were getting was very positive.

Solidarity action was on the cards and was being talked of more and more. Indeed, some leaderships of individual unions were prepared to start organising on that basis. We had reports of the NUR and FBU leaderships looking favourably on that sort of strategy — but were told, in no uncertain terms, by the 5 unions involved in the dispute, that their help in that field was neither required nor wanted — so they backed off from that.

The decision to take strike action here was to make known how we felt we'd been sold down the river by the TUC leadership. We wanted as many crews to realise what was being offered. The media did a good selling job for Poole's package and there seemed to be no-one saying it wasn't a good deal. Or those that were, were made to sound like malcontents. In fact, Kenneth Clarke, the health minister, seemed to be the on-

ly truthful one — he said it's just the same amount of money dressed up in a different way. That's why he wanted to bring to the attention of the public we'd been conned.

We took strike action with our own emergency cover. We are fortunate that the council hired ambulances for us. We had nine vehicles running, which was very good when you consider the normal level is only 30. They were really well organised, and we had a proper radio network (much better than the one we normally use). Doctors and hospitals were told by the Regional Health Authority not to use us because we weren't a proper service. It would be better to have a police van — a transit van and a few blankets. Our service had proper vehicles — we made public our number, sent out handbills with it on and also used them to explain why we were on strike. We didn't know how well we would be used but in the end we were as busy as we were normally.

Hopefully our dispute will have inspired other sectors of the NHS to go for better pay deals. Staff within the NHS, particularly the ancillary workers, are amongst the lowest paid sector of the British working class — they deserve far better rates and some formula, whatever shape, that will preserve the values of their pay scales.

Though we can't look at the settlement as a victory some good things have come from our six months of action. Ambulance workers haven't been noted for their political activity. The more rural branches, like Shropshire, weren't considered political branches. Now they've become educated and politicised to an extent by this, and they've learnt how to deal with it. They're certainly stronger trade union members after it.

As a branch we're much stronger than

we've ever been. In our own service we've got a lot of part-time staff, who to me were the very backbone of the dispute. Some hadn't been involved in industrial action before but didn't hesitate to get involved. Some said they'd voted Tory all their lives — they hadn't had reason to think differently, but now think they've been walking around with their eyes shut. If the dispute educated those people it's been worth it.

Without the pay formula we can see this will be a perennial dispute until that's achieved. During the dispute we had a lot of dialogue with other stations around the country. We had a number of contacts we could ring to get the real picture of what was happening. We want to retain the links we've made, and are setting up a conference on Saturday 3 April, at the Trade Union Centre, Liverpool. It's for all the people we've been in contact with to have a discussion, to look at the lessons we've learnt in this dispute, and plan for any future disputes on this scale.

Clarke sees the way forward for the ambulance service and other sectors of the NHS of local pay structures and bargaining. Not just as an ingredient of an overall pay strategy, he wants that to be the actual pay strategy. That's something we need to discuss how to oppose. There's possible moves toward privatisation — we have to discuss them. We also need to think what strategy health workers should take to win disputes — it's different from other places where you can walk out the door and turn off the machines.

The conference should be a way of preserving our unity. We've never had anything like this before, and we don't want to lose the unity that we've achieved in the last six months.

## CPSA: pay fight must start now

By Mark Serwotka, Merthyr Tydfil DSS

CPSA members are amongst the lowest paid in the Civil Service. For the last ten years we have had a drop in our living standards as our pay settlements have been less than the rate of inflation.

Last year, the right wing Executive of the union succeeded in forcing through a long-term pay deal with the government. This deal was accepted in a postal ballot of the membership, although the vote to accept was won by the Executive running the most dishonest and deceitful campaign in recent years. Part of this campaign was a series of claims that we would have an increase of up to 23% in some cases, as well as the removal of any need to fight in the future because of the establishment of a settled formula which would ensure that our earnings were in line with those in private in-

dustry.

The reality of the pay deal was a very different story. On average wages rise by 6.5%! In London, the London weighting allowance was not increased at all. Regional, local and performance pay were all introduced. Since then we have also seen a Bonus Pay Scheme introduced which allows management to make one off payments to individuals for carrying out everyday tasks in an exceptional way! This has meant the office favourites getting sums up to £1,000 as a 'bonus'. This is all paid for out of existing budgets. In other words we are paying for a favourite's charter.

This year the pay review body is recommending that we receive a pay rise of between 7.2% and 9.4%. All negotiations therefore will be about a settlement between those two amounts. After the negotiations are complete the right-wing Executive intend to run a postal ballot on the offer, it seems likely that they will recommend a 'yes' vote. Against this background the attitude of activists in the branches is vitally important. It would be wrong to sit back and wait for the offer and then

ballot. We should be starting a pay campaign now. The poll tax alone has raised the question of pay in member's minds.

They are already asking what's happening? And how much will we get this year etc. Unfortunately the Broad Left seemed to have fallen into the trap of waiting for the ballot and arguing a 'No' vote. This is an irresponsible approach, it means fighting on the management's and right wing's terms and would lead to a negative campaign.

Instead we should be calling meetings now. Workplaces, Areas, branches should all be used to raise the issue of pay, call for a campaign and to argue for submitting a claim to the employer as opposed to waiting for an offer.

The claim should be flat rate, percentages will not be in our interests. The claim should be for £30 per week. Flooding the NEC with these demands will be useful. It will also ensure that the issues are raised within the membership. They will leave us in a strong position to defeat any attempts to impose a shoddy deal and to launch the necessary strike action that will be required to win our demands.

## IN BRIEF

British Rail union leaders are seeking a pay increase of at least 10%. They have rejected management's offer of 8% linked to a 37-hour week with productivity strings.

The EETPU is to ballot its manual worker members in the electricity supply industry for industrial action after rejecting a pay offer of 8.5%.

A series of one-day strikes by British Telecom managers over a new pay structure are set to commence. This follows a ballot by the Society of Telecom Executives.

# SOCIALIST

## ORGANISER

### Tory budget has no answers

Anyone who expected a Tory budget to work miracles with the economy would have been disappointed.

"Cautious and prudent" was John Major's first Budget. More than past Thatcher government Budgets, it is aimed — though in-

decisively — at helping the government get over its political difficulties.

Income tax remains the same, though personal allowances rise in line with inflation so that most taxpayers will be 50p or £1 better off. Tobacco and alcohol taxes go up 10 per cent. Incentives to get people to save include increased poll tax relief for high savers.

Users of workplace nurseries will no longer be taxed for it. Most importantly, though, interest rates remain what they were, and may even rise further.

Inflation is predicted even by the Chancellor to continue to rise — "for a few months". Major's predecessor Nigel Lawson said that too, a year ago.

And with inflation goes working-class militant action to keep wages in line.

### An appeal from Socialist Organiser to defend freedom of dissent in the Labour Party

The editorial board of Socialist Organiser has published the following petition, and calls on all readers to sign it and seek signatures in the labour movement.

"The Labour Party National Executive in February decided to 'investigate' Socialist Organiser, to see if our paper should be proscribed and our supporters expelled from the Labour Party.

The editorial board of Socialist Organiser is asking Labour and trade union activists to help defend freedom of speech in the labour movement by endorsing this statement:

"We oppose expulsions of Labour Party members for their political views. We believe that the right for Labour Party members to associate to publish and distribute journals such as Socialist Organiser is an essential part of the democratic life of the Labour Party."

• Please return to PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA.

Name.....

Organisation/position .....

.....

.....

### Stop press

The Labour Party National Executive will vote next Wednesday (28 March) on a proposal from the Organisation Sub-Committee for an investigation into Nottingham East CLP.

The CLP AGM was closed down, following which, it is alleged, there were violent scenes.

An enquiry into violence must not be used as a cover for a right-wing witch-hunt.



Manchester 17 March 1990: After the murder of Farzad Bazoft, British and Iraqi people, some with scarves round their faces to avoid recognition, demonstrate against the regime. Photo: Paul Herrmann (Profile).

# The second murder of Farzad Barzoft

By Gerry Bates

The revelation last week that Farzad Bazoft, the journalist killed by the Iraqi regime, had a petty criminal record, appeared in the British media as if it might partially vindicate his death.

Then Tory MPs and the press allowed themselves the speculation that he might indeed have been a spy, one of ours or one of Israel's, or if not, investigative journalism is pretty damned near the same thing anyway.

Why it should be that because you were once convicted of minor fraud you are more likely to be guilty of international espionage has not been made clear.

Equally unclear is why Mr Allason MP, who thinks Bazoft may have been up to something should therefore want to abandon him. If he was a British spy, you would have thought that Tory MPs might show a little more solidarity. It certainly isn't much of an advert for spying, is it? If you get caught, don't expect us to help you.

Quite clearly, the British establishment has had no desire at

all to get on the wrong side of Iraq's Saddam Hussein just because he was murdering an innocent journalist. Bigger things were at stake than Farzad Bazoft's life.

But what? In part, no doubt, the peculiar attitude of the British government and media is explained by the fact that Bazoft was not really English. He was Iranian, a dark-skinned foreigner, altogether less deserving of our sympathy than he might have been with a different ethnic origin: these Middle Easterners, you know, are always killing each other; one more, who had defrauded a British building society of a few hundred pounds, didn't make much difference.

But there is more to it. Throughout the Gulf War, the British government remained on friendly terms with Saddam Hussein (as it did, behind the scenes, with Khomeini). Like other Western governments, it sold the Iraqis guns.

Now the war is over, Iraq and Iran are attractive fields for investment by British companies. And there's no money to be made in causing diplomatic crises, after all. What's one man's life compared to the millions to be made from post-belligerent Iraq?

The British government did nothing to save Farzad Bazoft. Now they want to cover their backs with spurious innuendo about the dead journalist.

## Lambeth poll tax protest

Lambeth Against the Poll Tax calls on the people of Lambeth to turn up in their thousands to the lobby of the council on the evening of the poll tax setting, which will now be Thursday 29 March.

The lobby is being organised as a peaceful mass protest against the poll tax.

We are campaigning for mass non-payment of the poll tax, for the trade unions to refuse to co-operate with it, and for Lambeth Council not to implement it.

We also call on the council to give a commitment that they will not

prosecute poll tax non-payers.

We are part of a massive tidal wave of opposition sweeping the country against the Tory poll tax. We are completely confident that we have the arguments, and the mass of the people with us, to defeat this unfair and unjust tax.

We reject the media scare campaign over "organised violence" which is trying to divert attention from the real issues. We recognise that many people are very angry about the poll tax but believe that we must ensure that we build a movement that commits itself to well organised and disciplined events, to express the anger of or-

dinary people over the poll tax.

We are building a mass democratic movement which will defeat the poll tax. Join the anti-poll tax movement. No poll tax here!

**Lambeth Against the Poll Tax**  
Public Meeting  
**Thursday 22 March**  
**7.30**  
**Lambeth Town Hall**

• For more details contact Councillor Steve French on 01 733 3403.

**LEFT UNITY**

**VOTE**

**Mark**

**SANDELL**

**Janine**

**BOOTH**

**Steve**  
**MITCHELL**

**Part time Executive Officers**

**DON'T PAY THE POLL TAX STOP LOANS**

**ORGANISE FOR ACTION**  
**VOTE LABOUR**