

SOCIALIST

ORGANISER

**Vote
Labour
May 3rd!**

POLL TAX

Teachers say we'll strike!

Hands off Lithuania!

Brezhnev would have sent in the tanks to crush the Lithuanians, as he sent the Warsaw Pact armies to crush the Prague Spring in 1968.

The West's "good Tsar", Mikhail Gorbachev, is more civilised. For Tsar Mikhail, not tanks and mass repression — *or not yet* — but brutal economic strangulation.

The USSR gave a curt imperialist ultimatum to the Lithuanians: renounce your attempt to regain the independence taken from you 50 years ago by Hitler and Stalin, or face immediate economic sanctions, indeed all-out economic war.

The Lithuanians have stood their ground, the ultimatum date has passed, and as we go to press Gorbachev has started the economic



Soviet troops in Vilnius, capital of Lithuania

**By Liam Conway
(Secretary, Central
Notts NUT, in per-
sonal capacity)**

At our union conference in Bournemouth, teachers have voted for national strike action against job cuts due to the poll tax.

The poll tax means cuts across the board in local authorities, and a threat to the jobs of all local authority workers — teachers, other workers in education, and council workers of all sorts.

Our fight against those cuts is linked to the campaign by anti-poll-tax unions for mass non-payment of the tax.

For us, the threat of cuts is even greater because Local Management of Schools (LMS) — setting individual and usually reduced budgets for individual schools — is coming in at the same time as the poll tax. There have been cases of experienced teachers being sacked because they are 'too expensive' and the school wants to replace

'It's quite likely that the Executive will seek a legal ruling that we can't take any action or alternatively simply not implement the conference decision.

"We have to do our best to ensure the policy is implemented by building up a big campaign of pressure. This will be possible because of the fact that so many teachers face redundancy in so many areas.

The most important thing is that the majority of delegates have been convinced. They can be used as the basis for building solidarity action".

Ian Murch, Executive member for Bradford and proposer of the resolution to fight redundancies.

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2 POLL TAX

NUJ votes to oppose poll tax

The National Union of Journalists Annual Delegate Meeting (ADM) has committed the union to a policy of outright opposition to the poll tax through mass non-payment and industrial action. The meeting passed the following motion by a large majority:

"This ADM re-affirms its opposition to the poll tax. The government continues to push the tax and local authorities across the country are co-operating with its implementation. ADM believes that the tax could be defeated if the labour movement mobilised the very widespread opposition to the poll tax through a mass non-payment campaign.

This ADM calls for:

1. Mass non-payment of the poll tax. The Executive should urge NUI members not to pay.
2. Full support for anti-poll tax unions. NUI branches should be encouraged to affiliate to and participate in their local anti-poll-tax group.
3. Industrial action across the trade

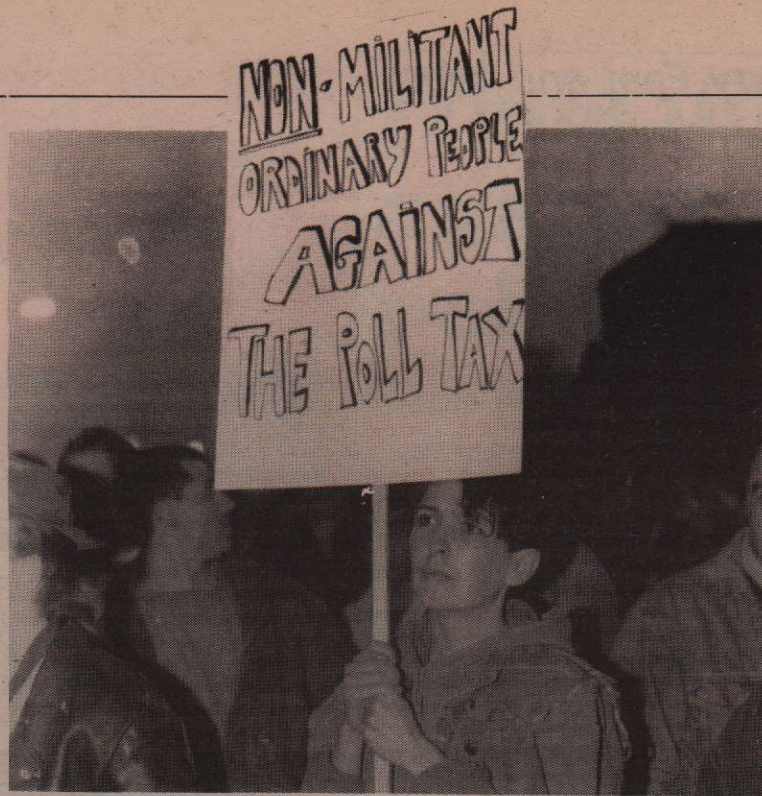
union movement against the poll tax.

4. Full support for workers' disciplined for non-implementation of the tax.

5. The Executive to write to the Association of Metropolitan Authorities and the Association of District Councils calling on them to ask their members not to implement the poll tax.

6. Local authorities to refuse to use warrant sales to collect debts arising out of poll tax non-payment.

It is essential now that branches and chapels use this decision as a basis for action, both locally and nationally. As well as giving support to anti-poll-tax groups around the country, they should sponsor the conference against the poll tax called by the Socialist Movement Trade Union Committee on 23rd June, and should call upon the NUI Executive to commit the union nationally to support and help build the conference.



Why the Sheffield poll tax strike ended

By a Sheffield housing worker

At a NALGO mass meeting of Sheffield housing workers affected by the poll tax, on Wednesday (11 April) a vote to return to work was passed by 180 to 153 votes.

The motion, brought by a group of area managers, re-affirmed NALGO's rejection of the latest management offer but conceded management's right to impose a deal. The argument was that we could not win a fight over the conditions on which the poll tax was to be introduced, so we should instead save our strength for a fight over 'mixed tenure management'.

The decision to allow a deal to be imposed is a disastrous one and will play directly into management's hands. Around a month ago a ballot was conducted over willingness to take strike action. The result was 75% yes vote. At that point NALGO was in a position of strength and management had to concede some ground. We had district backing and when the first workers came out they got national backing from the NEC. So what went wrong?

Management have sought to draw out the dispute as long as possible while attempting to divide NALGO. The acceptance of the last management offer by the minority 'unions' has been exploited to the full by management. Letters to in-

dividuals outlining the latest offer have been sent to all staff and some directors have encouraged individuals to sign and return those letters to signify individual acceptance of the offer. The implication clearly being that the City Council can negotiate deals with individual workers and by-pass the union and established negotiations procedures. In addition to all this an atmosphere of a witch-hunt has been fostered both by area managers, NUPE shop stewards and top level management against the left in

NALGO.

The mover of the motion to return to work, said the days of strikes achieving anything were over. One thing is for sure that NALGO will be able to win few battles with management if we allow management to manipulate us and play us off one against the other. This dispute over the poll tax could have been won, it's vital we learn the lessons of what went wrong and make sure we don't repeat them next time.

NUT: challenge right wing!

Andy Dixon, Executive member for Greater Manchester

'The realities of struggling against the Tories have come into conference.

The emergency motion came from the real and immediate threat of government policy in various parts of the country.

"It also shows a political weakness of the Executive. Firstly

because it could not see it coming and secondly because they are frightened of any possible fight with the government.

"McAvoy is using his position politically. He can no longer claim to be a neutral employee. The myth that the union is non-political has been exploded.

"The right wing policies of Straw, Kinnock and McAvoy must now be challenged head-on. To quote Ian Morgan the right wing executive "You can't build policies out of straw", (or does he mean Straw?)"

Teachers say we'll strike!

From front page

them by 'cheaper' inexperienced teachers.

In the past week, massive redundancies have been announced in several authorities, including Bradford, Nottinghamshire and Cambridgeshire. More are expected in other authorities.

It was a humiliating defeat for the right wing leadership of the National Union of Teachers (NUT) when our conference at Bournemouth over Easter upheld our right to take national strike action in defence of jobs.

The first vote on the issue gave a firm majority of 103,000 to 77,000 despite attempts by the union Executive and general secretary Doug McAvoy to scare conference into thinking that anything other than isolated action within individual schools would be illegal.

In an even more desperate move to reverse this decision McAvoy attempted to portray Militant as a conspiratorial force behind the conference decision. The accusation is quite laughable given Militant's weakness within NUT left. But the final card vote confirmed our decision by 160,000 to 74,000.

The tide has clearly turned within the NUT against the attempts by McAvoy to steer it towards an anti-strike professional advertising agency — a course of action also advocated by the major right wing force within the Executive, the CP-dominated Broad Left (sic!)

Anger has been growing in schools at the introduction of the national curriculum and testing, withdrawal of negotiating rights, poll tax cuts and LMS. This coupled with a new mood of confidence due to the anti-poll tax revolt and the Tory crisis, is putting the union on a new course for fighting back.

The left also won on the issue of taking action against the reactionary aspects of the national curriculum such as exam testing of young children. The Executive were defeated by the left in their attempts to put restrictions on the use of the political fund now being proposed for the union.

Further victories for the left are anticipated on the final day of the conference although disgraceful bureaucratic handling of conference by union President Barbara Lloyd will undoubtedly push some items off the agenda.

The challenge is now for the left in the union, the Socialist Teachers Alliance and the Campaign for a Democratic and Fighting Union to organise more effectively between conferences in a united manner. Disgraceful tactics can be expected from the union leadership to sabotage conference policy in defence of teachers' jobs. On pay they have gained room to manoeuvre away from a fightback by postponing any decision until a Special Conference in October.

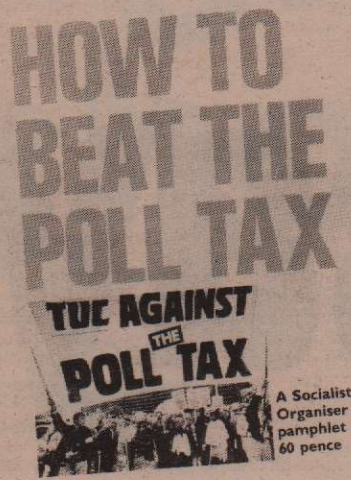
An early national meeting must be convened, drawing in all the forces of opposition in the NUT to continue the fightback begun at this conference.

Rule, what rule?

Straight after the result of the card vote on jobs, cuts and the poll tax was announced the President of the NUT, Barbara Lloyd made an announcement. She said that she wanted to "make it clear that the rules of the union state that any action the union takes must be within the law".

Andy Dixon, Executive member for Greater Manchester, brandishing a copy of the union's rule book then asked Barbara what rule she was referring to. She could not answer him.

An omen for the future...



60p plus 32p postage from SO, PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA

Royal rumours

OUT AND PROUD

By Edward Ellis

The *Daily Mirror* last week conducted an 'exclusive interview' with an important personage that would seem to have been along the following lines.

Intrepid and diplomatic *Daily Mirror* reporter: "Is it true, your royal highness, that you are one of those gays?"

Outraged and offended royal highness: "Piss off."

Still, it hit the headlines as major news, the news being that Prince Edward is not gay. Are we to expect more such headlines as every famous person in the world who is not gay announces this fact? It could go on for years. In ten years

the *Daily Mirror* will be revealing that Colonel Gadaffi and Arthur Scargill deny everything.

The rumour supposedly was that Prince Edward had been having it away with Michael Ball, star of *Aspects of Love*, which has just opened on Broadway. Michael Ball quickly appeared in several tabloids the next day in the company of Cathy McGowan, so he can't be gay anyway. Then the *Daily Mirror*, having concocted the news in the first place, rushed to Edward's defence with various photographs of him looking severely rufty tufty, so we can all sleep safer in our beds now that that's sorted out.

The interesting thing is that everyone wants to know, if they're honest. I sure as hell want to know, although I had expected Michael Ball to have more imagination, him having such a nice voice and everything. The fact is that homosexuality is talked about all the time. It's not talked about very sensibly, of course, but talked about it certainly is. You can't open a tabloid without finding some reference or other to it.

Why does everyone want to talk about it? Why does everyone care who a balding Prince who shouldn't get paid so much (in fact shouldn't have his job at all, I suppose) sleeps with? Will it make him less irritating if he sleeps with girls? Will it render his speeches more profound? Is Prince Andrew more worthy to be a feudal anachronism because he's managed to get Fergie pregnant once or twice?

Will civilisation collapse if Prince Edward is known to stand around off-stage simply melting every time the unfortunately named Mr Ball starts off, "Love, love changes everything...?" Will the millions of *Sun* and *Daily Mirror* readers who lap up every gristly bit of nonsense about the royal family cease to do so once they know that one member of this noble British madhouse prefers people called Michael who happen to be boys (not always the case in aristocratic circles, I notice)? I doubt it.

Homosexuality was once blamed for the fall of the Roman Empire. No one ever managed to square this with the known fact that the

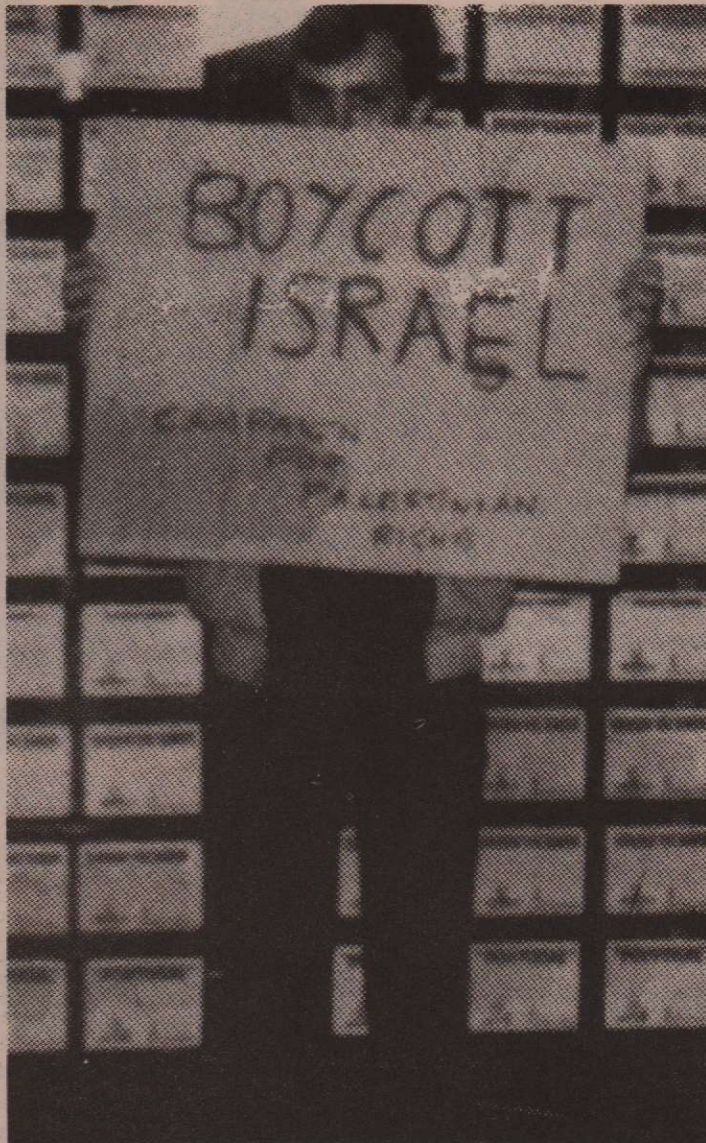
"unspeakable vice of the Greeks" didn't stop them from developing their civilisation. But anyway, although most people these days think that the fall of the Roman Empire probably had some other cause, you know, ailing economy, corrupt emperors, invasions of barbarians, etc, they still get upset by gay princes.

I'd like it if Prince Edward came out, assuming he is gay, which everybody does (as the *Daily Mirror* knows very well, nothing confirms suspicions like a denial). I can't say it would change my life very much. But it wouldn't do any harm, and might even help — help the lives of the thousands of people for whom discovery could mean worse things than a hard time in the press, that is.

Anyway, the *Daily Mirror* got the rumour wrong. It's not Michael Ball he's supposed to be seeing. It's a different Michael altogether. I have it on good authority.

Guesses on a postcard, please, to Edward Ellis, Out and Proud, etc.

A clue: he used to be in EastEnders.



In 1938, the Nazis attacked Jewish shops. The 1988 picket from the 'Campaign for Palestinian Rights' is in fact the National Front. Photos: Searchlight

Name that source!

PRESS GANG

By Jim Denham

One unforeseen result of the Strangeways prison seige was that Bill Goodwin was not sent to jail last week.

Mr Goodwin is a trainee journalist on *The Engineer*. Last November the High Court ordered him to reveal his source of information about the commercial affairs of 'Company X'. Mr Goodwin may be only a humble trainee on a relatively obscure trade magazine but he understood enough about the elementary ethics of journalism, to refuse.

He appealed unsuccessfully to the House of Lords and last Tuesday returned to the High Court, expecting to be sent down.

Three journalists this century have been jailed for contempt of court: Brendan Mulholland of the *Daily Mail* and Reginald Foster of the *Daily Sketch*, got six and three months respectively for refusing to name sources during the Vassall case of 1963; in 1971 Bernard Falk, the genial TV and radio presenter, spent four days in Crumlin Road prison after refusing to identify an IRA man he had interviewed.

Then came the 1981 Contempt of Court Act, Section 10 of which gives journalists the right to refuse to disclose sources... "unless it is established to the satisfaction of the court that disclosure is necessary in the interests of justice or national security, or for the prevention of disorder or crime."

That seems fair enough, doesn't it? In fact it wasn't very long at all before the judges seized upon the words that followed "unless..." to make a mockery of Parliament's intentions.

The Sarah Tisdall case demonstrated once and for all the uselessness of the statutory protection supposedly contained in Section 10. In 1983 *The Guardian* published excerpts from a leaked Ministry of Defence document and was promptly ordered to return it so that the source could be identified.

The paper appealed, basing its case on Section 10. In an extraordinary decision, the Court of Appeal ruled that although the publication of that particular document posed no threat to 'national security', the person who leaked it was obviously untrustworthy and might leak more important documents in the future. *Guardian* editor Peter Preston huffed and puffed about freedom of the press and searched his liberal conscience for about five minutes before capitulating. Sarah Tisdall got six months.

Fortunately, some journalists have shown more guts. Last year, *The Independent's* financial reporter Jeremy Warner was ordered to reveal his source for articles he's written about insider dealing. The High Court had ruled that Section 10 protection did not apply because disclosure was "necessary in the interests of justice" and "prevention of crime".

Such an interpretation would, of course, make it impossible to protect any sources in any article about any crime... Mr Warner stood his ground and was fined £20,000 with £100,000 costs.

The "interests of justice" get out was used again by the Law Lords in turning down William Goodwin's appeal. This time a further imaginative twist was added by Lord Bridge who explained that 'justice' could mean the wish of a private company to discipline a disloyal employee, "notwithstanding that no legal proceedings might be necessary to achieve this end".

Taken together with the decisions reached by the learned judges in the Tisdall case and the Warner case, this amounts to a situation where journalists cannot legally protect any source in any article dealing with security matters, crime or the internal affairs of a private company. So much for investigative journalism.

Incidentally, *The Engineer* complied with 'Company X's' injunction on William Goodwin's article, which was never published. No commercial damage was done. The only 'crime' in this case was the refusal to reveal sources.

Even so, 'Company X' wanted Goodwin sent down for six months, but Mr Justice Hoffmann observed, "the prisons have enough problems without having to take an otherwise perfectly honourable man like yourself".

Mr Goodwin was fined £5,000 with £100,000 costs.

Should we boycott Israeli goods?

EDITORIAL

A new attempt is being made to set up a movement in Britain to support the Palestinian Arabs by organising a boycott of Israeli goods on sale here.

It would be a campaign like the decades-long boycott of South African goods. According to press reports, it already has pledges of support from as many as twenty MPs, mainly Labour, and including Clare Short.

Socialist Organiser supports the Palestinian uprising in the Israeli-occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip, and we support those within Israel fighting to get the Israeli army out of the occupied territories and for equal rights for Israel's Arab minority.

But we believe the boycott is a bad idea. It will do little to help the Arabs either within Israel or in the West Bank and Gaza. It will do more harm than good.

In the first place, such campaigns

generally have little direct effect. In the 30 years since the Sharpeville massacre triggered a powerful international campaign to boycott South African goods, its impact on South Africa has been pretty marginal and peripheral.

If progress has been made, it is mainly the result of the mass movement within South Africa. The main importance of the campaign to boycott South African goods has been not economic but political, to provide a focus for anti-apartheid propaganda and agitation.

Nobody could reasonably expect a consumer boycott campaign to tip the balance for the Palestinians.

Even so, a boycott might make sense as a means of mobilising and focusing a political campaign against Israel. The reason it doesn't make sense, and should be opposed, is that such a campaign would inevitably become a campaign against the Israel-supporting Jewish community in Britain, who number not much fewer than half a million.

The Nazi mass murder, and the struggle to win, consolidate and defend the Jewish state, are central to the identity of the Jewish community. It is not possible to have a campaign to boycott Israeli goods without coming into headlong conflict with the Jewish community and then — if only in self-defence — going on to target them and campaign against them as an Israeli fifth column.

And why stop with a boycott? In the early '80s some supporters of *Socialist Organiser* — who now support *Briefing* and *Socialist Outlook* — wanted us to campaign to "drive Zionists out of the labour movement". The campaign to boycott Israeli goods would quickly, and inevitably, overlap with such blind "anti-imperialist" and

"anti-Zionist" emotion and bigotry.

It would inevitably lead to a campaign for a boycott of — and pickets of — for example Marks and Spencer and other "Zionist"-owned enterprises.

Because they advocate the destruction of Israel, sections of the left are forced into an attitude of comprehensive hostility to most Jews, who have a reflex identification with Israel. Whatever anybody intends, that is a form of anti-semitism. The boycott proposal would make things worse. It would pitch sections of the left into a campaigning variant of anti-semitism.

A boycott of Israeli goods does not necessarily or logically imply the destruction of Israel; but those who have long campaigned for the boycott do stand for the destruction of Israel, and the boycott proposal does have the same logic of comprehensive hostility to the Jewish community in Britain.

To believe that will do the Palestinian Arabs any good you have to be drunk on the "anti-imperialism of idiots" according to which "Zionism" is evil incarnate and equivalent to fascism.

Instead, we believe, socialist supporters of Palestinian rights should advocate reconciliation between Jews and Arabs. That must mean

recognising that both nations have a right to their own state — the policy of both the Israeli radical left and the Palestine Liberation Organisation. We support the Palestinian uprising on that political basis.

The well-intentioned proposal to help the oppressed Palestinians through a boycott would quickly and inexorably turn into a campaign against the Jewish community. Behind this 'left'-initiated campaign would line up all the old-fashioned anti-semites.

The Nazi National Front is already campaigning for a boycott of Israeli goods. The left boycott campaigners have very different motives and goals from those of the National Front. Brutus and Cassius — according to Shakespeare — had radically different motives for stabbing Julius Caesar. But Caesar probably wouldn't have thought those differences were very important.

The logic of the idea that Israel is a bad nation which does not have a right to exist — the idea about the Middle East dominant on the left from the SWP through to sections of Labour's soft left — would unfold within such a campaign in all its vicious anti-socialist stupidity.

Stop it before it starts!

The left should oppose and boycott any boycott of Israeli goods.

Campaign for Solidarity with Workers in the Eastern Bloc
London Meeting

Fighting Anti-Semitism in Eastern Europe

Speakers from East Germany, 'Searchlight'

Tuesday 24 April
7.30pm

Lucas Arms, Grays Inn Road, WC1

'The emancipation of the working class is also the emancipation of all human beings without distinction of sex or race'

Karl Marx
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4 CIVIL LIBERTIES

Prisons for property

GRAFFITI

Of 38,548 prisoners sentenced in 1988, nearly half were in prison for crimes against property.

Only 23% were there for violence against the person (and many of them may have been sentenced for crimes like 'assault' which involve no 'actual bodily harm'). 7% were imprisoned under charges of sexual offence.

That so many people are in prison for theft is instructive. The legal system is far more concerned to defend property than it is to defend people.

Working class people who are burgled know full well that it is extremely unlikely that the burglars will ever be caught or their possessions found. Muggers usually get away with it, too, for that matter. Bank robbers, on the other hand, are taken more seriously by the legal system, from the police upwards.

Imprisonment is not a good way to deal with petty thieves. Even if poverty is not the direct cause of their thieving (and often it is), social conditions in a more general sense certainly are.

To the problem of working class kids nicking televisions from their neighbours, heavier policing isn't much of an answer. The underlying problem is the lack of solidarity in working class communities — the lack of a 'community' properly speaking.

Overcrowding was clearly a big part of the cause of the Strangeways and other recent prison riots. One easy answer to that is to release from prison all those people who are no physical danger to other people, that is, most of them.

Imelda Marcos, on trial in the United States, bathes as usual in the glare of publicity. She turns up in a limo.

But co-defendant Adnan Khashoggi, formerly Saudi Arabia's OPEC-whizz kid and richest man in the world, goes, unrecognised on the subway. How are the mighty fallen! But Khashoggi claims he uses the underground railway only because it's quicker than his limo.

They are on trial for corruption charges.

They both have a few millions left, it would seem. Life isn't too bad, then.

An armoured car rolling down your street? Has martial law come to the UK?

No, maybe it's just the poll tax collector. Rhymney Valley District Council, in South Wales, has bought an armoured van to serve as a mobile tax office.

The van is built to resist chain-saw and axe attacks, and equipped with a ventilation system to counter gas attacks, toughened glass, siren alarms and two-way radio.

According to the Sunday Times, the council 'hopes the armoured vans will encourage the public especially those who want to pay in cash'.

According to one theory, the nationalised economies of the old Stalinist systems in Eastern Europe defined them as 'workers' states'.

The all-stifling bureaucratic regimes, however, made them deformed workers' states.

Today the major means of production in Eastern Europe are still nationalised; but the old one-party states have been shattered and replaced by regimes which are democratic, at least as these things go in today's world. So are the countries of Eastern Europe now democratic workers' states?

Obviously not. Nowhere in Eastern Europe, as yet, do the workers even have a strong political party of their own. Their trade unions are weak. The governments are dominated by aggressively pro-capitalist politicians. The factories are still run by the old bureaucrats, though now increasingly in alliance with Western capitalism.

Which all shows that there must be something wrong with the 'workers' state' theory... But some people on the left may be clinging to the theory instead of the reality.

Petr Uhl has long been the best known Trotskyist in Eastern Europe. A member of the international current which includes Ernest Mandel in Belgium, the LCR in France, and *Socialist Outlook* and *Socialist Action* in Britain, he was a student leader in 1968 and a founder of Charter 77, serving nine years in prison during his brave struggle against the Stalinist regime in Czechoslovakia.

And now he is...boss of Czechoslovakia's state press agency! Doubtless he does a better job than the Stalinist he replaced, and doubtless he has more autonomy from the pro-capitalist politicians now dominating Czechoslovakia's government than such bosses of state agencies had in less turbulent times.

Nonetheless, if Czechoslovakia is anything less than a democratic workers' state, it can hardly make sense for a Trotskyist to take a top official job. All the more so since our reports from Prague are that Uhl's move into the job has led to him ceasing activity in 'Left Alternative', the small left group founded by him late last year.

Yet Uhl's comrades report his elevation without comment, the French LCR weekly *Rouge* even commenting proudly on the number of people — 1700 — employed by his agency.

What do Uhl and his comrades think is the class nature of the new government in Czechoslovakia? And what class attitude should socialists have to it?



Whitehall spies on half a million people

By a CPSA member

Half a million civil servants, contractors, consultants and casuals were 'vetted' by Whitehall last year alone, according to an unpublished House of Commons report leaked to the *Independent*.

In the name of security screening, 508,942 people had their police files checked. The report says that the files are often extremely badly-informed and out of date — 'in a

terrifying state of inaccuracy', according to the Law Society.

The Home Office says that people need to be checked up on if they are going to have access to classified material. But half a million people? Casuals? The report dismisses this claim.

There is no certainty even that the police reports refer to the same person, as there is no link to fingerprints.

The system of vetting can only in part be to weed out people with criminal records. Even that is an infringement of civil liberties. If someone has been punished for a crime, interfering with later employment is just further punishment.

But vetting is also political. The

top civil service does not take kindly to socialists. If, for some reason, a socialist wished to become a top civil servant, vetting would put paid to their ambitions. The civil service, at the summit of its hierarchy, wants only tried and tested Tories. That's the nature of the system. This is even more true in 'sensitive' government departments like defence. 'Intelligence' information could be given to employers.

The report suggests that vetting has become routine. Officially, it is supposed to cover people seeking jobs that bring them into contact with children; applicants for sex shops and amusement arcade licences; for the police force; potential jurors in cases involving national security; and drivers of heavy goods and passenger vehicles.

But the report says that the vetting is used much more widely. And it notes that the local police forces providing the information might do so 'haphazardly' — ie without proper concern for individual liberties. The report says: "We believe that if the public were more aware of these arrangements, there would be an outcry. There is no element of accountability in the present arrangements."

People have a right not to have their personal information stored in police files at all, never mind have future employers given access to it when they are not. The whole system should be abolished.

A joint weekly of the Left?

LETTER

Please can you explain the future or later possibilities for Labour Briefing, Socialist Organiser and Socialist Campaign Group News being put together for a weekly paper, as a resource for the left.

As an alternative to Tribune also, a newspaper publication should be a centre for planning, debate, news and open views for the left.

Now is the time to pull all the resources together for socialism in the '90s if we are to forward our ideas and beliefs.

Let's go forward to socialism!

Andrew Melville
Secretary, Enderby Labour Party,
Leicester (personal capacity)

Chaos on the buses

THE HIDDEN HAND

The use of buses has gone down by ten per cent over three years since the Tory Government turned most bus routes over to free enterprise.

A report by the Association of Metropolitan Authorities, previewed in the *Sunday Correspondent*, finds that "in the main the commuter has suffered".

"There is no shortage of buses in city centres — but getting into town is proving increasingly problematic.

The main reason for buses being used less is, according to the report, poor information.

In areas where numerous different private operators run overlapping networks, comprehensive and up-to-date timetables are almost impossible to get. An extreme example is the bus service bet-

ween Hemel Hempstead and Stevenage. One company runs buses daytime, another evenings. They run from different stops, and neither company will give information on its rival's service.

Confused and frustrated travellers give up and go a different way.

Driver-only operation (without conductors) has reduced the costs of running buses.

And — so a free-market theorist might argue — if travellers really wanted buses with conductors, then they would pay extra fares for them, and it would be profitable to operate buses with conductors. If it is not profitable then there can be no real need or demand for conductors.

In fact no-one waiting for a bus will let a driver-only bus go by in order to wait longer for one with a conductor. The extra delays, congestion and strain caused by driver-only operation (it takes four times as long for passengers to get on as on buses with conductors, for ex-

ample) spread their effects over millions of people who have no way of protesting through market demand.

Every textbook of capitalist economics mentions the three factors which mean that a free market in bus services fails to do what the other chapters of the textbook say it should do, giving the consumers what they want.

The theories praising the free market assume that consumers have ready access to all the alternative products; that all the costs and benefits of the products are costs and benefits to the individual consumer and no-one else; and that consumers have full information about the products.

Bus services don't fit the bill. And, indeed, every textbook mentions that there are 'exceptions'.

The question is, are there any goods which aren't 'exceptions'? Aren't the 'exceptional' factors much more important, in fact, than the elements of correspondence to the idealised theory of the free market.

Socialist Organiser

Fighting for Socialism '90

Student weekend forum

Saturday — Sunday 12 — 13 May
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Hong Kong entry curbs are racist

The government, and for that matter its opposition critics don't like the idea of thousands of Hong Kong Chinese coming to Britain.

Backbench Tories are finding government proposals to give only 225,000 Hong Kong British citizens the right to immigrate too much to stomach. And Tory plans are careful to grant entry only to rich Hong Kong citizens. The poor have no chance, technically British citizens with the right to live in Britain, or not.

We hear less outcry about another lot of potential immigrants: white South Africans. Indeed according to the Home Office-funded UK Immigrants' Advisory Service, the government is deliberately encouraging South African whites who fear black majority rule, as these would most likely vote Tory — a precious quality these days.

Now you can't have it both ways. If the reason for limiting immigration is supposed to be that we have no room, then we can't suddenly find room just because the immigrants are white. If on the other hand...

The truth is that the whole idea of 'room' for immigrants is a re-herring dreamed up to stop non-white people getting into Britain.

London in a certain sense doesn't have 'room' for all the people who are sleeping under its bridges. But no one is proposing therefore to limit the number of people entering London from, say, Manchester. No one says that there aren't enough jobs in London, so Mancunians should go home. In fact everyone knows there are more jobs in Lon-

don, which is why so many people come here trying to find work.

That they don't find work is not because there are too many 'immigrants' to London — it's because of a breakdown in the system.

That people sleep under bridges is not because there are too many people and not enough places to live. There are plenty of places to live. And where there is a serious shortage of housing, there is plenty of money available that could be spent on building new houses.

It certainly isn't northerners coming to London, taking our jobs and stealing our houses, that causes all the problems. It's the system itself, the system that puts profit before people, and doesn't care if thousands of kids sleep rough in cardboard boxes, thousands more are stuck in bed and breakfast, and thousands more are on the dole.

It makes absolutely no more sense to limit the number of people coming from Hong Kong to Britain than it would to limit the numbers of Mancunians coming to London.

The Tories' hypocrisy when it comes to South African whites shows that they know that. It's got nothing to do with numbers. It's all about race. The Tories, and for that matter their opposition critics, in wanting to deny Hong Kong people the right to live in Britain are saying, quite simply that they don't want them here because they are Chinese.

The solution to unemployment and homelessness is for workers, whatever their race, to unite and fight together.

If white South Africans want to come to Britain, let them. But let anyone else who wants to, also come.



Workers' solidarity against apartheid

Naming no names, Nelson Mandela attacked Margaret Thatcher in his speech to the Wembley concert for her hypocritical stand on sanctions.

Mandela's freedom shows that outside pressure on South Africa can have an effect. But outside pressure wasn't all that won his freedom. Also, perhaps more important, was the mass movement in South Africa itself.

If — or when — apartheid falls, it must be replaced by a genuinely democratic system. All our solidarity must be to that end. We have to help the democratic forces in South Africa build a new system.

Most of all that means solidarity with

the powerful South African workers' movement. It will be no good if the workers inherit only closed factories. Solidarity must aim to help the working class in the fight for its rights, to work, to live decently and wherever they choose and for a system which doesn't just replace white bosses with black ones.

Government sanctions are not the most effective form of solidarity, certainly not for the purposes of aiding the movement itself, on the ground, because neither the motives nor the actions of governments can be trusted. What we need is working class solidarity.

That can take many forms. The workers at Dunne's store in Ireland who refused to sell South African goods took one form of action. Liverpool dockers

and many TGWU members in Leicester have boycotted work associated with apartheid. But other forms of solidarity are also possible: from inviting South African trade unionists to Britain to speak, to pressure on British companies in dispute with South African unions, to strike action in support of South African workers.

Mandela's release and visit to Britain should be an inspiration to us. It should show us that if we do not ignore the problems of the world, we can solve them. Mandela is free because millions of people across the world made it clear that they wanted him to be.

But our endeavours should not only be to free other 'Mandelas'. Freedom depends upon the movement that will construct it, and we must make sure that such a movement exists and is strong.

Behind the ANC torture scandal

By Tom Rigby

The African National Congress tortures, beats and kills dissidents within its own ranks.

That is the allegation being made against the ANC by five former members of its armed wing, Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK). Nelson Mandela has confirmed that many of the allegations are true.

According to a report in last Sunday's *Correspondent* (April 8) the five, Simla Molefe, Jacki Molefe, Ronnie Masarigo, Luvu Mbergo and Amos Maxonga, and many other ANC dissidents, have faced:

- Beatings
- Various forms of torture including 'kulukudu' in which prisoners are kept in underground containers exposed to the full heat of the African sun
- 'Daily bread' in which prisoners were forced to lie with their faces flat on a cement floor while officers in heavy army boots jumped up and down on their skulls
- 'Slaughter', where officers made inmates stand straight against a wall with their eyes open as they hurled rocks at their faces
- Testicle strangulation

All these punishments were visited on critical MK members at a punishment and 're-education' centre nicknamed 'Siberia' by the jailers.

The dissidents were being punished for a mutiny which spread across MK's Angolan camps in 1984 and involved up to 90% of the movement's fighters in the country.

The ANC rebels wanted MK to concentrate on the guerrilla struggle in South Africa rather than the war in Angola. Many were also critical of the flamboyant lifestyle of the ANC's exile leadership, a lifestyle in

stark contrast to the squalid conditions of many MK camps in the frontline states.

MK has never been free from infiltration by the South African secret service. These revelations come at a very difficult time for the ANC, as the movement's leadership prepares to enter 'pre-negotiations' with the regime and Mandela is about to visit Britain.

Nevertheless, it would be wrong for left-wingers to try to sweep the allegations briskly under the carpet.

The treatment of these dissidents should be seen as part of a more general pattern.

The ANC and ANC sympathisers in the liberation movement have in the past been ready to use physical violence or the threats of physical violence against left wing dissidents in the mass movement.

It should therefore come as no surprise that the MK leadership should be prepared to behave so brutally towards dissidents within their own ranks.

But why? MK is seen by many black South Africans as a liberation army, and it is a genuinely popular expression of resistance to the hated apartheid regime. Through the '70s and '80s, militant black youth sought to join MK as the most effective way of fighting the regime.

However, MK is more than merely a symbol of black rebellion. It is a military and political organisation with very definite aims and functions.

The kind of 'armed struggle' that MK is engaged in — the struggle of an elite divorced from the mass of black workers — necessitates a high degree of military discipline. If there are no democratic channels within the broader political movement to raise the kind of criticisms the rebels had, and there appears to

have been none, then this military discipline simply becomes a weapon for suppressing dissent. Brutally and bloodily if needs be.

ANC strategies have traditionally defined a dual role for MK. It is both a guerilla elite, vanguard in a broader 'people's war', and the basic component of a new police force in a liberated South Africa. To perform this second function it is vital that MK remains unified, disciplined and free from internal disruption.

According to this reasoning, dissent can no more be tolerated within the ranks of MK than De Klerk could tolerate dissent in the SADF or SAP.

How MK functions as part of the security forces of the post-apartheid state will be shaped by the class interests that state defends. It

is already clear that the central ANC leadership seek a partnership with big capitalist and the mine owners in the shape of the Anglo-American corporation. Already both Winnie Mandela and the Communist Party's Joe Slovo have dubbed the Anglo-American bosses 'patriotic businessmen of good faith'.

If MK are to defend such a political settlement they may well find themselves in brutal and bloody conflict with black workers who seek economic and social as well as political emancipation.

The five dissidents say they still support the 'political' ANC and Nelson Mandela in particular. To clear the movement's name, Mandela should help organise an open and public inquiry into these allegations.

Nelson Mandela has admitted that the allegations about torture in ANC camps are true.

"Unfortunately it is true that some of these people who were complaining were in fact tortured. But once the ANC became aware of these malpractices steps were taken to discipline those who were guilty and the leaders were immediately dismissed".

Potentially, Mandela's statement could open the door for a major purge of MK (the ANC's armed wing). Recent allegations have pointed to the involvement of leading MK commanders in torture.

Moves in this direction would also remove from positions of influence with the ANC those most committed to the 'armed struggle' and suspicious of negotiations.

Iraq: is the pipe a gun?

By Clive Bradley

From the viewpoint of someone living in Tehran or Tel Aviv, the prospect of Iraq's Saddam Hussein having an extremely big gun can't be very appealing.

Especially if, as some experts suggest, the gun would be most appropriate for chemical warfare. The regime in Iraq has already used plenty of chemical weapons against its enemies, most horrifically against the Kurds.

However, there is something fishy about the current press story of parts for a big gun bound for Iraq.

In the first place, Iraq has got

plenty of big weapons already, acquired without secrecy, through the normal channels whereby brutal dictatorships get hold of their means of destruction: they buy them either from the USSR, or as in Iraq over the last few years, more likely from the West.

To sustain its war with Iran, Iraq had no need of weird smuggling exercises. You can see why it might resort to such methods to get hold of nuclear weapons, but it is clear that the alleged gun would be useless for nuclear purposes.

Second, according to the company that made the parts that are supposed to fit together to make this gun, they wouldn't fit together, at least not with each other.

It is, of course, possible that there is some reason that is not im-

mediately apparent why Saddam Hussein would want to get hold of a monster weapon in such a strange way. He could have gone completely round the bend, for example, and that is not a joke (and certainly won't be a joke if he starts to wipe out towns he doesn't like for no reason other than that he is able to do so).

But there is an alternative explanation. There was no gun. The British government made it up and did so to improve its anti-Iraq image.

The British government seemed weak and ineffectual over the recent Farzad Bazoft affair. They need to appear to be tough with the Iraqi government. Conspiracy theory? Maybe. But it certainly explains what the gun theory does not.

RESOLUT



Thatcher appeared resolute in the face of a labour that lacked determined leadership. Photo: John H

Socialists and the first years of Thatcher government

If opinion polls mean anything, we are moving towards the end of the Thatcher era.

Margaret Thatcher's personal rating in the opinion polls is down to 20 per cent, the lowest ever recorded for a prime minister, and Labour leads the Tories in the polls by 20 per cent or more.

The left still needs to learn the lessons of the era, and especially why Thatcher was not stopped in the first couple of years of her government, when working class confidence was still high and the Tories were almost as unpopular as they are now.

Those were also the first years of *Socialist Organiser*. The paper was launched in October

1978 by the Socialist Campaign for a Labour Victory, which had been initiated in spring 1978. Martin Thomas looks back over our struggle for policies which could have beaten the Tories.

The impulse to form the Socialist Campaign for a Labour Victory came from the approach of a general election.

The election seemed likely to come in autumn 1978, but was eventually called for May 1979. As it approached, the left had spent four years battling against the cuts and wage freezes of the Callaghan-Wilson Labour government.

In 1976-77 the International Marxist Group and the Socialist Workers Party had stood some candidates in by-elections. Some of the IMG candidates got passably good scores. At one point it looked possible that there would be a serious joint slate of the revolutionary left for the coming general election.

The short-term advantages of such an effort could not be sufficient to outweigh the damage to the long-term work of socialists in the

Labour Party. But what was their alternative policy for the election?

They had the general formula 'Vote Labour and prepare to fight', borrowed from the Marxists of Lenin's day. But did that amount to anything more than being foot-soldiers for Callaghan and mumbling Marxist criticisms for their own consolation?

Some of us evolved the idea of a *Socialist Campaign for a Labour Victory*. We would try to organise Labour leftists with slogans and leaflets to win votes for Labour but simultaneously to build support for socialist policies.

At first we thought that this would inevitably be a small-scale affair. Unexpectedly we found that the project allowed us to tackle a problem we had already identified without being able to see an answer: that Marxists' activity in the Labour Party was largely propagandist, without any link to the broader left.

A small (and, as it turned out, rightward moving) leftist group called the 'Chartists' agreed to join the campaign. They brought a big range of contacts. By July 1978 we were able to organise a conference for the SCLV with 200 Labour activists, the participation of such people as Ted Knight and Ken Livingstone, and a message of support

from Arthur Scargill.

In late 1978 *Socialist Organiser* was launched as the paper of the SCLV. SCLV local groups and later SO local groups drew in many new activists.

The SCLV published leaflets and broadsheets for the election in May 1979 which were used to one extent or another by five CLPs. As we wrote at the time: "Our achievements in the election were limited, but only by our small forces. In principle we proved it possible to mount a distinct left-wing campaign within the Labour Party's campaign — for the first time since the ILP's break with the Labour Party in 1932, or maybe even for the first time since the early 1920s when the young Communist Party and the Labour Party were still organisationally entwined..."

The development of the SCLV and the accompanying shift from pure propaganda activity in the Labour Party to an attempt to organise a broader left, caused considerable controversy among Marxists. Many comrades argued that we were abandoning principles and giving credit to fake-lefts.

The proof that we were not would come after the election, when Knight, Livingstone and the 'Chartists' went for rate rises as the answer to the Tory cuts in money for local government. We fought them hard — indeed, maybe with less tactical flexibility than would have been desirable — they split from the SCLV in early 1980.

There was no revolutionary left slate for the May 1979 election. The SWP and the IMG stood a few desultory token candidates each, and got such small votes that both of them have renounced the idea of standing parliamentary candidates ever since.

The SWP had responded to the election of the Labour Government in February 1974 by developing the perspective that Labour would

rapidly be 'exposed' and the SWP would grow as an alternative mass party. 'Steer left' was the slogan. It was a disaster. The SWP lost probably the majority of its active trade unionists. They were demoralised and alienated by a policy of ultra-militancy and shrill denunciation which lacked all relation to the cautious and hesitant evolution of workers' real response to the slump and the betrayals of the Labour Government.

After some floundering, the SWP finally regrouped itself round the idea that working class struggle had suffered a decisive 'downturn' in the mid-'70s. The practical conclusion was the sectarian orientation which they have followed (with this or that modification) to this day.

From wild expectations that they would replace the Labour Party, they slipped into passive acceptance that Labour would dominate working class politics for the foreseeable future, while the SWP concerned itself with the 'militant minority'. They could have summed up the policy as 'The SWP looks after the strikes, Labour looks after the rest'.

The inadequacy of this policy was cruelly exposed in the 1979 election. After 11 or 12 years of proclaiming everything in and about the Labour Party to be a waste of time, the SWP slipped into a brief anti-Tory, pro-Labour binge. Paul Foot wrote: "For the next three weeks I am a strong Labour supporter. I am very anxious that a Tory government shouldn't be returned and I shall be going around to meetings we are having telling everyone to vote Labour".

The IMG did no better. They formed an electoral front, 'Socialist Unity', with one or two tiny other groups. 'Socialist Unity' got miserable votes for a few candidates on a platform considerably less revolutionary than the SCLV's and then disappeared, its only lasting legacy being largely to exclude some



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activists from the dramatic upheavals in the Labour Party that followed May 1979.

The years 1979-81 were among the most tumultuous in Labour's whole history. In October 1979 at Brighton the Labour Party conference voted for mandatory reselection of MPs and the principle of NEC control over the Party manifesto.

De-selection of MPs had been possible since the early '70s, but required an elaborate procedure to initiate it. The reform made a selection contest automatic.

The demand for NEC control over the manifesto had been triggered when Harold Wilson personally vetoed the call for nationalisation of 25 top companies included in the NEC-drafted Labour Programme of 1973. Both reselection and NEC control had been campaigned for steadily since 1973 by the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy, a ginger group set up that year.

A special conference in May 1980 approved a manifesto for 'Peace, Jobs and Freedom'. Tony Benn made the main speech, calling for abolition of the House of Lords, extension of public ownership, and no compensation for renationalised enterprises.

In July 1980, the NEC issued a draft manifesto, designed to be the first draft of a 'rolling manifesto' which would be continuously updated and thus provide a permanent check on the Parliamentary leadership. The enraged Parliamentary leadership could not stop the manifesto being issued, but did manage to cancel the press conference at which it was to be announced.

The Blackpool conference in October 1980 consolidated mandatory

reselection, lost NEC control over the manifesto, but voted in the principle of election of the Party leadership by the whole Party (not just the MPs). It adopted unilateral nuclear disarmament, backed direct action against local government cuts, and committed Labour to withdrawal from the Common Market.

Callaghan retired as Party leader the same month, trying to get a successor securely in position before the new leadership election procedure could be introduced. But Callaghan's chosen successor, Denis Healey, was narrowly defeated by Michael Foot, an obvious interim figure and a left-winger, though a faded one.

In November Labour MPs disrupted Parliament to stop the Tories decreeing a rise in council rents. In January 1981 a special Labour Party conference adopted procedures for electing the leadership: there would be an electoral college with 40% of the vote for the unions and 30% each for the CLPs and the MPs.

In March Shirley Williams, William Rodgers, and David Owen quit the Labour Party to set up the SDP with Roy Jenkins. Tony Benn announced that he would stand for deputy leader against Denis Healey. At the end of a hectic battle he had 49.6% of the vote to Healey's 50.4%, including 83% of the constituency vote.

Formally the shift to the left was smaller than in 1970-73. The NEC's draft manifesto of July 1980 omitted the proposal for nationalisation of 25 top companies which had caused so much trouble in 1973, and the October 1981 conference remitted the proposal for the nationalisation of the banks and insurance companies which had been carried in 1971.

But the stability of Labour as a bourgeois workers' party had never been measured by how few or how many nationalisations its

manifestos promised, but by how securely its leadership could control and protect themselves from the rank and file. On that criterion Labour had been seriously destabilised.

In the division in Labour's right wing that took place in March 1981, Healey, Hattersley, and the others who stayed in the Labour Party were right against Williams, Rodgers and Owen.

The SDPers found out 'from the right' what others have found out 'from the left' — that Labour had deep and tenacious roots in the working class, and that breakaways, even with an impressive-seeming initial base, are likely to throw themselves into a void. And the right-wingers who stayed with Labour finally managed to make the Party safe again for capitalism. But it was a long and arduous struggle for them, not completed even today.

The SCLV played an important role. It initiated the Rank and File Mobilising Committee, the broadest united front of the left in the Labour Party's history, which led the struggle for Party democracy.

The RFMC, like the SCLV, was not a project clearly planned in advance. We started with an idea — a united front on the democratic reforms — and then found we could do more with it than at first we imagined. First we were able to get the agreement of the CLPD, and then, with their support, we were able to pull in the rest of the left — Labour Coordinating Committee, Institute of Workers' Control, ILP, Socialist Educational Association, NOLS, Clause 4, LPYS, Militant, Labour Action for Peace.

Most of these groups did little more than give their insignia to the campaign. The practical work — production and circulation of

literature, organisation of big meetings round the country and at trade union conferences with Benn and other speakers — was done largely by SCLV and CLPD.

But the meetings were big, there were a lot of them, and the effort was decisive on such things as getting Labour's leadership elected by the whole Party.

SO did not just build the big movement. It argued a policy. It argued that the left which had destabilised the Labour Party must aim for a 'workers government' — a government accountable to and based on the labour movement, which would take decisive measures against capitalist power and privilege.

Immediately, we called for the labour movement to break off all collaboration with the Tory government.

The struggle for Labour Party

democracy had to be extended to a wholesale renovation of the labour movement. In particular, the struggle for democracy had to be taken into the trade unions — for all the left's victories relied on a temporary and fragile alliance with the trade union bureaucrats annoyed by the Labour government's treatment of them in 1976-9 — and "we must rearm the movement with real socialist policies at the same time as we fight for democracy".

"The victories so far are formal" we warned. "They must be filled out with the content of working class struggle if the movement is to be regenerated. A 'democratised' labour movement will become a fighting organisation of the workers, hammering at the Tories and their backers, or it will quickly fall again under the control of the bureaucrats and timeservers" — who would use witch-hunts to help them neutralise the democratic reforms.

That is indeed what happened. In December 1981 Michael Foot marked the start of the counter-offensive with a denunciation of the left-wing labour candidate for the then forthcoming Bermondsey by-election, Peter Tatchell. In January 1982 the Labour Party and TU leaders met in conclave at Bishops Cleeve, and agreed a programme of restabilisation.

A witch-hunt was launched against Militant — not because they were dangerous (they had been passengers in the RFMC, no more), but because they were an easy target to use to frighten the whole left.

Since then the restoration of right wing control in the Labour Party has been slow, faltering, laborious, but apparently inexorable. Why? How did the left lose the advantage?

There were four main reasons.

• **Lack of rank and file movement in the unions**

The rank and file movement in the Labour Party was unable to link up with a rank-and-file movement in the trade unions. The lack of linkage in 1970-4 when vigorous rank-and-file groupings in the trade unions were unable to make any links into the Labour Party was repeated in reverse.

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8 OUR HISTORY

The first years of Thatcher

From page 7

The trade union bureaucrats thus remained in control. Their alienation from the Labour leadership after 1976-9 was sufficient to allow the left a few victories. But as soon as they decided that the left's victories had gone far enough, and wanted to clamp down, they were able to do so. The demoralisation of industrial militancy by the slump and by defeats made it easier for them to do so.

This was far from inevitable. In early 1980s there was a long, bitter steelworkers' strike. The Wales TUC called for a general strike. In February 1981 a miners' strike forced the Tories to back down over pit closures. A long campaign of industrial action by Health Service workers in 1982 won widespread solidarity. New Broad Lefts were emerging in the unions. The CPUSA Broad Left, dominated by *Militant*, controlled that union's National Executive between May 1982 and May 1983. The telecom engineers' Broad Left won control of their union in June 1983.

The problem was political. The major political forces in the union rank-and-file groups and the Broad Lefts were the SWP and *Militant*. The SWP spent the entire period arguing that the ferment in the Labour Party was a fuss about nothing. It was just left-wing talk that could have no possible base in the working class (because of the 'downturn'). The SWP did not start orienting to the Labour Party, sending open letters to *Militant* and selling papers outside ward meetings, until 1985 — long after the big ferment had died down.

Militant was in the Labour Party. But they were just passive passengers in the RFMC. In unions like the CPUSA they were just left contenders for votes and offices. When they were witch-hunted in 1982-3, they organised a campaign.

But they refused to unite with the rest of the left, so that we ended up with two parallel campaigns, one run by *Militant* the other run by the rest of the left; and their main effort was the unprincipled and foolish use of the capitalist courts against the Labour leadership.

• Political vagueness

The Labour left remained politically vague and vulnerable to demagoguery and manipulation. Its faith in the 'Alternative Economic Strategy' of 1972-74 gradually dwindled, but it found nothing to replace it.

• The failure of the Marxists

It was inevitable of course, that the broad Labour Left should start off politically vague. What could have changed things — and consolidated at least a substantial minority round a class-struggle programme — was the intervention of Marxists. That was lacking.

The SWP abstained and indeed denounced the whole struggle as a waste of time. *Militant* contented themselves with dead propaganda and recruitment. Since they were the biggest apparently Marxist force in the Labour Party, and they got huge free publicity from the 1982-3 witch-hunt, they were very successful in recruitment, turning themselves from a dim and obscure sect into the biggest force on the far left in Britain. The strengthening of *Militant* was, however, no help to the struggle.

Activists from the IMG dabbled marginally in the Labour Party, but, continuing their trajectory from 'Socialist Unity', they did not enter at all seriously until 1982, very late on in the struggle.

SO did what it could. But its resources, its circulation, its influence were too small to tip the balance.

• The debacle of the local government left

The failure of the Marxist groups

was not just a failure to consolidate at least a section of the broad Labour Left. The Marxist groups also failed with the radical or 'hard' section of the Labour Left.

That 'hard' left, or at least a sizeable chunk of it, could have become the intermediary through which the Marxists consolidated a section of the broad Labour Left. Instead, it became a force channelling activists who could have become Marxists towards the Labour mainstream. It did that through its course in local government.

By May 1979 the 'hard' left already controlled two Labour councils. In Lothian and Lambeth. In June the SCLV organised a 225-strong conference of London Labour activists on local government. Lambeth leader Ted Knight argued for rate rises as the answer to Tory government cuts; the left argued for Labour councils to mobilise for confrontation.

The debate continued vehemently through the next two years. Where were the Marxist groups? Most of them took no part at all. The 'Charterists' — first within SO, and then, after they split, through *Labour Briefing* — were on the wrong side. They provided Marxist-sounding rationalisations of the rate-rise policy.

In November 1979 60,000 people joined an anti-cuts march in London in work time. In October 1980 the Labour Party conference voted to back direct action against the cuts. But the potential was squandered.

Barely three weeks after the June 1979 conference where he had argued so vehemently for rate rises as necessary for a strategy to fight cuts, Ted Knight proposed four and half per cent cuts in Lambeth! He was forced to reverse them by a rebellion from the local Labour Parties and trade unions. In January 1980 a Lothian Labour Party aggregate voted for 'no cuts, no rate rises' there.

At budget-making in spring 1980 both Lambeth and Lothian went for big rate rises (49 per cent in Lambeth). In November Lambeth imposed a supplementary rate, about £50 from the average ratepayer. A backlash against rate rises spread on Lambeth's council estates. In April 1981 Lambeth council, panicked by that backlash, made 10 per cent cuts.

In May 1981 Labour won the Greater London Council and Ken Livingstone was elected GLC leader. In May 1982 'hard leftists' won strong positions on a number of London borough councils. But the policy of muddling through continued to hold sway. *Briefing* defended rate rises as a way to 'win time' to prepare a struggle; in fact what the local government left were doing was losing the time in which a fight back by Labour councils, council workers and local communities could link up with still-buoyant industrial militancy.

Bit by bit, the policy of muddling through collapsed. The left council leaders became nothing more than would-be benevolent administrators of capitalist local government. Hundreds or thousands of Labour activists, on the councils or around them, had been schooled in class collaboration.

No force on earth could have kept all the left councils to a class-struggle policy. But the Marxist groups, with the forces they had, could have consolidated at least a fraction of the local government left round a class-struggle policy. In fact the SWP and the IMG largely abstained from the whole argument; *Briefing* and *Militant* played a positively harmful role.

We largely missed the chances of the early '80s; and we have paid with eleven years of Thatcher. But if we learn the lessons now, the efforts made then will not have been wasted.



Look at the faces of these thugs! This is cold vicious violence. But this kind of violence — of the racing establishment against the stable lads — won whole hearted support from the same people that today damn the poll tax protesters. According to the Daily Telegraph at the time, one of the ringleaders of this violent attack, a Major General Sir Ronald Fulden said "It was a

spontaneous decision to act". A stockbroker added "why the hell should we suffer this when we come to the races for a day to enjoy ourselves and get away from this sort of action which we encounter everyday on the railways and elsewhere?" An elderly woman ruling class hooligan said 'she would get them with her hatpin'. An offensive weapon perhaps?

The stable lads' strike of 1975

Gary Scott tells the story

The stable lads' strike of 1975, involving Newmarket stable staff, was to last for three months.

It began when six hundred stable staff decided to strike after being repeatedly refused an extra £1.47 per week by the Newmarket Trainers Federation.

The action taken by the stable staff included attempts to delay the 1000 and 2000 Guineas races. The 1000 Guineas protest involved the stable staff sitting down on the race-track.

During the protest, Willy Carson was dragged from his horse as he and other jockeys rode through the stable lads' sit-down protest.

A bulldozer was stolen from the nearby Newmarket by-pass in the early hours. It crashed through a fence and was driven half a mile

across the heath to the Rowley Mile. The course was nipped by the bulldozer as the vehicle criss-crossed the track between the two furlong and mile starts. The saboteurs then pointed the vehicle — still in running order — down the course towards the stand and then disappeared hastily.

On the day of the race, groups of strikers began to make their way to the start as the runners were parading for the race. They allowed the horses to go down to the start and then, just as nearly all the horses went into their stalls, the strikers repeated the tactics employed two days earlier before the 1000 Guineas, by sitting down right across the course.

Police on horses and others with dogs managed to clear the track, but the protest lasted for ten minutes. During this time the horses had been unloaded from the stalls. As part of a pre-arranged plan the runners were dispatched by a flag

fifteen yards in front of the stalls.

During the course of the dispute TV cameramen came out in sympathy, blocking out racing from the screen on Saturday afternoons as well as missing several week-day meetings. Royal Ascot was completely blacked out and only an eleventh hour plea from Lord Wigg kept the Derby on TV.

Newmarket trainers were insistent that the pot had run dry. Sam Horncastle, district organiser of the TGWU, stood firm in his negotiations with John Winter, spokesperson for the trainers.

Arbitration was continually rejected by the trainers, and both Jack Jones and Lord Wigg attempted to resolve the difficulties. Finally, on 24 July, after the dispute had gone to ACAS, a deal was worked out that gave the stable staff a minimum wage of £37 from 1 August.

Why we blocked the course

Kevin Johnson, who worked in a Newmarket stable and was involved in the strike, told SO about his working conditions and the 1000 Guineas protest.

I started work at 6.30am. There was a break for breakfast at 8.00, then I started work again at 8.30.

I worked until 1.30. There was a break until 4.30, then I would work until 6.30. There was a rota for watering horses and locking up at 10.00pm.

In the morning we would muck out, take out the first string of horses to exercise, come back, muck out and do the second string. At our stable we had a third string. There were forty horses with only five stable lads.

The proper ratio should be one stable lad to three horses, otherwise the horses suffer through not being groomed properly and because they are rushing from one place to the

next.

Five of us lived in the basement below ground level — below the kitchen. The only way out was through the kitchen. So there was an obvious fire hazard.

We saw the trainer, but we were never on friendly terms and we had to call him "sir". This was the norm at every stable.

Newmarket is a huge racing community so it was easier to organise stable lads there than elsewhere.

The intention of the 1000 Guineas sit-down was to delay the race as a protest — to raise public awareness since it was on television.

We formed a line across the course about 100 yards away from the stalls. When the horses were coming down to the start, some of the horses were stopped. Lester Piggett rode straight through. He didn't slow down.

The bookies and bookies' runners threatened us with violence unless we cleared the course and shouted "charge" as the jockeys tried to ride through us. Willie Carson was dragged from his horse, later claiming that he had been whipped.

The police came and the course was cleared, but we had delayed the race and made our point, gaining some publicity.

NEW PROBLEMS NEW STRUGGLES



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"We have never had socialism or planning in the GDR"

Thomas Kupfer of the United Left in Halle spoke to Clive Bradley

What is your assessment of the elections?

We were all disappointed. It was important for us to be in parliament, although not the number of representatives. What was really disappointing was the general result, first of all the successes of the right-wing.

They won the elections very clearly. It was disappointing but not surprising.

Why did New Forum do so badly?

First, none of the opposition has ever had close connections with working people. They were small groups, and didn't pay attention to the concerns of the masses.

Also, for example, New Forum includes a wide variety of political streams. The only thing all of them have in common is that they want to create a different understanding of democracy. But as New Forum grew, they tended to have the same opinions as the other parties, for example on unification. So no-one wanted to vote for them.

One part of the Forum, those who really initiated the revolution, will leave the Forum, I think.

What is the organisational strength of the Social Democrats and the PDS?

They are very strong. The PDS has a lot more members than any other party — and the Social Democrats are growing, too. It's not yet clear what direction those parties will choose.

The PDS might choose to become a strong left-wing party with revolutionary traditions and aims. Or it might choose to become the strongest social-democratic party.

The Social Democrats were the stronger party last December, but they haven't managed yet to consolidate. They made a lot of mistakes.

What's the social composition of the two parties?

The PDS is full of intellectuals — not only intellectuals, of course. The Social Democrats have a lot of priests and lawyers, like all parties, but a lot of workers, too. There are some workers who remember the social democratic tradition, and are against the PDS-SED.

Do you mean literally 'remembering' the tradition? Old workers?

Through their families, in many cases. I've talked to many social democratic workers who've told me about their family traditions. But only the active workers who are really thinking over the situation have joined the Social Democrats, or in some cases are still in the PDS. The majority of the others voted for the CDU.

What is the strength of workplace organisation?

After the revolution, the old trade union structures collapsed, but there was no new structure to replace them. Some workers tried to elect new leaders to the unions. On the one hand there was no strong organisation to fight for workers' interests, but on the other, such an organisation was more necessary than ever before.

Factory managers, who had been part of the Stalinist system too, of course, are making deals and contracts with the Federal Republic.

It's difficult to decide who to support. There were 'initiatives' for independent unions. Many people who took part in setting up the United Left took part in such initiatives. The most important is the Initiative for Independent Trade Unions (IFUG), but it hasn't

managed to grow, it's very weak.

The old trade unions still aren't totally renewed. They still have the old bureaucratic structure, are only concerned with social security, and don't fight for workers' interests.

Is it true that workers see workplace activity as too risky because it might scare off Western investment?

Yes, it's true, I think. People want to have the same standard of living as the Federal Republic. Many are afraid that strong unions and factory committees will mean that no money will come in from the Federal Republic.

We have a campaign for factory committees, but there's always only a minority in the factories who have thought everything through. Sometimes they get into trouble with their colleagues, who think the

positions. They were an associated group of the United Left, but we cut the connection. We had a coalition with them, but I think it was a mistake. Many of them are really old Stalinists, and quite militaristic. I don't know how long they'll survive.

How does the United Left define itself against the old system?

There are a lot of different streams in the United Left. For example, there are some ecological socialists who are totally against traditional concepts of the left, but who have much to say. It's important such people are involved in discussions. There are anti-Stalinist Marxists, there are some people who see themselves as anarchist, some people who only wanted to create independent unions, women's groups, the Christian

Developments in these countries of course played an important role in inspiring the movement in the GDR.

How do you assess the position of the far right?

It would be a mistake to think that nationalist demonstrations show an extreme growth of the far right. But the far right is growing. We don't have democratic traditions, or popular discussions. Decisions were always made without majorities.

Most people aren't really nationalist or fascist. They just want to have the same kind of life as in the Federal Republic.

There are lots of youth groups and others who have a real tendency to nationalism and fascism. Many of them are initiated by people coming from the Federal Republic. For

example, we have contact with all the left, but the type of contact varies. We had contact with the left of the Green Party, former Green members, the United Socialist Party, and others. We try to be very open.

What role will there, or should there, be for West German unions in the GDR?

It's difficult to decide how to act. The West German unions are very bureaucratic, but it's not possible to work without them. What we can do is try to inform workers about how the West German unions act, and influence the choice of unions.

There are people in the unions in the Federal Republic who fight for workers' rights and we can use their proposals.

How do you approach the integration, for example, of parliamentary institutions?

We would want an all-German constituent assembly. It's not clear yet what is going to happen. The Christian Democrats, West and East, want unity only from the top.

Is the idea of democracy from below in unification popular?

Not popular enough. People just want unification. Of course, people will accumulate experience and I think that maybe in one year they will agree with the things we say now. But it will be too late, although I am sure it will not be such a fast development as some people want to have.

Another big question about reunification is the currency. What do you think is going to happen and what is your attitude?

I've heard of some cases of workers already being paid in Western marks, but I'm not sure if it's widespread.

The general thing is that people want to have monetary integration very quickly. The situation now is that people are disappointed and angry because of the attitude of the West German government and the West German banks.

They had promised to have an exchange rate of 1:1, and now they are going to discuss a rate of 2:1, which is totally impossible. It would mean that we have higher prices and half the wages. I think they will be forced to have 1:1.

Of course, if you want a left politics you cannot just reduce yourself to aspects of the constitution. Among the other very important things: if the workers demand — and they have a right to demand — equal money for equal work, I think we should support them.

We should criticise our government for the difference between their promises and their reality.

How definite is it that a reunified Germany would be part of NATO?

It's not definite. They are discussing with the USA and the USSR. I'm sure even many Christian Democrats are against being in NATO.

Is the military hierarchy in the GDR resistant to the unification and NATO?

It varies. There are some officers who are totally against unification and serving in NATO. West German uniforms have already been brought to the GDR.

The general situation in the army is chaotic.

The United Left and the Green Party are having a campaign against military service. Even the PDS, of course, say they are for 'law and order' and oppose us.

Have you had much discussion about, for example, Lithuania?

In Berlin there was a demonstration to support Lithuania. I went to Lithuania twice. There's a lot of nationalism. It's not always easy to distinguish the just demands from the nationalism. It's the same in Poland.

When I was in Lithuania, there was a basketball game. They supported the Americans because they were against the Russians.



way to get money is by attracting it from the West.

What attitude does the United Left have to the PDS and Social Democrats? Do you have any united front initiatives?

Maybe we will have a united front, but in the past it was not possible. The situation changed every week. Even four or five weeks ago the Social Democrats seemed the strongest party. Because they were more right wing than the Social Democrats in the Federal Republic, it was not possible to have a united front with them. The situation is changing now, so we'll see.

It will be necessary to try to develop such a political aim. The PDS is changing and becoming more active. But they didn't take part in defence of trade unions, or the campaign for factory committees — except in their programme (under the influence of some of our members who are still in the PDS-SED).

PDS members are used to a Stalinist culture. They find it difficult to survive in a situation where they are not always the winners.

The Greens?

The Greens are weak. They made the same mistakes as other parties — they were too dependent on their equivalents in the Federal Republic. For example they were told not to make any coalitions with the left-wing. The parties in the Federal Republic always see their own interests first.

Who are Die Nelken?

It's a small party who are all former members of the SED. They wanted to return to really Marxist

Left, etc.

Even so, the United Left is more defined than the other parties. We are against Stalinism and for democracy. We believe we have never had socialism or economic planning in the GDR. We are also anti-capitalist.

But it's not possible to reduce the discussion to a simple formula. The United Left is a democratic organisation fighting against the restoration of capitalism in the GDR, and against all forms of dictatorship and non-democratic political structures.

What international links have you had in Eastern Europe?

Not much. But such links are important. Everyone in the GDR is only interested in the West. Our friends in Poland wanted to organise a conference.

"Most people aren't really nationalist or fascist. They just want the same kind of life as in the Federal Republic."

example, they went to the demonstrations in Leipzig with tons of material. They didn't say they were fascists, of course.

Will unification strengthen the far right?

Unification as such won't strengthen them. But there's a big gap between the promises and the reality of unification. The Christian Democrats have promised everything, but they can't deliver it. People could get disappointed and look to the far right.

How do you now address unification?

We're not against unification, we're against incorporation. We haven't been against unification in general, but the unification being proposed was not in the interests of working people.

We will have the reunification of Germany. It doesn't make sense to fight it now. But we want to challenge the nationalist euphoria. For example we want demilitarisation.

People want unification, but there are lots of things they don't want. It's very strange to be in an army and all of a sudden be told to face the other direction, which is what it would mean if the GDR joined NATO.

We want to have a new constitution for this united Germany. We need to protect the GDR's economy for a period, because it can't survive market competition.

We want to be a real partner, with equal rights to the Federal Republic.

What links have you had with the West German left?

Much of the contact is not coor-

A double story of elusive charm

CINEMA

Belinda Weaver reviews 'Strapless'

'Strapless' demolishes two myths, one overtly and one covertly.

Outwardly it's a Sleeping Beauty story. Lilian, an American doctor working in a Health Service threatened with cuts and closures, meets a Prince, entrepreneur Raymond Forbes.

Lilian is around 40, still living with her much younger sister in a muddled, random household. She's not unhappy, or dissatisfied, just in a rut. Raymond, with his sudden appearances and disappearances, his lavish gifts, is so exotic and unlikely a choice that she picks him. He's something new, something daring, a way of being irresponsible for once in her life.

It's a leap of faith, taking on a stranger, whatever his lavish promises, and it can fail badly. Raymond promises instant excitement, colour and romance, life as a series of high-class television commercials. Lilian is attracted, but is left in the lurch.

Raymond, as well as being the prince in the Sleeping Beauty myth, also represents capitalism, with all its myths. Like capitalism, he promises flowers, excitement, champagne, all the good things of life, endlessly and forever on tap. But after the peaks come the troughs, and they last much longer. Just like capital, which flits hither and thither, leaving debris in its wake, Raymond is off in search of new excitement, and, as ever, the people not responsible for the debts are the ones left to pay.

Raymond is no ordinary con man; he believes wholly in the illusions he peddles, and is all the harder to resist for it. Such men



Lilian (Blair Brown) falls for the capitalist charmer Raymond Forbes (Bruno Ganz).

should carry stern warnings, the way share advertisements do: "The value of investments can go down as well as up."

Lilian learns that love is no escape, no bolt-hole of security; it can be as undependable as the weather. It is no strap to pull you out of the mundane, nor is it a reliable support.

Through work, she discovers that nothing, not even the 'English values' that tempted her to England in the first place, lasts for ever. Hospital beds and the staff to keep them open are just some of the things that have to be defended over and over again.

The allegory is quite cleverly done. 'Strapless' could simply be

seen as one woman seeing through the illusions of romance and learning to manage on her own, yet the allegory makes it a richer story. David Hare, the writer and director, is not trying to show only the hatefulness of capitalism, with its phony promises, but also its dangerous seductiveness, the way it taps into our daydreams.

Moral blackmail

LES HEARN'S SCIENCE COLUMN

Readers may recall that the Armenian national movement of recent years started to gain mass active support with demonstrations in the capital, Yerevan, against the pollution of the country, particularly its rivers and its largest lake by heavy industry.

One such factory is the Nairit artificial rubber plant situated in Yerevan. This is the USSR's only producer of chloroprene artificial rubber and latex, contributing some £14 billion to the economy and supplying a wide range of other industries, from vehicles to medical supplies.

However, the factory has no waste purification systems and discharges, toxic fumes into the air and other wastes into the River Razdam. Situated in the middle of a city and in an active earthquake zone, Nairit has been the target of environmental campaigns for many years.

In July last year, the Armenian parliament voted to close the plant

by the end of the year. This would of course harm the USSR's economy, since it has made no effort to build more environmentally safe replacement plants. So the USSR government is asking the Armenians to keep the plant open, hinting subtly about the 'debt' the Armenians owe for the assistance they received after their disastrous earthquake in 1988.

Smokers

It has been a slightly puzzling finding that women smokers are more prone to cervical cancer than are non-smokers.

Research has already found chemicals from cigarette smoke in the mucus coating the neck of the womb. Now researchers from St Mary's Hospital Medical School have reported on their findings from the analysis of tissue from cervical smears.

Cigarette smoke is known to contain cancer-causing chemicals which are aromatic hydrocarbons. These are thought to get into cells and bind to the DNA, making the cell prone to become cancerous.

These DNA-chemical combinations or 'adducts' have been found in the lungs and placental tissue of smokers. All the smokers tested had adducts in their cervical tissues, some at very high levels. Some of the non-smokers also had these ad-

ducts, although at fairly low levels. Presumably, this was the result of 'passive' smoking.

This finding indicates that cigarette smoke operates to increase the risk of cervical cancer in a similar way to that of lung cancer and that non-smokers may be endangered as well by passive smoking.

Mice and genes

Genetic engineering using laboratory mice has helped test one theory of how humans contract leukaemia.

It has been known for over 20 years that people with certain forms of leukaemia have chromosome abnormalities. A piece of one chromosome has become swapped with a piece of another, making a new composite gene and thus perhaps causing the uncontrolled multiplication of some white blood cells.

This theory now seems confirmed following the insertion of the novel gene into the DNA of a group of 10 mice in a Los Angeles hospital. Within two months of birth 8 mice were acutely ill or dead with leukaemia of the same types found in humans with the same chromosome damage.

Now it should be possible to test anti-cancer drugs and other

treatments on such mice. This will be a lot quicker than testing them on humans, since mice have a much shorter life span and an increased metabolic rate. It will also be more acceptable, ethically.

Sunburn

Incineration of toxic chemicals, such as dioxin is at present the only way of getting rid of some of the nastiest substances.

Unfortunately, it seems that not all the chemicals are rendered harmless, if evidence of harm to humans and animals around plants such as Rechem in Wales is valid.

Now, new techniques involving sunlight are being researched in Colorado and New Mexico. Giant parabolic reflectors concentrate sunlight, causing temperatures of over 1000°C at the focus. Vapours containing dioxin or water polluted with trichloroethane are passed through chambers or pipe at the focus and the molecules are destroyed. Fewer by-products are produced than with conventional incineration.

If the techniques are viable, they could be extremely important in helping to decontaminate the growing number of toxic chemical dumps that are being discovered in the USA and some other countries often underneath residential areas.

Having a go...

TV

By Vicki Morris

Lately, the number of viewers complaining about sex and violence on TV is rivalled by the number complaining about the size of top presenters' salaries — and with far more justification.

TV chiefs insist, despite viewers' protests that they could do it for half the money, that really good news presenters and chat-show hosts are few and far enough between to justify the hundreds of thousands they get each year. It sounds to me like TV chiefs are shooting themselves in the foot.

I thought that competition between the TV stations resulted in reduced costs. Instead, a clutch of, I'd say, fairly mediocre talents can flit back and forth between the networks demanding higher and higher transfer fees.

Michael Checkland, controller of the BBC, is reputed to earn £105,000 pa (gasp!) This compares pretty poorly with, for instance, Noel Edmonds salary of £150,000 (double gasp!) I don't know what Michael Checkland does for his money, but having seen what Noel Edmonds does for his doesn't convince me that he's worth that much either.

With BSB and Sky TV now entering the field, the most televisual faces are set to look smugger than ever.

I'm not saying that anyone could do what Noel Edmonds does... probably half the population couldn't do it as well. Probably half the population could make a decent stab at it.

"I Could Do That!" There's an idea for a new TV show...

BC's 'Style Trail' is the latest addition to the recent trend of tacky shows in which the public itself stars.

In this, two people, out of whatever curious motives, consent to be photographed going about their everyday business. Then they appear in the studio in their everyday (oh yeah...) finery to be further examined by a panel of more or less vitriolic celebrities who, what they have already seen, have to extrapolate telling details like the guest's Favourite Tipple.

Of course, you get a rather homogeneous set of people enrolling to be studied, all socio-economic group A and B. There isn't after all, much scope for probing the lifestyle of people who buy what's in the shops nearest to home because they haven't got the time or the money to go mooching around the boutiques constructing an image.

I might be wrong, of course, and forthcoming programmes might star the likes of truck-drivers and shop-assistants. That's not to say that it would make this ugly programme any more interesting.

Labour Party Socialists Conference

Saturday-Sunday 19-20 May, at Sheffield Poly Student Union, Pond Street. Registration from 10am Saturday.

Credentials £10 (delegates from organisations), £6 (waged individuals), or £3 (unwaged), from PO Box 118, Chesterfield, Derbyshire S44 5UD.

Shorter working week victories

The engineers continue to make progress in the shorter working week campaign. Slow progress, but progress nonetheless.

- Workers at two LUCAS plants in South Wales have voted to accept a deal for a 37 hour week involving only the vaguest commitment to the idea of talks about productivity. Six other LUCAS plants targeted for strike ballots have not yet made an offer.

- Workers at Weir Pumps Alloa also look set to accept a phased 37 hour week. Negotiations continue at other Weir plants.

- William Cook have conceded a 37 hour week for all its workers.

- Vickers have signed a deal for 37 hours.

- Gavin Laird AEU General Secretary says 161 deals for a 37 hour week have now been won covering 150,000 workers.

- So where does the campaign go from here?

The employers are obviously in a weak position as can be seen by the willingness of many firms to offer a 37 hour week when simply threatened with the possibility of a ballot over strike action.

Engineering workers should exploit this weakness and press home the attack. National action — starting with a one-day strike across the whole of the engineering industry — is the quickest and surest way of putting on the pressure on the employers. What's more the relatively easy victories that we have seen recently, suggest that a determined push for the full claim of 35 hour week with no strings could well succeed.

Engineers name new targets

These are the new companies targeted for strike action in the engineers' shorter working week campaign.

- North West:** Francis Shaw (Manchester), Williams Fairey (Manchester), Cambria Engineering (Workington).

- North East:** Vickers Defence Systems (Newcastle), Williams Press (Newcastle), Cleveland Bridge (Middlesbrough), American Air Filters (Cramlington).

- Yorkshire:** Rolls-Royce (Barnoldswick), Kent Inrol (Brighouse), AE Turbine Components (Bradford).

- East Midlands:** GPT (Beeston, Notts), Hoval Farrar (Newark).

- West Midlands:** Conex Sanbra.

- Humberside:** Logan Fenamec, Richard Sizars, Bridgport Machines, F H Fenner and De Smet Rosedowns.

- East Anglia:** Rose Forgrove (Skegness and Lincoln), Rushton Gas Turbines (Lincoln).

- South:** Dowty Rotol (Cheltenham), Aerostructures (Hamble, Hampshire), Laser Engineering (Brighton), Mitchell Cotss (Weston-super-Mare), Centrax (Exeter).

- Scotland:** Ferranti Defence (Falkirk), Brown Brothers (Falkirk), Allen West (Ayr), Oticon (Hamilton), Lanarkshire Boltwork (Lanarkshire), MSA (Coatbridge).

- Wales:** South Wales Transformers (Gwent), Lasing Linde (Gwent).

Solidarity across BAe

Manual workers at British Aerospace Kingston remains the only group out on strike for the shorter working week.

At successive mass meetings the strikers have refused to accept management's outrageous strings. What's needed now is combine wide action starting with a properly coordinated overtime ban, right up and including indefinite strike action, to win a decent agreement.

Don't let Kingston fight alone!

The end of a good working relationship

INSIDE THE UNIONS

By Sleeper

The decision by Ford of Britain to cut back investment at its Bridgend (South Wales) plant and to transfer a new £225 million engine assembly line to Cologne brings to mind one of the most shameful episodes in recent British trade union history.

Back in November 1987, the German union IG Metall approached its British opposite numbers, hoping to discuss the situation in Ford throughout Europe. IG Metall was particularly anxious to draw up a joint union code to oppose Ford's ability to transfer production round Europe like pawns on a chessboard.

The right-wing-controlled AEU and EETPU were, apparently, quite interested in such a discussion, but progress was stymied by the MSF and TGWU. These "left-wing" unions argued that they had a "good working relationship" with

the management of Ford of Europe, and therefore had no need of talks with the likes of IG Metall.

The confidence of the MSF and TGWU was boosted by Ford's decision to concentrate its European engine production on Bridgend rather than Cologne. IG Metall was, naturally, unhappy about this, and hoped to persuade the British unions to support its campaign to get some of the Bridgend investment diverted to the Cologne plant.

Then, in January 1988, came Ford's shock decision to transfer production of its most profitable model, the Sierra, from Dagenham to Genk in Belgium.

It became apparent that Ford's policy was to concentrate production of particular models on single sites in Europe. The loss of the Sierra put the very existence of the sprawling and antiquated Essex plant into question.

Thinking that the proposed Sierra transfer might have woken up the TGWU and MSF leaders to the need for European union cooperation, IG Metall got back in contact, with a tentative offer of a united campaign to keep the Sierra at Dagenham in exchange for some support for their efforts on behalf of the Cologne engine plant.

Again they were rebuffed. Instead, the TGWU's National

Automotive Officer, Jack Adams, was busy sending signals to management to the effect that his union would offer concessions (like three-shift working) to match anything the Belgian unions could offer at Genk. Ford was not impressed, and the Sierra transfer went ahead.

Ford shop stewards have long maintained loose, sporadic international links. But these are inevitably limited by lack of official support.

To this day no Europe-wide strategy to deal with transfers and to defend conditions exists at official level.

Ford's commitment to its British plants has nothing to do with any "good working relationships" with the British unions. It has everything to do with the fact that, by comparison with the rest of the continent, Britain is a low-wage economy.

The huge profits of Ford of Europe (£436 million after tax in 1988) are largely the result of cheap labour and high showroom prices in Britain. But this is shaky ground for the British unions: Ford's greed for short-term profits in Europe (to offset their disastrous losses in the US) is increasingly being outweighed by their concern for long-term stability.

The growing signs of militancy among British Ford workers (like

the unofficial strikes in January of this year) have confirmed Ford bosses like Bill Heydon in their view that continental production must not be vulnerable to the knock-on effects of British strikes.

An additional factor that the British unions can, perhaps, be forgiven for not taking into account (though links with the research departments of the European unions might have helped) has been the new EC regulations on catalytic converters. The CVH engine made at Bridgend is relatively easily converted, and the new rules have given it an unexpected lease of life. Thus Ford was not going to build both the CVH and the new engine at Bridgend — which would have meant 70 per cent of its European engines being built at the Welsh plant.

Had the British unions taken up IG Metall's offer in November 1987, there is no guarantee that Bridgend, rather than Cologne, would have got the new engine line. Any Europe-wide union agreement would involve some give and take.

But at least the British unions would now be in a position to exert some control over Ford's European wheeling and dealing, instead of depending on that mythical "good working relationship" with the management.

Southwark NALGO: strike to defend jobs!

By Roy Webb, Vice Chair Southwark NALGO

Southwark NALGO is balloting for an all out strike to start from 25th April 1990.

The union has a position of opposition to compulsory redundancies, compulsory redeployment and to any loss of earnings during a reorganisation of services. Now management intends to go further than the existing policy to impose new conditions on town hall workers. The existing policy, imposed against union wishes, allows management to designate any employee as surplus to requirements and, if they haven't found a job within 18 weeks of this happening, they will automatically become redundant.

Even those lucky enough to find another suitable post in time will only have their existing wage levels protected for the first three years, after which they revert to the rates of pay applying to the new post.

Not surprisingly, the union was totally opposed to this. At the AGM, NALGO voted to start a series of selective actions in the lead-up to a ballot for all out strike actions should the council ever try to use this policy. When these selective actions led to key departments such as Housing and Leisure and Recreation withdrawing services, and the council refusing to use the telephones on an escalating basis, starting with a day a week, Council members instructed the management to begin negotiations with the union on a new redeployment and redundancy package. This happened, after one or two incidents, such as when management threatened to use some dodgy Tory laws to dock pay from the strikers.

The negotiations soon ground into the dust. Management failed to turn up to any of the last three scheduled meetings. At the end of the period management suddenly came up with a new document proposing to go even further than the existing policy. This includes scrapping the whole assimilation process which regulates how reorganisations take place, removing trade union involvement except in individual appeals and allowing someone to move straight from the assimilation list to being made redundant! This would allow management to hire and fire at will, with no protection for longstanding members of the Council or those already in the ser-

vices.

As the Council has already said it wants to recruit to some of the new areas of service, the situation would be that existing members of the workforce would be made redundant while other staff were being appointed!

No local authority in England and Wales has, at this time, a policy like this!

This attack comes hand in hand with the arrival of the poll tax, and the poll tax cap, which has taken another £14 million out of the budget. But even so the Council could still afford to meet the union's demands! In fact it would be cheaper to do so than the attempt to effectively smash union organisation in the local authority.

What is also clear is that the attacks have been co-ordinated London-wide. These are policies that are being introduced in London borough after London borough, by Labour councils such as Islington, Camden, Brent and Ham-

mersmith.

Yet with the Tories on the rocks, the 'dented shield' or 'new realism' policy is even less relevant than the day it was first thought of. Now it's clearly possible to win battles against the Tory government.

Town Hall workers are going to need concerted action. Southwark NALGO's strong, if belated, stand is a great start. Other branches across London could be drawn into action as management propose to do away with basic terms and conditions of employment in those boroughs too.

The fight from the unions needs to be linked to a fight in the Labour Party: for democratically accountable services aimed at meeting local people's needs. This needs to be linked to a campaign for proper resources for local authorities like the one in Manchester, where council workers are fighting the poll tax and demanding proper resources for local government spending.

Southwark NALGO will be lobbying the NEC hard for full strike pay for the whole branch, and will be in need of financial and practical support from other NALGO branches. The mood in the branch is determined and following the well attended branch meeting, looks likely to produce a YES vote in the ballot, which will mean picket lines will be in place from April 25th.

The action promises to be the biggest strike in Southwark for years. The chances are that the other local unions NUPE, UCATT and TGWU will join in, as the new management proposals threaten their members too. Joint union publicity is currently being organised, and talks are going on to co-ordinate activity over the strike. NALGO is also heavily lobbying both existing and prospective new council members over the issue to get the message in the Labour Party.

Messages of support and donations to the strike funds to: Southwark NALGO, 34 Peckham Road, London SE5

CPSA pay offer: vote no!

By Mark Serwotka

The right-wing executive of the civil service clerical workers' union CPSA have issued the results of their secret negotiations with the employer for the 1990 pay settlement.

In effect the offer is an 8 per cent increase across the board, this being the middle ground produced by the Pay Level survey agreed in last year's settlement.

Eight per cent represents a pay cut. It is less than the rate of inflation. It takes no account of record interest rates or the Poll Tax. It is less than current offers already rejected by railworkers, power workers, and Underground workers.

Despite this, the CPSA executive is recommending that members vote in favour of the deal. Even worse, they have called an immediate postal ballot on the issue, with only one week for voting, issued a scurrilous circular which claims that the offer is worth 11.7% (this is a lie based on money due

from last year's deal), and failed to call any meetings on the issue.

It is vital that the offer is rejected. The right wing are yet again using disgraceful tactics to force through any deal that avoids a battle with the employer. Our job is to expose the offer as the tenth consecutive pay cut, a deal which does nothing to alleviate current hardships or to prepare us for ones

ahead.

We must ensure that members have a full discussion at workplace meetings before they vote. This will guarantee that the lies put around by the right wing are fully exposed and that members can not only vote no to the offer but also discuss how to prepare for the fight needed to deliver a decent wage.

Nottingham & District Trade Union Council

Mayday March & Rally
Monday 7 May

No Poll Tax!
Don't Pay!
Don't Collect!

Speakers include:

Arthur Scargill, President NUM • Emma Colyer, National Secretary-elect, NUS • Sham Singh, All Britain Anti-Poll Tax Federation • Paul Gosling, Leicester Anti-Poll Tax Councillor

Assemble 10.30am Market Square
March leaves 11.00am
Rally at Victoria Leisure Centre

SOCIALIST

ORGANISER

Trade unionists against the poll tax

Back this
conference!

By Cate Murphy
(Socialist Movement
Trade Union
Committee)

Defend women's right to choose

By Janine Booth
National Union of
Students' Women's
Officer (personal
capacity)

The abortion amendments to the Embryology Bill, being discussed in Parliament on April 24, represent the biggest challenge to abortion rights since the '67 Act.

This time they are government proposals, not a private members' bill, and there is no chance of filibustering them out. Unless there is a stormy protest outside parliament, amendments will be passed to cut the time limit for abortions.

After a confusing series of changes, the amendments will now be discussed so that the lowest proposed limit, 18 weeks, is voted on first, 24 limits last. This procedure was apparently agreed in a backroom deal with the Labour front bench, without any consultation with the Parliamentary Labour Party.

Defend women's
abortion rights
No reduction in time
limits

• March

Monday 23 April
6.30pm, ULU, Malet St,
London WC1. Nearest
Tube: Goodge St

• Lobby of Parliament

Tuesday 24 April
Mass lobby of MPs — 2pm
onwards, House of
Commons. Meeting in
Grand Committee Room

Many Tory MPs and many Labour MPs will vote for the 24 week limit — which in practice means more like 20 weeks.

There are other issues in the Embryology Bill which must not be forgotten. On 23 April there will be a vote on whether to ban embryo research outright or permit it up to 14 days. At the same time as we fight the abortion amendments we must push for the 14 day limit in preference to a total ban.

It is necessary to mobilise huge opposition to this attempt to limit abortion rights. The Stop the Amendment Campaign has organised a march on Monday 23 April and a lobby of Parliament on Tuesday 24.

There must be a big mobilisation from the labour, women's and student movements.



We beat Alton, we can beat the Tories!

Face up to the anger!

WHETTON'S WEEK

A miner's diary

The attempt by the leader of the NUT to blame *Militant* for stirring up industrial action is a cop out.

It means the leaders of a large and powerful union can see the situation staring them in the face and just don't know how to handle it. They want to shift the onus away from themselves and put the blame onto *Militant*.

There are going to be attempts to cut back in education as a result of the poll tax and other things. The NUT leaders have to face up to the reality of the situation that their members are in a very angry mood.

I would urge teachers and people on school boards of governors, to take no notice of that sort of comment and to ignore it.

I saw Neil Kinnock was at the Nelson Mandela concert. It seemed a strange irony.

In fact people like Thatcher who condemn violence are nothing but bare-faced liars. I didn't hear Thatcher or indeed Kinnock screaming their heads off about the breach of law and the violence that brought about the downfall of Ceausescu, and I didn't hear them screaming about the breach of law when the Berlin Wall was breached.

And Thatcher backed the supreme violence, the violence of the state, by going through the lobbies and voting for the restoration of capital punishment. Paul Whetton is a member of Manton NUM, South Yorkshire.

It seems to me what they're really saying is that we will condemn violence when it suits us.

While Gorbachev is attempting to trample on the Lithuanians, it is sickening to hear the supposed great freedom-lover Thatcher advocating that both sides should "negotiate" — i.e. that the Lithuanians should accept Gorbachev's demand that they bow to the threat of force and of economic coercion, and put their

tions inside the USSR, including the fifty million strong Ukrainian nation which inhabits one of the most industrially developed parts of the USSR, to press their demands for independence.

Hands off Lithuania!

From front page

war by cutting off Lithuania's gas supply. Lithuania is very vulnerable to economic sanctions by the USSR. Its prospects are grim.

The socialist and democratic politics of Lenin and Trotsky accepted the right of small nations like Lithuania to be independent. But Gorbachev — like Stalin, Khrushchev and Brezhnev before him, though his style is different — is a Great Russian imperialist.

He cannot accept Lithuanian independence without thereby encouraging the other oppressed na-

tion to independence on the negotiating table.

It is sickening that Labour front-benchers like Gerald Kaufman, and labour movement publications like the *Morning Star*, are being "even-handed", pretending to see "both sides of the argument". That too is in practice to side with Gorbachev. The labour movement should take sides with Lithuania. The leaders of the labour and trade union movement should raise their voices in support of Lithuania. Hands off Lithuania!

Trade union action can beat the poll tax! That is the message that came from the rank and file at the conferences of the National Union of Teachers and National Union of Journalists.

With the first poll tax payments due this week, ripples of resistance and resentment are spreading across the country.

Groups of workers in local government around the country are clearly engaged in guerilla action over the introduction of the tax. Many employers are fearful of the consequences of being forced to deduct payments from workers' wages. Even the Engineering Employers Federation has complained to the Tories over this.

The Socialist Movement Trade Union Committee has decided to call a conference of trade unionists against the poll tax on 23 June.

We need the most representative gathering possible of trade unionists against the poll tax to thrash out a strategy and coordinate the resistance. Let's make sure this event is it!

The original idea came from the 500-strong delegate-based Socialist Movement Trade Union conference last November. The call for the June conference has already received support from Tony Benn MP, Sham Singh (the Trade Union officer of the All-Britain Federation), Andy Dixon (NUT executive), Kyran Conolly (NUJ executive), and numerous trade union bodies.

Support the 23 June Conference! Get your trade union, shop stewards committee, trades council etc to affiliate.

Return to Socialist Movement Trade Union Committee: c/o 53A Geere Rd, London E15

Tick as appropriate:

Our trade union branch/committee fully endorses the call for a National Conference of Trade Unionists Against the Poll Tax

Agrees to officially sponsor such a Conference

Requests further information as soon as possible

Name of organisation/individual

Secretary

Address

Telephone

The Socialist Movement Trade Union Committee (elected from a Conference sponsored by 34 Labour Movement bodies, including two TGWU Regions, the Durham NUM, Ford Dagenham Shop Stewards Committee, the Indian Workers' Association and the Campaign Group of Labour MPs and supported by NALGO and CPSA branches) request that your union or committee endorses the call for a National Trade Union Conference Against the Poll Tax