

SOCIALIST

ORGANISER

Fight for a general election!

Kick the

Tories out!

Thursday's local elections are sure to be another milestone in this detestable government's decline and fall. Voters everywhere will declare their opposition to the Tory poll tax, Tory health service 'reform', and Tory interest rates.

Last minute Tory propaganda has centred on Labour councils' "overspending", and tried to show that ratepayers' money is wasted. A Tory leaflet in one London borough claimed that over £75,000 had been spent on a lesbian and gay unit. Since they also claimed that the council budget came to around £1500 per person, that means that about fifty people paid for the lesbian and gay unit. Hardly a case of massive profligacy.

But the Labour Party must not sit on its laurels. Labour is high in the polls, but largely on the strength of anti-Tory feeling. Labour needs to turn that mood into a solid and lasting pro-Labour movement.

Neil Kinnock should launch a big campaign to force an early general election and win a Labour victory.

Labour should support those who are fighting the Tories now. It should support people who are refusing to pay the poll tax, or can't pay it, instead of joining in with Thatcher to attack them. Labour should lead, or it will leave millions of people disillusioned and demoralised.

The end of Thatcherism is in sight. The Labour Party must be sure not to let the Tories squirm their way out of crisis.



Poll Tax forms burned in Bristol. Photo: John Harris

Make Labour back trade union rights!

33 trade union leaders have launched a campaign for the right to strike.

The "Campaign for Free Trade Unions" demands:

- The right to belong to a trade union, to recruit fellow workers into unions and to have your union recognised by the employer for collective bargaining;
 - The right to be active in your union and to take industrial action without the fear of the sack;
 - The right to strike, to picket effectively and to take industrial action in support of other groups of workers, without fear of losing your job or legal attacks on your union;
 - The right of union members to determine their own rules, in line with ILO Convention of Freedom of Association.
- Launching it, Leslie Christie of the civil service workers' union NUCPS, and Colin Christopher of the furniture trade union FTAT, declared:
- "In 1989 a government was condemned by a committee of experts of the International Labour Organisation (part of the United Nations).
- "The cause was this govern-

ment's repressive legislation against trade unions. The ILO found that this legislation was contrary to international conventions on nine counts.

"That government was not in Chile, Romania or South Africa. It was the British government.

"In 1987 George Lake, a London docker, received the British Empire Medal for his services to the dock industry. He was nominated by the Port of London Authority. In 1989, the PLA sacked George Lake for his trade union activities.

"Following the Zeebrugge ferry disaster, Tommy Wilson was awarded the Queen's Medal for Gallantry. Within a year, P&O sacked Tommy Wilson for his trade union activities.

"At GCHQ Cheltenham, 18 workers have been sacked for being members of a trade union and the rest of the workforce barred from joining a trade union.

"These attacks on trade unionism are coupled with reductions in individual workers' rights such as those covering maternity benefits, redundancy pay and industrial tribunals.

"We support free trade unionism abroad; we demand free trade

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Milken leaves the court

The system which produced Michael Milken

EDITORIAL

As financier Michael Milken came out of court last week in New York, 'well dressed young professionals' applauded him.

He had pleaded guilty to charges of fraud and conspiracy which could bring him up to 29 years' jail when he is sentenced in October (but probably more like 5 years in a low-security 'country club' prison.)

The sharp-suited yuppies, so the *Independent* reports, saw him as a class-war hero, struck down in battle by the laws of the dominant class.

According to Milken's friend Marc Belzberg, "It was very much class war going on in American industry. Managers were acting like they owned these companies, and they answered to no-one. Mike Milken simply came up with a tool that helped to make them listen".

This was not a class war of the poor against the rich. It was a 'class war' of the new rich against the old

rich.

On one side, the Establishment; on the other, Milken and his partners, from poor or middling backgrounds, mostly Jewish, and resentful of the Anglo-Saxon Protestant bias of the old rich. Both groups made fortunes from the sweat of millions of workers in the USA and in the Third World countries which toil to pay off debts to US banks; but about the division of the spoils they quarrelled bitterly.

The *Financial Times* calls Milken "the most influential American financier since JP Morgan", which I guess amounts to the same thing as the *Independent's* description, "the century's most powerful financier".

Milken invented the 'junk bond'. A 'bond' is a piece of paper sold by a company to raise money. The buyer is paid interest on the face value of the bond, or has the option of selling the bond to a third party.

A 'junk bond' is simply a bond offering a very high rate of interest but relatively little security, or, in other words, a relatively high risk that the company which promised the interest payments will go bust and the bond will become waste paper.

Those 'junk bonds' allowed speculators and quick-money people to raise vast amounts of cash at lightning speed, and provided the wherewithal for America's vast takeover boom in the 1980s. The bosses of big, sober, old-established companies suddenly found brash young capitalists taking over their businesses and carving them up for quick gain.

Some people made great fortunes from the 'junk bond' binge. Milken took \$550 million in salary alone in 1987, and is estimated to have at least \$1 billion left to him today, after paying the \$600 million fines agreed with the court last week.

His decline and fall started in 1986, when a former associate, Dennis Levine, was arrested. Ivan Boesky, Milken's company Drexel Burnham Lambert, and many others have fallen victim since then to inquiries by the US Securities and Exchange Commission.

Did the Establishment gang up against the interlopers? Maybe; but it's hard to see how the 'junk bond' binge could not have ended in a crash and a scandal.

More and more risky deals were made. Speculation piled upon gamble upon corner-cutting upon speculation.

Milken's office, according to the *Independent* "operated as something of cross between a protection racket and a wager-rigging ring.

"Milken... was able to extort money from at least one client by threatening to drive their stock price down, force another into a hostile takeover, order the country's largest arbitrageur to warehouse stock illegally for him, and create artificial prices for many of his junk bonds".

Milken's 'class war' will end like other such squabbles within the capitalist class: some of the new robber barons, like Milken, won't make it; others luckier, will be accepted into the company of the old robber barons.

Milken was an archetypal capitalist success story. At his high school he was head cheerleader. At university he made money by managing investments for fellow students.

In his early days on Wall Street, he would take the bus from New Jersey each morning at 5.30, wearing a miner's helmet so that he would have enough light to study financial paperwork. Then he moved to Beverly Hills, where he would start work at 4 each morning, to be

in time for the opening of the stock market in New York. His company, Drexel, used to organise an annual junket in Beverly Hills called 'The Predators' Ball'.

Such are the efforts that capitalism rewards. They never had much to do with producing useful goods and services. Milken is clearly a person with extraordinary drive and energy — though apparently no more subtle creative talents — and all that energy was directed to helping one lot of rich people rip off another lot of rich people, and a lot of poor people besides.

The poor people will foot the bill. One of the offshoots of the junk bond binge was the collapse of America's Savings and Loans companies (roughly, small building societies). S&L bosses put their money into risky speculations which failed. The federal government had given guarantees to the small savers, so has to bail them out. The bail-out will cost American taxpayers as much as \$500 billion — \$2500 for every child woman and man in the US!

And many workers lost their jobs because of Milken too. The great wave of takeovers and asset-stripping financed by junk bonds made an orientation to quick profits and quick gains compulsory for US corporations.

Long-term investment was shelved. Costs were cut recklessly. Businesses going through a slow period were ruthlessly chopped.

In the 1930s, the writer Scott Fitzgerald expressed his disillusionment with capitalism by saying that the system which had produced the heiress Barbara Hutton could not possibly last many years more. A system that produces Michael Milken does not deserve to last many years, any more than the system which produced Nicolae Ceausescu.

There's 'scum'... and there's villains

PRESS GANG

By Jim Denham

While David Waddington and the prison authorities were faffing about, playing footsie with the Strangeways rioters, the *Sun* knew exactly what was needed: "JAIL SCUM MUST BE CRUSHED — send in the SAS".

But Waddington proved to be a man of straw, if not a closet liberal. The SAS were never called in and the whole business ended peacefully.

The *Sun* now has its doubts about Waddington's fitness as Home Secretary. After all, he is supposed to be a honker and great things had been expected of him: "The impression was that behind the plain, blunt exterior there lurked a plain, blunt and tough man... But then came the Strangeways meeting... Instead of apologising for the shambles of cowardly inaction, Mr Waddington went to the House as if he were triumphantly announcing the relief of Mafeking. In this lawless age, we still need a strong man at the Home Office. Does Dave think he is up to it?"

Thanks to Waddington's new-found liberalism we were not only denied the invigorating spectacle of the SAS 'going in' and killing a few malcontents, but the definite impression was given that criminals are not just 'scum' who deserve everything they get. This sort of softness towards known enemies of the law and order is exactly the kind of wet, liberal, do-gooding nonsense that the *Sun* hates. Criminals are criminals and should be treated as such.

Except that is, for a few special criminals. Like poor old Charlie Wilson, gunned down in cold blood last week at his Marbella villa.

The *Sun* gave Charlie a grand send-off with a front page story about his dog, Bobo, (slain with his master) and two inside pages of tribute along the lines of "Charlie was a likeable, old-time villain who couldn't walk a straight line if he tried. He wouldn't know what to do with himself if he wasn't involved in some sort of ramble". *Sun* readers could even dial a special number and hear 'I like it', the Gerry and the Pacemakers hit that Charlie apparently sang "as the Train Robbers counted out their loot at a farmhouse hideaway in 1963".

The *Sun* did make the point that Charlie's untimely end was probably the result of drug dealing activities. But even in this field, it seems Old Chazza was basically a Good Egg: Joe Cannon (a 'former bank bandit' according to the *Sun*) explained that, "the big boys don't want to share with anyone. There's no honour among the drugs barons now. It's a dog eat dog world". Oh dear, oh dear, what is the world coming to?

But the *Sun's* very favourite villains are, of course, the Kray Brothers, now immortalised on celluloid. The *Sun* paid the brothers an estimated £100,000 for serial rights to their book 'Our Story' a couple of years ago. Since then the paper has campaigned for Reggie's release from prison (sadly it seems to be accepted that Ronnie must stay in Broadmoor for the rest of his natural) and now the film is out, *The Sun* is busy regaling its readers with colourful tales of East-end daring do.

Last Monday's paper had a four page pull-out feature including the moving story of how poor Reggie "thought a robin was his dead wife", a first-hand account of the death of Jack 'the Slat' McVitie and detailed profiles of all the old 'Firm' — ranging from 'Scotch Jack' Dickson (a 'loudmouthed drunk') to Ronnie Bender ("A marvellous bloke... he's still a diamond"). Whether the *Sun* paid Mr Tony Lambrianou for these insights is not disclosed.

It seems that if you're a 17 year-old remand prisoner on the roofs of Strangeways, you're 'scum'. But if you're a drug baron or a psychopathic gang boss, you're really a sort of working class hero as far as the *Sun* is concerned. Especially if you've been portrayed by a pop star in a film.

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

Karl Marx
Socialist Organiser
PO Box 823
London SE15 4NA
Newsdesk: 071 639 7965
Latest date for reports: first post Monday
Published by WL Publications Ltd
PO Box 823 London SE15 4NA
Printed by Press Link International (UK) Ltd (TU)
Registered as a newspaper at the Post Office
Signed articles do not necessarily reflect the views of Socialist Organiser

Build on the pro-choice victory

By Cate Murphy

The anti-abortionists suffered a convincing defeat last week when MPs voted to liberalise the abortion law.

While MPs voted overwhelmingly to lower the upper time limit from 28 to 24 weeks, three amendments which will take the law beyond the provisions of the 1967 Act were passed.

By a majority of 215 votes MPs approved abortions over 24 weeks, and with no upper time limit, in the case of "grave permanent injury" to the physical or mental health of the woman — the so-called "social grounds". Similarly, there is now no upper time limit for abortions on the grounds of foetal abnormality.

Equally important was the decision to separate abortion law from the 1929 Infant Life Preservation Act. Under this Act, which took precedence over the 1967 Abortion Act, doctors could be prosecuted for aborting a "viable" foetus. Viability was deemed to be 24 weeks. Consequently, few doctors would risk carrying out a termination after 24 weeks, despite the 28-week limit allowed by the 1967 Act.

Removing this threat of prosecution means doctors will no longer have to err on the side of caution when carrying out abortions. Had the Infant Life Preservation Act still been in force, the 24 week limit would, in practice, mean 22 weeks. Now, 24 weeks means 24 weeks.

The anti-abortion lobby were dismayed by the result. They were confident that they could win a reduction to 22 weeks, for all abor-

tions. But they were defeated on that by 46 votes, and they have seen the pro-choice lobby win our most significant victory since the 1967 Act itself was passed.

But, although the "pro-lifers" had promised that they would not bring restrictive abortion legislation back in the lifetime of this Parliament, Anne Widdecombe has now pledged to campaign to reverse the exemption clauses when the Embryology Bill returns to the House of Commons.

So we can't relax. And attempts continue to ban lesbians and single women from access to donor insemination.

Ann Winterton's original clause, expressly denying lesbians and single women access to DI, has been re-worded and, as an amendment in the name of the Lord Chancellor, will state that the future welfare of the child must be taken into consideration when deciding who is

"So while we celebrate the extension of abortion rights, we must argue that we won't compromise on the issue of choice for all women, and step up the campaign for the right of lesbians and single women to have equal access to reproductive rights."

"suitable" for fertility and DI treatments.

The rationale for this re-wording is clear: the bigots hope it will go through on the nod, with MPs not fully aware of its implications. Undoubtedly, the Code of Practice — yet to be worked out — will specify in more detail which women will be deemed "fit" mothers: lesbians and single women almost certainly will be excluded.

So while we celebrate the extension of abortion rights, we must argue that we won't compromise on the issue of choice for all women, and step up the campaign for the right of lesbians and single women to have equal access to reproductive treatments.

Also still to be debated is the demand for self-referral, where women themselves will be allowed to decide on whether or not to have an abortion, up to 12 weeks, without having to get the agreement of two doctors. This would significantly reduce the number of late abortions, as doctors exercising their "consciences" would be unable to prevent women from having an abortion. The campaign should continue to fight for this amendment to be passed, so that Britain is brought into line with the majority of European countries.

Nor should we forget that liberalising the abortion laws is meaningless if you live in Birmingham, where few facilities are provided, and many doctors refuse to grant "permission" to women seeking NHS abortions. To make the abortion law effective, we should campaign for better NHS facilities, sex education and contraception: that is the way to cut down on late abortions. Reversal of the cuts in government funding that have threaten up to 50% of family planning clinics must be fought for.

The campaign launched this week by MPs for better facilities, and contraception is an important part of the continuing fight for real choice: we should also encourage affiliations to the National Abortion Campaign, to build on the successes won in Parliament, and win an extension of our abortion and reproductive rights.



The last defiant rebels come down from the roof of Strangeways prison. They now face long additional sentences, a long time in solitary confinement, and a routine of being shifted from jail to jail. Photo: Paul Herrmann, Profile.

Will Walesa become a new Pilsudski?

Second and final part of an interview with Jozef Pinior of the Socialist Political Centre (Poland) with Mark Sandell and Martin Thomas

What do you think are the prospects for building a left wing within Solidarity?

It is a real possibility, not only within Solidarity but also with people from the former opposition against Stalinism.

For instance, there is now a move to the left by Karel Modzelewski. He was the author with Kuron of the Open Letter to the Party in 1964 [a revolutionary socialist manifesto]. Modzelewski is now a senator in parliament, and he is a university teacher in my university in Wroclaw. In parliament he has organised a group to defend the workers.

He is moving to the left. He is not a revolutionary or a Trotskyist, but he is moving to the left. We have to support such positions.

We have to support everyone in Solidarity who is open to the left, who wants to discuss with us, who is against unemployment and pauperisation, and have a broad movement without sectarianism.

Do you still think you were right to boycott the elections last year?

It was obligatory for us. We had a really broad base at that time. On 1 May in Wroclaw we had a demonstration of about 15,000 people. It was a potential movement for more democracy than offered by the Round Table.

Our analysis was correct. But perhaps the boycott was a little sectarian. I'm not sure now.

How immediate do you think the threat from the right is in Poland?

I see two dangers. The first danger is state authoritarianism.

Walesa wants to be president. As president, if he wants to introduce the IMF programme, he must attack workers' rights — the right to strike, the right to free trade unions and so on. We could have something similar to Pilsudski's system before the Second World War — state authoritarianism.

Another danger is the rise of a reactionary, chauvinistic, anti-semitic movement, with populist demands.

I'll try to explain the difference by comparison with Poland between the wars. There were two sources of authoritarianism in Poland then.

There was a nationalist movement, National Democracy, the biggest political party in Poland, openly anti-semitic, petty bourgeois. Some currents in it were fascist.

Another source of authoritarianism was the Pilsudski current. Pilsudski came from the pre-First World War Socialist Party, but after the war he was a military leader, not a socialist leader.

He created an authoritarian state, not on a nationalistic position, but on a state position, based on the state bureaucracy, the state apparatus, the military apparatus, and so on. His coup d'etat in 1926 was supported by the Socialist Party and the Communist Party!

I think they supported the coup d'etat because they were afraid of fascism from National Democracy.

How is Walesa motivating his bid

for the presidency?

He says the changes in Poland are going too slowly. He calls for the complete overthrow of the nomenklatura. It is only propaganda, but it is his demand.

He criticises the Mazowiecki government from a free-market position — that they go too slowly with the privatisation of the economy. Evidently he wants to control the new wave of radicalisation in Solidarity.

He says the situation is very bad because we don't have privatisation yet, we don't have the free market yet, the nomenklatura is still in control and so on.

Since the split in the PPS(RD) your group is mostly confined to Lower Silesia and Warsaw. Do you have plans for spreading to other areas of the country?

Yes. We want to work on a national scale. We work together with the workers in rank-and-file Solidarity in Upper Silesia, and other areas.

We're organising a publishing house, and we're publishing a monthly bulletin.

What are your relations with the KRET group. [Mandelites]?

We co-operate. Our differences are tactical. They want to build a political party now, and we think that is impossible — we must build a political centre first.

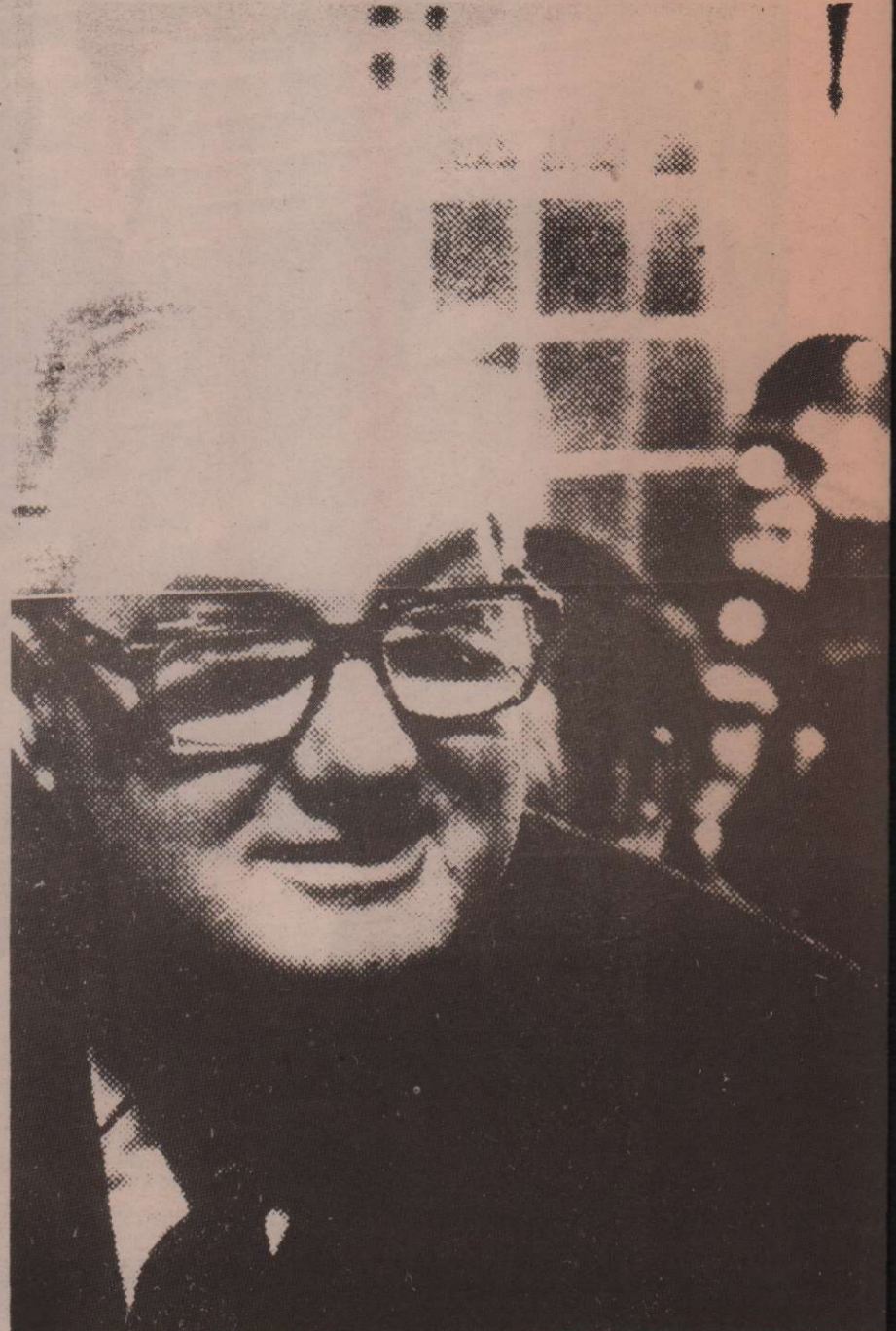
How is building a political centre different from building a political party?

In our opinion we must be in the mass movement. We must be careful not to build a political party which will be sectarian, a political party outside the workers movement.

But don't the KRET group want to be inside the mass movement



1972: Mass strikes free jailed dockers and smash Heath's anti-union laws



1977: Firefighters battle against Labour government

Lessons of the seventies

In 1972-74 great trade union struggles brought down a Tory government. Yet it was followed by a Labour government which carried out cuts on the behest of the IMF. Martin Thomas draws the lessons for today.

In June 1970 the Labour government was voted out of office. The new Tory government started out with a proto-Thatcherite free-market policy.

Tremendous trade union struggles over the following three and a half years finally crippled it and forced it into an election which it lost in February 1974.

As a huge TUC demonstration against the Tories' anti-union laws made its way down the Embankment in March 1971, the left-wing AEU leader Hugh Scanlon jumped onto a bench and told the seething crowds that we must kick the Tories out and get Labour back in.

But — he felt obliged to add — this must not be another Labour government like the last one. It must be a Labour government with a socialist programme.

The slogan "Labour government with a socialist programme", or "Labour government with socialist policies", had been the stock-in-trade of the Trotskyists since the 1940s. To the Trotskyists it meant that they were cleverly combining the need to relate to the Labour Party with the need to argue for their revolutionary programme. To the average worker listening, it meant only that the Trotskyists wanted a Labour government and leftist policies of some sort.

The slogan was not transitional, but just a bit of ambiguous word-

play. If it should get any grip at all, it could only be miseducational, by implying that socialism was a blueprint to be executed by a Labour government rather than an effort of self-liberation by the working class.

And, indeed, the Trotskyists were unable to provide the trade union militants of the early '70s with any means to get a grip on politics. The Trotskyists echoed the spontaneous slogan "Kick the Tories out!" They added radicalism by saying "Labour government with a socialist programme" or "General strike to kick the Tories out!"

But "General strike to kick the Tories out!" was ambiguous too. To the Trotskyists it meant "General strike for revolution"; to anyone else it meant "General strike to force a general election", or, in other words, "General strike whose revolutionary potential the government can readily disarm by calling an election".

All this left Harold Wilson in charge of the political alternative to the Tories. There would be a few token Trotskyist candidates in the February 1974 election, but they were token candidates with token votes.

The Trotskyists supported Labour. But most of them had no orientation to the Labour Party at all. *Militant* mumbled its routine propaganda about nationalising the top 200 monopolies.

Some of these issues were thrashed out at the time, in the Marxist magazine, *Permanent Revolution* (early 1973).

Reviewing a book which argued that the working-class character of the Labour Party was withering away it agreed that active working-class involvement at ward level was declining. Many workers had lost patience and turned to direct industrial militancy instead.

That could be a step forward "as long as we understand that the way 'forward' to revolutionary politics is not a simple linear succession of steps."

But "the inability of direct industrial action short of general strike to come to grips with the whole of 'Tory'-dominated society imposes the need to consider governmental alternatives on workers". The Labour Party retained its trade union links, and its ability to channel workers' political activity.

It had been important to "disinter" Lenin's concept of the Labour Party as a bourgeois workers' party; most of the Trotskyists had come to think of it as just the "workers' party".

The slogan "Labour government with socialist policies" was "fantasy-mongering". But socialists needed to raise specific demands on Labour, "to mobilise workers against the Labour leadership", and argued that "the Labour Party [remains] a major — bourgeois — force in the politics of the working class. It will not die away of itself..."

Besides its reluctance to come to grips with the Labour Party at all, one other

political problem crippled the revolutionary left in this period.

The Tory government was applying to join the Common Market. Most trade union leaders were alarmed at the prospect that their places in the corridors of power, already threatened by the Tories' domestic policies, would be further menaced by a shift of authority to Brussels.

Wilson opportunistically denounced Common Market entry as being "on the wrong terms". Labour's deputy leader, Roy Jenkins, consistently voted in Parliament for entry and against Labour Party policy.

Both in the country at large, and in the Labour Party, it seemed that the Common Market was the great issue of the day which separated right from left.

When the Common Market had first become an issue in British politics in the early '60s all the Trotskyist groups had said that the socialist answer should be neither to oppose nor to endorse entry, but to build working-class links across Europe. Now they all allowed themselves to be swept away by the wave of nationalism. They all rallied to the anti-European cause (with only one exception, *Workers' Fight*).

For the mainstream reformist left, opposition to the Common Market was logically linked to their basic economic programme, the "Alternative Economic Strategy" which emerged in 1972-4. They proposed import controls, price controls, increased public spending, selective nationalisations, and "planning agreements" between a Labour government and major companies — in short, a siege economy, but oriented to welfare rather than to war.

The Trotskyists criticised this nationalist strategy, of course; but how could the criticism make much

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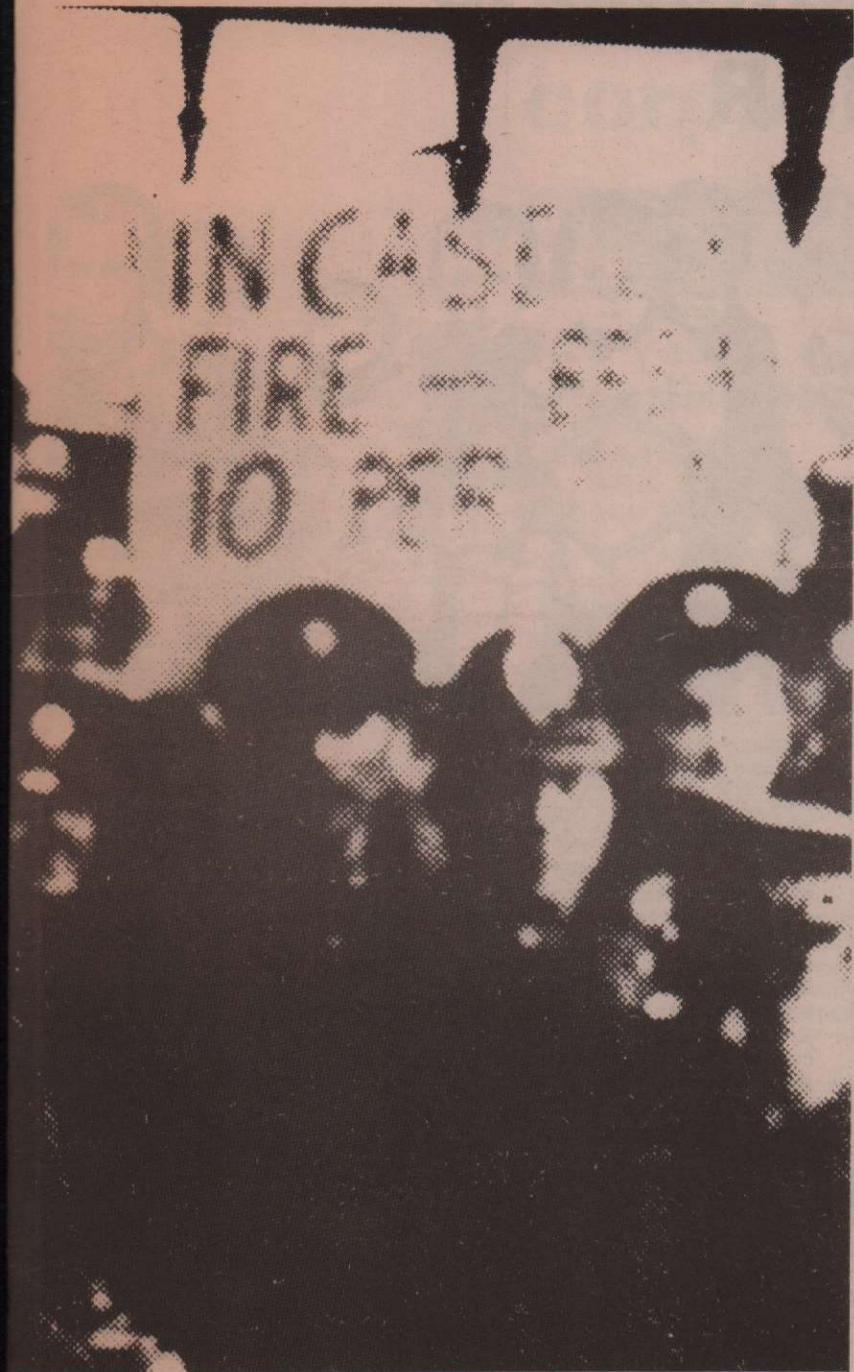
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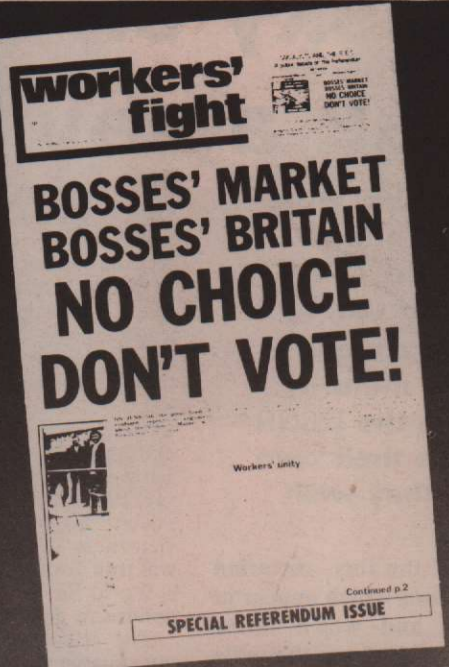
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The left and the EEC

As a great wave of anti-EEC British chauvinism swept the labour movement in the 1970s only one paper, *Workers Fight*, maintained an unambiguous and clear socialist and internationalist position. One by one every other left paper dropped the traditional approach of 'whether in or out the fight goes on'. To illustrate how far some groups were prepared to travel in order to be 'part of' the anti-EEC campaign we reprint the front page of *Socialist Worker* at the time of the EEC referendum in 1975 (below left) and quotes from a lead article from the paper's forerunner, *Labour Worker* written by today's editor of *Socialist Worker* Chris Harman.



These arguments for and against entry into the Common Market are essentially arguments about how different sets of capitalists are to maintain their profits. It should not be our concern to argue one way or the other, for either way the profits are made at our expense.

When Labour leaders commit themselves on one side or the other, they are only committing themselves to one interpretation or another of the needs of the existing ruling class.

Instead we must prepare to meet the organisation of bosses on an international scale with the international organisation of the workers. This demands real links being forged between workers in different national branches of international companies.

Rather than be diverted by an argument we are powerless to implement, it is these links we should be looking to. The only answer to the international combine of the bosses, is the international combine committees of the workers.

when they were simultaneously endorsing the mainstream left's argument that links with Europe should be opposed because they would thwart the nationalist strategy?

After 1970 Labour swung left with remarkable rapidity and adroitness, considering the miserable chaos of the last few years of the 1964-70 Labour government.

The 1973 Labour Party conference was probably, on paper, the most left-wing Labour Party conference ever. Labour committed itself to the nationalisation of the banks, insurance companies, shipping, and building land, and "a fundamental and irreversible shift in the balance of power and wealth in favour of working people".

There will be howls of anguish from the rich," said Denis Healey. Figures for individual Labour Party membership — unreliable because of the practice of counting a minimum of 1000 members for each constituency — actually showed a slight continuation of decline from 1970 to 1974. In fact there was at least a revival of active membership, though a modest one. The driving force for the left shift was not so much the constituencies but the trade union leaders. Many of them were now left-wingers and under great pressure from their members.

The shift in the union leaderships produced a shift in Labour's internal Executive, which by 1973 was dominated by the left. The Party programme was loosened up. When left-wing MPs like Dick Tavener and Reg Prentice were de-selected, the NEC did not intervene to save them. The list of "proscribed organisations" was formally renewed in 1973, after years of neglect. The Young Socialists had been taken over by *Militant* in 1970,

at a conference where there were only 126 delegates. In the early '70s it grew, and allowed *Militant* to recruit substantially. For the first time it became a force to be reckoned with in the same league as the IS/SWP, the Healyites (still

"A Labour government with no organised opposition from the left"

numerous then, and not completely dead until 1974), and the IMG.

Militant's politics — which guaranteed that the YS would do nothing more radical than listen to countless speeches about nationalising the big monopolies — and the new liberalism of the NEC allowed peaceful coexistence.

In February 1974, harassed by a miners' strike and a Middle East oil crisis, the Tories called a general election.

Labour emerged as the biggest party, though without a majority, and with a lower share of the total vote than at any time since 1931; the big gainer in votes was the Liberal Party.

The price was now paid for the left's failures over the previous four years. Scanlon, Jones and the other left-wing trade union leaders had come to an agreement with Wilson, the so-called "Social Contract" signed in February 1973, which was

supposed to provide for welfare-state improvements in return for wage restraint. The mainstream Labour left was politically crippled by its dedication to the anti-European cause.

Most of the Trotskyist left had been unable to add anything but radical-sounding rhetoric (and absence from the Labour Party!) to what the mainstream left said.

The result was a Labour government with no organised challenge from the left.

In 1974 the Labour government repealed the Tories' laws curbing trade unions and forcing increased council rents, and there was a tremendous wave of wage strikes. Tony Benn, as Industry Minister, offered government aid to worker co-operatives in enterprises threatened by closure. Several shop stewards' committees wrote to Benn asking for their enterprise to be nationalised. Labour won a majority in a new general election in October 1974.

Britain lurched into economic crisis. Profits slumped to almost zero. Jack Jones and Denis Healey got together to propose the answer: a £6 limit on wage rises, imposed in July 1975.

The left had already been shattered by its huge defeat in the referendum on the Common Market, in June 1975. Wilson had sacked Benn. The October 1975 Labour Party conference showed its resentment by voting Denis Healey off the NEC and replacing him with Eric Heffer, but supported the £6 limit.

In March 1976 Healey pushed through a huge programme of public spending cuts which he considered necessary to get a loan from the IMF. 37 left Labour MPs initially voted against the cuts — defeating the government — and then fell into line when Wilson called a vote of confidence. The Parliamentary Left then collapsed

and ceased to be a force.

The NEC remained left-wing. At the 1976 conference it moved a document which called for the nationalisation of the banks. In November 1976 it supported a demonstration against the Labour government on the question of cuts, which mobilised 80,000 workers in London on a working day.

In 1978 Labour Party conference voted against the government continuing wage controls: it was the government's defiance of that vote which led to the "winter of discontent" and Labour's ignominious defeat in the May 1979 general election.

But the left opposition was all piecemeal. There was one notable opportunity for something better.

The Labour councillors of Clay Cross, who had defied the Tory government's legislation to enforce rent rises and suffered disqualification and surcharge, called a conference in 1974 to demand redress from the new Labour government. Some socialists at that conference proposed the launch of a coordinated rank-and-file movement of the left in the Labour Party. But the dominant force in the conference

was *Militant*. They turned it into a lecture hall, and nothing came out of it.

The IMG agitated bombastically with the slogan "Unite the left against Wilson". It was no good, since (1) they had no programme for this unity other than the "Alternative Economic Strategy" reworded in Marxist jargon; (2) no force on earth could have stopped the "Left against Wilson" fragmenting anyway; and (3) the IMG themselves did only marginal work in the Labour Party.

So the left opposition in the labour movement was piecemeal. By 1978-79, however, it was strong and widespread.

The official membership figures (by now completely misleading) showed a continuing slight decline over the 1970s, from 690,000 in 1970 to 666,000 in 1979. There was observably, however, no exodus from the Labour Party like in 1966-70.

More and more of the leftists who had shunned the Labour Party in the late '60s and early '70s were now going in to it. The question was, how would they organise and what would they argue for once in there?

Constituency Labour Parties Conference
Fighting the Poll Tax and the witch-hunt
Saturday 16 June
11.30-4.30
Red Rose Labour Club, 129 Seven Sisters Road, London N7 (tube: Finsbury Park)
Credentials for delegates and observers:
£5 from CLPs Conference, c/o 11 Egremont Prom, Wallasey, Merseyside L44 8BG

Trotsky on the right of nations to break away from the USSR

Leon Trotsky wrote this article (here abridged) in 1939, arguing for the right of the Ukrainians — and other minority nations in the USSR — to have their own states if they wish

In one of the tiny, sectarian publications which appear in America and which thrive upon the crumbs from the table of the Fourth International, and repay with blackest ingratitude, I chanced across an article devoted to the Ukrainian problem.

What confusion! The author-sectarian is, of course, opposed to the slogan of an independent Soviet Ukraine. He is for the world revolution and for socialism — “root and branch”. He accuses us of ignoring the interests of the USSR and of retreating from the concept of the permanent revolution. He indicts us as centrists. The critic is very severe, almost implacable. Unfortunately, he understands nothing at all (the name of this tiny publication, *The Marxist*, rings rather ironically). But his incapacity to understand assumes such finished, almost classical forms as can enable us better and more fully to clarify the question.

Our critic takes as his point of departure the following position: “If the workers in the Soviet Ukraine overthrow Stalinism and reestablish a genuine workers’ state, shall they separate from the rest of the Soviet Union? No.” And so forth and so on. “If the workers overthrow Stalinism...” then we shall be able to see more clearly what to do. But Stalinism must first be overthrown. And in order to achieve this, one must not shut one’s eyes to the growth of separatist tendencies in the Ukraine, but rather give them a correct political expression.

“Not turning our backs on the Soviet Union,” continues the author, “but its regeneration and reestablishment as a mighty citadel of world revolution — that is the road of Marxism.” The actual trend of the development of the masses, in this instance, of the nationally oppressed masses, is replaced by our sage with speculations as to the best possible roads of development. With this method, but with far greater logic, one might say, “Not defending a degenerated Soviet Union is our task, but the victorious world revolution which will transform the whole world into a World Soviet Union,” etc. Such aphorisms come cheap.

The critic repeats several times my statement to the effect that the fate of an independent Ukraine is indissolubly bound up with the world proletarian revolution. From this general perspective, ABC for a Marxist, he contrives however to make a recipe of temporising passivity and national nihilism. The triumph of the proletarian revolution on a world scale is the end-product of multiple movements, campaigns and battles, and not at all a ready-made precondition for solving all questions automatically. Only a direct and bold posing of the Ukrainian question in the given concrete circumstances will facilitate the rallying of petty-bourgeois and peasant masses around the proletariat, just as in Russia in 1917.

True enough, our author might object that in Russia prior to October it was the bourgeois revolution that unfolded, whereas today we have the socialist revolution already behind us. A demand which might have been progressive in 1917 is nowadays reactionary. Such reasoning, wholly in the spirit of bureaucrats and sectarians, is false from beginning to end.

The right of national self-determination is, of course, a democratic and not a socialist principle. But genuinely democratic principles are supported and realised in our era only by the revolutionary proletariat; it is for this very reason that they interlace with socialist tasks. The resolute struggle of the Bolshevik Party for the right of self-determination of oppressed



Famine victims in the Ukraine 1932. Stalin deliberately promoted mass starvation as a way of controlling the rural population.

nationalities in Russia facilitated in the extreme the conquest of power by the proletariat. It was as if the proletarian revolution had sucked in the democratic problems, above all, the agrarian and national problems, giving to the Russian Revolution a combined character. The proletariat was already undertaking socialist tasks but it could not immediately raise to this level the peasantry and the oppressed nations (themselves predominantly peasant) who were absorbed with solving their democratic tasks.

Hence flowed the historically inescapable compromises in the agrarian as well as the national sphere. Despite the economic advantages of large-scale agriculture, the Soviet government was compelled to divide up large estates. Only several years later was the government able to pass to collective farming and then it immediately leaped too far ahead and found itself compelled, a few years later, to make concessions to the peasants in the shape of private land-holdings which in many places tend to devour the collective farms. The next stages of this contradictory process have not yet been resolved.

The need for compromise, or rather for a number of compromises, similarly arises in the

field of the national question, whose paths are no more rectilinear than the paths of the agrarian revolution. The federated structure of the Soviet Republic represents a compromise between the centralist requirements of planned economy and the decentralist requirements of the development of nations oppressed in the past. Having constructed a workers’ state on the compromise principle of a federation, the Bolshevik Party wrote into the constitution the right of nations to complete separation, indicating

“The sectarian, as so often happens, finds himself siding with the police, covering up the status quo, that is, police violence by sterile speculation on the superiority of the socialist unification of nations as against their remaining divided.”

thereby that the party did not at all consider the national question as solved once and for all.

The author of the critical article argues that the party leaders hoped “to convince the masses to stay within the framework of the Federated Soviet Republic”. This is correct, if the word “convince” is taken not in the sense of logical arguments but in the sense of passing through the experiences of economic, political, and cultural collaboration. Abstract agitation in favour of centralism does not of itself carry great weight. As has already been said, the federation was a necessary departure from centralism. It must also be added that the very composition of the federation is by no means given beforehand once and for all. Depending on objective conditions, a federation may develop toward greater centralism, or on the contrary, toward greater independence of its national component parts. Politically it is not at all a question of whether it is advantageous “in general” for various nationalities to live together within the framework of a single state, but rather it is a question of whether or not a par-

ticular nationality has, on the basis of her own experience, found it advantageous to adhere to a given state.

In other words: which of the two tendencies in the given circumstances gains the ascendancy in the compromise regime of a federation — the centrifugal or the centripetal? Or to put it even more concretely: have Stalin and his Ukrainian satraps succeeded in convincing the Ukrainian masses of the superiority of Moscow’s centralism over Ukrainian independence or have they failed? This question is of decisive importance. Yet our author does not even suspect its existence.

Do the broad masses of the Ukrainian people wish to separate from the USSR? It might at first sight appear difficult to answer this question, inasmuch as the Ukrainian people, like all other peoples of the USSR, are deprived of any opportunity to express their will. But the very genesis of the totalitarian regime and its ever more brutal intensification, especially in the Ukraine, are proof that the real will of the Ukrainian masses is irreconcilably hostile to the Soviet bureaucracy. There is no lack of evidence that one of the primary sources of this hostility is the suppression of Ukrainian independence. The nationalist tendencies in the Ukraine erupted violently in 1917-19. The Borotba Party expressed these tendencies in the left wing. The most important indication of the success of the Leninist policy in the Ukraine was the fusion of the Ukrainian Bolshevik Party with the organisation of the Borotbists.

In the course of the next decade, however, an actual break occurred with the Borotba group, whose leaders were subjected to persecution. The Old Bolshevik Skrypnik, a pure-blooded Stalinist, was driven to suicide in 1933 for his allegedly excessive patronage of nationalist tendencies. The actual “organiser” of this suicide was the Stalinist emissary, Postyshev, who thereupon remained in the Ukraine as the representative of the centralist policy. Presently, however, Postyshev himself fell into disgrace. These facts are profoundly symptomatic, for they reveal how much force there is behind the pressure of the nationalist opposition on the bureaucracy. Nowhere did the purges and repressions assume such a savage and mass character as they did in the Ukraine.

Of enormous political importance is the sharp turn away from the Soviet Union of Ukrainian democratic elements outside the Soviet Union. When the Ukrainian problem became aggravated early this year, Communist voices were not heard at all; but the voices of the Ukrainian clericals and National Socialists were loud enough. This means that the proletarian

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

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29-30 June and 1 July 1990
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Malet Street, London WC1
Organised by Socialist Organiser

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Jozef Pinior
Hillel Ticktin
Speakers from the opposition movements in Czechoslovakia and East Germany

Sessions include

THE END OF THATCHERISM

- * The fight against the poll tax
- * The left in the Labour Party
- * The left in the trade unions
- * 1992
- * Renewing socialism

REVOLUTIONS IN EAST EUROPE

- * Round table with socialists from



- Eastern Europe
- * Symposium on the nature of the Stalinist systems
 - * Debate: the left and the Eastern Bloc
 - * The USSR today
 - * Feminism in East Germany
 - * Workshops with socialists from Eastern Europe on what's happening in their countries.

RENEWING SOCIALISM

- * Is Marxism outdated? A discussion with Marxism Today
- * Market socialism
- * Did Leninism cause Stalinism?
- * Green and red politics

INTRODUCTORY COURSE

- * Capitalism
- * Socialism from below
- * Reformism
- * Stalinism
- * Revolutionary socialism today

ISSUES FOR SOCIALISTS

- * Nicaragua: what went wrong?
- * China: will the democratic movement revive?

- * South Africa: is apartheid on the way out?
 - * What would socialists do about prisons?
 - * What way for lesbian and gay liberation?
 - * The new technology of childbirth
- Other courses on

MARXIST ECONOMICS OUR HISTORY AND THEIRS THE POLITICS OF WORKERS' LIBERTY

- And extra sessions on
- * The politics of football
 - * Freud and Reich
 - * Is the world dying
 - * Myths in the movies
 - * Chaos theory
 - * The novels of Salman Rushdie
 - * Racism in Fortress Europe
 - * Anti-semitism in the USSR
 - * Which way for the student left?
 - * and much, much more

This Agenda is provisional. A full timetable will be available nearer to the date of the school.

Friday-Saturday-Sunday 29-30 June, 1 July 1990

Noon to 7pm Friday
11am to 6pm Saturday
10am to 4.30pm Sunday

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