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Tories

out

now!



Fight for a general election!

Eric Heffer on Thatcher's resignation

The rest are just as bad

By Eric Heffer MP

I'm delighted that Thatcher has gone. She has done great damage in her 11 years in office.

But all those bidding to replace her are equally responsible for that damage. They have all supported what she has done.

What's happened is that the ruling class has decided that Thatcher has become a liability, and they have pushed her out in the hope that a new leader will enable the Tory party to win the next election.

I don't think they will win. I think Labour will win the election.

What worries me is the

behaviour of the Labour Party leadership. I'm worried that they are going to continue as they

have done recently, being a pale reflection of Toryism rather than offering an alternative.

Remove the whole bunch of them!

By Tony Benn MP

We shall make a great mistake if we concentrate on Mrs Thatcher.

She and the Cabinet and all her former Cabinet colleagues and all the Tory MPs who voted night after night, and the newspapers who supported her, and all the people who voted Tory — they are all responsible for what has happened. In the post-Thatcher

debate we should look back and give our verdict on the whole decade of the 1980s and an agenda for the 1990s. We should not use Mrs Thatcher as a scapegoat.

This is our chance to remove the whole bunch of them.

There should be an election. What we are having is a preliminary discussion in Parliament about the last 10 years, and the sooner that decision by the public, the better.



As protests grow against the US military build-up in the Gulf, protesters in the

Philippines demand that US troops there, too, go home.

Unite to stop war!

By Tony Benn MP

At the moment the immediate objective is to stop the war.

And I think it would be a mistake if we were to divide among ourselves as to how it should be done. If you can stop the war, the troops will be able to come back, and a lot of other things will be able to be solved.

I'm very keen that we don't divide.

The first test is to build

such a powerful peace movement that we stop it.

I had a personal letter from Nelson Mandela on Friday, wishing me luck when I go to Baghdad on Sunday. I told the press — not a single newspaper has published it.

Willy Brandt sent a message. Papandreou has sent a message. Julius Nyerere sent a message.

But the British censorship is unbelievable. They do not want people to know how strong the opposition in Britain to the war really is.

Nelson Mandela's letter to Tony Benn

"The African National Congress supports and effort which will avert a war situation in the Gulf. We encourage your efforts to explore a peaceful solution."

Bailiffs run scared

By Rosey Sibley

Bailiffs in Nottingham were so frightened of a picket organised by local anti-poll tax groups on Wednesday 14 November, that none of them showed up to work.

Broxtowe Borough Council has been using the notoriously foul M.A. Julious & Co. bailiffs in an attempt to intimidate non-payers into paying. It hasn't worked — instead the bailiffs are feeling intimidated.

About 70 protesters from 11 local groups gathered outside between 7.30 and 9.30 in the morning to shout slogans, sing songs, blow whistles and ring bells. This noise was added to by car horns blaring out in response to "Hoot if you hate the poll tax" signs held up by protesters. The picket which so scared the bailiffs ranged from babies to pensioners and covered all ages in between.

A smaller "surprise" picket the following day did catch the bailiffs going into work — who immediately called the bailiffs. The police arrives after the bailiffs had gone inside, dragged off one protester — apparently at random — and arrested him.

Two other protesters were also arrested, one of whom was simply walking back to his bike after the picket had ended. All three have been charged with disorderly and abusive behaviour.

Union fights closures

By Tim Cooper, Secretary, Richard McCance, Convenor Social Services, and Chris Tamsley, Chair, Notts NALGO

Is this what socialism is about? That's the question Nottinghamshire Labour county councillor George Miller asked about the callous announcement by the ruling Labour group that it will go ahead with the closure of 13 elderly people's homes.

The excuse given for the closures is the government's demand that homes in Nottinghamshire be brought up to minimum standards (as private homes are already required to do by law).

As the council wants to make a 1% saving on this year's budget as a way of avoiding poll tax capping next year, therefore, so the argument goes, money is not available to bring the homes up to standard and thus they must close.

The reality is that a small clique of top officers and councillors saw this as an opportunity to ditch a commitment to what is regarded as expensive care. As another angry Labour councillor said to us: "If the figures contained in the Director of Social Services review were correct, we would be guilty of having run a very poor service in maintaining these properties."

These people are amongst the most in need in the county, and the sort that the "get rich quick" private sector usually turn away because they require too much care and are not profitable.

Social Services Chair Cllr Joan Taylor insists that they care really. But her crocodile

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WE'LL STRIKE FOR OLD FOLK

Unions unite in battle

tears have been met with a massive wave of contempt from everyone in Notts, especially when we hear (1) No proper survey was ever done in case it upset the residents!; (2) No statutory requirement for the closure is due for five years; (3) A solution was "natural wastage" — ie. hoping they die quickly; (4) Refusals to move by the brave residents were met by threats of eviction; (5) They spent £1 million on a recent case to try to cover up racism in the police force which spectacularly failed.

The council, like many up and down the country, hoped to avoid a clash with the government over poll tax capping by making cuts now of "only 1%". But the fact that, for example, 60,000 people in Nottingham alone haven't paid a penny of poll tax, and heavy use of courts and bailiffs has not changed this, means that the cuts could be up to 5% we are now told — ie. £30 million.

And at a time when extra needs to be spent on the growing elderly population.

The huge support for a campaign against the closures even from local anti-union papers has made a mockery of the right-wingers in the unions who say there is no will to fight, and has vindicated Notts NALGO's position of supporting the non-payment campaign and opposing such cuts with action.

Standing by the people of Notts who are suffering the effects of the poll tax, whether they be staff, clients or non-payers, is popular. Doing the Tories' dirty work for them isn't.

- Support the lobby at County Hall on 28 November.

- Vote for joint strike action with NUPE at the Special General Meeting on 29 November.

- Lobby councillors and pass motions at unions, Labour Parties, etc.

Killer of city woman gets jail for life

A CITY man who murdered a woman in 1979 has been sentenced to life in prison.

"Whisky is whisky, whatever the label"

WHETTON'S WEEK



A miner's diary

went to Nottingham Trades Council last night (21st) with sacked miners.

One of the speakers was making the point that the crisis in the Gulf was the number one issue today "aside from Heseltine's campaign", and that made me laugh.

I liken it to a copper who stops a motorist for drink driving and the driver then says: "Don't worry about it. I'm only drunk on Bell's Whisky, not Famous Grouse."

The copper isn't going to be interested in the label on the bottle. A bottle of whisky is a bottle of whisky. And a Tory is a Tory. The Conservative Party is the Conservative Party.

It is still going to carry out anti-working class measures, and it is still going to make us pay for

the economic problems.

Everybody is talking about Thatcher and Heseltine, but to me it is a total irrelevance.

As someone said, there is no such thing as bad publicity. I'm not disappointed that Thatcher's gone, but I'm not over the moon about it. I don't think it is going to make a great deal of difference to the working class.

I was really disappointed at the result of the ballot on an overtime ban, but it wasn't really surprising, with leaders in certain areas campaigning for a no vote.

What they have done is to

condemn their own members to having a pay deal imposed on them which has been negotiated by Roy Lynk. I think we should look seriously at their actions, because they were campaigning against a NUM conference.

In Yorkshire we just pipped it. In Nottinghamshire they got a good result. A majority voted for the ban.

The overtime ban was the correct thing to go for, because we would have started to hit the Coal Board immediately. There are stocks on the ground, but it is winter, and we've got the situation in the Middle East; it was the right thing to do.

Paul Whetton is a member of Manton NUM.

Now drive a stake through her heart!

Don't let Thatcher's spirit live on

Mrs Thatcher is one of the great villains of twentieth century British history.

Her monument after eleven and a half years in power is a society which she — as the evil genius and agent of the ruling class — has ratcheted back down several degrees nearer to the primeval capitalist barbarism. The labour movement had spent the previous hundred years painfully inching society up from that in red-in-tooth and-claw dog-eat-dog conditions.

Never mind what so much of the fawning boss class press — even her critics — says about her and her place in history. The majority of the British people never voted for Mrs Thatcher, never endorsed what she did to the welfare state, were never consulted about most of the characteristically "Thatcherite" things she did.

She has served the rich with a mercilessness towards the poor and the less well-off — that is, the majority of the people of the country — which would have shamed even the leaders of the Tory party during the four decades before 1979.

Millions of people in Britain have taught their children to hate Margaret Thatcher!

Yet Mrs Thatcher had guts. She was a fighter for her class and her ideals. It has been commonplace during the Awful Eighties for socialists to express the wish that the leaders of the labour movement would fight for us as Thatcher did for her own side.

Mrs Thatcher fought the labour movement with the insensitive, unimaginative bone-headed piggishness of a small shopkeeper dunning a hard-up and ineffectual creditor.

For two days this week these same qualities of Mrs Thatcher seemed about to render a great service to the labour movement. Mrs Thatcher looked like she was about to wreck the Tory party, and disable it for a long time to come. If she'd stood her ground that would have been the result.

But she finally chose to cut and run rather than slug it out, and risk tearing the Tory party further apart.

How does she leave her party? Seriously split and divided — on Europe and on the poll tax. Opinion polls this week showed that the majority of grass-roots Tories were backing her against the

Parliamentarians. Some of that was no doubt reflex loyalty to the incumbent leader. But plainly she had struck a chord with her appeals to nationalism.

If she had slugged it out the troops were there for a war with the Parliamentary Tory 'rebels'. But the Parliamentarians prevailed.

They have toppled Thatcher in a palace coup at Westminster in the hope of lessening the chance that the electorate will topple the government and a lot of Tory MPs in the next election.

They hope to use the next 18 months to regain support under Hurd or Heseltine, or whoever.

It is impossible to judge now whether or not the nationalist strain in the Tory party which Thatcher revived will subside or continue to fuel a neo-Thatcherite faction which will sap the party's vitality.

All the contestants in the leadership contest are died-in-the-wool Thatcherites. Yet all three of

"Like Dracula, Mrs Thatcher has been buried, but she is not dead"

them are a bit less Thatcherite than Thatcher. There is no hard Thatcherite candidate in the Thatcher-Norman Tebbit mould.

It is likely that whoever the new leader is there will be an attempt to return to consensus politics and bipartisanship on many basic social issues. Thatcher contemptuously kicked aside consensus when she got down to dismantling the welfare state. There will probably be a less abrasive, less militant style of Toryism.

But it will not be the old pre-Thatcher consensus. It will be a post-Thatcher consensus which takes for granted — takes as something fixed on common ground — many of the central ideas of the Thatcher counter-revolution.

"Thatcherism" is now basic to the emerging consensus. Thatcher is politically dead but her legacy lives on as a poison in the social and political bloodstream of this country, and of all mainstream parties, notably including the Labour Party. Kinnockism in the Labour Party is heavily tintured and tainted by Thatcherism.

It is one of the great shames of Neil Kinnock and Roy Hattersley, and of the Labour Party they have shaped with the help of the trade union leaders, that it too bears the twisted stamp of Margaret Thatcher.

Like Dracula, Mrs Thatcher has been buried, but she is not dead. Before Labour can destroy her legacy in Britain, the socialists must first drive a stake through the rotten heart of Kinnockism-Thatcherism in the Labour Party!

Thatcher's fall will encourage the labour movement and thus help bring forward the day when we can drive her spirit out of the Labour Party.



Troops out of the Gulf!

From back page

don the prize they now contest with Saddam Hussein. They are very unlikely to.

The truth is that Middle East oil — a good proportion of the world's known reserves of oil — is a compelling reason for them to stay put for as long as necessary. That is what they will do.

If necessary, they will fight a protracted war of the sort they fought in Vietnam — where they had no direct economic interests worth speaking about.

They hesitate. There are undoubtedly conflicts of opinion and interest within the imperialist camps. Now that is one reason why it is still only a phoney war. But everything is now in place for war and the entire logic of the situation points to a prolonged stay by Western armies, amongst them Britain.

Just as the end of the two-bloc Cold War rivalry comes to an end we are witnessing a new eruption of imperialism.

**We must oppose this war!
We must use the time of this pro-**

tracted phoney war to build a powerful anti-war movement.

So far the attempt to build such a movement has been disrupted by a damaging dispute over slogans for the campaign: "Troops out now", or "No to war".

Last weekend's decision by CND to change its politics and advocate withdrawal of troops ("phased withdrawal") can go a long way towards healing the divisions. It can allow us to mount the vigorous campaign we desperately need!

**Troops out of the Gulf!
Iraq out of Kuwait!**

"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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How many secret armies?

GRAFFITI

Who killed Aldo Moro?

Secret armies sponsored by the CIA have operated across Western Europe for 40 years.

The Italian group, 'Gladio', was exposed recently. Other groups are still operating in Germany, Belgium, and the Netherlands, at least. The European parliament has ordered an investigation.

The secret armies were set up — officially, at least — after World War 2, for guerrilla fighting should the Russian Army invade. They recruited mainly right-wingers, including, it is alleged, ex-Nazis. Soon their main purpose was to plot not against Russians but the Left in their own countries.

In Italy, 'Gladio' developed close links with fascists. Explosives from its arsenal went missing just before a fascist car bombing in 1972.

The 15,000-strong secret army may also have organised the murder of Italy's prime minister Aldo Moro in May 1978. Right-wingers had infiltrated the Red Brigades, the left-wing group which killed Moro; the CIA had tried to bribe Moro out of allowing the Communist Party into a coalition government, and murder was the next gambit.

What other secret right-wing outfits are there behind the scenes? The European labour movement should launch its own inquiry.

Depressing but true: papers like the *Sun* really do influence people's politics.

A new survey by William Miller of Glasgow University (reported in the *Guardian*, 20 November) finds that in the run-up to the 1987 general election *Star* readers showed a 30% swing to the Tories, and *Sun* readers 36%, while the overall swing was only 17%.

Inquiring more closely, Miller finds that "the *Star* and the *Sun* were not mobilising latent Conservative partisans with Conservative opinions, but converting readers with pro-Labour attitudes on the economy and defence..."

Labour should strip the media barons of their undemocratic power, and take the mass media into public ownership, with guaranteed democratic access for all points of view.

All I can say is: how appropriate that she should be in Versailles when she heard the news." Tony Benn on the leadership poll.

I have in my briefcase the voting intentions of the various MPs. Unless they are downright liars, she will win comfortably," said Mrs Thatcher's secretary Peter Morrison on Tuesday (20th).

So now we have it from the Tories' own mouths. We are governed by downright liars.

The top 25 per cent own 75% of all marketable wealth in Britain, according to the Inland Revenue.

The latest figures, covering 1988, show an increase in inequality since 1976.

Inequality seems to have lessened a bit at the very top, with the share of the top 1% dropping from 21% in 1976 to 17% in 1988. That drop, however, probably reflects the rapid rise in house prices (the bulk of the wealth of all but the super-rich) and the relatively low level of share prices in 1988, more than any real shift in assets.

According to *Building* magazine, Derek Hatton has admitted being paid £50,000 by the building company Wimpey for lobbying Liverpool City Council.

Such payments would be legal — and, indeed, peanuts compared to what some Tory ex-ministers get for their services — but utterly corrupt.

It's sad to see a man so corrupted by the desire for money and power."

By a curious irony, *Sunday Telegraph* writer Bruce Anderson — a former member of the International Socialists (now SWP) who went slopping in the fleshpots of Thatcherism — got sacked last week for quoting those words about somebody else.

The somebody else was Andrew Knight, boss of Rupert Murdoch's British newspaper company. The words were spoken by Prince Charles to *Daily Telegraph* deputy editor Charles Moore, and communicated by him to his editor Max Hastings and by Hastings to Anderson. *Telegraph* bosses told Anderson he had gone too far when he printed the story in the paper.

Thin is beautiful?

WOMEN'S EYE



By Liz Millward

Naomi Wolfe has stirred up the 'women's' media with her book, 'The Beauty Myth'. The most common accusation levelled at the book is "we've heard it all before". Well maybe we have, but I'm not averse to a little stirring myself...

The book deals with the fact that beautiful (read thin, expensively dressed, made-up, lifted, padded, white) women get on better than plain women.

I fail to see how anyone can argue that this is truly how things are. Like it or not, physical beauty is a great help in almost every endeavour. And it stinks! The more books written

about it the better.

Medical research shows that diets generally lead to the dieter gaining weight, unless the diet is a gradual shift to healthier eating and regular exercise.

Yet millions of women go on quick-loss diets every year. They eat silly little bars of chocolate, and drink silly little drinks with 'only' 58 calories (water or black coffee contains 0!) and complain about how miserable they are.

The whole performance costs more than three hot meals a day, and doesn't even do any good.

And then there's clothes. I could dress for a year on some of the outfits I see on the tube. Five years ago I went on my one and only junket and heard one of the Eurocrats explaining how her suit 'only' cost £400. And she didn't even look good. She looked uncomfortable.

And shoes. I have to go to special shops to get shoes for my 'oversized' feet. Which means I've missed out on training myself to wear 'heels', ie. I've missed out on the chance to distort my posture, give myself lower



Naomi Wolfe

back strain and corns.

Of course, 1990s woman is a lot better off than our sisters from times past. At least no-one expects us to wear corsets, or drag 14 layers of petticoats around with us.

But who knows what will be in the next 'season's' collection?

I can see why women do it. The pressure is irresistible. Aren't cosmetics gorgeous in their shiny packaging? Who wants to change their eating habits and lose a stone next year when you can buy a box of disgusting 'meal replacements' and be thin in a week? For a week or two...

Who wants to look like a frumpy feminist when there are all those fabulous clothes on sale, and you can buy them with 'instant credit'?

The point is that you can never achieve 'the look' you want. The entire 'woman' industry is designed to keep women unhappy. But think about it. If the diet worked, who'd buy another one?

Women are deliberately made to feel miserable about the way we look. If

an outfit suits you it falls to bits, or 'fashion' changes. Genuinely comfortable, warm, easily washed clothes are usually found in the men's department. Films, TV, newspapers all show only thin women having a good time.

There are a million battles for women to fight in our struggle for liberation. It seems sick to worry about fashion-oppression with so many other battles going on around the world. But in the here and now capitalism makes women waste millions of pounds, dollars, and yen and hours and hours of precious time, trying to reach an impossible ideal.

The fashion industry and the ideology which infects the whole of Western society is one of capitalism's nastiest tricks on us. Apart from simply being miserable, women accept mutilation and starve themselves to death to fill shareholders' pockets.

Get off that diet! Throw that catalogue away! Buy some comfortable shoes!

You have nothing to lose but your backache.

The Tory press and the leadership contest

An agonising loyalty test



By Jim Denham

Not least amongst all the enjoyment to be had, thanks to the present leadership battle, is the spectacle of the right-wing press all-at-tizzy.

For newspapers whose stock-in-trade is fawning loyalty to Mrs Thatcher and all her works, a terrible dilemma now presents itself: whether to continue with uncritical support of the Supreme Leader or to countenance the possibility that someone else (Heseltine? Hurd? Major?) may now be an acceptable alternative.

The agony is compounded by the lack of reliable intelligence on the likely outcome of events. If anyone could be reasonably sure that Mrs T would see off the Heseltine challenge with contemptuous ease, then the answer would be easy: rubbish Goldilocks as an

untrustworthy fly-by-night, power-crazed usurper and general ne'er-do-well.

The problem with this approach is, of course, what if Goldilocks should win? How could a paper call for a general election vote for a party led by someone it had been slagging off only months before?

And Tory MPs are a notoriously devious 'electorate': the *Independent* quoted a "well-known Home Counties 'wet'", grinning broadly and saying: "If one of Mrs Thatcher's team asks me I shall say, 'Of course, old boy, need you ask?'" He was voting for Heseltine.

So it is not at all easy working out which way to jump. Predictably, the *Sun* and the *Express* had no hesitation in rallying to their mistress's side in her hour of need. In fact, these two ultra-Thatcherite publications went a bit overboard, embarrassing the Supreme Ruler's campaign team with a counter-productive smear concerning the private lives of some of Heseltine's lieutenants: Thatcher feigned outrage and officially decried any attempt to introduce "personal abuse" into the contest.

The *Daily Mail*, which has occasionally raised a few mild criticisms of Thatcher's anti-European stance, hesitated a little longer before plumping

for Maggie. The *Daily Telegraph*, of course, is solidly pro-Thatcher, though it has avoided the unseemly excesses of the *Sun* and *Express*.

The only paper to offer immediate and unequivocal support to the Heseltinees was the *Independent* which has nothing to lose as it has never been in the Thatcher camp and its early leanings towards Dr David Owen have left it with no coherent political stance at all these days. Surprisingly, two Murdoch titles, *Today* and the *Sunday Times* veered towards the Heseltine camp with the *ST* coming out with "A reluctant goodbye" to Mrs T on November 18. The *Times* itself delayed giving its verdict until Tuesday 20 (too late for this column's deadline), but Monday's edition carried an extraordinary last-minute outburst from Mrs T, accusing Tarzan of lining up with the Labour Party and comparing his industrial policy with that of the pre-Gorbachev USSR....

Underlying all this agonising by the Tory press is the occasional hint that what most of them would really like to see is for the Supreme Leader to stand down gracefully, after the first round and hand her baton over to someone like Douglas Hurd...except for the *Sun*

and *Express*, of course. They want Maggie to rule forever.

A splendid row has broken out at the *Sunday Telegraph* and the best part is that it has resulted in the sacking of that paper's odious political commentator Bruce ('The Brute') Anderson.

It seems that Prince Charles made some disparaging comments about Andrew Knight, the former *Telegraph* chief executive who earlier this year defected to the Murdoch camp. The comments were made at a *Daily Telegraph* lunch and all concerned were sworn to secrecy. But the temptation proved too much for the Brute, who ran the story in his *Mandrake* column last week.

Max Hastings, editor-in-chief of the *Daily* and *Sunday Telegraphs*, who has been at daggers drawn with Anderson and all the old *Worsthorne* gang since "integrating" the two papers last year, seized his chance: he invoked the *Telegraph's* disciplinary procedure and Anderson was duly fired.

The Brute is one of Mrs Thatcher's favourite journalists, and it must be especially galling for her to be deprived of such an outspoken supporter at this difficult time.



French students on the march

French students' victory

Alain Mathieu, a member of the French Revolutionary Communist League (LCR), spoke to Socialist Organiser last weekend.

There was a big demonstration on 12 November — 200,000 people in Paris — and demonstrations at the same time in the big provincial cities.

The government has decided to open negotiations. For the first time it has agreed to meet delegates from the school students. A delegation from the two student coordinating committees was received by Mitterand — there's a coordinating committee mainly led by members of the Communist Youth, in which there are also some Socialists and some Trotskyists from the JCR [youth group of the LCR] and Lutte Ouvriere; and there's one mainly led by people from SOS-Racisme [an anti-racist group close to the Socialist Party], but the two committees made an agreement for the demonstration on 12 November, and for the delegation to meet Mitterand.

The Education Minister has committed himself to an emergency plan for education. In the secondary schools there are not enough teachers, inadequate buildings, intolerable conditions for study. This emergency plan was announced without giving any figures, and the school students decided to continue the movement with sit-ins on Friday [16th].

Following that, the minister agreed to release 4.5 billion francs [about £450 million]. That's not nothing, but spread over all the schools in France it's not enough. It's difficult to give a figure, but maybe 8 or 10 billion francs are needed to renovate the buildings

and recruit teachers. And at the same time the teachers are fighting for a revision of their salaries.

This week the National Assembly is discussing the education budget; and the minister will only be able to get his budget through by using a special procedure of the 5th Republic [De Gaulle's constitution] which forces MPs either to accept the budget or to throw out the government.

The right wing has put down a motion of no confidence. The Communist Party will support it, but a section of the Right is going to support Rocard [the Socialist Party prime minister].

The teachers' unions have not called a national strike. They have simply called on their members to strike with the students in their schools. They have joined the demonstrations. We think the unions should call a national teachers' strike.

The problems raised by the students are the same as the problems raised by the teachers.

There's been a contradiction in the government's policy for four or five years. They have encouraged more pupils to continue their studies, and so the number of students in the secondary schools has gone up sharply. But they haven't given the schools the means to deal with this issue.

The movement started in the working-class suburbs of Paris and the big cities. One month before the students' movement started, we had for the first time in France what you've had in Britain — an uprising of youth in a district of Lyons following the death of a young North African.

At the head of the students' movement have been the most disadvantaged — blacks, North Africans — but all the youth have united behind them, all the 14 to 19 year olds in the secondary schools.

The main representative of the coordinating committee led to SOS-Racisme is a North African, and of the coordinating committee led by the Communist Party, a Senegalese. And that's welcomed.

For some years now among French youth an identity has been built up based on rejection of racism and mixing together in the schools. There aren't ghettos where blacks are in one area and whites in another.

So, for example, when there have been violent incidents involving students from the suburbs, the reaction of the students in the Paris schools is to sympathise with the students from the suburbs, not see them as wreckers. They say the answer is renovating the schools and the working-class suburbs.

On the demonstrations, the slogan of money for the schools, not for the oil war, is taken up quite widely.

For the moment, the movement has not touched the universities. The student unions have mobilised in support of the school students, but there's no movement coming from the universities.

The students' demands are not just about more money for education; they want to know what it means concretely. There are demands for committees to be set up in each department [local government unit] to oversee the budgets, with representatives of the students. There are also demands about freedom of expression in school, and the right to have organisations to defend students' interests.

Renew Labour's youth movement!

Delegates from Labour Clubs, LPYS branches and trade unions gather in Bridlington this weekend for the annual Labour Youth Conference. Here we reprint an article by Nick Lowles from the Labour Party Socialists youth and student bulletin, outlining what is wrong with the two wings of Labour's youth, NOLS and LPYS

Labour's youth organisation is discredited, ineffective and has a history of undemocratic procedure. The party leadership, with their eyes on the youth vote, have started to move.

The flurry of leaflets from Walworth Road urging students in particular to register for voting is a sign that the National Organisation of Labour Students (NOLS) is central to organising the youth vote at the next election. Questions from head office about halls of residence in Tory marginals and the seemingly endless round of Labour Club meetings on canvassing confirm it. NOLS have even organised a housing day of action, enlisting the talents of Jack Straw to urge students to register their vote. In their own strange way, they're trying.

Their potential for success will be determined by factors such as administrative powers, targeting key seats, producing user-friendly publicity. They may even campaign to build up a profile. But NOLS will not relate to the existing struggles or concretely address what the party has to do to help liberate young people.

The reason NOLS has failed to grow is political. Firstly, it flatly refuses to lead the student movement, preferring to 'intervene' into the parliamentary

process. NOLS see the membership as a stage army, to be mobilised rarely. NOLS have no strategy to orientate the student movement to the labour movement. Norman Willis speaking at the annual NUS demonstration does not substitute for real, living rank and file links between students and workers. And NOLS have no project of making their organisation the backbone of NUS. NOLS must become an active rank and file group that can organise at a local level. Because of ritual infighting over NUS National Executive places, and systematic exclusion of the left, this perspective hasn't had a chance.

This year the crisis has become even more acute. An inexperienced NOLS team have organised no NUS campaigns, have supported the Kuwaiti embassy's 'Free Kuwait' initiative which merely demands the return of the undemocratic anti-working class Emir through the military intervention of the US and British troops, and have dragged NUS reform back onto the NUS conference agenda, giving in to Tory threats. NOLS are in trouble and increasingly desperate.

On paper the Labour Party Young Socialists exists; in reality it doesn't. There were only 52 branches registered in the NEC report to this year's party conference. The YS, once *Militant's* stronghold, was felled by a series of proposals drawn up by ex-Bennite, now Kinnockite clone Tom Sawyer. In 1987 the age limit was reduced from 26 to 23, YS national conference was abolished, as were regional conferences. The *Militant* leadership gave up, waged no serious battle against the proposals despite their stranglehold on the YS, and veered into the Youth Rights Campaign they set up to replace the YS.

Labour Party Socialists thinks Labour needs to renew its youth organisations: both NOLS and the YS need to be 're-formed'. New democratic procedures and political changes are necessary.

LPS supports a 'Charter of Democratic Rights' for NOLS and the YS, as for the party at large. We also think that if a mass radical youth movement is built, it will be on a different basis than the existing policies. Right now that means opposing the

Western imperialist build-up in the Gulf, being on the picket lines, and stopping the poll tax bailiffs. It also involves adopting a world view in which class struggle is the motor of society. Unfortunately, both NOLS and the LPYS have failed to defend class politics. LPS exists to put it back on the agenda.

Come to this school!

The crisis in the Tory Party and the war drive in the Gulf form the backdrop to "Fighting for Workers' Liberty" *Socialist Organiser* weekend of debate for students.

The weekend will address the major issues that face socialists today, such as the attitude the left should take towards war, and the strategic considerations in a Labour Party dominated by Kinnock. We will be examining the development of imperialism and asking what is the relationship between art and revolution.

Elsewhere, the crisis of contemporary feminism, the nature of the national question in the '90s and the need to build support for Marxist ideas in the student and labour movement, will be the subject of workshops.

Student activists are registered from across the country. *SO* asked some of them why they were coming.

"I've never experienced a Labour government and I've got a lot of questions to ask; I've found some good answers in *SO*. The school is a chance to further the debate," said Pete Harvey, from Mid-Kent college.

Gill Cann from Tyne Tees told us: "Changing the world is important to me. It's the only way to

change the position of women in society. At the school there will be a discussion on feminism and the women's movement. We need to understand the problems of the past to work out what we need to build in the future."

Wayne Perry from Wakefield District College said: "We have to understand how the world works in order to work out how we change it and what to change it into. The *SO* weekend is a good way to begin."

Transport is available from all areas of the country. Ring Jill or Paul on 071 639 7967 for more details. Join the fightback!

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Jozef Pinior on the new workers' committees in Poland

Polish workers grapple with 'capitalism with a human face'

This Sunday, 25 November, Lech Walesa is likely to be elected president of Poland, defeating his own previous nominee as PM, Tadeusz Mazowiecki. Walesa will be elected with workers' votes — but his campaign has nationalist and authoritarian overtones, and chiefly accuses Mazowiecki of going too slowly with his free-market economic plans. Jozef Pinior, from the Socialist Political Centre in Poland, explains the political developments in the Polish workers' movement

The economic situation is pauperisation, pauperisation and pauperisation!

The Balcerowicz plan provided for a fall in production of 10-15%. The actual decline in production from January to May amounted to 30%. Prices for consumers in April this year were 150% higher than in December.

Real wages fell about 43%. Unemployment at the end of October was about 1 million. Half of these were women. And we have not yet entered the period of factory closures and the sacking of whole groups of workers.

Monthly average earnings in the Polish economy between January and September were about 900,000 zlotys — the equivalent of \$94 (about £47). About 9% fewer flats are being built, and lack of housing is a big problem in Poland.

Railways carried 29% less goods this year, and road traffic was reduced by 59%. This is the reality of "capitalism with a human face"!

In response, a new wave of radicalisation has begun in Poland. What changed the situation was the railworkers' strike in May. It was the first movement to challenge the credibility of the Mazowiecki government.

The present miners' strikes are a big new step because the miners are the strongest sector of the working class in Poland. It was miners in Upper Silesia who defended themselves against army and police officers when martial law was imposed in December 1981, and some of them were shot dead.

The miners are a very combative section of the working class, with a tradition of egalitarianism and struggle for political rights.

But Lech Walesa has used the situation very cleverly. There is no political alternative for the militants and the combative sections of the working class, so Walesa can use such struggles to build support.

The Mazowiecki government and the political currents around it, like ROAD (Citizens' Movement for Democratic Action) have become a symbol for people of the disastrous economic situation.

Walesa will win this election — and Walesa will lose his credibility, just as Mazowiecki has done this year. Remember, Mazowiecki had enormous prestige and credibility. Only a year later he and the people around him have lost everything.



Solidarnosc trade unionists will vote for Walesa — but he has no answers for them

The new workers' committees

We're seeing a kind of class instinct emerge inside Solidarity. Its platform is to change Solidarity so that it is a trade union against all politicians.

Over the last few months, new inter-enterprise co-ordination committees have developed, in the first place in Upper Silesia and in Lower Silesia. This is really workers' self-organisation from below, inside the official structures of Solidarity. And sometimes the workers involved in these structures don't believe in Walesa, or at least they are sceptical.

These new structures are not very strong yet. They are just beginning.

In Lower Silesia, my region, the inter-enterprise co-ordination committees stood candidates in the last regional Solidarity election a month ago, and their candidate got one third of the votes in the Congress, after only two months of organisational work. His platform was to discuss economic problems with the government — what is to be done to defend workers against unemployment, and so on.

And, what is very important from our point of view, his platform also contained points about anti-semitism and racism as a danger for the labour movement in Poland.

At the same Congress, the former regional leader, Frasnikiuk, my friend from the underground, lost everything, because he is now one of the leaders of one of the pro-Mazowiecki Citizens' Movement for Democratic Action.

In the Lower Silesia region of Solidarity there is now a balance of

forces between a left Christian current with strong support for Walesa and the inter-enterprise co-ordination committees.

The fundamental problem in Poland at the moment is this: when Walesa becomes President will it be possible for him to control the Solidarity trade union, to smash democracy inside it? If it is possible, then things will very rapidly move to a very reactionary position. But if it is not possible, then opportunities open up for us. The fundamental question for us is to build a left alternative inside the labour movement.

How workers see Walesa

Solidarity trade unionists see Walesa as an alternative to this government, and they are combatively hostile to this government. This government is a symbol of economic disaster and of betraying Solidarity. And in their minds there is no alternative, only Walesa.

In Walesa they see a man who is from the working class and hasn't yet cut his roots in that class. That is their thinking. And so most of the working class, and most Solidarity members, support Walesa.

But there are a lot of members who are sceptical. They don't support Mazowiecki, but they are sceptical about Walesa.

At the regional congresses in Lower Silesia there was a vote to support Walesa in the Presidential elections. It was evenly balanced — around 120 to support him in the election, and 100 not.

Among those 100 are a lot of people who are against Mazowiecki and



they will vote for Walesa. But they want to have an independent trade union against Walesa, too.

I think there is a place in Poland and Eastern Europe for some kind of independent working class party. But not today, not yet. Maybe in future parliamentary elections the Solidarity trade union will be able to get its own candidates elected as representatives of the working class movement.

The Polish Socialist Party (Democratic Revolution) has reunited with the PSP (Lipski) and the emigre PSP. Its leader, Lipski, has said he personally will be voting for Mazowiecki. The Party as such has no opinion. There is no place for such political parties without any relation to existing realities or to existing labour movements.

The Social Democracy (ex-CP) have their own candidate for President. The group around Fizbach, also called Social Democratic, and also ex-CP, are supporting Walesa. Fizbach was a party secretary in Gdansk in 1980. He supports Walesa and wants to organise a Social Democratic party in Walesa's camp.

How the socialists are organising

Our group is not a political party. We are something between a research group and a political group. We support neither Walesa nor Mazowiecki. We work inside the labour movement as an independent workers current on the base of the new inter-enterprise co-ordination committees.

We are organising a conference of these inter-enterprise co-

ordination committees in the rank and file of Solidarity from different regions. In the miners' strikes, our inter-enterprise co-ordination committees call for support for the strikes from everybody, and for spreading the movement from miners to other workers.

At the same time we try to be an alternative information centre, to inform the population about alternative politics and economics.

The big danger in Poland is of a deep demoralisation and disorientation, and a lack of alternative politics and directions. There are dangers from the rise of anti-semitism and racism. But I don't see fascism as an immediate possibility.

A lot of things will change in Polish politics. There will probably be an alliance in favour of privatisation, bringing together people in the Walesa camp and people around Mazowiecki. They will come together on the right — and there will be a lot of change in the left and in the labour movement.

There is a strong pressure on the issue of abortion from the Church and from nationalist and Catholic political groups. The Senate and the Parliament have made a statement against the laws allowing free abortion, but they have not changed the law yet. There is still free abortion in Poland.

And, outside of Solidarity, a lot of new women's groups have emerged to campaign against these plans — from the ex-Stalinist women's organisations and completely new groups. Inside Solidarity there is a new women's commission, which we are very active in.

These women are trying to organise a women's platform inside Solidarity for free abortion and for a good situation for women in the economy.

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Stop the War in the Gulf!
National Demonstration 24 November
Assembly: 10.00, Entrance: 12.00
March to rally in Hyde Park

No to war!

USSR: when will the generals move in?

By Jack Cleary

For forty years West Berlin has kept a year's reserve food supply in stock. Newly reunited Germany has just decided to donate that food to the USSR, which now faces a winter of famine and starvation.

Food was stockpiled in West Berlin — which was a West German island a hundred miles within the former Stalinist East Germany — for fear of a new Russian blockade, like that of 1948.

In 1948 the pile of ruins that was West Berlin was an anachronistic spot on the map of Stalin's new East European empire. He thought he could take it over by stopping supplies getting through from the West.

A mass airlift followed, and after some months Stalin's siege was lifted. But they stockpiled the food nevertheless. Now they can afford to donate it for famine relief to a Russia on the verge of collapse, and perhaps beyond the verge. That is one measure of how much things have changed in Europe.

The USSR continues to spiral deeper into crisis. Gorbachev has had a vast new increase of formal power. All the powers of government are now combined in the person of the Union president.

But it is notional power only. The individual republics, including the biggest of them, the Russian, continue to go their own way, asserting that their own laws and their own government's decisions override the authority of the Kremlin.

The Baltic republics are in a state of de facto secession.

The decision is taken to introduce a free market system — but even the authors of the "500 days" plan now say openly that it cannot work.

Moving towards a free market in the USSR is proving even more chaotic than in Eastern Europe.

There has been too little preparation over time. By contrast, Hungary, for example, has been adopting marketisation piecemeal for two decades. In the USSR the system of the centralised command economy has now broken down together with the central political

authority, but there is nothing to take its place yet.

The economy is collapsing, layer upon layer.

This year there was an exceptionally good harvest, yet the cities are threatened by starvation because of the state of the distribution system.

The "radical" (that is pro-capitalist) city councils in Moscow and Leningrad want to bring in

rationing but are unsure because they can't with confidence undertake to provide people with even minimal rations.

This was a command economy. It worked sluggishly and badly and wastefully, but in so far as it worked it worked through political decisions, through the lumbering sluggish political bureaucracy, backed by the vast police state network of repression and coercion.

Gorbachev's reforms have eroded and crippled that system though the KGB remains intact, as does the army. The central bureaucracy has grown feeble, power has passed to the republics.

There is no functioning market system higher than the black markets to do the work done so badly by the old centralised command structures.

When you put a bullet through the brain of an elephant or another large animal its limbs go slack, its knees buckle and it collapses on itself in a sprawling heap. Gorbachev's reforms and the series of explosions they have released to destroy the power of the central political bureaucracy have had the same effect on the great lumbering structure Stalin built in the USSR.

Like the primitive but highly organised Inca empire the Spaniards found in Peru early in the sixteenth century, which collapsed into chaos when they captured and killed its god-king, who had been the centre of everything, the USSR is in chaos because Gorbachev's reforms have killed the power of its heart and brain, the old central political bureaucracy.

No wonder the organised working class too wants to move as quickly as possible to a market economy — that is to something that works, away from chaos. According to Boris Kagarlitsky, the USSR's trade unions have now become heavily pro-market.

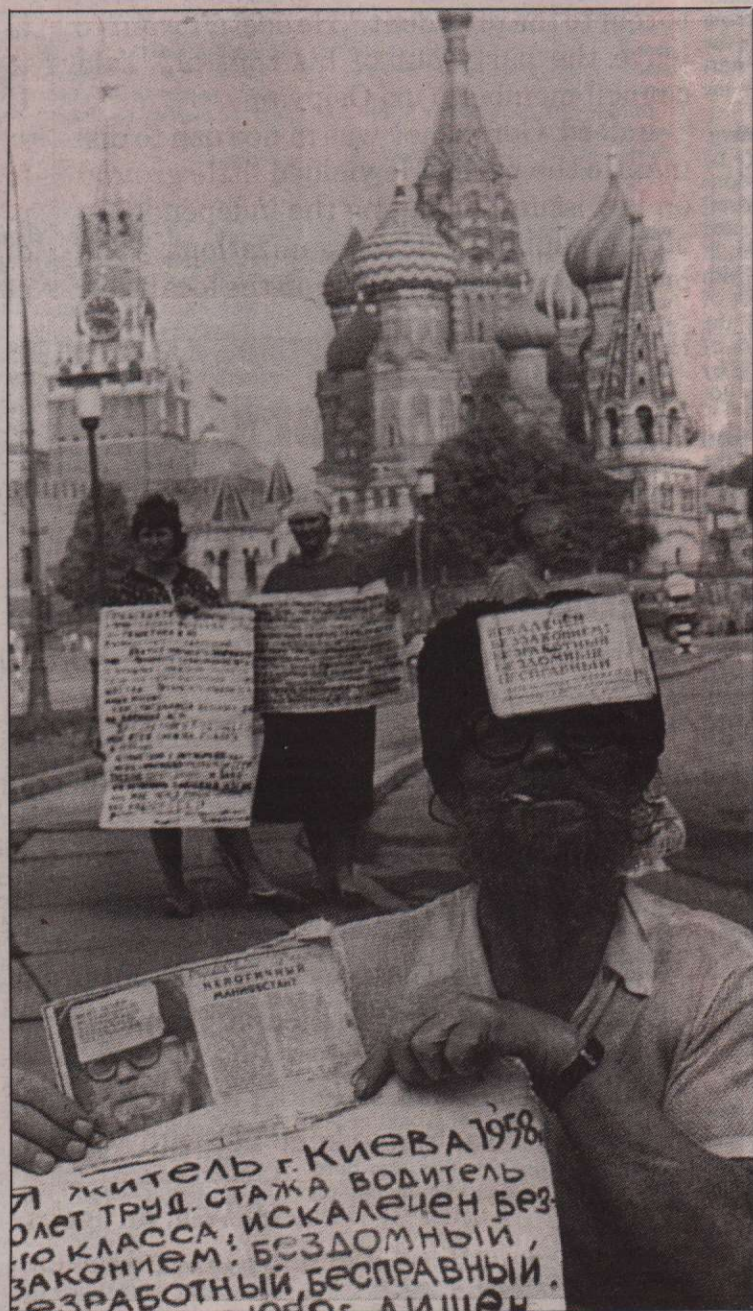
On the other hand, there are many millions who see chaos and the coming famine, and conclude that the old authoritarianism was better. That too "worked".

There is probably a mass base in the USSR for a military or KGB coup to restore order and authority.

Mikhail Gorbachev now is plainly what Alexander Kerensky was in 1917 — a weak titular figure doomed to be pushed aside by stronger forces of either the left or the right. In 1917 it was the Bolshevik left: there is nothing comparable now. There is only the right: even under a military authoritarian government the moves towards marketisation would continue.

There are a lot of ready-made rough models in the Third World that the liquidators of Russian Stalinism can borrow from.

It seems it is only a matter of time before an attempt is made to embark on such a model. There are generals, probably, who think a time of looming famine is high time.



"We cannot live this way": protesters in Moscow

Socialist Conference fails to focus lessons from Eastern Europe

By Martin Thomas

A wide range of speakers from the USSR and Eastern Europe attended the Fourth Socialist Conference last weekend (17-18 November).

Unfortunately, it's impossible to say that any clear distinction came out of the Conference's discussions on "Freedom, Democracy, and Socialism". They were spread over 40 workshops, often with heavily overlapping themes which they

wandered around diffusely.

With 850 attending, the Conference was only half the size of the previous Socialist Conferences (initiated under the sponsorship of Tony Benn in Chesterfield in 1987). The proportion of middle-aged ex-revolutionary "intellectuals" was higher, and of labour movement activists lower.

Many of the East European speakers, understandably, were not socialists in any sense beyond wanting a welfare state. And many of those attending were visibly not sure of how to respond to the East Europeans' scepticism about socialism.

An index of the tone was the response to a reading by Tariq Ali from his gangrenous novel 'Redemption', where he seals his desertion of the socialist cause with a string of childish in-jokes about his former comrades. The response was not anger, but sage comments about the need for the left to look at itself sceptically and humorously and not to take itself too seriously.

Socialist Organiser supporters at the Conference sold SO and other literature, signed up new members and sponsors for the Campaign Against War in the Gulf, and collected £50 towards the Polish Socialists' Appeal.

Stop the Nazis marching!

By Nick Lowles

This Saturday (24 November), Nazis from across Britain will be marching through the East End of London as a sign of provocation to all the communities in the area.

The march, organised by the BNP, comes only weeks after they polled 12.5 per cent of the vote in a by-election in Tower Hamlets: they received 25% of the white vote.

The area, battered by 11 years of Tory attacks and a racist Liberal council, has been open recruiting ground for the fascists for many years.

The route the BNP are taking has been carefully planned to create as much provocation as possible. It will go through the area of their electoral success, past the site of a recent racist murder, and through areas where Asian and Jewish communities live.

The fascists have picked their day: most of the left will be on the Gulf demo in London or on the Manchester Martyrs demo.

The fascists must not be allowed to get away with this; if they march unopposed they will only get stronger. The effects of them marching will be an even greater increase in racial attacks in the area — they must be opposed.

• Counter Demo: Assemble 2pm, Morpeth School, Morpeth Road, Bethnal Green.

Fund passes half way mark

Socialist Organiser is a good paper," says Jozef Piniur of the Socialist Political Centre in Poland. "It's interesting. And the fact that it has cultural coverage as well as politics is good."

SO supporters are organising new sales all round the country with the new expanded 16-page paper — in shopping centres, at railway stations and bus stations, round pubs, door to door, and at labour movement meetings, conferences and demonstrations.

Every reader can help by taking a small bundle of SO's to sell at work or in your Labour Party or trade union.

With the Tories in disarray, it's good time to build circulation! Send reports of sales in your area to SO, PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA.

Time to build sales

£210 from comrades in Australia, £100 from John McIlroy, and new contributions to our "200 Club" have raised the running total on our £25,000 fund appeal to £13,074.

We need another £11,926 to make sure of being able to continue the paper with 16 pages and printed on heavier-quality paper.

Regular monthly payments into our "200 Club" are a good way to help — and you get a chance of winning £100 each month in our "200 Club" draw.

Donations to, and standing order forms from, SO, PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA.

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General strike threat to government

Bulgaria's new

Workers organise against post-Stalinist regime

On 19 November Bulgaria's trade union federation Podkrepa threatened that it would call a general strike unless the crisis-racked Socialist Party (ex-CP) government elected in June this year steps down.

Grigor Gradev is a researcher working for Bulgaria's other union grouping, the Confederation of Independent Trade Unions. Last weekend he spoke to Socialist Organiser about the development of the unions in Bulgaria.

Bulgaria has two national trade union confederations. One is the Confederation of Labour (Podkrepa), the other the Confederation of Independent Trade Unions of Bulgaria.

Podkrepa emerged as an organisation after the political change in November last year. It had existed since February 1989 as a small group of intellectuals trying to build a union. They were arrested, then let out, and when the change came they could work openly.

At the same time the old leadership of the official unions declared themselves independent of the ruling party and the state, but in practice nothing changed.

In December and January, a wave of worker unrest started. In January and February we had more than 500 industrial conflicts, of which at least 200 were strikes.

The trade union movement began to disintegrate. The workers didn't believe in the old leadership of the trade unions. But Podkrepa was an attempt to copy Solidarity in Poland, and they put a heavy stress on political action and industrial ac-

tion with political aims.

In my opinion that was a big mistake, because they could have created a base at that time. Their intentions were in conflict with what the workers wanted, because the workers' primary demands were industrial — wages, hours, ending compulsory weekend work, health and safety. The line of Podkrepa was that we must first dismantle the system as a whole, and then start building a new one — and for me that's impossible.

The workplace power that emerged at that time was used by managers to split from corporations [combines of different enterprises] which had been artificially created by the government a year earlier, in an attempt to create capitalism with socialist means. That was a sort of political issue — because all the directors and general managers of the corporations had been put in by political decision — but it was not what Podkrepa wanted.

They were for full and total privatisation of industry. At the time when Podkrepa was the only viable union — or potentially viable union — they could not create a big social base. They started with doctors and teachers then some scientists and groups of industrial workers, but only scattered groups.

At a Congress at the end of March they claimed 100,000 members, but that was only an estimate, because they weren't collecting membership fees. Sometimes they would go to an enterprise where there was industrial conflict, and appear with a declaration about dismantling the totalitarian system and saying they would help the workers. When the workers voted for the declaration, they would consider them members of Podkrepa.

The old unions transformed

Meanwhile the workers were acting for themselves. They used the Labour Code. In 1987 a system of self-management

Reform from above

1987: State planning of production targets abandoned, enterprises to be "self-financing", workers to elect managers, strikes to be allowed.

Late 1988: The old Stalinist regime of Todor Zhivkov announces plans to restructure Bulgarian enterprises into corporations which can issue shares and trade freely with the West.

October 1989: Reformers in the regime, led by Peter Mladenov, oust Zhivkov, and launch democratisation.

December 1989: Government agrees

to talks with the opposition after the independent trade union Podkrepa threatens a general strike.

December 1989: Government reverses discrimination against Turks. Demonstrations in protest — said to be organised secretly by hard-line Stalinists.

June 1990: The Socialist Party (ex-CP) wins a majority in free elections. The opposition coalition, the Union of Democratic Forces, refuses an invitation to a coalition government.

was developed in industry. Collectives of workers elected their managers and took decisions. But when the workers began to exercise their powers under this law, they rejected the nominees of the nomenklatura; and managers refused to sign agreements with the work brigades because of pressure from the Party. In 1988 the government cancelled the whole thing and introduced the corporations, which were to operate in a much freer market, with links with abroad, and so on.

In the strike wave which began in December 1989, the workers legitimised their actions with the self-management. They elected new directors, and they separated their enterprises from the higher economic bodies.

The workers set up strike committees, which often later became trade union committees.

In the old unions, reform-minded people from the self-management period took power at the top. They brought in a completely new model of trade unionism, based on collective bargaining, tripartism, and the defensive functions of trade unions.

This won strong acceptance in the rank and file because this defensive programme was just the programme they needed. So the old unions did not collapse.

From the top and from the rank and file there was what was called the sandwich strategy. In February, when the Confederation was born — it was not a confederation

before, it was a centralised organisation — there were new elections in the union structures. And new groups also joined the Confederation; they could use the organisational potential and material assets of the old unions to create a new union movement.

So the Confederation was born as the other big national trade union centre. It has about 3½ million members now. The workforce in Bulgaria is about 4 million, and Podkrepa should have grown since March.

The unions and politics

The Confederation signed an agreement with the government, and we helped the creation of an employers' association, so that we could work with somebody. The Confederation also proposed a new law on strikes. It got an agreement for indexation of wages in line with the cost of living. Now it's drafting laws on trade unions and on social security.

The Confederation declared independence from any political party. When I left Bulgaria in September there were discussions about the unions forming a new party, a labour party, but as far as I know nothing has come of that.

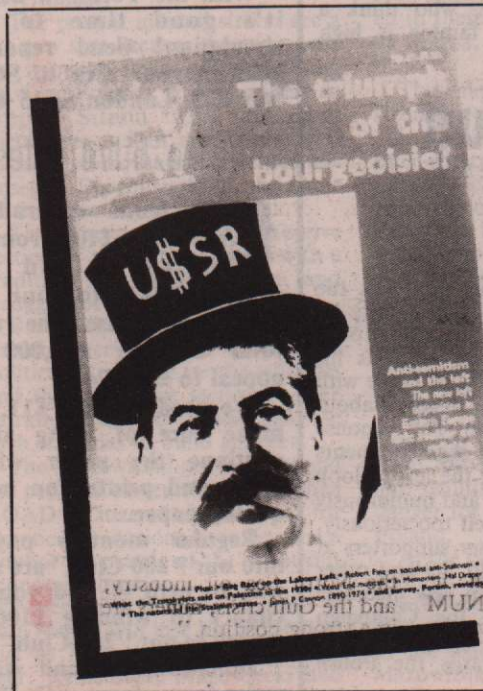
Podkrepa is in the Union of Democratic Forces [the opposition alliance], and in fact it has played a major role. It supplied the base for UDF.

Podkrepa tended to support a more right-wing stance than the rest of the UDF. They have a much firmer stand on everything that comes up in parliament. The problem is, we need a national agreement a national consensus, a coalition government.

But Podkrepa has begun to put more emphasis on industrial issues. And they work very quickly. In many cases they respond more quickly than the Confederation. They have doubled or trebled their membership.

Collaboration has developed between Podkrepa and the Confederation, and in July we had the first joint action of the two organisations, when we put a memorandum to the National Assembly that it should study the economic situation. When I left Bulgaria relations between the two organisations were quite good, but in the last week or so something has happened to make them worse, I don't know what.

The government said it would resign, then it didn't resign, then there was announced a 100-day crash programme for the economy.



Triumph of the bourgeoisie?

Marxism after Stalinism: why we must abandon the idea that Stalinism is "post-capitalist"; Robert Fine on the poverty of traditional left anti-Stalinism; a survey of the new socialist groups in Eastern Europe.
Anti-Zionism, anti-semitism and the left: John O'Mahony argues, in an open letter to Tony Cliff, that radical anti-Zionism has opened the way for anti-semitism to reclothe itself in

"anti-imperialist" colours; Robert Fine surveys what Marxists wrote about Palestine in the 1930s.
Eric Heffer's socialism: a discussion covering religion, democracy and Europe.
And much more, including Albert Einstein on socialism, Reg Race on the Labour left, and Barry Finger on Hal Draper.
£1.20 plus 24p postage to quiz from SO, PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA.



Protest against government

The economy in chaos

Over the first nine months of this year the economy declined about 10 or 12 per cent. That's according to official figures, so it's probably more. When I left in September, cheese, yellow cheese, sugar and vegetable oils were rationed. Now all basic

movement



goods except bread are rationed. And even if you have ration coupons there's nothing in the shops. Prices are going up between 300 per cent and 400 per cent. Those are still fixed state prices, so you can imagine what would happen if they left it to market forces. Black market prices had gone up by a factor of three, four or five by September and now it's even more. When we started studying living standards in Confederation, we found that more than half the population was below the poverty

line.

There's a problem of control of production and distribution.

At the beginning of the year we had 8,000 unemployed, and by the end of the year it'll be 100,000. And still the economic programme has not been enacted, so think what will come after that!

Earlier this year the government moved to liberalise certain sectors. The result was that the people in power began to buy the enterprises. That's privatisation which we don't want. There was a law in parliament

to stop it.

The trade unions have made demands on what should go together with privatisation. We have insisted that the workers should be consulted, that time should be left for workers to make their decision, that workers should be able to participate in the ownership of enterprises.

And we've raised the problem that there is no money for social security — not even for the numbers who are unemployed now.

Miners' overtime ban

Why we lost

Dave Cliff, Hem Heath
NUM raises some
important issues

The surprise result of NUM ballot for an overtime ban was a surprise only in that 43% of miners voted in favour.

All the national press without exception gave dire warnings of the consequences of miners voting for industrial action. On top of this British Coal launched a propaganda blitz. Notices all over the pits screamed "Put your families first". The same message was pushed into each individual's locker.

What did the NUM do to counteract this overwhelming publicity blitz? Not very much, is the sad fact. A single sheet issue of *The Miner*, largely dominated by pie charts showing overtime up and bonuses down and a few leaflets giving scant details. Nowhere did I see any clear explanation of what the NUM wage claim consisted of, even less of why British Coal refused to negotiate and the meanings of the conciliation agreement.

British Coal have threatened, bullied and blackmailed miners for five years now. In this latest ballot they perfected these arts, threatening further pit closures, using the prospect of losing up to £10,000 in redundancy payments, and using the UDM to bully their way into forcing what is in effect the fifth annual reduction in miners' pay.

Certain areas, South Wales and Scotland, campaigned against a yes vote, although they should have obeyed their mandate from the national delegate conference. South Wales leaders are now mooting the idea of a breakaway from the national union. The politics being operated in the South Wales area at the moment appear to deny all sense of collective



responsibility.

There are also good reasons why the NUM need to adopt slightly more sophisticated tactics than banning overtime. The ban that would have been effected if the vote had succeeded would have been one that gave British Coal safety cover. The last time such a ban was operated everybody and his dog worked overtime giving safety reasons as the excuse.

To operate an overtime ban without safety cover also has massive drawbacks. The shafts are not inspected for work to commence on Monday mornings, the result of this being many miners losing at least one shift a week. Incentive payments fall to almost nothing during such bans, the result being a huge reduction in earnings even for those men who never work overtime.

As anyone who has been in such a situation knows only too well, you are better off on strike, nobody expects to get paid then, while if you are still earning everyone wants paying. Perhaps it's time the NUM learnt a few lessons from the railway, with their days of action and area strikes of short duration.

The lack of campaigning, the shortsighted adoption of an overtime ban as the NUM's only tactic, combined with the splits in the NUM ranks, and the existence of the UDM, all added up to making a no vote almost a foregone conclusion. It's no use carping on about the tactics used by British Coal; they've been using them for five years now, and the NUM have totally failed to adopt any new strategy to oppose them.

Scots and Welsh leaders are to blame for defeat

If the Scottish and Welsh area leaderships had campaigned for a yes vote then I'm confident we would have won this ballot," Castlebridge miner Phil Cowan told SO.

But they didn't, and now the Scottish leadership are pushing for the removal of NUM President Arthur Scargill and General Secretary Peter Heathfield.

At the same time they want the NUM to accept British Coal's existing negotiating machinery which would mean that in pits where the NUM is the minority, NUM members would be represented by the UDM.

As Phil Cowan put it: "This is selling out NUM members in places where the

UDM are the majority."

Activists in the NUM will not be surprised by the outcome of the ballot. British Coal pulled out all the stops to frighten miners off action: "They threatened to cut redundancy pay offs and half the direct debit of union dues," explained Phil, who went on to point out that his own Scottish area leadership "are quoting Sir Robert Haslam and Kevin Hart when they should have been putting over the union's case."

Despite the setback, Phil remained optimistic: "We've got to get the left together across the union. We need to rebuild confidence. We've got to convince rank and file miners that with increased productivity, falling coal stocks, industrial action in the North Sea oil industry, and the Gulf crisis, miners are in a strong position."

The sad story of the left and Europe part 2

AGAINST THE TIDE

Sean Matgama



SO has always rejected the identi-kit 'left' position on the EC and must have seemed to many to be perverse on the issue. Last week I showed, with quotations, that the entire far left started with the same policies as SO and changed under pressure of the nationalists and chauvinists.

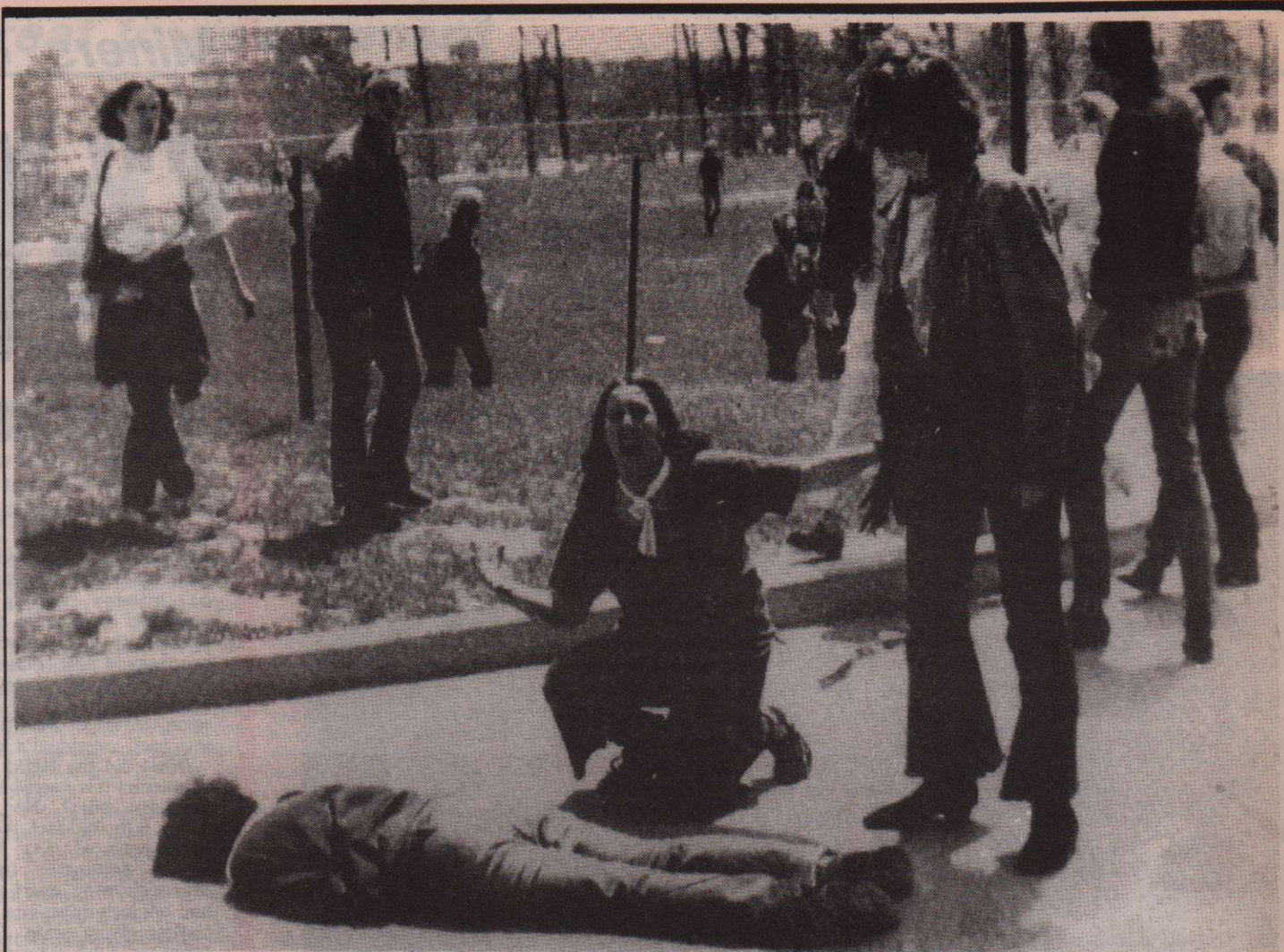
The only thing that changed in the EC after those positions were taken was that European economic integration continued and intensified, and Britain's non-membership became more untenable.

The CP and the nationalist left both reflected working-class gut nationalism, and rationalised, justified, and reinforced it. Instead of fighting nationalism and chauvinism, they inserted their own nationalist slogans into the working-class struggle that developed against the Wilson Labour government in the mid-'60s.

In 1967, when Harold Wilson decided to try to get Britain into the EC, it was denounced as one strand of a comprehensive "betrayal". Political confusion on the part of some Trotskyists led them to take up the cry. Calls on Labour to "take power with socialist policies" had been central to the Healy group (SLL) for a long time. Labour wasn't building socialism, but linking up with European capitalism. Cries of treason on this issue merged naturally with the surrounding chorus of the CP and CP-influenced left.

Thus the SLL, then by far the strongest far left group, had the doubtful honour of leading what was to become a gadarene stampede towards the anti-European camp.

The SWP (then called IS) did not change until 1971, when the British ruling class made their last, successful, push to get into Europe. There was a tremendous upsurge against the Heath government and its anti-union laws. At the IS conference at Easter 1971, an attempt to put the organisation in



Those who do not learn from history are likely to repeat it

May 1970. Mass protests against the Vietnam war at campuses across the US are met with brutal repression. Four students are murdered at the hitherto non-political

Kent State University Ohio, another two students are murdered at Jackson State University, Mississippi. Despite the hostility of the forces of 'law and order' the mass

movement against the war continued to grow. It played a major part in forcing the US out of Vietnam.

ine with the anti-EC mood was heavily defeated. Soon after the leaders of the group decided to change the line.

Bandwagon-jumping is an undignified business, and the IS leaders scarcely tried to disguise their rush and panic. At first they proposed that IS should go on saying "In or out, the fight goes on!", but nevertheless, if its own propositions were defeated, vote with the left in trade union branches and so on. Within weeks they were pushing opposition to EC entry as their line. By the time of the 1975 referendum on the EC, the weekly *Socialist Worker* had worked itself into a

frenzy of anti-Market in which every problem, battle, ruling-class imposition and working-class interest was meshed into a single focus — getting a "no" vote in the referendum.

In 1971, the undemocratic switch of line on the EC created a major crisis in the then still democratic IS organisation. The crisis triggered the transformation of the group into one more single-faction "revolutionary party", and the expulsion of the *Workers' Fight* group and, soon after, the expulsion of what became the RCP and RCG.

Militant and the IMG (forerunner of today's *Socialist Outlook* and *Socialist Action*) followed more quietly, and it was thus that the "line" on the EC, the far-left orthodoxy for over 20 years, was put in place.

The arguments for the far left's changed line were among the worst aspects of it.

"No to the Common Market, Yes to the Socialist United States of Europe" was, they argued, a principled position, an explicit rejection of little Englandism.

Abstractly — yes. Really — no. The argument was a scandalous sophism. The revolutionary left did not conduct its own campaign in a pure and rarefied atmosphere where good intentions and private reservations counted. It attempted to insert its own slogans into an existing chauvinist campaign. "No to the Common Market" was the leading, audible slogan, and the rest was lost in the hubbub. Nonsensical blaming of the Common Market, not capitalism, for the problems of workers, was the message, nothing else.

The "No" was reactionary, and not really linked to the Socialist United States of Europe at all. The revolutionary left was like a little boy in front of a large orchestra playing "Rule Britannia". He positioned himself and his tin whistle with the thought: if only I play the first few notes of "Rule Britannia", I can then switch to the "Internationale". They'll all hear me and listen as I drown out the orchestra...

Of course socialists should have made propaganda for the Socialist United States of Europe. But its logical starting point was "In or out the fight goes on: neither little Britain, nor EFTA, nor Commonwealth, nor EC, but the Socialist United States of Europe — and, immediately, Europe-wide workers' unity as the response to Europe-wide capitalist integration". Indeed, if the left was to let itself be forced to say yes or no to the EC, then the

Marxist answer could only be yes.

This debacle was a major factor in the shaping of the revolutionary left as it exists today.

Irrationality and incoherence is not easily confined to one issue. It spreads. The approach of buckling under pressure and talking out of both sides of your mouth at once — that is a bad education.

It played a big part in the degeneration of the IS/SWP to the level of general incoherence which its founders rightly used to point to as one of the proofs that "orthodox Trotskyism" had lost its way. The IS/SWP's various positions on the Gulf, on the Iran/Iraq war — or on the poll tax, or its insistence that the Labour and trade union leaders could easily get the Tories out "without waiting for an election" if only they tried — all those rely on the same method.

Was it sectarian to stand apart from a powerful movement? No. Opposing the anti-EC crusade did not set us apart from either the industrial struggles of the working class or the struggle in the Labour Party. *Socialist Organiser* — and *Workers' Action* — stood apart from those struggles a lot less than most of the anti-European far left.

Marxists — though we are politicians, and should sometimes "trim" and duck and weave on secondary issues — are first of all fighters for ideas, bearers of a programme and an outlook on the world. We do not "trim" where basic questions are involved. And on the EC a wrong answer could be — and for the British labour movement was — utterly disorienting.

The Common Market debates were a major battle in the class struggle — a battle on the ideological front for that most precious of all working-class values, socialist internationalism. Not only the broad labour movement, left and right, pro or anti the EC, have been on the anti-working-class side of that ideological class struggle: most of the revolutionary Marxists, too, have fought against the working-class interest.

Those of us who swam against the tide for so long on this question now see our principles and our approach to politics vindicated. Sometimes it seems otherwise that principled socialist politics leads only to isolation and "sectarianism". The long dispute on the left over the EC proves that Marxist politics does count for something. And what is now proven about the EC is also true about our politics in general.



Our answer to the bosses' international unity, the international unity of the revolutionary workers.

The founding of the Communist International 1919

Never imitate the enemies' slogans

"We must never play with slogans that are not revolutionary by their own content but that can play quite a different role according to their political conjuncture, the relationship of forces, etc..."

(Leon Trotsky: 'On the Theses "Unity and Youth"', Writings 1934-5)

"The will of the 'Nation' or of its majority, is not a sort of God for Social Democracy, before which it humbly prostrates itself; on the contrary, Social Democracy's whole historic mission depends above all on revolutionising, on forming, the will of the 'nation' — that is, its working majority." (Rosa Luxemburg, 1908)

"The method of ideological imitation of the opponent and of the class enemy — a method which is thoroughly contradictory to the theory and the psychology of Bolshevism — flows quite organically from the essence of centrism, from its unprincipledness, inconsistency, ideological hollowness... (in the Comintern) we see one and the same spirit of mimicry, constant imitation of the opponent, a striving not to use their own weapons — which, alas! they do not possess — but weapons stolen from the arsenal of the enemy."

(Leon Trotsky: 'Against National Communism', August 1931. From 'The Struggle Against Fascism in Germany')

Opium for the people

SOAPBOX

By Michael J Ryan

In the diary Trotsky kept for a few months in 1935 (Max Shachtman found it in his

papers and published it in 1959 under the title 'Diary in Exile') there is a lovely passage, characteristic of his whole outlook and spirit.

Trotsky is listening to a radio programme from Lourdes, where the Virgin Mary is said to have appeared to Bernadette, a young peasant girl in the 1860s. Sick Catholics have gone there ever since looking

for miraculous cures. (I am forced to quote from memory).

"The real human miracle of the radio at the service of petty imaginary miracles sold at the vulgar miracle shop at Lourdes!" This, wrote Trotsky, is a good measure of the decadence of our culture under capitalism.

Our own technical media are vastly more wonderful than

anything which existed when Trotsky wrote his angry comment about radio being used to purvey abject superstition from Lourdes. Things are probably worse now, more decadent than in Trotsky's time.

Now we have astrology talk shows on radio, and unspeakable creatures like Russell Grant give us regular TV run downs on our 'star signs'.

All the popular newspapers and magazines have an astrology column.

It is commonplace in serious histories to find Hitler's devotion to astrology cited as self-evident proof of his mental derangement.

The last President of the USA, Ronald Reagan used to consult his wife's astrologer!

California is overrun by mystics and quacks: the 'personal psychic' — a version of the fairground fortune teller — has for many of the well-to-do replaced the psychoanalyst.

Mysticism combined with gobbledygook science is at the centre of the genre initiated by Star Wars. The spin-offs and imitators which for over a decade have been filtered through the minds of young people by billion-dollar industries are nothing less than spiritual glue-sniffing kits for defenceless young people.

Star Wars style mysticism is a hard-souled calculating mysticism, to be sure. But this pornography of the soul is no less mind-rotting for that.

A sizeable number of current movies are about ghosts!

We live in an age when the Christian churches are in phenomenal retreat in most of the advanced world. But as the bureaucratic church structures have weakened and crumbled and the old intellectual fetters of religious dogmatism backed by the state have rotted away we get not enlightenment and emancipation from superstition, but a flood tide of primitive magic and superstition oozing up out of the debris of the old organised religions.

It is well-known of course that the bureaucratized Christian churches acted as a barrier against the primitive popular religion that superstition is. In the centuries when the church intellectuals could integrate earlier scientific knowledge with church dogmas and create a unified world outlook, they kept superstition in check, or underground.

Now the dogmas of the church are comprehensively discredited: at stark variance with what even small kids know. You get sceptic vicars and bishops who scarcely believe in God at one side — and on the other this great uprising of undefined and unstructured intellectual and spiritual sewage out of the depths.

Not the least remarkable thing is the widespread indifference to and tolerance of it — and of course the exploitation of it to sell movies, newspapers and TV advertisement time.

Capitalist society is a cold, bleak, insecure place in which everyone is alone with the TV set. People need comfort and consolation and, above all, they need some idea that gives them an overview of life.

As Marx said: God did not make man: man made God. Human beings make and remake God and all the little god creatures and god substitutes.

Marx also truly said that religion was "the heart of the heartless world", "the sigh of the oppressed in this vale of woe, the opium of the people".

The current wave of commercialised mysticism is nothing less than the 'crack of the people'.

And it isn't just unpleasant and degrading: it is dangerous. A society where many millions and tens of millions of citizens exist at this mental level of unreason — that is a society at the mercy of social and political demagogues — from Rupert Murdoch to Thatcher now, and maybe, new Hitlers of the future.

And even the revolts of people sunk in such mental barbarism will be tainted and fatally infected. The black Muslim movement in the US is a tragic example. There are others.

Builders fight the slump

Construction work is at its lowest level since 1985. Fiona Monkman reports.

The growing general economic recession has already badly hit the construction industry. Unemployment faces many building workers.

Entry into the ERM and the 1% drop in interest rates is unlikely to have much effect. Sir Brian Hill, of the major construction company Higgs and Hill, says it was "a positive step, but we need further cuts".

The Federation of Master Builders reports workloads at their lowest since 1985, with only 35% of the Federation working at its full capacity.

The position of the construction industry in economic downturns has always been a vulnerable one because of external economic factors, and, in part, because of the way construction firms organise.

On site there are a multitude of worker/employer relations — workers unity over site-based struggles is made difficult by the terms and conditions of employment, which vary amongst them. Their conflicts are, as a consequence of the switch away from directly employed building labour to subcontracting, with different employers.

The history of trade unionism in the building industry started with early roots amongst the skilled building trades where the tradition of the craft guild, whose demise has been comparatively recent, helped reproduce an ideology of solidarity.

Throughout the nineteenth century, in particular, the building industry was an important base for the development and spread of general trade unionism. Building unions were central, for instance, to the formation of the Trades Union Congress in 1868.

Yet, in the industry itself trade unions gained roots amongst only certain sections of craft workers employed by particular types of firms (master



builders), in a limited number of towns and cities. This reflected sharp divisions among the workforce which have characterised construction ever since.

The post-war years have seen a dramatic decline in the power of craft unionism, despite the unprecedented level of construction activity that persisted for 25 years, up to the early 1970s. The decline occurred because of the growth of self-employment outside normal trade union influence.

A series of management tactics have served to further weaken workers' position in the industry.

The bosses' tactics included the introduction in 1947 of incentive payments, which reduced workers' control over their pace of work. The use of self-employed 'lump' workers, who

are drafted in and out of jobs to perform specific functions for a fixed sum, is now widespread.

In purely economic terms, the construction industry relies heavily on borrowing large amounts of capital from banks and building societies — which is then tied up for the length of the contract period until revenue can be retrieved as rent from the finished property.

During slump periods, when the cost of borrowing goes up, construction firms find the amounts of capital needed to start building prohibitive. Construction profitability has a cyclical variation which is similar to that of the rest of the economy.

This similarity suggests that it is the general state of the economy rather than the overall demand for construction work that determines variations in profitability.

Construction firms deal with economic crises by undergoing restructuring processes which are more closely linked to changes in the ownership of capital than to new methods of production. Take-overs of small firms by larger ones and job redundancies are the result.

Despite the repressive conditions that exist for construction workers in this divided industry, there do still exist areas of workers fighting back. Shop-steward-led unofficial strikes have become major weapons of building workers to improve local pay and conditions, to control workspeeds and to fight against the introduction of self-employed 'lump' workers.

The steel erectors strike in 1989 brought the London Docklands development to a standstill and resulted in workers winning huge wage claims.

Injured at work?

Every year 150 building workers, or three a week, are killed at work. Government investigation of these deaths show that the vast majority were preventable. In other words they were not accidents at all.

Please get in touch

Construction Safety Campaign c/o Isle of Dogs Neighbourhood Centre Unit D, Great Eastern Enterprise, Millharbour London E14 9SX. Tel: 071 538 0507

The cop as hero



Down these mean streets

Mass sale popular fiction helps shape and colour the way millions of people see and interpret the capitalist world they live in. Detective and police fiction deal with society at its ragged edges. It portrays the "grab what you can however you can" ethos of capitalism when it has overthrown the social norms and laws through which capitalism regulates itself.

In the second of her occasional series, BJ Siddon discusses the work of Ed McBain, king of the "Police Procedural".

Ed McBain is probably most well known for his 87th Precinct stories. These are tales in the 'police procedural' genre — a sort of Hill St Blues in paper covers.

McBain also writes more traditional detective novels with a Florida lawyer — Matthew Hope — as protagonist. If that wasn't enough, McBain has written a number of 'straight' novels under his real name of Evan Hunter. 'The Blackboard Jungle', which has been filmed, is the most widely known of these.

Like Agatha Christie, McBain writes prolifically and on different themes. Unlike her, he writes consistently. Any review of Agatha Christie's work would tend to gloss over the ridiculous exploits of 'Penny and Tuppence' — the same reviewer could confidently discuss all of McBain's work, from short stories to serious novels.

For a newcomer to crime fiction, the Matthew Hope books are the most accessible. Hope is a reasonably successful lawyer, with a failed marriage and an interest in crime. He does a fair bit of dashing about, and his cases usually have an acquaintance with glamour — they are set in Florida after all.

But Hope is not Perry Mason. He does make mistakes, and he usually thinks he'll lose! Mason is a professional detective/lawyer, whereas Matthew Hope is a professional conveyancer.

All the books benefit from Hope's dry humour. Florida weather, for instance, is not all it's cracked up to be:

"...only an iguana would find Calusa habitable in the summer months..." ('Jack and the Beanstalk', 1984).

"It began raining again the moment I started the long drive back to Calusa — a big surprise here during the summer months, our daily reminder that there was indeed a God." (ibid).

The 87th Precinct stories share the weather obsession, without the humour. For the detectives of the 87th hot weather means a crime wave, cold weather means freezing stakeouts.

"There were times when he did not necessarily enjoy police work (like night now, freezing his arse off in an alley)." ('Fuzz', 1968).

The weather, like the poor, is always with us in Ed McBain's books.

Poverty, foul, disgusting, urban poverty is more evident in the fictional 'Isola' (the city of the 87th) than in Florida. The urban poverty is sophisticated — women becoming whores, kids on smack, gang fights, slums and ghettos.

In Florida, the poverty is the traditional



Miami police crackdown on rioters. McBain does not romanticise these cops

American poverty of bad crops, bad weather and farm labourers — men and women, worn out at 30.

McBain doesn't avoid showing the downside of the American dream. The 87th precinct stories would not survive without it. The precinct is not the city's worst, but it isn't nice either, and often the detectives are called to other parts of the city which are really bad. The descriptions of burned out tenements, stretching for block after block, where a white man is either a policeman or a dead man is terrifying.

Isola is based on various US cities, but Chicago and New York seem the closest models.

I don't much care for paragraphs beginning "The city is like a woman..." which are regrettably common in McBain's work. But away from the generalisations McBain's descriptions can be chilling.

"You could always tell a neighbourhood of poor people in this city because the streets were always the last to be plowed and sanded, and the garbage, especially in bad weather, was allowed to pile up indefinitely, presumably as an inducement to free enterprise among the rat population." ('Ice', 1983).

McBain does not avoid any of the other

divisions in American society. The slums are nearly always black or hispanic areas, and this is pointed out. But a black slum-dweller is not necessarily a criminal or a failure.

McBain is at pains to distance himself from the racism of both cops and citizens. By contrast, ethnicity is shown positively, even where it leads to prejudice. This is a part of people's lives and McBain's books deal with the whole person, not the stereotype:

"...another Jack, common name. Except in my family. In my family the common names are Sidney, Bernie, Marvin, Irving and Abe." ('Jack and the Beanstalk', 1985).

A number of McBain's detectives are black, and Italians and Jews are also well represented. There are fewer hispanics, and those there are are treated less empathetically. If any of the books falls into stereotyping, it is that drug dealers are almost always Bolivians, Cubans or other native Spanish speakers.

In fairness to McBain, his books make a genuine effort to expose racism, anti-semitism and prejudice — including anti-gay prejudice — so what he portrays is probably a fair picture of American society faced by a large ethnic group determined not to integrate and lose their language.

McBain makes few moral distinctions between good and bad guys. By the nature of the

books, the good guys are the law in one form or another. But there are good and bad cops, and McBain distinguishes between them, not by his own comments but by the characters' own self-image, or by colleagues' views.

"Carella thought Parker was a lazy cop and a bad cop and the kind of cop who gave other cops a bad name. Parker thought Carella was an eager cop and a goody two-shoes cop and the kind of cop who gave other cops a bad name." ('Bread', 1974).

"[Ollie Weeks] knew Carella from a case they had worked jointly some five years back, at which time Carella had called Ollie on his peculiar idiosyncrasy of referring to an 86-year old Puerto Rican matriarch, grandmother to 12 children, and proud parent of a son who was then running for the city council as 'that decrepit spic twat'. Ollie had taken offence at Carella's having taken offence, and the working relationship had been somewhat strained from that moment on." (ibid).

The same applies to the bad guys. McBain exposes rather than judges.

'Cindarella' is the story of a cocaine theft, and the search for the woman who has stolen it. Two of the searchers are Cuban gangsters who, in an opening scene, murder a girl for the simple reason that she doesn't provide an address quickly enough.

Later on in the book, the same gangsters are shown worrying about how to pacify their boss if they fail in their mission. These are human beings — different from most of us, but with the same hopes and fears.

That book ends with the death of the two gangsters and the arrest of the woman who stole the cocaine, and her accomplice.

"Dump the dope and the money in the Ford and off we go into the wild blue yonder, riding high..."

"But it never works out the way you think it will."

"You sit instead in a 6 x 8 cubicle with bars as thick as your cock, and on the wall, prisoners past have written stupid little sayings and there's a toilet you can sit on with everyone looking through the bars at you, and it never works out the way you think it will."

"And she thought — as he locked the door behind him — they always let me in the ballroom but they never let me dance."

Those two criminals were just taking a chance to get out from under. Other McBain villains are of the "he made me do it" school. My feeling is that these people are the true-to-life criminals, and their stories are very convincing.

"He tried to rush me, and I had to shoot him. Same thing as Jack, if you see what I mean. All I wanted was the money, they shouldn't have tried nothing." ('Jack and the Beanstalk').

"[I] stabbed her without saying a word to her. I didn't want to but...she knew my name you see." ('Shotgun', 1968).

Or the couple in '80 Millions Eyes' (1966) who were in love, so they 'had to' kill her husband. The criminals whose fault it never is are far more believable than the Agatha Christie murderer who is simply 'evil' or 'criminal'.

From the quotations I have used it would appear that Ed McBain's books are non-stop violence, misery and racial and class harmony. In a way they are — they show a side of life, particularly in big American cities, which most British people have no experience of.

But McBain also shows us that everything is relative:

"If you told a slum-dweller on Chicago's West Side that you were going to move him into New Town and you described it as a cluster of two-storey stuccoed buildings surrounding a grassy compound planted with sabal palms, he'd have thought you were inviting him to a paradise on earth. When he got here, though, he might look around and discover for himself how other people were living..." ('Jack and the Beanstalk').

McBain doesn't use the sick society we live in as an excuse for the way some inhabitants behave. Nor does he romanticise his cops — even the good ones. The books are nasty, although not as irredeemably nasty as, say, Elmore Leonard. They are a snapshot of part of the world we live in, and they don't make very comfortable bedtime reading. Despite (or because of?) the subject matter, the books are entertaining, and have few jarring notes.

A defiant story from Salman Rushdie

Books

Clive Bradley reviews 'Haroun and the Sea of Stories' by Salman Rushdie. Granta, £12.99

Haroun al-Rashid was the legendary Caliph of Baghdad to whom Sheherezade told her thousand and one stories to avoid execution. Haroun and Rashid are the son and his father at the centre of Salman Rushdie's latter-day Arabian Nights.

Rashid al-Khalifa, a master story teller known by his friends as the Ocean of Notions and by his enemies as the Shah of Blah, lives with his wife and son, Haroun, in the land of Alifbey, in a city so sad it has forgotten its name. An election approaches, and the contending political parties all want Rashid's tale-telling services to enrapture their potential voters. But when Rashid's wife runs off with a neighbour, he finds he can no longer remember any stories. When he gets up to tell them, all he can say is "Ark ark". He has lost the Gift of the Gab.

Rashid and Haroun set off on a journey to the Dull Lake, where Rashid is to perform in the election campaign of the snotty Snooty Buttoo. Waking in the middle of the night, Haroun finds a Water Genie, Iff, disconnecting his father's story water supply. He manages to steal the magic Disconnecter, and forces the Genie to take him to the Earth's second moon, Kahani, to prevent Rashid's subscription to the story water being permanently cut off. They fly to Kahani on a mechanical hoopoe named Butt.

On Kahani is the Ocean of the Streams of Story. But it is being polluted by the wickedness of the dreaded Khattam-Shud. Haroun (and his father, who has got to the moon by a different route) team up with the people of the chatterbox city of Gup to go to war with Khattam-Shud and his city of Chup to save the Ocean — and to rescue Princess Batcheat (who sings the world's most horrible songs).

This is all recognisable Rushdie, but told in the style of a fairy tale, and I imagine genuinely accessible to children. Its quirky philosophical conundrums remind me rather of the children's classic 'The Phantom Tollbooth'.

It is impossible to read this book and not think of its author's plight, and if ever a book proved the fallacy of attempting to do so, this is it. It has a determinedly happy ending, and movingly asserts the possibility that everything can turn out right. In the city of sadness, everyone is now happy. The very writing of such a book, full of wonder at the multifariousness of life, seems to me pretty commendable when his inclinations must be towards doom, gloom and bitterness.

The case for Rushdie's right to write does not depend on his skill or quality as a writer. But in this short novel he demonstrates again that he is a story-teller with a remarkable imagination. This is, as you would expect, a lot simpler in style than his other fiction. Perhaps people will read it who have been reluctant to read him before, and be encouraged to read more. Who knows? Maybe even someone insistent on the banning of 'Satanstoeves' could discover through this Sheherezadesque little book that Rushdie has something to say that is worth hearing.



Demi Moore and Patrick Swayze: "a storybook couple"

A banker goes to heaven

Cinema

Belinda Weaver reviews 'Ghost'

'Ghost' has already taken more box office money than 'Pretty Woman' and 'Total Recall', both monster hits this year, and there's no end in sight.

Everybody likes 'Ghost'; there's nothing not to like. It's lovey-dovey and sweet, you get to laugh and cry, and the bad guys get punished in the end. What more could you want?

Er.... authenticity? Reality? Something more nourishing than candy floss?

Sorry. 'Ghost' is not in the business of providing any of that; this is escapism with a capital E.

It has its good points. It's watchable, if rather sickly sweet. Another pleasant change is that we see more naked male flesh than female; for once the camera isn't gloating over female nudity. Even the homeless get a look in. The baddies' ill-gotten gains get diverted to a homeless shelter, which is nicer than seeing some wastrel feather his nest.

But 'Ghost' is also simple-minded, and silly, and too lightweight to matter. Its basic ideas are that evil is inevitably punished, that love conquers all, even death, and that good guys go to heaven. Not profound, and not even true!

The plot centres around investment banker Sam and artist Molly, a storybook couple who endlessly profess their love for each other. (Yawn). Things liven up when Sam gets mugged and dies. His spirit isn't ready to go (admittedly the after life looks

tedious after New York), so he hangs around, mooning over Molly, and pining a lot, until he wakes up to the fact that he was deliberately murdered and that Molly too is in danger.

Various implausibilities ensue. Sam finds a fake psychic called Oda Mae (who, as ever, conveniently turns out to have real powers) and annoys her into helping him. Oda Mae, played, or rather overplayed, by Whoopi Goldberg, is fun; you can see she enjoys going over the top. The film lets her get away with it, and she's comic relief after all the sighing and mooning.

The biggest implausibility is the love affair. It's not that Demi Moore as Molly and Patrick Swayze as Sam aren't attractive or desirable, but the film gives us no idea of their relationship, of why they like each other, or what keeps them together. Their love is like a romantic ten-year-old's view of love — all cute mementoes and smooch kisses and eternal vows. It's just a given.

Also implausible is the choice of an investment banker as a prototypical good guy, as Mr Benevolent and Decent, someone who ascends to heaven in a shower

of silvery stars at the end. Give me a break!

In the film, Molly and Sam live in the hugest loft, with trendy furniture and acres of space... in Manhattan, foot for foot probably the most expensive place to live on earth! You can't tell me people get lofts like that by being good.

It'd be nice if some of 'Ghost's ideas were true. I like seeing the bad guy get carted off by the spirits of darkness instead of triumphing the way they do in life; I wish more millions went the way of the homeless. But this is the real world here. 'Ghost' is a daydream.

Illusions warp Provo socialism

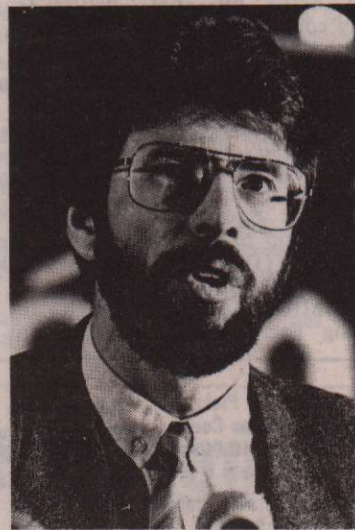
Books

Martin Thomas reviews 'The Politics of Illusion: Republicanism and Socialism in Modern Ireland', by Henry Patterson. Hutchinson, £7.95

The "real needs...of the Catholic working class" in Northern Ireland, according to Henry Patterson, are "for economic, social and political inclusion in a state which...will remain 'British' but with an increasing 'Irish Dimension' in its Northern Ireland extension."

A "pro-imperialist" conclusion? Be that as it may, anti-imperialists in Britain and Ireland can learn a lot from this book.

After a short survey of the ideas of Liam Mellows, a left Republican leader in the civil war of 1922-23, Patterson covers three main episodes in left or "social" Republicanism — the Republican Congress of 1934; the trajectory of the "Official" Republicans from the early 1960s to their "departure from the social Republican tradition" in the late '70s, when they became the Workers' Party; and the Provisionals in their swing to the left, from the mid-'70s to



Gerry Adams

social Republicans had nothing to offer distinctive from Fianna Fail, the main nationalist party of the Gaelic-Irish capitalist class, other than militarist tactics — and those militarist tactics increasingly alienated the Southern Irish workers. To the majority of the Northern Ireland workers the social Republicans had no appeal because they failed or refused to recognise the specific concerns of the Anglo-Scots-Irish community.

According to Patterson, the "social Republican" tradition has fallen apart in the last 15 years or so. The Provisionals have substantially retreated into Catholic "defenderism", with "a marked retraction of ambition and a narrowing of the social, regional and political project of contemporary republicanism."

Patterson fails to deal with the important Stalinist influence in stunting the Republican Congress; and his conclusion flows not at all from his analysis.

The civil rights movement of the late '60s, which unleashed the present Troubles in Northern Ireland, aimed precisely at what Patterson says is the answer — inclusion of the Catholics as equals in a still-British Northern Ireland. How — and by whom — is that bit of history to be re-run with a better outcome? Patterson, sternly sceptical about the "airy implausibility" of such ideas as a federal Ireland, offers only a scenario in mid-air.

But the book should be read — above all by those who will disagree most with the concluding sentences.

Two political features you should catch, even though they are already in full swing: 'Der Kinder' (BBC 2 Wednesdays 9.25) is a thriller about the German terrorist left; 'House of Cards' (BBC1, Sunday 9 pm) is a glorious spoof by Andrew Davies ('A Very Peculiar Practice') about a conning Tory chief who seems to be modelled on King Richard III as maligned by Shakespeare! The Great Programme Controller in the sky has synched it nicely with the current Tory civil war. Don't miss the rest of it!

'Y's and wherefores of men

Les Hearn's



SCIENCE COLUMN

A single gene for maleness? And are males mutant females?

Men and women have almost identical genetic structures. Both have 44 chromosomes, containing genetic information, inherited equally from their parents. In addition, they possess either two X chromosomes or a single X and a somewhat smaller Y chromosome.

Since virtually all those with a Y are males, it would seem that the Y has rather a lot to do with maleness. But what?

Also, all men possess an X and even a single X chromosome by itself will make a person female. What is the Y doing to stop this happening in men?

Geneticists have tackled this by trying to find out what information the X and Y chromosomes carry. It turns out that a lot of the genes on them are nothing to do with sex determination. We know the function of some of these genes through the diseases caused when they are faulty. Conditions such as haemophilia, colour blindness and Duchenne muscular dystrophy are found almost exclusively in males because the faulty genes are found on the X chromosome and males have only one of these. Females, having two, usually possess at least one normal gene and are therefore less likely to suffer these conditions.

The lack of a paired X chromosome undoubtedly accounts in large part for the greater frailty of males.

The search for a sex-determining and, in particular, maleness-determining gene on the Y chromosome has been having some success of late but, geneticist Professor Ursula Mittwoch* of Queen Mary and Westfield College, London, points out, this is not the whole answer.

The study of genetic abnormalities has provided some clues. One in a thousand men have an extra X chromosome, ie they are XXY instead of XY. There are even some with XXXY and XXXXY. Clearly, the Y has a disproportionate influence and, in genetic

terms, is 'dominant'. Genetic abnormalities in women are also illuminating. A small proportion have only one X — they are XO. Thus, in the absence of a Y, only one X is needed to make a person female.

So the Y is dominant and many researchers have interpreted this to mean that there is perhaps a single dominant gene on the Y chromosome that determines maleness. The existence of two groups of people with a hitherto puzzling chromosome abnormality would seem to support this theory.

These are the XY females, and the XX males. Examination of these people's DNA shows that, in many cases, the Y chromosomes of the former lack a small region while the X chromosomes of the latter have an extra bit that apparently comes from a Y. The mix up probably occurs when sperm cells are formed. An X and a Y destined for separate sperm cells must get rather tangled and end up with a bit swapped over.

Researchers have been looking at the appropriate region of the tip of the Y, called SRY (for Sex-determining Region of Y) for a hypothetical Testis-Determining Factor (TDF).

Earlier this year, scientists in the ICRF's laboratories in London announced the discovery of a new candidate for the title.

However, Professor Mittwoch argues that closer examination of embryo development and of the results of various sex chromosome abnormalities do not support the idea of a single 'gene for maleness'.

Up to five weeks, an embryo possesses the ability to develop into either male or female. There are a pair of 'genital ridges', which contain germ cells capable of becoming either sperm or eggs. The ridges themselves can become either ovaries or testes.

Associated with these ridges are two types of tissues which can develop into the genital tracts of a male or a female — the vas deferens of the male or the Fallopian tubes, womb and vagina of the female. Interestingly, males have a tiny vestige of the embryonic womb in the form of fibres in the abdomen.

In some way caused by the presence or absence of the Y chromosome, the embryonic genital ridge develops into an ovary or a testis. The testis secretes male hormones which cause the disappearance of the female tract and the growth of the male tract, including the external genitalia.

If no testes are present, the male tract degenerates and the female tract and external genitalia develop. This occurs even if the embryo has no ovaries as the mother's female hormones are circulating through the embryo.

Significantly, the testes develop earlier than the ovaries. Mittwoch sees this as a pre-empting of a natural tendency to become female or as what has previously been called 'the race to be male'. She says this theory is supported by a closer examination of what happens in the sexual development of people with abnormal sex chromosomes.

There are for example a small number of XX males with no Y material, a fact which is inexplicable if maleness is due solely to a

gene on the Y chromosome. In these cases, masculinisation is less complete than in XX males with Y material, though. They have abnormal, ambiguous genitals, typically underdeveloped, perhaps with the urethra failing to reach the end of the penis. The testes are often undescended (ie, still inside the body where they originally developed). This is because the fetal testes have produced insufficient testosterone to induce complete sexual development. In adult life, such men are infertile and have for example sparse beard growth.

This is not due entirely to the lack of Y material as low levels of testosterone are also found in XXY men. The presence of an inactive Y may not be enough to cause complete masculinisation and XXYs have a greater incidence of undescended testes than the average. Things get worse with more Xs and XXXXY males have severely underdeveloped genitalia.

The existence of hermaphrodites is perhaps the killer blow to the theory of a gene for maleness but the distribution of the male and female tissues in such rare individuals supports Mittwoch's argument, that it is the pace of development that determines sex. In all people, the left and right sides develop at a different pace, the right usually being the faster. It seems therefore that the presence of a set of genes encourages or otherwise the development of the genitals. The ones that develop faster become male and vice versa. In the borderline area, incomplete development may be found and rarely the faster growing right hand genital become a testis while the slower left hand one becomes an ovary.

The genes so far found on the Y chromosome to have a role in sex-determination seem to regulate rates of growth of different tissues. The tissues themselves seem to 'know' how to grow, once they have been stimulated. The idea of a gene 'for' something like maleness thus seems to be rather misleading.

* Writing in New Scientist this month.

'Socialist' faces a difficult future

LEFT PRESS

By John O'Mahony

"The Irish are a truthful race," said the reactionary (stereotyping, racist, etc, etc) pundit. "They never speak well of each other."

In the main, the same is true of left wing journals. So you are warned!

Socialist, the paper which will be published fortnightly by the Socialist Movement in the new year, has produced a pilot issue. It has a well-designed front page but the rest of it looks like a rather grey trade paper.

The pre-publicity claimed that Socialist would deal with the news in a new, sharp way: it doesn't. The front page serves up a story about Britain's role in arming Iraq, very much a rehash, and anything but news. Maybe the fortnightly will do better.

The pre-publicity also said the paper would draw on a wide spectrum of writers. You'd think they'd be able to, with the network of Socialist Movement contacts. More to the point, you'd think they'd have made a big point of it, for this first issue.

But no. In fact a very large number of Socialist Outlook people have by-lines in Socialist, forming the biggest identifiable group. The result is — despite the presence of other contributors, including Socialist Organiser's Bob Fine — that Socialist No.1 is pretty much an Outlook affair (plus supporters of Catalyst). Socialist's effective editor seems to be Outlook's Davy Jones.

The SWP is a sizeable presence in the Socialist Movement; they are not in evidence in the paper.

Political line? There is an editorial saying the Gulf crisis is "about imperialism". It denounces the occupation of Kuwait too. It is silent on the issues that divide the British anti-war movement — whether to call for troops out of the Gulf or not. A signed article by Stephen Marks backs economic sanctions against Iraq.

Orientation? Labour Party Socialists (the Labour Party grouping linked to the Socialist Movement) have been assured that Socialist will call for a Labour vote in every constituency, but the pilot issue puts leading figures in the Green Party and Plaid Cymru first among the testimonials.

Socialist faces a difficult future. Its sponsor, the Socialist Movement, is an amorphous body, really an occasional conference, though with useful offshoots like Women for Socialism and Labour Party Socialists. It is made up of unattached individuals and hard organised blocs with papers of

their own (Socialist Worker, Socialist Organiser, and Outlook used to have Briefing before Socialist). In terms of political ideas it is amorphous, too, very.

Can such a movement produce and sustain a paper? Financially it expects to survive by spending a £15,000 donation someone gave them on a fundraiser who is expected — the pump having been primed — to keep it afloat. Good luck to her!

In fact you can't produce a paper with neither commercial backing nor an organised network of supporters.

The new paper will either be a commercial success — they say it will depend on "subscriptions" — fold, or quickly come to depend on Socialist Outlook and a few groupuscules and individuals. The logic of that is for Socialist to become what Briefing was for Outlook for a while, plus additional contributors from the Socialist Movement network. (But, as we've seen, this is a surprisingly underemphasised element in this pilot issue.)

That is what the logistics of newspaper production, together with the state of the left now, would lead you to expect — and it is the pattern plainly visible in the pilot. The underlying pattern will probably be covered over and obscured a bit if Socialist comes out regularly, but it will continue to be there — and it will eventually re-emerge and dominate as plainly as in the pilot issue.

The sad truth is that all the talk about overcoming the fragmentation of the left and escaping from the left's present state of emaciation by way of a "big" "broad" "non-sectarian" paper is no more than a beguiling fantasy. The world doesn't work like that.

The left isn't built like that. Newspapers aren't built like that. Newspapers of this sort are produced by groups. Even the attempt to pretend otherwise depends on... a group, and you get even a pilot issue with a foolishly large group presence. Thus do the real choices and the real state of affairs on the left assert themselves!

The political issues that divide the left groupings can't be pushed aside like this: the way to left unity is by a fight for political clarification conducted honestly and loyally combined with the maximum unity in common projects. Unity in action; dialogue where there are differences; no attempt to fudge the differences — that's the way forward.

I did warn you at the beginning!

For an invaluable discussion of the question of broad and narrow left-wing newspapers, see Leon Trotsky's 'Crisis of the French Section', available from SO.

WHAT'S ON

Friday 23-Sunday 25 November. Labour Party Youth Conference. Royal Spa Hall, Bridlington. Starts 7.30pm Friday evening.

Saturday 24 November. 'Stop War in the Gulf' national demonstration. Assemble noon, Embankment. March to rally in Hyde Park.

Sunday 25 November. National Anti-Poll Tax Conference, Apollo Theatre, Manchester. Details: PO Box 764, London E5 9SX.

Monday 26 November. 'Where We Stand', Socialist Organiser meeting. Speaker: Mark Osborn. Staffs Poly, Stoke, 7.30pm.

Monday 26 November. 'South Africa: can the deal hold?', Socialist Organiser London Forum. Speaker: Bob Fine. London School of Economics, Houghton St, Holborn, 8.00pm.

Monday 26 November. Picket of Camberwell Magistrates Court for poll tax hearings. 10.00am-4.00pm.

Tuesday 27 November. 'We Stand for Workers' Liberty', Socialist Organiser meeting. St John's Church, Newcastle, 7.30pm.

Wednesday 28 November. 'Women and the Struggle for Socialism', Socialist Organiser meeting. Glasgow University, Queen Margaret Union, Committee Room 1, 1.00pm.

Wednesday 28 November. 'We Stand for Workers' Liberty', Socialist Organiser meeting. 7.30, St Mary's Centre, Middlesbrough.

Thursday 29 November. Torchlit demonstration for peace in the Gulf, called by CND. 7pm, Newcastle upon Tyne.

Thursday 29 November. 'The fight against council cutbacks', Sheffield Socialist Organiser meeting. SCAU, West St, Sheffield, 7.30pm.

Thursday 29 November. 'The

lesson of the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign', Nottingham Socialist Organiser meeting. International Community Centre, Mansfield Road.

Thursday 29 and Friday 30 November. Picket of Nottingham court against poll-tax hearings. Guild Hall, Trinity Square, 10.00am-4.00pm.

Friday 30 November. Mass picket of Sheffield poll tax hearings. Magistrates court, Sheffield. 10.00am-4.00pm.

Saturday 1 December. Anti-war demonstration in Bridgewater (Tom King's constituency). Speakers include: Campaign Against War in the Gulf and CARI.

Saturday 1 December. Left Agenda conference organised by Labour Left Liaison. Speakers include Tony Benn and Ken Livingstone. 10.30-5.00 at LSE. Details: 10 Park Drive, London NW11.

Saturday 1-Sunday 2 December. 'Fighting for Workers' Liberty', Socialist Organiser student

weekend in Manchester. Details: PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA.

Sunday 2 December. Women Against War in the Gulf meeting, Conway Hall, Red Lion Sq, London WC1. 12.00.

Sunday 2 December. Socialist Movement (Scotland) Forum and AGM. The Cowane Centre, Cowane St, Stirling. 12.00-4.00pm.

Monday 3 December. 'The Decline of the US', Islington Socialist Organiser meeting. Speaker: Martin Thomas. The Belinda Castle, Canonbury Road, London N1, 8.00pm.

Tuesday 4 December. 'Tories in crisis — fight for a general election', Manchester Socialist Organiser meeting. Manchester Town Hall, 8.00pm.

Thursday 6 December. 'Women and Socialism', Socialist Organiser meeting. Packhorse Pub, Woodhouse Lane, Leeds.

Friday 7 December. 'Is Socialism Dead?', Luton Labour Parties Forum. 3 Union Street, Luton, 7.30pm (LP members only).

socialist

Government encouraged export of vital machine tools

UK CENTRE OF IRAQ ARMS RING

Living... The World Turns... Socialist's supplement about the international scene... In politics... Living... The UK Centre of Iraq Arms Ring... Living... The UK Centre of Iraq Arms Ring... Living... The UK Centre of Iraq Arms Ring...

Social Security strikers defend jobs and services

By Stephen Hughes, Wallasey local office

Staff in nine Social Security offices have been on indefinite strike since 5 November. The staff, members of the National Union of Civil and Public Servants (NUCPS), are striking as part of a campaign to reverse job cuts and review the DSS's 'Operational Strategy' computerisation project.

The Operational Strategy involves computerising every DSS office in the country at a cost of over £2 billion. Once fully implemented the system will be

the largest computer system in Europe. However, the enormous cost of the project is to be funded by staffing cuts. Already some 6,000 jobs have gone nationwide, with probably twice that number still to come.

Right from the start NUCPS has said that the DSS should not have committed itself to staff savings before it even knew how many jobs the new system would actually save. The Treasury was only persuaded to fund the project by promises of reduced staff costs, which had no scientific basis but were virtually conjured up out of thin air.

The union has persistently pressed the Department to explain how the staff savings have been calculated, with no adequate response. NUCPS has

submitted a claim for 8000 extra staff to be employed until the Department proves that the new system needs less staff than the old.

A second cause of the dispute is that the system does not function as well as it needs to be able to provide an adequate level of service to the public. The computer trade press carries regular reports of the DSS system's shortcomings. Despite this the DSS has continued to computerise more and more offices, thus putting more and more strain on the system.

NUCPS has asked that no more offices are put onto the system and that the faults are ironed out before introduction into more offices.

Members of NUCPS want to



be able to provide the best possible service to the public, but they are unable to do so because of staff shortages and a computer system that is just not good enough. The decision to strike was not taken lightly, but the members decided that they could tolerate no more and that the time had come to take action. Unfortunately the CPSA, which represents clerical grades, is not backing NUCPS's campaign. This means that clerks are in work while their supervisors and assistant managers are on strike. However, in many offices CPSA members have taken the initiative and supported their NUCPS colleagues by walking out for up to a week's unofficial strike action.

Civil service agencies victimise activists

By Mark Serwotka, Secretary, Branches Against Agencies

A local CPSA official has been suspended from duty, under threat of dismissal, since early September.

John Williams, a Socialist Organiser supporter from DE Plymouth Area Branch, has been singled out in an attempt to weaken organisation and to browbeat other workers under the new regime of agency management.

John played a part in reviving the Plymouth branch in 1986/87; it had been defunct for two years. The Employment Service (ES) is in some respects a

difficult area for the unions to organise, having a large network of small local offices.

Management had commenced "inefficiency proceedings" in October '89 but as there was no real case, changed tack.

They switched to disciplinary proceedings and strung together a series of trivial incidents to drum up a case of serious misconduct. Management have admitted that each individual conduct allegation is trivial in itself. And according to DE procedures, suspension can only follow accusations of gross misconduct.

The attack on John is part of a much wider management offensive. The splitting up of the civil service into separate agencies has always carried with it the underlying threat of each agency adopting its own terms

and conditions of employment.

Employment Service Agency management say that they have no intention at present of withdrawing from the personnel procedures covering the whole of the Employment Department. However, judging by their actions, this is a commitment in theory only.

Since agencification of the ES there have been a number of disciplinary attacks on union members. Ann Jarvis, the DE Section Organiser, a supporter of the Kinnoquite BL'84 grouping, was disciplined for attending an ES national negotiating meeting at which she was expected.

West Midlands regional management had instructed her to go on a training course to coincide with the meeting. This situation had been engineered to harm union organisation by compulsory transfer to new work. In the end the only sanction taken by management was to dock pay. Management do not want to be seen to be attacking national officials.

When it comes to local branch activists, though, they take a harder line. Mayuri Patel the Health and Safety Rep of DE Inner London West Branch was charged with misconduct and insubordination. She had challenged local management at Camden over their failure to carry out a commitment to remove fire hazards. After a three-week strike the charges were dropped.

In other agencies as well there have been similar stories. As previously reported in SO, eight workers have now been sacked at DTI Companies House, Cardiff, since it became an agency. Agencies are not "just an organisational change" as CPSA general secretary John Ellis described them. Agencies are a threat to the jobs, working conditions and union rights of every civil servant.

Angry Telecom engineers call on general secretary to resign

An angry mass meeting of over 300 British Telecom engineers on Tuesday 20 November voted unanimously to call on NCU general secretary and 'Broad Left' supporter Tony Young to resign from his post after he helped push through this year's pay deal against the wishes of the majority of Telecom engineers.

In a ballot the engineers had voted narrowly to reject a deal which included strings that could

involve a pay cut of up to £3,000 a year for some.

Young himself spoke to the meeting. His performance was described as 'pathetic' by one activist in the key LNCI branch.

The meeting went on to call for the rest of the engineering executive who backed the deal to resign and for Telecom workers to boycott the new 'voluntary' shift system that could lead to pay cuts.

Other branches should follow LNCI's lead and unite to prevent management push through the new strings at local level, picking on the weakest sections first.

Sheffield strikes against the cuts

November 28 promises to see the biggest day of strike action in Sheffield for years.

At a packed AGM on Monday 19th, around 600 NALGO members voted unanimously to hold a half-day strike and demonstration jointly with other council unions to oppose the threat of 3,000 redundancies.

It was also decided to call a

one-day strike on the day any council worker is issued a redundancy notice. This looks likely to occur on 30 November, and coincide with 20,000 people being summonsed to court for non-payment of the poll tax.

Joint action between white collar and manual and craft workers has to be built on to prevent the council singling out the weaker sections of the workforce.

UCW unofficial action

This year's pay ballot comes in the wake of a series of effective, angry and unofficial strikes. At the start of the month 1,100 mainly male Oxford postalworkers were out for a week in protest at the sexual harassment of a woman cleaner. The strike was immensely popular with local people — passers by would come up to congratulate the pickets for their principled stand. The postal service was completely shut down in Oxfordshire and solidarity strike action reached Swindon and Northampton.

In Dumfries an unofficial walk out in defence of a postalworker suspended for refusing to deliver to a house with a dangerous dog quickly developed into a strike halting deliveries throughout South West Scotland. Management retreated after 12 days.

Also this month in Peterborough an immediate walkout by the entire staff forced management to pay all workers the proper overtime rates. The action was victorious before the first shift affected was scheduled to end.

Spread the action

By Steve Battlemuch, CPSA

The staffing dispute in the DSS was stepped up by NUCPS this week when Tottenham DSS came out on strike and their group executive committee called a one-day strike for 7 December.

CPSA's leadership in DSS continued to scab on the strikes by telling members in the nine NUCPS strike-bound offices to work normally.

However, CPSA members are reluctant to be used in this way. Last Friday CPSA members in Stockton and Redcar walked out for the day and now Ilford — who had been on unofficial strike for nine days — have been given official backing and commenced an all-out official strike on Wednesday 21 November.

The DSS section officials — Duggan and Hansen — are doing an excellent job for management in attempting to dissipate the anger of CPSA members. No doubt they will be fully rewarded in time.

For instance, Duggan, the most right-wing person in Broad Left '84, tried to stop the strikes in Ilford even after members had voted for it, arguing a two-thirds

majority was not sufficient for action.

The campaign to get the other CPSA members (apart from Ilford) out alongside their NUCPS colleagues must be stepped up.

Talks are being held with management about Wallasey which, if they break down, will lead to an official CPSA ballot for all-out action. CPSA activists in DSS need also to work to implement the policy adopted at the recent Broad Left conference, all offices should seek to join the staffing campaign.

The other focus for activists will be the NUCPS one-day strike on 7 December. Pressure should be put onto the CPSA executive to support the action, however in the likely event that it won't, the BL needs to put out a clear call for CPSA members not to cross NUCPS picket lines on that day.

It is to be hoped that NUCPS will ask CPSA members not to cross in the nine offices. This has not been done to date.

Organise collections to support the Ilford strikers. Send money to Collette Shackelworth, 34 Mowbrays Road, Collier Row, Romford, Essex RM5 3ET. Tel: 081-550 5778/598 9554.

• Stop Press: Bloomsbury DSS CPSA came out on official strike over staffing on Wednesday 21 November.

Postal workers pay ballot

By Pete Keenlyside, Manchester Amalgamated UCW

The executive of the Union of Communication Workers (UCW) are recommending acceptance of a 10.4% wage offer in settlement of this year's Royal Mail letters wage claim.

The result of the ballot on the offer will be known at the beginning of December and it seems more than likely that the offer will be accepted. It is at the higher end of the range of public sector settlements and there are no strings attached.

The offer does leave serious questions unanswered though.

Our pay date is 1 October. The 10.4% offer wasn't made until the middle of November and we will be lucky if we get any money before Christmas.

The executive claim that the deal came as a result of their 'hard negotiations'. Yet management were quoted as saying that the offer was "a fair one" and that they could afford it. So who's fooling who?

Could it be that the delay will have the effect of turning an unacceptable offer into an acceptable one? 10.4% is below the current rate of inflation and the executive had a conference mandate to get an inflation-plus deal.

What assurances were given over the coming negotiations on other issues such as monthly pay, team leaders and incentive schemes? And what about the interest payments the Post Office has made on our money?

As well as getting answers to these questions UCW members need to make sure that if we have a pay date of 1 October — 1 October is when we get an offer.

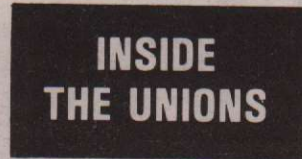
Goodbye ballot-rigging, hello shenanigans

Outright ballot-rigging has been distinctly unfashionable in the British trade union movement since the EETPU scandal of 1960.

That is not to say that it has never taken place over the last 30 years — the old TGWU "tradition" of "block voting" amounted to ballot-rigging, for instance. But blatant fiddling on the scale that went on in the EETPU in the '50s is very much a thing of the past and though it sticks in the throat to have to admit it, the Tory legislation enforcing postal ballots now makes ballot-rigging virtually impossible.

The recent attempt to fiddle the TGWU NEC ballot was so crude and obvious that it is not excessively conspiratorial to suspect that the fiddle was meant to be discovered.

Ballot-rigging may be (more or less) a thing of the past, but the mentality that gave rise to it is not. The trade union movement is still rife with practices that may not actually be fraudulent, but are



By Sleeper

certainly undemocratic and demonstrate complete contempt for the membership. These practices are often referred to as "shenanigans", a word that is not defined in my dictionary, but recent events in the CPSA may help illustrate what it means.

The CPSA has been debating the possibility of merging with the other main civil service union, NUCPS, for some time. The issue has split both left and right within the CPSA but on the whole the 'hard left' has opposed the merger. Supporters of the Socialist Caucus (including Socialist Organiser supporters) have been at the forefront of the anti-merger campaign.

The result of the merger ballot is known to be a small (but clear) majority of CPSA members in favour. But, astonishingly, the result has not been officially announced. This is because supporters of Militant on the union's national executive have lined up with the anti-merger right (notably the union president, Marion Chambers) in demanding an "investigation" into the ballot. Their excuse for doing this is some purely administrative irregularities of the type that are almost inevitable in any ballot. No-one is suggesting ballot-rigging or anything concerning the democracy of the ballot.

What is going on here is that Militant

and the anti-merger right don't like the result, so they are suppressing it and hoping to get a re-run that might give a different result. Anyone who doubts this should ask themselves: can you imagine Militant demanding a re-run of a ballot that went in their favour, whatever the "irregularities" that may have come to light?

The truth is that the CPSA membership voted for merger and their wishes should be sacrosanct, however much that upsets Marion Chambers, Militant, and, come to that, SO.

Shenanigans like this eventually lead to a quite justified cynicism amongst the rank and file and open the door to anti-union legislation which comes to be seen as at least having the virtue of curbing the trickery of the officials.

The behaviour of Militant in the CPSA is not blatantly fraudulent and it would be grotesque to suggest that it is the same thing as the behaviour of the Stalinists in the EETPU...but the same mentality is at work here. It's time to put a stop to these shenanigans.

SOCIALIST

ORGANISER

'Born on the 4th July' author slams Bush's war drive

Ron Kovic, disabled Vietnam veteran, author of 'Born on the Fourth of July', speaking at a 2000-strong Berkeley 'Teach-In' on 14 September

Come here tonight to tell you that this fight is just beginning and that if President Bush goes to war in the Middle East, then we are going to be back on the streets of this country, until

we finish.

Because we are not going to allow what happened in Vietnam to ever happen again! We will not allow another war in Washington to happen in the names of 50,000 or 100,000 or 150,000 young American boys for a war that is being fought for corporations, profits and oil!

Do not underestimate, Mr Bush, the power of the American people. Do not underestimate the fact that we now understand that your government does not represent the people, but represents greed and selfishness, and profit, and we will not stand for it any longer.

I went to Vietnam for the first time in December of 1965. I grew up in a small town of Long Island called Massapequa. And I remember, as many of you do in this gathering tonight, watching John F Kennedy on 20 January 1961, in his inaugural address. I felt that I was serving my country and I volunteered with the US Marine Corps. I had grown up with John Wayne movies, much like the Rambo movies that have sent tens of thousands of young American men and women to the Saudi Arabian desert.

I came back from Vietnam after I was wounded on 20 January 1968, in the demilitarised zone. I was shot

"A war that will be fought for corporations, profit and oil"

with a rifle bullet through my right shoulder. The bullet passed through my right lung and paralysed me from my mid-chest down. That was after my second tour of duty.

I had volunteered to go back to Vietnam a second time because I still believed they were telling me the truth. I was a very stubborn boy, and it would take getting paralysed from my mid-chest down, being sent to a rat-infested Veterans Administration hospital in the Bronx.

It would take undercover agents posing as Vietnam veterans against the war, and throwing me out of my wheelchair, kicking me in my stomach, calling me a communist and a traitor for me to begin to wake up, for me to begin to realise that they had been lying to me and a generation of American boys, that these people who I once respected, these people who I thought to be my leaders were in fact the real traitors.

And then I began to realise that they had taken our country from us, this country that we were born in, this country that we have been trying to love. They have caused suffering and misery, degradation and disease and death throughout the world in the name of the American people. They have shamed us.

Tonight we will begin a movement for all the people, and not only for every American man, woman and child, but for every human being in every country. We must begin to build a new movement.

Eric Larsen — will you stand up Eric — is a marine who will not go to war. Eric, I feel confident that I will not let them do — that we will not let them do — to Eric what they did to me and a generation of Americans.

We promise you tonight, Eric, that because you've had the courage and the decency to stand up for your beliefs you will not come home in a wheelchair and your name will not be put on a wall in Washington.

Because, Eric, we are all part of the same community, and that community is going to grow. Two thousand people were in Cooper Union in New York last night. Almost 2000 people are here tonight — and, Mr President, we are just beginning!

• From the US monthly Socialist Action



Ron Kovic

US and British troops out of the Gulf!

Has George Bush lost the stomach for war with Iraq?

We don't know. We can't know. We know that Bush continues to prepare for war.

We know that Iraq is unlikely to surrender peacefully.

We know that George Bush will have committed political suicide if he turns tail without having retrieved Kuwait from Iraq, without having toppled Saddam Hussein.

The inescapable conclusion is that war is still on the agenda — next week, in six weeks, whenever they decided to strike.

The fuse proves to be longer than it seems when the Western military build-up in the Gulf began: the bomb is still there, however, waiting to go off, and the fuse is still burning towards it.

This war they are preparing is a war about oil. They don't care

about Kuwait, any more than they cared about the Kurds, when Saddam Hussein — whom they were then arming — was gassing villages of the Kurdish minority in Iraq.

It is cheap oil and the military balance in the Gulf they care about. To have things their way they are prepared to devastate the region — including Kuwait — and maim and kill many tens of thousands of people.

They have re-established so powerful a Western presence in Arabia that it amounts to a serious

degree of re-colonisation.

This imperialist presence in the region, together with the likely devastation war will cause will politically destabilise the region. It will undermine America's and Britain's Arab allies, in Saudi Arabia for example. If that happens the Western powers will have a massive incentive to dig in and stay put to guard the oil they are now preparing a major war to secure.

The alternative would be to abandon

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Iraq out of Kuwait!

Campaign Against War in the Gulf demand US British troops get out of the Gulf

Picket & Vigil
outside the US Embassy, Grosvenor Square, London (tube: Bond St)
6.00-7.00, Wednesday 5 December
followed by
Public CAWG Meeting
to discuss future campaigning and the Gulf situation.

7.15, Wednesday 5 December, Mayfair Library, 25 South Audley St — near to Grosvenor Square