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For workers' liberty!



For socialist renewal!

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SOCIALIST

ORGANISER

We wrecked
the
poll tax



Council workers in Liverpool strike against redundancies. Photo: Paul Herrmann

Tories out!

By John O'Mahony

If Britain had a truly democratic system, with annual, or even two-yearly, elections, then the Tories would long ago have been kicked out of office.

But they can, if they like, still cling on in office for another year.

If the will of the people really governed Britain, then we would never have had a Poll Tax. Now, though we have wrecked the Tories' Poll Tax, and forced them to dismantle it, it will be *two years* more before the Poll Tax goes and is replaced!

In fact, what we have is neither a flexible democracy, nor rule according to what the majority of the electorate say they want.

Tory rule is still blatantly government of the people by the rich, for the rich.

You see it in the Poll Tax's replacement. Look at the

tender care with which millionaire Michael Heseltine has looked after the interests of the rich!

You see it in the way they continue to wreak havoc on the welfare state. You see it in the indifference with which they see the growth of mass unemployment: to the Tories it is mainly a handy argument against workers who fight for higher wages.

Yet we have bent and battered the Tories! Mass unpopularity and mass resistance sank the Poll Tax, which they had defined as their flagship. Now *Today* cries out in alarm (23 April): "**Power, rail and council workers are all trying to push up the offers their employers have made to them. Their leaders are confident they will receive bigger increases... The employers must stand firm in the interests of the whole nation**".

London Underground workers are voting to strike against job cuts on the Tube.

Turn to page 3

Vote Labour on 2 May!

The lie machine



David Owen helped to torpedo Labour's challenge to Thatcher back in 1981, when he split from the Labour Party to form the SDP and link up with the Liberals. Now, with the SDP deservedly dead, he aims to help the flagging Tories another way, by joining the Tory government. The Tories must be getting desperate.



Anne Lennox is a widow, and Matthew Lennox fatherless, because of the Gulf war. Thousands of other women are widows, and other children fatherless, in Iraq. Those women and children are struggling with Iraqi army terror, lack of clean water and medical facilities, and sometimes starvation too. They certainly won't agree with the *Mirror* that all the deaths were worthwhile.



The *Sun* reported the outrageous £1 million pay rise for Tesco boss Ian Maclaurin, but tried to suggest that he was a likely lad who deserved his "luck". It did not report the story carried in the same day's *Mirror* about Tesco being fined for having cockroaches in one of its shops.

Tories' poll tax replacement Fight is not yet over!

By Chris Croome

The Tories have announced their replacement for the poll tax: half property tax, half "personal tax".

Heseltine's long-awaited alternative to the poll tax appears to maintain the tax in a distorted form. Every household will be expected to pay a bill, 50% of which is calculated on the capital value of the property (divided into seven "bands" of rating), 50% of which is a head tax, based on two adults in a house.

If only one person lives in the property, they can claim a 25% rebate for the "personal" element of the bill, or one eighth of the entire bill.

Heseltine calculates that this will cover 90% of adults, and thus he hopes to satisfy those die-hard Thatcherites in the Tory ranks who want to maintain the fundamental principle of the poll tax, that "everyone must pay something".

They have stated that those on benefits, students, student nurses and apprentices won't have to pay 20% of the new bill, as they have to pay 20% of the poll tax at present.

But it is still a tax that will benefit the better off. What isn't taken into account is ability to pay.

Two people on low incomes would pay the full amount, whereas a person living alone on a wage of, say, £30,000 would get a rebate!

And if a single person owns two homes, they will get two rebates — despite their obvious wealth!

The Tories' headaches over the poll tax are not yet over. They have stated that the poll tax will still be around for two years before the new "son of poll tax" and combined property tax would come into effect. Local government finance experts reckon that it will be a couple of years after 1993 before the new system is fully in operation: we could be facing five or six more years of the poll tax!

They are still being forced to tinker with the system, in ever desperate attempts to reduce its continuing electoral liability.

This week the government have been forced to admit that the much-vaunted £140 reduction in poll tax bills announced in the budget isn't quite what it seemed. Of the 36 million people liable to pay the poll tax, over 20 million won't get the full £140 reduction. Almost 15 million will get less than £80 — those on benefits, most in need of a reduction. They will all, however, have to pay the increase in VAT!

And councils still press on with prosecutions of non-payers, still authorise the

bailiffs to come in and seize working class people's goods. As long as the poll tax continues, so will the court actions, they promise.

Cuts in local services and redundancies are still being pushed through by local authorities, in an attempt to avoid poll tax capping.

More than ever, we need to continue the campaigns against the poll tax. The government — and many Labour councils too — hope that the announcement of the abolition of the tax will see the death of the anti-poll tax campaign, and encourage people to pay.

The campaigns must continue in defence not just of non-payers, but in support, too, of the council workers taking action in defence of jobs, services and working conditions.

Nor must we forget the poll tax prisoners: those jailed for non-payment, or for taking part in the anti-poll tax protests and demonstrations. Our campaigning must include the demand for release of all poll tax prisoners, and an amnesty for all non-payers.



Labour left split over slate

By Cate Murphy

The Labour left faces bitter quarrels over our slate for this year's elections to the Party's National Executive.

Under new rules, the Constituency Section of the Executive has to be elected by "one member, one vote" in the constituencies, rather than by delegates at conference as in previous years.

Neil Kinnock hopes that inactive Party members will vote for

right wingers made well-known by TV exposure, rather than the left candidates.

Tony Benn and Dennis Skinner are the only two left wingers on the Executive at present. They face a hard battle this year to retain their seats. The quarrel over the left slate won't help.

Unfortunately the left has never established any democratic representative procedure for deciding the slate. The Campaign Group of left MPs has decided to back Diane Abbott, Tony Benn, Alice Mahon, Dennis Skinner, Ken Livingstone, Jeremy Corbyn and Dave Nellist. Corbyn and Nellist replace Jo Richardson

(who has moved to the right) and Audrey Wise (who is standing in the trade union section) from last year's slate.

Labour Party Black Sections object to Dave Nellist, a *Militant* supporter, because he opposes black sections, and they plan to nominate Kanta Patel in his place. The Campaign for Labour Party Democracy objects to two women being replaced by two men, and will probably support Kanta Patel and Anni Marjoram rather than Nellist and Corbyn.

At its meeting last Saturday (20th), Labour Party Socialists decided by a majority to support the Black Sections slate.

SO supporters backed the LPS majority. It is not just that Dave Nellist objects to black sections — we disagree with other people on the slate at least as much. Nellist supports *Militant*, a Stalinoid sect which has been witch-hunted, to be sure, but which is also deservedly discredited in the Labour Party, which is now backing its own "real Labour" candidates against the official (unjustly imposed) Labour candidates in Liverpool council elections, and which has increasingly pulled its supporters out of the Labour Party.

We are against Neil Kinnock's drive to expel *Militant* supporters; but when the left is looking for a new candidate to add to its slate, a *Militant* supporter is not the best candidate. The broader appeal of Black Sections, their active role against the Gulf war (unlike *Militant*), and their active support for anti-witch-hunt campaigns like *End the Ban!* (again unlike *Militant*), make Kanta Patel a better choice.

Student leaders block debate

By Paul McGarry

As we go to press, it's two days into the Spring Conference of the National Union of Students, and neither the major issues facing students — grants, poll tax, education cuts — nor the central international issue of the Kurds has yet been discussed.

The failure of Labour Students (NOLS) to field candidates for the National Executive Committee (NEC) elections has dominated conference. "Re-open nominations" (RON)

has won in the elections for President and Secretary. NOLS will probably win these positions when the elections are run.

The only real discussions have been on the affiliation of school Sixth Forms to NUS. Right wingers ensured it didn't get the required majority. Paul Richards, NOLS Chair told SO: "I'm delighted Sixth Forms are not allowed to affiliate."

Left Unity lesbian and gay members led a successful campaign to stop NUS dealing with companies that use lifestyle questionnaires.

The most controversial debate will be NUS Reform — NOLS and the right wing favour cutting back on internal NUS democracy — and the Gulf war.



As part of their three-day strike action Liverpool council workers marched through the city

Labour council leader backed by Heseltine

By Dale Street

On a recent visit to Liverpool, Tory minister Michael Heseltine gave support to Labour council leader Harry Rimmer's plans for cuts and union-bashing.

Trade Union leaders like Ron Todd have called for the redundancy notices to be withdrawn. Even Neil Kinnock has suggested that Rimmer should reconsider the situation.

GMB leader John Edmonds has also opposed the redundancies. At the council meeting held on April 17th, the second day of the strike, a resolution of no confidence in Rimmer's running of the council was voted through by 29 votes to 28, with Liberal Democrats and a number of non-suspended Labour councillors abstaining. Rimmer has declared that he will carry on regardless.

Thirteen strikers picketing Liverpool City Council offices were arrested last Thursday, 18 April, as police waded into picket lines and shouted racist abuse at black pickets on the third day of an all-out strike by the council workforce.

The three-day strike had been called by the City Council Joint Trade Union Committee as part of its campaign against 1,000 job cuts, voted through by right-wing Labour councillors in alliance with Liberal Democrats.

The pre-strike ballots had shown strong support for the strike. Only NUPE voted against striking (and that by only a majority of 83), although amongst teaching

unions only the NUT backed the strike (3 to 1). 3,500 council workers demonstrated on the second day of the strike when the city council met.

The issue is more than a thousand job cuts. It is an attempt by the council and top council officers to break the strength of the unions, and to pave the way for a further 6,000 jobs cuts, large-scale privatisation of council services and worse pay and conditions for the remaining council workforce.

Offers by the JTUC to establish a retraining/redeployment unit so that retraining could be substituted for redundancies, and to discuss "the best deployment of employees across the Authority" in order to improve council services have been ignored by council leader Harry Rimmer.

Instead, he and his dwindling band of followers in the Labour Group have remained intent upon confrontation, pledging that another batch of redundancy notices will be sent out on 26 April, just six days before the City Council elections on 2 May.

The next stage of the campaign of strike action is for 358 council employees to remain on selective indefinite strike, financed by a levy on those in work. The employees selected for ongoing strike action include workers in housing offices, libraries, social services, street cleaning, car parks and the computer unit.

The next stage in the council's strategy is to bring in private contractors to shift the mountains of rubbish which have been accumulating in Liverpool long before the start of last week's strikes.



The paper needs activists to make it live; activists need the paper to inform and educate their activity

"Ours cannot merely be a popular paper", wrote the American socialist James P Cannon in the 1940s, "even if every line of its contents is irreproachably correct as far as it goes."

"It must strive to be a *combination paper*: a paper which interests and serves the needs of the new reader who picks it up for the first time, the reader who is beginning to think of himself as a Trotskyist, and the educated militant, all at the same time..."

"Most important of all we must bear in mind that the new reader does not remain a new reader all of his life. The average intelligent worker quickly absorbs a few simple ideas which attracted him to the paper in the first place. Then he begins to feel the need of more substantial food."

In producing *Socialist Organiser* we have aimed to follow Cannon's plan. The purpose of a socialist newspaper, we believe, is not just to expose the evils of capitalism and to spread basic socialist ideas. It must also discuss more difficult and complicated issues.

We will never win over enough people to socialism just by printing and selling newspapers. The capitalist class will always have more resources — television stations, the best printing presses, and all the journalistic talent that money can buy.

What will win people over to socialism is *the experience of struggle*. In strikes, and in activities like the mobilisations against the Gulf war, workers can learn very quickly about how rotten capitalism is and the potential power that the working class has to change the world.

Newspapers come into it by helping those who do learn from strug-

A paper for the struggle

gle to systematise what they learn instinctively, to develop their ideas further after the first excitement of struggle, and to become activists capable of leading new struggles and explaining socialist ideas to others. A socialist newspaper has to aim to provide enlightenment and new material for thought both to the activist who initiates an anti-war campaign, leads a strike, and organises discussions for the people newly drawn into politics through those activities, and to the new reader.

The very nature of the struggle for socialism demands concern for ideas and theories. The Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci put it like this:

"To expect that a mass reduced to such condition of physical and spiritual slavery" — that is, the working class — "would spontaneously begin and continue an act of revolutionary creation is an illusion of ideologists: to rely on the unique creative capacity of such a mass and not work systematically to organise a great army of disciplined and conscious militants, ready for every sacrifice, and educated to put their slogans into practice...not to do this is a real betrayal of the working class and an unconscious counter revolution in advance."

The last 18 months in Eastern Europe confirm Gramsci's argument strikingly in a negative way. Spontaneous courage, determination and heroism toppled the old Stalinist regimes. But because there were no socialist groupings which had worked in advance to thrash out ideas and map out clear alter-

natives, the victorious workers were taken in tow behind priests, professors, and turncoat bureaucrats.

The same lesson has been illustrated in many great working class struggles in Western Europe, for example in the great wave of battles between 1968 and the early '70s.

For socialists, a paper like *SO* is our primary tool to get across to individuals interested in socialist ideas. It can build upon the consciousness of new activists and give them the capacity to come to a more all-round view of socialism than that acquired by their personal experience alone.

The paper also *organises* socialists, regulating the routines and rhythms of their weekly activity, focusing them on a systematic

drive to find new socialists rather than just discussing among themselves or burying themselves in trade union or Labour Party routine.

The paper makes clear our political distinctiveness from the rest of the left and explains our differences. Sometimes such issues have to be posed sharply. We can only thrash out an all-round socialist view of the world by being combative against ideas we find wrong or inadequate. People new to politics need to be able to distinguish between the left groups and papers, and for that they must be told honestly what the differences are.

However, a paper that is full of bright ideas is not enough. A socialist paper cannot rely on the

weight of *money* to find it readers — through advertising, through access to the established systems of distribution — as Murdoch's or Maxwell's papers can. It can only succeed to the extent that it has the support of a body of activists who will contribute to it — journalistically and financially — distribute it, sell it, and fight for its ideas.

The "Alliance for Workers' Liberty" conference, on 4-5 May, will be discussing how to develop such a body of activists. We urge readers to attend.

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Tories out!

From front page

The Tory Government could itself have been sunk and driven out of office long ago if the Labour Party leaders had dared put themselves at the head of the opposition to the Poll Tax. Labour missed its chance.

Now the Tories stand exposed for gross economic mismanagement as the slump scythes through British industry and hundreds of thousands are herded on to the dole. Even the Director General of the Institute of Directors, Peter Morgan, has publicly denounced the Tories.

And what will Labour do? Confine itself to schoolboy-style debates in the Commons, or go out and organise to force the Tories to call a general election?

It will be a crime if the Tories are peacefully allowed to go on for another year. The case for a general election, for the people to be given the chance to pronounce on the Government, is unanswerable. A mass campaign of meetings and protests would put the Tories on the defensive, at least.

It is time the labour movement told Neil Kinnock to pull his finger out! Labour must campaign for a general election!

"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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The reserve army

The latest unemployment figures, released last week, showed a total of over 2 million. You might reasonably expect the "leaders" of the British trade union movement to be kicking up a bit of stink about it. But no. The silence from Congress House (and also Smith Square, Peckham Road, etc) has been deafening.



INSIDE THE UNIONS

By Sleeper

Maybe it's because our Champions of Labour have more important matters on their mind at the moment — like working out plans for a new Social Contract with the next Labour Government, or negotiating a credit card scheme with Unity Trust. Maybe Norman Willis is preparing his bid to oust Ted Hughes as Poet Laureate. Or perhaps it's because This Great Movement of Ours really doesn't have very much to say about unemployment, redundancies, and closures just at the moment.

Given the regularity at which redundancies are being announced, it is a sad commentary that the only noticeable "campaign" is around the proposed BAe closures and that, so far, seems to be taking the form of a re-run of the noticeably unsuccessful "public opinion" campaigns organised around Ravenscraig and the other Scottish steel plants.

Part of the problem is the form that most of the redundancies in the present recession have, so far, taken: "voluntary redundancy", early retirement, "natural wastage", etc. This kind of "painless", piecemeal redundancy is much less dramatic and more difficult to oppose than the total plant closures of the '70s and early '80s.

But if the present recession lasts and deepens (as most bourgeois "experts" predict) then we can expect the pattern of job loss to change: less VR and more total plant closures.

In this situation we need to revive some memories of 20 years ago, when the Upper Clyde Shipbuilders workforce occupied their workplaces to prevent closure and the Chief Constable of Glasgow warned the government that unless the closure was reversed, he could not be held responsible for the consequences in terms of civil unrest.

In the aftermath of the Upper Clyde workers victory, over 300 workplaces were occupied to prevent job loss and/or closure between 1972 and '74. Most of these occupations were completely unofficial but at least the "leadership" then gave belated, half-hearted backing to this sort of action.

Now, one suspects, the likes of Willis, Jordan and Todd would completely disown an occupation and (as at BAe) urge, instead, that the management and government "rethink" matters and keep the plant open out of the goodness of their hearts and/or in the interests of the nation's economic competitiveness against the dreaded Germans and Japanese.

If the unions are presently pretty ineffectual at stopping job losses, they are even less effective when it comes to organising the victims.

The latest comprehensive survey of unions' policies towards the unemployed was a 1981 survey of the (then) biggest 50 unions, covering 10 million workers. Out of the 50, only 30 allowed, in their rule-books, for the recruitment of unemployed people. Only 35 made provision for the retention of unemployed members. And of those that did, several offered no reduction in weekly contributions for the unemployed which, in practice, meant that unemployed people could not stay in membership.

Activists in several unions have "bent" the rules to recruit unemployed workers (the TGWU in the Merseyside area being a notable example). And, what with amalgamations and rule-changes, the unions are now much more accessible to unemployed people than they were ten years ago.

Some unions (like the AEU and the "scab" EETPU) even offer free membership to the unemployed. But moves by serious activists in the GMB to recruit and organise unemployed people and youth on government training schemes have been thwarted by the bureaucracy.

In the TGWU unemployed workers have to pretend to be "part-time workers" for 13 weeks — and pay 60p per week, before they can take advantage of the union's reduced unemployed rates.

One union that claims to be willing to recruit the unemployed free of charge is the MSF. But try ringing your local MSF headquarters and see if anyone there has heard about this...

A city of striking contrasts

Two faces of Paris

LETTER FROM PARIS

By John Moloney

I was lucky enough to spend some time in Paris recently. While in popular imagination Paris is the city of culture, which it undoubtedly is, it is also a city of striking contrasts.

If you spend any time travelling on the Metro, the name of the underground system, this becomes all too obvious. On one ride three beggars came on a train, one after another and began begging. The method for all three was the same. At the top of their voices they would scream that one or both their parents were dead, they needed money for food, etc.

They would then move down the carriage asking for money from the passengers, most of whom looked straight ahead, pretending not to notice them.

One girl, of about eight, after she had worked the carriage, got out at one of the stops. The last sight I had of her was her standing on the platform, chewing gum, already at her age completely hardened, already an adult.

The thought that jumped

into my mind was what she would be like in ten years time.

From time to time, the Transport Police, who unlike their British counterparts are actually fit and hard looking, would join a train en masse. At every station they would get off, stare at everybody on the platform, daring them to try anything and then the cops would get back on the train.

Their luck was in at one stop. Two people were shouting at each other. Before they knew what was happening, five or six police jumped on them. No messing about, against the wall, search and then the handcuffs.

Obviously on the Metro, civil rights are not rated highly.

Not that this stops crime. On some stations, in fact in many carriages on particular lines, drugs are openly sold.

At night large numbers of drunks go down into the Metro to sleep it off and try, if they are not moved on by the Transport cops, to stay there for the night.

At one station, which is about a hundred metres from the Louvre museum, the seats were full of tramps. One of the greatest collections of art works in the world side by side with destitute people.

This has been only a thumbnail sketch of Paris. Despite all the above it is a wonderful place, but the glamour hides a lot of darkness.



Demonstrations call for the removal of Los Angeles Police Chief, Daryl Gates. Gates' violent and racist cops were recently responsible for the videotaped bashing of black building worker Rodney King. George Bush described Gates as "an all American hero"!

New Zealand's lessons for Kinnock

One of the longest-established welfare states in the world, in New Zealand, is being smashed. The new National Party government is ending the free health service and cutting welfare spending by a quarter. Right-wing Labour policies paved the way. Tony Brown reports

Neil Kinnock says that "the great task that will face a new Labour government is the modernisation of Britain."

The New Zealand Labour Party saw things the same way when it was elected in 1984.

After six years in office Labour was routed in October last year. Nine Ministers, two assistant Ministers, the Whip, Speaker and Deputy Speaker all lost their seats. In a Parliament of 97, Labour was left with only 28 seats, its lowest representation since the 1920s.

In 1984 Labour took over one of the most protected and insulated economies of the advanced capitalist world. They saw their role as

the managers of capitalism and criticised the previous National Party government for being poor managers.

Under Roger Douglas as Finance Minister Labour made sweeping changes. Tariffs were cut, import quotas were abolished and subsidies to agriculture and industry were cut. Air New Zealand, Telecom, the State Insurance Office, and the Post Office bank were all privatised. In the first year of the privatisations 15,000 civil service jobs were lost.

Foreign exchange and interest rate controls were abolished and the New Zealand dollar was floated.

Douglas reduced tax rates for the wealthy and business. The top personal rate became 33% and corporate rates were cut from 45 to 33%. A value added tax was introduced.

By October 1990 the result of this dose of free market economics was a disaster for workers. Unemployment was at record levels, wages had been depressed, the national debt was ballooning and important industries like wool and meat were collapsing.

Some of the biggest union battles had been fought in the abattoirs as meat workers lost their jobs. But mostly the union leaders decided that the preservation of the Labour government was more important than the preservation of jobs and workers' living standards.

The New Zealand TUC was dominated by the Socialist Unity Party, an

old-style Moscow-line party. They were so supportive of Lange's anti-nuclear ships policy that they effectively turned a blind eye to the economic attacks taking place and failed to mobilise any working class opposition.

As the government's policies became more Thatcherite, party members began deserting the party in droves. Jim Anderton, an NEC member and Minister, left the party and set up the New Labour Party. Grandiose claims were made as to how the NLP would challenge Labour at the forthcoming elections. Anderton held his seat, but the NLP polled poorly and its continued existence is in question.

At the election little difference could be seen between the Nationals and Labour. After suffering years of cuts and job losses workers weren't prepared to endure Labour any more.

The result has been, after six months of a National government, more cuts. New Prime Minister Jim Bolger has said that welfare spending has to be reduced by 25% this decade. Already they have announced an end to the free health service, the repeal of the Equal Pay for Women legislation, a tightening of eligibility for unemployment benefits, and a reduction in the amount of the dole.

On May Day the Employment Contracts Act comes into force. It removes national awards, union representa-

tion, minimum wages, basic conditions such as maternity leave and redundancy pay, and encourages employers to negotiate a separate contract with each worker.

So far huge protest strikes have been held in opposition to the Bill. Last week 95% of teachers struck, and were joined by pensioners, the unemployed and other unions in the biggest demonstrations since the 1981 Springbok tour.

The Nationals won't be unprepared for such protests. In Australia in the mid-'70s and Britain in the early '80s mass protests greeted incoming Conservative governments. But they never became challenges to the government's legitimacy, they served only to release workers' steam and eventually weakened as the valves were randomly opened and closed by the union leaders.

Co-ordination, determination and increasing pressure are essential to forcing the government to retreat.

The size of the Nationals' parliamentary majority means that Labour has little prospect of returning to government before 1996. Six years of Labour Thatcherism will probably result in six years of National Party government with nothing to show for it other than record employment, lower living standards, debt and a demoralised labour movement.

Neil Kinnock should think about that.

The Kurds are still dying

The US and Britain have begun to set up their "safe havens" — refugee camps — for the Kurds in northern Iraq. But the camps will accommodate only a small minority of those fleeing the Iraqi army; the Iraqi police, at least, remain active in

Kurdistan; and the US and Britain declare they will not allow the Kurds to use the camps as military bases for defending themselves. Hundreds are still dying daily. The only answer remains self-determination for the Kurds.

By Seyfi Cengiz (Turkish Kurdish Communist Movement)

The uprising of the Kurdish people was used by the US to try to force the Iraqi regime to get rid of Saddam.

They did not want to get rid of either the dictatorship or the Ba'athist regime. They wanted a military coup.

Turkey did not want to let the Kurds in. They do not want the extra trouble. They

do not want an uprising amongst Kurds in Turkey.

Major's proposal for a "Kurdish enclave" in Northern Iraq actually started with Ozal. Ozal wanted a "secure Kurdish area" to keep the Iraqi Kurds out of Turkey.

We should support the Kurds' right to self-determination. Perhaps we should propose a referendum in Iraqi Kurdistan. If the Kurds choose federation, autonomy, an enclave or a separate state — whatever — it is their right. I am sure they

will not choose an enclave.

This does not mean we do not want food and other aid, just that we should have no illusions about the imperialists' intentions. We must stress that all the imperialists should leave the region. They cannot liberate the Kurds.

The responsibility for this situation lies with the West and the Kurdish bourgeois leadership. In the end the only solution is for the working class to get rid of imperialism and capitalism on a world scale.

The West should share blame

By Bawer, National Liberation Front of Kurdistan

Britain and France carved Kurdistan up in the 1920s. Thousands of Kurds died in uprisings during the '20s and '30s.

When Saddam invaded Kuwait the Western powers

made a fuss of international law. But the West's real interests were oil.

The West decided that Saddam was dangerous and had to go. They signalled to the Kurds to rise up. The traditional Kurdish leaders relied on the powers and were taken in.

Today on the border the Turkish Kurds are trying to help the refugees. They are being prevented by Turkish

police. Protest demonstrations have been broken up.

Although Iraq is immediately to blame for the massacre, other powers also share some of the responsibility — Turkey and the West.

The Kurds have the right to self-determination. The only solution is an independent state for Kurdistan.

Any solution must not be imposed by outside powers.



The injured child was the only survivor of an Iraqi helicopter attack on his home.

The Kurds in history

By Stan Crooke

The Kurds — living in the mountain regions now divided between Iraq, Syria, Turkey, the Armenian Republic and Iran — were conquered by the Arabs in the 7th century (West European calendar).

The Arabs converted them to Islam. In subsequent centuries they were subject to repeated incursions by the Mongols and by the rival and expanding empires of Persia and Turkey.

There was no single Kurdish nation. The various Kurdish tribes were grouped into about 30 mutually hostile principalities, which sometimes allied with the Turks, or the Persians, against neighbouring principalities.

Whatever the fortunes of war, Persian and Turkish overlordship over the Kurdish mountains was mostly nominal rather than real into the 19th century.

The 19th century saw the

first stirrings of Kurdish political nationalism, when Sheikh Ubeidullah attempted to create a Kurdish national state under Turkish overlordship.

In 1897 the first Kurdish newspaper was published; in 1908, the first Kurdish political club was founded.

During the First World War Kurds fought on the side of Turkey.

The Kurds used the war as an opportunity to settle accounts with their traditional enemies, the Christian Armenians and Christian Assyrians, and committed a series of massacres. Wherever the Armenians and Assyrians were strong enough, they behaved likewise towards the Kurds.

The Treaty of Sevres, signed in 1920 by the Western allies and the Turkish sultan, proposed that "a commission shall draft a scheme for local autonomy for the predominantly Kurdish areas". In 1923, however, this treaty was superseded by the Treaty of Lausanne, which made no mention of an autonomous Kurdistan.

Instead, the Kurds found themselves to be minorities in the new states of Iraq and Syria, in the states of Turkey and Iran, which had lost their empires, and in the Armenian republic of the Soviet Union.

In Armenia and Syria they were and are small minorities of the population (600,000 in Syria, 120,000 in Armenia).

In the 1920s Kurdish rebellions were crushed in Turkey, in Iraq and in Iran

In Syria they received "favoured minority" status from the French authorities who governed the country and who saw them as a useful counterbalance to other minorities and factions in the country.

In the new Turkey of the nationalist leader Kemal Ataturk there was no place for an autonomous or independent Kurdistan.

A Kurdish rebellion of 1924 was brutally crushed.

All Kurdish mosques were closed, Kurdish associations were dissolved, Kurdish ceremonies banned and Kurdish traditional dress proscribed.

In Iran Kurdish rebellions in 1920, 1926 and 1930 were put down by the government. From 1930 onwards the Iranian government discouraged the use of Kurdish national dress, customs, and language, enforcing the use of the Persian language instead.

In Iraq it was the same story, with a series of uprisings by the Kurds in the 1920s and 1930s, mostly led by Sheikh Mahmoud Barzani, being suppressed by the Iraqi government backed up by British military assistance.

The defeats of the Kurdish rebellions in Turkey, Iran and Iraq in the 1920s did not put an end to the Kurds' struggle for national rights — rebellions occurred again at the close of the Second World War and, more recently, in the 1980s, as Kurds in Iran and Iraq exploited the opportunity of the Iran-Iraq war.

Kurdish nationalism today is a mixture.

The tribal chieftains are still strong, opposed to any state intervention into what is left of the Kurdish traditional way of life. In 1961, for example, they launched a rebellion in Iraq against the progressive land reforms and land tax of the Qassim government.

But the urban intelligentsia is the backbone of the Kurdish political parties. Opposed to tribalism (they condemned the 1961 rebellion in

Iraq as "reactionary and inspired by imperialists") and the assimilationist policies of the national states, they often express their ideology in Marxist or pseudo-Marxist language.

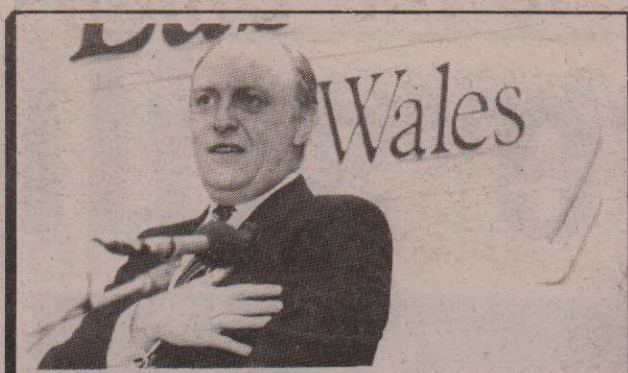
The Kurds have never yet constituted a nation in the Marxist sense of the word. The emergence of modern nation states broke up their traditional way of life, and their own tribal divisions blocked off the road to national unity and a nation-state of their own.

...and what Washington says

The latest *Newsweek* uncovers the US's real attitude to the Kurds' demands.

"[The Iraqi Kurds'] slogan has been 'Democracy for Iraq and autonomy for Kurdistan'. Few believe them. It's autonomy today, but a separate state tomorrow. We all know that," says one of

the administration's senior Middle East analysts. A State Department official who served in Iraq is even more cynical: "It probably sounds callous, but we did the best thing not to get near [the Kurdish revolt]. They're nice people, and they're cute, but they're really just bandits. They spend as much time fighting each other as central authority. They're losers."



Kinnock: loyal service to the Queen is all he's fit for

Vat's vat

GRAFFITI

get nearly half the spending.

The Labour Party leadership struck a blow against the Tories last week, exposing Norman Lamont's claim that increased VAT rates will be paid mainly by the rich.

In fact the poorest 10 per cent of the population spend 9.2 per cent of their income on VAT payments, and the richest 10 per cent only 5.7 per cent. So the Tories' VAT increase to 17.5 per cent will hit the poor hardest.

Second question: what do the Labour Party leaders propose to do about it? Answer: keep VAT at the increased Tory rate.

The Labour Party's other coup last week was in Parliament where Neil Kinnock was jubilant about a crushing rejoinder to John Major.

Major denounced Kinnock for missing a vote in Parliament. And Kinnock's response? That he was on a picket line at the time? Busy drumming up aid for the Kurds? Active helping the homeless of London and other big cities?

No! Kinnock's reply, which seemed to please him more than anything he has said in Parliament for years, was that he was dining with the Queen at Windsor Castle.

Indeed the only thing red about the Labour leaders these days is the colour of their faces after all those meals with the high and mighty.

John Smith's main form of political campaigning is lunches with City bankers, and the Party's new fund-raising scheme is £500-a-place or £1000-a-place dinners with Kinnock for rich Labour supporters.

But they should watch out. Their faces could become even redder. It was, apparently, at a lunch party that Australian millionaire Laurie Connell got an assurance from Australia's Labor prime minister Bob Hawke that the Labor government would not introduce a tax on the revenue from gold mining. Connell then gave \$1 million to the Labor Party over the following three years.

Now Connell's business has gone bust, and he is spilling the dirt, much to Hawke's embarrassment. This scandal comes after a number of others connecting Labor politicians with Australia's quick-buck men of the 1980s.

£4.4 billion — almost as much as the Channel Tunnel was originally estimated to cost — is to be spent on transport systems for the big new offices in London's Docklands.

Here, as everywhere else, individual private transport by car is boosted above public transport. Roads will bring 18 per cent of the workers to Canary Wharf — yet they will

Already London has the most expensive public transport in Europe. According to a survey by the Association of London Authorities, fares in London are about *double* the average in Western Europe and *three times* as high as in Paris.

The Tory Government has demanded that London Regional Transport show a profit of £70 million by 1993.

Britain also has one of the lowest rates of child benefit in Western Europe.

A family with three children aged 10, 13 and 15 receives only a third as much in Britain as in Belgium, and less than in any other of the richer countries in the European Community.

Italy was excluded from the survey (by the Family Policy Studies Centre) because its child allowances are means-tested (though they are generally higher than Britain's), and Britain's rates are higher than those in the poorer EC countries like Greece and Portugal.

British rates compare a bit better for families with one small child, since other West European countries pay more for second and third children than for first (while Britain does the opposite) and more for older children than for younger (while Britain pays the same).

One company in every twelve will be the victim of swindles or fraud by its own managers in the next ten years, or so reckons a new survey by "City Investigations (London)".

Government figures indicate that 40 per cent of companies will suffer fraud. 74 per cent of frauds are carried out by employees, and in 29 per cent of cases — that is, 21 per cent of all frauds, or 8 per cent of all companies — it is fraud by the manager.

Often-blamed workers like computer operators, drivers, and salespeople are involved in much smaller percentages of cases.

"We're not only finding trouble in run-down areas, but yuppies in quite expensive houses on the Isle of Dogs are giving us a hostile reaction," said a Census spokesperson last week, commenting on resentment from people worried that Census data would be used to help collect the poll tax.

According to the latest figures, for 1988, the top ten per cent now have an income 18 times bigger than the bottom ten per cent.

In 1967, and again in 1978, the differential was only ten to one. The real income of the poorest ten per cent is about the same as it was in 1967, while the real income of the top ten per cent has almost doubled.

Tabloids clean up their act

End of the Sleaze Age?

PRESS GANG



By Jim Denham

Don't get over-excited, but there are one or two signs that we may be witnessing the end of an era. Or at least the beginning of the end.

The golden era of tabloid sleaze can be roughly dated from the point in the mid-seventies when the *Sun's* circulation overtook that of the *Daily Mirror*. From then until sometime last year (you can't be precise about eras), the tabloids were locked in battles to outdo each other in trivia sensationalism and sex.

The *Sun* dragged the *Mirror* down in its wake while the *Daily Star* often succeeded in out-sleazing both of them. It was much the same with the tabloid Sundays, except that the top-selling *News of the World* could scarcely go any further down market without becoming openly pornographic.

Last year's Calcutt Report on press standards and Douglas Hurd's chilling warning ("clean up your act, or else...") resulted in a just-about-perceptible degree of self-restraint from the main offenders.

But now there is a much more compelling reason for the tabloids to clean up their act: plummeting sales (and profits). According to the Audit Bureau of Circulation, the *Sun's* year-on-year sales to February were down by 4.2% — significantly worse than the



Would you recognise the Grey Man?

Mirror. Sales of the *Sun*, *Mirror* and *Star* combined were down by over 400,000 while the *News of the World* and the *People* lost 500,000. This despite TV advertising costing over £18 million between these five papers.

The biggest drop of all was for the *Sunday Sport*, which lost 20% of its readers.

Meanwhile, the three papers whose year-on-year sales went up were the *Independent on Sunday*, *Sunday Telegraph* and the *Guardian*.

But the tabloids' problems run deeper than the sleaze question: the population is increasingly literate and politically aware. As former *Sunday Mirror* and *Daily Express* editor Robert Edwards asked, rhetorically, (in the *Independent*): "when did any of the popular Sundays last break a big political story? They don't believe their readers are interested in politics, but I think they're wrong."

It may be significant that Rupert Murdoch's struggling *Today* has recently introduced "serious" news coverage. On

the other hand, the tabloids' enthusiastic coverage of the exciting goings-on in Norman Lamont's flat suggests that the Age of Sleaze is not over quite yet.

Suddenly the press is full of stories about Tory disaffection. Norman Tebbit writes (in the London *Evening Standard*) of "Tories who want to lose the election". John Major's credentials and integrity are under question. It is suggested that the Prime Minister has lied about his 'O'-levels; his very name (Major? Ball? Major-Ball? Ball-Major?) seems to be in doubt.

The extraordinary thing about this furore is that it is being orchestrated by the Tory press. The *Sunday Telegraph*, in particular, has taken the lead in undermining the Grey Man. The question is, why?

The answer is, to a very large extent, Frank Johnson.

Mr Johnson is the leading light in a group of unreconstructed Thatcherite journalists (others include Bruce Anderson, sacked from the *Sunday Telegraph* a few months ago, and Noel Malcolm of the *Spectator*) who lunch regularly with the Queen Over the Water.

Johnson's "Political Notebook" in the *Sunday Telegraph* invariably contains cruel jibes and patronising back-handed "compliments" about Major. The latest deserves reproduction here. After comparing Grey Man to the Dennis Price character (a social-climbing mass murderer) in the film *Kind Hearts and Coronets*, Johnson concludes:

"Mr Major may be that stock English character: the lace-curtain seeker after something to place himself just one notch above the neighbours... (but) as the O-level business suggests, he might be another stock Englishman: the likely lad. I like to think he is the latter."

And people say Labour Party infighting is vicious.

Give Patty Bowman a fair hearing!

WOMEN'S EYE



By Liz Millward

Over a large part of the USA less than 30 years ago if a black man was accused of assaulting or even insulting a white woman he stood a very good chance of being taken from the jail — if he managed to reach that temporary sanctuary — and lynched. Such things were commonplace.

Numerous photographs exist of lynchings posing proudly with the bodies of their victims.

And not only blacks were lynched. Sometimes accused whites, too, would be taken from the jail and strung up. Mob rule — not due process; the power of masses, muscle and ignited bigotry, not justice.

Something like that is now happening to Patty Bowman. She is being lynched — by the American press!

The other twist is that Bowman is not accused of anything. She is the accuser.

She has accused William Kennedy Smith of raping her. He is a nephew of the top US Senator Edward Kennedy, who is the brother of the late President JF Kennedy, and head of the very powerful Kennedy clan. The rape allegedly took place at the Kennedy estate in Palm Beach.

Now, I don't know if she was or was not raped. I do not have much time for the view that if a woman makes an accusation, then she should automatically be believed. Kennedy Smith is entitled to answer the charge and defend himself under due process of the law.

But so, equally, is Patty Bowman entitled to a fair

hearing. The US press seems to be working overtime to make sure that she will not get it.

She has been named, contrary to the normal practice in such cases. And the press has begun to publish lurid tales about her alleged sexual and other history.

Already it has crossed the Atlantic. One of the muckier British tabloids this weekend carried a long article retailing the reminiscences of someone claiming to be an ex-lover of Bowman's. It makes her out to be a bit of a nut.

This sort of assault on her character is part of the ordeal any woman who charges rape can, in the present state of the law, expect to go through in court. It is happening to Patty Bowman in the press, not in court. It is happening in such a way that she will go to court already heavily discredited.

Bowman is herself from a wealthy and privileged background. Even such a person is not safe from the power of the super-rich Kennedys. She is learning that you do not accuse a Kennedy (even one named Smith!), and get away with it!

Kennedy private investigators and Kennedy "journalists" feeding a sensation-hungry venal press can do an awful lot to subvert Bowman's right to a fair hearing. She has little or no chance now of a fair hearing.

The way they are going at her, the money-power of the Kennedys — who pass for "liberals" in US political terms — has already made it impossible that Patty Bowman can ever again live a normal life.

It is a gruesome example of male power in these matters, multiplied a thousand times over by the power of money.



Patty Bowman will never be able to live a normal life again

Unshackle the Unions!



Building workers walk out in support of ambulance workers, January 1990. Photo: John Smith, Profile.

The new Tory law

At the "Unshackle the Unions" conference on 27 April, activists from up and down the country are meeting to discuss how to fight the Tory anti-union laws. Donny Brooke examines the latest Tory law and puts it in the context of the ruling-class offensive against the unions.

The new 1990 trade union law, which became operative earlier this year, has four broad objectives.

- To continue the Tory counter-revolution, further weakening union organisation, undermining strikes and confining trade unionism to the enterprise by outlawing the closed shop and secondary action.
- To intensify the pressure on union leaders to police the rank and file and centralise union decision-making in order to eradicate unofficial strikes.
- To artificially stimulate attacks by disgruntled reptiles on trade unions by facilitating legal action by members through granting greater powers to the Commissioner for the Rights of Trade Union Members.
- To keep the bogey of wild cat, militant unofficial trade unionism in the public eye for electoral advantage and to distract attention from deep-seated economic problems.

The 1988 Employment Act legally undermined the post-entry closed shop, the situation where all employees had to become union members after they were

employed. It abolished the earlier requirements for ballots contained in the 1980 and 1982 Acts. Instead, it simply stated that if any employee was dismissed or discriminated against because of their non-membership of a trade union then that dismissal would automatically be found to be unfair by an industrial tribunal.

Union membership and the closed shop

Any industrial action intended to establish or maintain 100% union membership was outlawed.

But this legislation did not deal with the pre-entry closed shop — the position where workers had to be in a union before they were given a job. This kind of arrangement has been most notable in the craft sections in the print industry, in special situations, such as the London

wholesale markets, where the TGWU operated as an employment agency, and in merchant shipping where employers recruit from a recognised pool of workers defined by union membership.

The Conservatives' 1989 Green Paper *Removing Barriers to Employment* stated that 1.3 million of the 2.6 million union members in closed shops were covered by pre-entry closed shop arrangements, although this seems a wild overestimate.

The Tories, therefore, wanted to make it unlawful for an employer to refuse to hire an individual on the grounds that he or she did not have a union card.

Section 1-3 of the new Act now states that:

• If you are denied a job on the grounds that you are not, or refuse to become, a member of a union or a particular union, you will win a case at an industrial tribunal.

• If you are denied a job on the grounds that you are, or wish to become, a member of a union or of a particular union, you will win a case at an industrial tribunal.

These provisions also cover statements in ads for jobs and the supply of labour to an employer by employment agencies and trade unions. If a case is proven a tribunal can issue a recommendation that the worker be employed as well as compensation. And if the recommendation is not complied with, compensation can be increased up to £8,925.

These provisions require attention in the context of attempts to maintain 100% trade union membership. Nevertheless, similar provisions of the Sex Discrimination and Race Relations Acts demonstrate the difficulties of pro-

ving discrimination if you are not already employed. And previous legal attacks on the closed shop have had little impact.

Stimulating internal subversion

After the glorious orgy of litigation spawned by the 1984-85 miners' strike, the Conservatives were disappointed at the failure of union members to bring legal cases to dislocate effective union action. The Commissioner for the Rights of Trade Union Members (CROTUM) established in 1988 with the specific purpose of developing a fifth column and facilitating such legal action has hardly set the woods on fire. A tiny number of complaints scarcely justify the current £1 million-plus annual expenditure.

S.10 of the 1990 Act, therefore, expands the powers of the CROTUM. Up until now she has only been able to assist members wishing to enforce rights granted to them against their union by recent legislation. In her first annual report as the CROTUM, Gill Rowlands sought an extension of powers and the government were anxious to comply.

She can now, in addition, assist members in legal action ensuing from alleged breaches of the union rule book. These breaches must relate to appointment to any union offices, disciplinary proceedings,

including expulsion, authorisation or endorsement of industrial action, balloting members, use of unions funds or property, the imposition of levies for the purpose of industrial action, and the constitution or proceedings of any internal union committee or conference.

The CROTUM will assist members wishing to take their union to court but will not be a party to the proceedings. However, her name will appear on the title of the action to give the member "more assurance that the Commissioner stood behind him (sic) in the proceedings".

There is little reason to believe that those provisions will lead to a dramatic increase in legal action. However, it is essential that activists keep an eye cocked as knowledge of the CROTUM's expanded powers might just overcome the blanket of apathy which consigned most of the fainthearts to verbal complaint rather than legal action.

Secondary action

The 1980 Employment Act outlawed pure solidarity action: if engineering workers took industrial action in support of ambulance workers then they would be open to legal action because there was no direct relationship between the two groups.

You were only protected when you took action to support other workers if you were employed by a direct customer or supplier of the employer in dispute. Even then the

Unshackle the Unions!

The new Tory law

courts had to decide whether the primary purpose of those involved in solidarity action by striking or boycotting certain work was to aid the initial dispute and whether their action was likely to achieve a successful resolution of the primary dispute.

These provisions contained in S.17 of the 1980 Act were a legal quagmire that gave free play to judicial inventiveness. They were criticised both by the unions and the judges on the grounds of their complexity but they did leave some kinds of secondary action protected.

The government's tendency in the latter part of the '80s to make policy on the hoof in response to the latest headlines was demonstrated by their citation of the dispute over the proposed Ford plant at Dundee as grounds for further legislation. They argued that threats by the TGWU to boycott delivery of components to the proposed plant if recognition was granted to the AEU just might be protected by the 1980 Act — because T&G organised component firms would be direct suppliers of Ford.

S.4 of the 1990 Act makes all secondary action unlawful. From now on, if you work for a customer or supplier of goods to an employer in dispute and you boycott deliveries or take other forms of solidarity action then you and your union can be taken to court.

Only direct disputes between an employer and his or her workers now attract legal protection.

The one exception is where you are picketing your own place of work and persuade employees of a second employer, such as lorry drivers, not to deliver or take away goods.

The importance of these provisions cannot be overestimated. Secondary action, as it is misnamed, is essential to winning many industrial disputes, and essential to trade unionism as a class-wide movement.

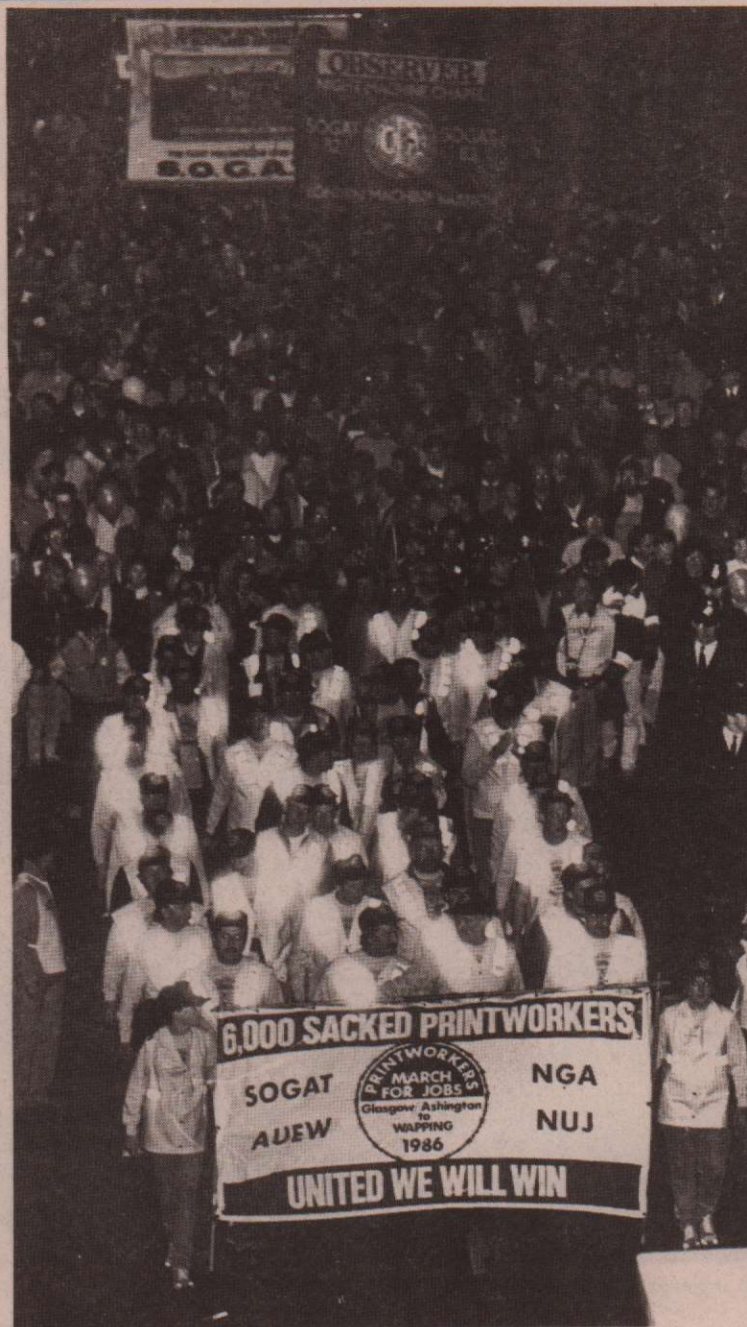
If we accept these restrictions in practice, then we are fighting employers with one hand tied behind our backs.

Policing the ranks

A major theme of the anti-union legislation since 1980 has been the attempt to attach legal liability to the union leaderships, as custodians of the organisation, rather than to individuals. It was thus hoped to ensure that the leaderships would not only desist from disruption themselves, but would actively encourage their members to desist.

Industrial action in 1988 and 1989, particularly the difficulties the leaders of the seafarers encountered in controlling their members, the outbreaks of rank and file rebellion during the docks dispute, and the unofficial action on London Underground, convinced the Tories that a firmer approach was required.

In the second 1989 Green Paper, *Unofficial Action and the Law*, they stated their belief that union bosses "turned a blind eye to, or secretly encouraged, unofficial action". The Tories wished to revive the stereotyped spectre of the "Winter of Discontent", and asserted, with no justification at all, that unofficial stoppages were more



Murdoch was able to sack his Fleet Street workers and get their pickets ruled illegal

expensive to the employer than union-backed action and undermined the UK's international competitiveness.

The government therefore wished to expand the concept of unofficial action in order to make the union itself legally responsible and sueable for an expanded range of action by its officials, stewards and members.

S.6 of the 1990 Act extends the responsibility of the union as a legal person. The union itself is now deemed to have authorised or endorsed — and is thus legally responsible for — any acts taken in relation to industrial action by its Executive, President, General Secretary, any committee of the union, and any full-time officer or shop steward.

Any action taken by a shop steward to call or support industrial action is now assumed to be authorisation or endorsement by the union itself. The behaviour of any TGWU shop steward, for example, is now treated by the law as implicating the union just as much as the behaviour of Ron Todd, Bill Morris or George Wright.

If Bill Sykes, the ACTSS staff rep at Fagins, or his shop floor counterpart Nancy, call a strike, the union can be sued. Even further, if Bill or Nancy are members of a committee or group, one of the purposes of which includes the organising or co-ordinating of industrial action, and any member of the committee calls a strike — *whether or not, it seems, they are a union member* — then the union is at risk.

This will be so even if the committee or group has no existence or no authority to involve itself in industrial action under the rules of the union.

For the union to get off the hook its leaders must "as soon as reasonably practicable" circulate a statement in the following terms: "your union has repudiated the call (or calls) for industrial action to

which this notice relates and will give no support to unofficial industrial action taken in response to it (or to them). If you are dismissed while taking unofficial industrial action you will have no right to complain of unfair dismissal."

This statement must be circulated "without delay" to the stewards and committees involved, but the union also has to "do its best" to ensure that it is also sent to every member who is or who might take part in the industrial action and to all employers affected.

If these requirements are not carried out then "the repudiation shall be treated as ineffective". Moreover, the courts will not accept that the union has repudiated the industrial action and is off the legal hook if the subsequent behaviour of its leadership is inconsistent with the purported repudiation.

These provisions involve immense practical difficulties — written notice to all who *might* be involved in action — in terms of logistics and finance. No matter how carefully planned or devoid of real intention they are, repudiations are likely to confuse and disorientate strikers and open up divisions which can be exploited.

But there is worse to come.

Sacking unofficial strikers

In its notice of repudiation the union has to inform strikers that if they ignore the repudiation and continue their action — or take action after the repudiation — then they will have no legal protection if sacked.

S.9 of the 1990 Act withdraws



The P&O seafarers at Dover found their union forced to instruct them to stop picketing assets seized

any protection against dismissal for union members taking industrial action without union support. Its implications for the right to strike are enormous. Until now complicated legal rules have forbidden employers from picking and choosing and selectively sacking those on strike. Under the 1990 Act those who participated in unofficial industrial action can be selectively dismissed.

The employer can, for example, dismiss only the strike leaders. Even further, an official strike begun after a legal ballot with full union support will be unlawful if one of the reasons for the action is the fact or the belief that an employer has sacked unofficial strikers. So any action to support those victimised is itself now outlawed.

The trap is well baited. Unions are made responsible for the acts of all representatives and the legal chart is so carefully drawn that effective action by those representatives is unlawful. Unless it repudiates such action the union will be open to injunctions and sequestration. If it does repudiate such action it will not only gradually undermine efficient representation and the voluntary activism upon which it depends, it will be throwing those activists to the wolves and giving the bosses carte blanche to lawfully sack them.

It will thus alienate both representatives and their members from the union.

Ballots and industrial action

The detailed rules on ballots for industrial action in the 1984 and 1988 Acts have pro-

A Workers' Charter

Labour's policy can and must be changed on trade union rights.

A resolution calling for Labour to commit itself to a comprehensive Workers' Charter got two and a quarter million votes at the Brighton Labour Party conference in October 1989, including the votes of the TGWU and the National Union of Mineworkers.

Similar resolutions have been passed by the North West and London regional conferences of the Labour Party, and by the 1990 conference of the public service workers' union NALGO.

A systematic campaign through the Labour Parties and trade unions can and must win majority support for a Workers' Charter.

- The right to belong to a trade union for all employees including those employed at GCHQ, the police, and the armed forces.
- A legally recognised right to strike, to picket effectively and in whatever number the strikes choose, and to take other forms of industrial action.
- The right to strike for all trade unionists, including secondary or solidarity action, without fear of dismissal, fines, or sequestration of union assets.

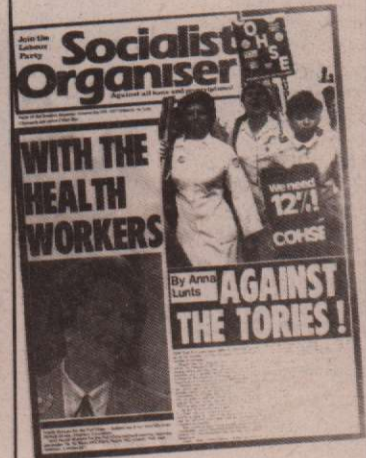
- Legally enforceable rights for unions to gain access to workplaces to organise, for workers to join unions, and for unions to gain recognition.
- The right for unions to determine their own constitutions and rule books in accordance with their own democratic procedures, free from any interference by the State.
- The right to stop work whenever health and safety are threatened.

- The right of workers and their unions to be fully consulted and informed by employers on all decisions relating to working conditions, job prospects, strategic investments, and mergers/takeovers.
- The right to employment free from discrimination on grounds of gender, race, age, religion, sexual orientation, or political persuasion.
- Full-time rights for part-time workers.
- Rights for short-term contract workers.
- Inclusion of homeworkers in employment protection legislation and financial sanctions on those who illegally exploit them.
- The right of trade unions to take political action and collect a political levy.

Unshackle the Unions!



picketers ruled illegal — and their picketing, on pain of having its



Socialist Organiser campaigned against anti-union laws, and in support of workers clashing with those laws, right through the 1980s.

vided numerous pitfalls for industrial action.

The 1990 Act now requires that voting papers must specify the identity of the persons authorised to call upon members to take part in industrial action if there is a "yes" vote in the ballot.

Industrial action taken in consequence of a successful ballot will then only be protected from legal action if it is actually called by the person or persons specified on the ballot paper.

There must be no authorisation or endorsement of industrial action before the date of the ballot. The Act goes on to state that industrial action taken after a ballot will only be protected by that ballot if no call by the union to take part in action to which the ballot relates has taken place before the date of the ballot.

These provisions open up another legal quagmire. If a union is to stay within the law then in a situation where industrial action is taking place or has been called, say by shop stewards, it must first repudiate the action and then call a ballot.

If it simply calls a ballot it will be struck down by the courts and will not protect subsequent action because a call to action occurred before the date of the ballot.

This seems to conflict, however, with another provision of the Act which states that an act "shall not be taken to have been authorised or endorsed" if it is subsequently repudiated.

This is all very confusing, but very dangerous and the courts can be expected to go for the most restrictive technical interpretations of it.

Moreover, if the ballot paper places the power to call action after a ballot in the hands of the union executive or general secretary, and a call is made by the stewards, successful legal action could be mounted against any subsequent

industrial action.

The drift of these provisions is clear: they are intended to geld industrial action by applying detailed, ambiguous, difficult, time-consuming procedures which will lead to a "safety first" concentration of decision-making and power in the union head office, and deprive the active rank and file of any initiative and autonomy.

Another blow at the unions

The Tories' latest production has the same theme as its predecessors: we want weaker, less

successful, and fewer strikes. It is unlikely that the new provisions on the closed shop and incitement to legal action by union members will in practice be any more successful than their predecessors were.

Nonetheless, every little bit counts in reducing union membership and strength and delegitimising trade unionism as a social practice.

The major thrust of the Act is clearly to make industrial action more difficult and expensive, its impact more limited, its incident rarer. The further circumscription of its scope — the outlawing of secondary action — violates ILO convention 87 on Freedom of

Association and fundamental democratic rights on withdrawal of labour, freedom of speech and freedom of movement.

The room to manoeuvre these provisions give employers can be maximised by the creative splitting up of companies demonstrated so successfully by Rupert Murdoch in the Wapping dispute.

The clauses on secondary action show just how far the Tories have come since 1979. Introducing the 1980 Act Jim Prior stated: "...simple repeal of the immunities for all secondary action would not be right...just as it is not reasonable to leave trade unions with more power than they need so it would be unreasonable to weaken them to the extent that they are unable to defend their members against attack". But it does not seem "unreasonable" to the Tories now.

The 1990 Act gives a push towards centralised decision-making within the unions with greater formalism, a further growth of hierarchy, top-down authority relations, "the union as a company". The object is to remove activism from the rank and file and concentrate it in head office, with the stewards becoming less the autonomous decision-makers, more the executors of decisions taken higher up — less leaders, more servants.

We can already see these tendencies at work in the recent directives sent to their stewards by the leaders of the AEU and UCW outlining the law and insisting stewards stick rigorously to it.

However, the 1990 Act could also precipitate rank and file revolt to a greater degree than its predecessors.

Its success or failure will be linked to wider political and economic developments and, crucially, the response of ordinary trade unionists to them.

"Our action justified"

The biggest unofficial action in the Post Office last year took place in Oxford when 2,000 workers — mainly men — went on strike against the sexual harassment of a woman cleaner by a male supervisor.

It was the biggest strike ever in the history of the British labour movement against sexual harassment. Solidarity action took place as far afield as Swindon and Northampton.

The action ended after a week with the supervisor being transferred, rather than suspended, pending an inquiry.

Under the Employment Act 1990 this strike would have been completely illegal, and the branch officials liable to legal action and the sack for organising it.

Oxford UCW Uniformed Branch Secretary Pete Boswell told us that he was "not impressed" by

the stand taken by his union's executive.

"If we hadn't taken immediate strike action over the issue," said Pete, "then we wouldn't have been able to defend the woman in question."

"Strike action is our most effective weapon, and if management think that we can't use it then all our members will feel under threat. I'm sure that if the victim of harassment had not felt that the union could defend her then she would never have spoken out against the supervisor."

"Our action was totally justified. The Tories are trying to take away one of the most basic rights working people have — the right to withdraw our labour."

"The Tories praise the recent freedoms won in Eastern Europe but forget to say that none of that would have been possible without the Gdansk strikes — action that would be completely illegal under their anti-union laws."

The road to Thatcherism

John McIlroy continues his series on the Tory Party

The ingredients of Thatcherite policies should be familiar. In political terms, Thatcherism owed its provenance broadly to the same disillusionment with the methods of the post-war consensus as a viable means of reversing Britain's economic decline as had fuelled Heath Mark I 1970-72, the betrayal of that approach by Heath Mark II 1972-74, and the consequent failure of both Heath Mark I and Heath Mark II.

It was the response of the Party to Heath's failures (as well as internal disarray) which enabled Thatcher to become leader of the Party.

It was the responses of the electorate to the failure of Labour's policies 1974-79, seen by the conservative right as cut from the same corporatist cloth as the later Heath, which enabled Thatcher to become leader of the country.

But Thatcherism was different in important aspects from the experiment mounted by Heath — indeed Powell might be seen as a more plausible, if politically unlucky or ill adept, patron saint. Unlike Heath, Thatcher supped at the table of the

New Right ideologues such as F A Hayek and Milton Friedman.

Where Heath wanted change within the framework of Keynesianism and the post-war consensus, Thatcher deduced from his failures that this was impossible. You needed monetarism, you needed to stay put when unemployment increased, you needed to build and use a strong state to create and then guarantee a free market.

Where Heath wanted to involve remodelled trade unions in the political process, Thatcher wanted both to remodel them and to weaken them more severely and cast them out of political regulation and social legitimacy.

Where Heath wanted to change aspects of the post-war settlement but maintain its framework, Thatcher wanted rid of it, lock, stock and barrel.

Where Heath was a man of the '40s in his observance of limits to coercion, Thatcher went back to the 1920s in her willingness to use force to break the working class.

Thatcher's clearer view of the kind of society or non-society, she wanted and, of course, her great determination and skill as a politician (as well as loads of luck) produced a greater integration of policy making.

With Heath — to take just one example — his macro-economic

policies were out of synch with his attempt to reduce wages and his anti-union legislation. Unemployment was more than twice its 1971 level when Thatcher's first legal measures began to take effect and of course, they were more limited and carefully drafted than Heath's *Industrial Relations Act*.

All of this meant that Thatcherism undoubtedly represented something new. But its novelty can and has been exaggerated. There was definitely a certain continuity not only with Heath but with the policies of the 1974-79 Labour government.

Those who have over-emphasised its novelty have also exaggerated its coherence.

The Thatcherism of 1987 was not the Thatcherism of 1981 or 1977.

The 1980 anti-union law was limited not because of the Tories' cunning plan but because Thatcher was not strong enough in Cabinet and Party to impose tougher measures on the reluctant Jim Prior. Similarly, what produced the attack on Local Government was not any ideological opposition or preconceived strategy but a gradually dawning realisation that here was an impediment to attempts to slash public expenditure and a redoubt from which political opponents could mount forays against central government and suggest living alternatives to its policies.

The Poll Tax only slowly emerged after the failures of grant-cutting, rates referenda, rate capping and so on.

Those who have exaggerated the novelty and coherence of Thatcherism also exaggerated its successes.

Thatcher got 43.9% of the vote in 1979, which was admittedly an excellent recovery from 35.8% in October 1974.

Thereafter, in 1983 and 1987, her share of the vote fell slightly, hardly a firm basis for the vicarious Tory triumphalism of Hobsbawm, Jacques and Stuart Hall of *Marxism Today*.

Baldwin, Churchill, Eden, McMillan, even the Heath of 1970, would have sneered at this kind of performance achieved in the face of a divided opposition.

We shall look later on at the details of the failure of her project and its contribution to her downfall.

Those we have mentioned failed to weigh correctly the political trajectory of Thatcherism.

In December 1990, when the Lady was already well and truly Turned, *Marxism Today* appeared with an article by Hall and Jacques



Thatcher becomes leader of the Tory Party in 1974. She did not dispense with all of Heath's policies

(presumably printed just too early) which burred as follows: "Thatcher herself is one of the most astute and powerful of contemporary political leaders and her drive for more power is remorseless — not least because it is not personally but ideologically driven: she means to use whatever kind of powers she can command for a Higher Purpose. In addition, there is still a year to go before the election timetable begins to run against her."

This profound-sounding blather is based on a failure to grasp the first principles of Thatcherism.

In fact Thatcherism was first and foremost an attempt to mount a major offensive against the working class, to break its militancy, to cut back the gains it had made since 1945, particularly in the areas of trade union organisation, political representation, the welfare state and nationalisation so as to remove it as a barrier to economic restructuring, enhanced efficiency and greater profitability.

This attempt to decisively and fundamentally transform the balance of class forces was essentially based on opening up the UK economy — and the UK workers — to international competition via a bonfire of controls and integrating UK capital into international capital. Heath was Brussels. Thatcher was Brussels, Hong Kong, Bonn, Tokyo, New York.

We must not underestimate the growing interpenetration and interlocking of different sectors of capitalism. But Thatcherism was prepared to accept that much of traditional manufacturing industry

would go to the wall. The recession and mass unemployment that a monetarist approach would engender, would decisively undermine the confidence and fighting ability of the working class.

The bloc of commercial and financial interests and multinational corporations would be the winners but a smaller more efficient manufacturing industry would eventually be reconstructed on the backs of a defeated working class.

While the collapse and renovation of manufacturing industry was being fashioned, Britain's balance of payments would be financed by the performance of the financial and commercial bloc in the world financial boom and the oil money given by the buoyant market in oil.

Manufacturing industry must jack itself up to the standards of Germany and Japan or simply get out of the game.

In economic terms Thatcher was an international capitalist player reluctant even to subordinate her internationalism to a more limited European base via the EEC. This would limit both her political nationalism and her economic freedom. Where Heath wanted Europe, Thatcher wanted the world.

Thatcherism was thus firmly based upon the City, the Treasury, the giant transnationals and, somewhat surprisingly, the CBI, who, apart from threatening a bare-knuckled fight at the height of the recession of the early 1980s, went along with the new project.

Some 30% of the CBI's constituents of course are not industrial companies. Larger multinationals are represented. Many CBI members welcomed the opportunity for restructuring and pushing up productivity, and the drive to weaken trade unionism.

Once Thatcherism is understood as an economic project, then it is essential to examine the ideology it generates.

Organised around the poles of anti-Stalinism, anti-collectivism, anti-socialism, Thatcherite ideology inflated and tied together social anxieties, fears and phobias such as:

- concern over inflation
- increasing crime
- the failures of the educational system
- the overweening power of the unions
- the bureaucratic inefficiency of the welfare state
- the image of a Britain packed to bursting with immigrants.

It agreed with what it saw as the popular sentiment that something must be done about these social ills and it suggested that a strong state would quickly get amongst them and sort things out — in short order.



Thatcherism was firmly based on the City, Treasury and the CBI



The battle for Orgreave, miners' strike 1984. Thatcher went back to the 1920s in her willingness to use force to break the working class

The "nanny state" looking after citizens ineffectively from cradle to grave shifted initiative, powerful unions crippled production and individual choice. Something must be done about it. We get looked after best when we stand on our own two feet and look after ourselves.

We make best use of our hard-earned cash when we spend it ourselves — rather than handing it over to a bureaucratic, inefficient state to spend it for us. We spend it best when we spend it on our own house and our own shares.

We must concentrate a lot more on earning, saving and spending cash and less on the sexual intercourse which had started in 1963, particularly its more perverted forms. The family must be rehabilitated as the repository of decency, suppression and economic rationality.

It was no good simply going on and on about all this, however, whilst consuming more and more double scotches in saloon bars in Mitcham, Surrey or Milton Keynes whose name, by the way, needed changing as well. Something had to be done about it, *something would be done about it*, and Thatcher was the woman to do it *and do it now*.

Stuart Hall of *Marxism Today*, a professor at the Open University thought all this was simply bloody marvellous.

Impressed by its novelty, he claimed that at the dark heart of Thatcherism there lay this "authoritarian populism" which increasingly colonised the proletarian psyche and constituted a new "common-sense".

Whatever his more recent disavowals, his writings urged that Thatcherism is essentially a powerful, compelling, new set of ideas which has gripped the imagination of key sections of the working class and guaranteed their electoral support for the Conservatives.

But what is really novel about the ideologies used by Thatcherism?

Surely it represents simply a foregrounding of certain relatively ancient and reactionary ideas and stereotypes which have long subsisted in bourgeois ideology and working class consciousness co-existing with contradictory social

democratic and socialist ideas.

What is the evidence that those ideas — which have come to the surface often in the past — were brought decisively and distinctively to the foreground in the years between 1975 and 1990?

Looked at from the angle of politics rather than impact on consciousness, were not Lord Salisbury and Stanley Baldwin authoritarian populists? Bonar Law and Churchill surely were.

Is not authoritarian populism simply "Victorian values" suitably updated?

"The failure of Thatcherism opens up the possibility of change in Conservative policy and this potential should not be underestimated. But it is likely to be less exciting and more sober than it is to the taste of those who, regressing to the mentality of primitive Trotskyism, pose splits and military adventures."

Did not Thatcher at best discover ideology and authoritarian populism in the same sense that Christopher Columbus discovered America?

Stuart Hall would argue that the novelty of Thatcherism lies in its original orchestration and powerful projection of these ideas in the context of the great reach and availability of media technology.

But if that is so we are really saying little more than that Thatcher, Tebbit and Co. were forceful, imaginative politicians able to exploit to the full changes in technology

and political packaging.

The claim that authoritarian populism has been "relatively hegemonic", has won the consent of the working class, has ensured that the political leadership of the nation has been exercised in the '80s with minimal resistance and with the need for minimal coercion, is even more questionable.

Evidence from all the opinion polls and surveys, particularly the annual volumes of the *Social Attitudes*, a crude way of measuring consciousness, but the best readily available, demonstrates large majorities, larger than in the '70s, for social democratic rather than Thatcherite attitudes.

There is large-scale support for a "socialist-type society" rather than a "capitalist-type society", collectivism against individualism, the welfare state, higher taxation, even trade unionism (although obviously related to its depletion in the last decade).

The striking point about the supporters of authoritarian populism is the lack of evidence they adduce for their flights into "cultural studies". Cultural studies, by the way, is Hall's academic subject, and that tells us a lot about his over-emphasis on ideology.

It is true that for example, Thatcher's promise of "free collective bargaining" was very important in 1979 and 1983 in winning skilled manual workers to her banner.

This bespeaks little in terms of novelty, as Heath promised the same and won in 1970 and, put somewhat crudely, skilled workers voted for Thatcher in 1979 because they believed her policies would put more money in their pockets.

The fortunes of Thatcher's economic policy, the fact that average earnings rose faster than prices between 1983 and 1988, concessions such as the engineered 1987 pre-election boom, bribes such as the sale of council house at bargain basement prices, *material not ideological factors*, gave Thatcher what success she gained as the difference electorally between the South and the North and Scotland demonstrates.

And that success owed more to the quirks of the election system, a split opposition, a divided Labour Party, not a little luck, as well as these factors in building together a

contradictory coalition of *only 43%* of the vote.

This 43% patch-up represented *essentially, at bottom*, the vote not of authoritarian populism, but the vote of those who had done well, or thought they would do well, out of Thatcherism, or thought they would do better out of Thatcherism than they would do out of the alternatives on offer.

Economics — in the full sense of the term — is what Thatcherism has been about. Economics in the full sense of the term is the key explanation for her support in the 1980s. As she painfully discovered in November 1990, the proof of the pudding lay in the eating.

Set in historical perspective, Thatcherism represents one phase in the history of Conservative Party. It is not the conclusion of that history. It is not the Party's fate. It can be modified. It can be dropped. But neither is Thatcherism the preserve of one woman or the politics of one small group. It was widely accepted by the Party and by capital as a coherent response to the problems of capital.

Our survey demonstrates that change is likely, for the Party possesses an extended repertoire of responses and, as we have recently seen confirmed, a fast-reaching organisational flexibility.

There is not one strand of conservatism but many.

Despite the recent rhetoric of principle, the essential imperative over the years has been, as Peel stated long ago, to preserve what is essential by accepting change in the inessential.

As the old Sicilian says in di Lampedusa's *The Leopard*, "Things must change so that they can stay the same".

Thus, in response to different political and economic pressures, different problems thrown up by the class struggle, very different policies and strategies have been pursued.

Indeed, as the great political novelist, Anthony Trollope, remarked: "...no reform, no innovation — experience almost justifies us in saying no revolution — stinks so foully in the nostrils of an English Tory as to be absolutely irreconcilable to him."

The failure of Thatcherism opens up the possibility of change in Conservative policy and this potential should not be underestimated. But it is likely to be less exciting and more sober than is to the taste of those who, regressing to the mentality of primitive Trotskyism, pose splits and military adventures.

The dialectic of continuity and change we have examined dictates that in the first instance, change is likely to be based upon political events — the economic situation, the General Election — and in the first instance upon a development rather than a complete ditching of Thatcherism.

The dramatic changes introduced in turn by Heath and Thatcher were the product of electoral disaster and intense periods of class conflict and took some years to introduce.

Change will have its roots in the failures of Thatcherism and the leadership election of 1990 and it is to those that we will turn in the next article.



Thatcher on her way out, November 1990

Darwin, Bryan, and the socialist Book of Genesis

AGAINST THE TIDE

Sean Matgamna



Last Sunday I made Thomas, my 12 year old son, the excuse for watching *Inherit the Wind* once again, on TV.

Made in 1960, this is a fine movie about the 1925 "Monkey Trial". A young American school teacher was charged, at the instigation of Christian fundamentalists, with teaching Darwin's theory of evolution; and he was found guilty.

A strange business. Stranger still was the role played in it by William Jennings Bryan, for decades America's leading left-wing populist. Three times a candidate for US President, champion of the poor and the oppressed, enemy of the monopolists and big bankers, and Secretary of State in Woodrow Wilson's government from 1912 to 1915, Bryan had long been a sort of Tony Benn in American politics.

But in the "Monkey Trial" Bryan appeared for the prosecution, who, taking their stand on the literal truth of the Bible, sought — in 1925! — to jail a teacher for daring to teach Darwin!

The case for the defence was put by Clarence Darrow, a perennial legal champion of civil liberties.

Frederic March, an actor who was witch-hunted by the McCarthyites, played Bryan as a twitchy, vain, glutinous, dogmatic, kindly and — I found — likeable old man, proud of his links with "the people" and fighting a ridiculous battle on their behalf. Privately he appeals to Darrow, an old acquaintance, to leave the people's Christian beliefs alone. Those beliefs are the best they have in poverty-stricken, closed-in lives, he tells him.

Now I know little about William Jennings Bryan and his religious beliefs, and not much about American populism.

But I read something recently which made the drama of William Jennings Bryan at the "Monkey Trial", depicted in lightly fictional form on the little screen in Thomas's room, seem to me to be a parable about the left.

It seems that Bryan hated Darwinism — the idea that animal species, including humankind, evolve through "natural selec-

tion" and "the survival of the fittest" — for reasons other than Christian fundamentalism. He hated, and had spent his political life fighting, the doctrines known as "Social Darwinism", or ideas like them.

The "Social Darwinists" took Darwin's picture of nature and made an ideology of it for society, justifying the domination of the rich and powerful over the poor and dispossessed. It was nature's law, they said.

This version of "Darwinism" added a "scientific" gloss, and sometimes could give a messianic elan, to old bourgeois attitudes that had already produced the savage 1834 Poor Law in Britain well before Darwin published his scientific theories.

Social Darwinism said that savage pre-welfare-state capitalism was the only possible, and therefore the only moral, system. It worked to stop people imagining even a welfare capitalism.

It openly stigmatised all the poor with the racial inferiority now alleged only by the most lunatic racists, and only against blacks. And those Social-Darwinist ideas were the trend of the times in the early part of this century. They had great power — because, entwined through they were with bourgeois special pleading, they were nourished by shreds of truth — and they carried all before them.

Turning observations about evolution in the wild into precepts for running society and into an ideology justifying exploitation and oppression by "the fittest", "Social Darwinism" was indeed a nasty and inhuman piece of brute bourgeois self-righteousness. It stank with the smell of the slums and of the workhouses, and it would later stink with the smell of the racist death camps.

So Bryan had social reasons, going beyond mere religious belief and reaching deeper than mere foolish Biblical dogmatism, for opposing all forms of "Darwinism".

He, and others like him, used religious ideas about the uniqueness of humankind, created whole by a supreme being, to assert social and political claims here and now — that men and women were not beasts, that they should not be treated as cattle, and that all were equal under God.

I assume that the great old populist did believe in the Bible when he stood up in court to make a fool of himself in the eyes of the educated world. But Bryan thought that the "Word of God" he defended was also the word authorising the struggle for a better human society than the one American

capitalism had so far made.

And of course it was all nonsense. Against science the book of Genesis was untenable. Bryan's stand on the Bible could only bring ridicule and discredit on him, and a measure of discredit on all his ideas. The real solution to the problem presented by the unholy alliance of bourgeois social ideas with science was to unite the proletariat — or, in Bryan's terms, "the people" — with science. Bryan went the opposite way.

The "parable" seems to me to be this: The left too has often opposed an evil capitalist system on platforms as senseless as that on which WJ Bryan tried to fight Social Darwinism. It is one of the main reasons why the left is now in disarray. It is the keystone of Marxist politics that the class struggle occurs not only on the economic and political fronts, but also on the ideological front.

What happens on the ideological front conditions and shapes what happens on the political and economic front.

For decades the left — I mean the honest, militant left — has been in disarray and in retreat on the front of ideas. Pressure from the ideas of the bourgeoisie — endowed with vast resources as they are, and aided by the reformists, with their outright bourgeois ideas — is always with us. In addition to that, Stalinism worked like a cancer within the left, appropriating, changing, perverting and internally disrupting old left-wing ideas.

Black was declared white, and not only on the level of straight lies. Goals, ends, means were redefined and redefined again, out of all recognition.

People in revolt against capitalist oppression wound up justifying or calling historically progressive systems more murderously oppressive than any capitalist oppression except Nazism in its final paroxysm. Starting with opposition to their immediate oppression, and trying to hold their own against the relentless pressure of the bourgeoisie and their ideas, left-wingers based themselves on general ideas about the world which were often blatantly nonsensical.

The prerequisite for mass socialist belief in the putrid Stalinist myths about the various "socialist fatherlands" — with their philosopher kings and their all-regimenting fascist-like states — was the need to deny what the bourgeoisie said about them. My enemy's enemy is my friend — or, in this case, workers were in effect saying of the totalitarian state and its bureaucratic ruling class: my enemy's enemy is me, therefore it is me over there too...

The clearest example in Britain today is Arthur Scargill, with his pixillated notions — even now! — about the Stalinist systems.

And not just the Stalinist left has gone astray, but much of the would-be Trotskyist left too. On most of the essential questions about the world, the neo-Trotskyist left stood on the same ground as Stalinism. Critically, to be sure, championing the rights of the workers, but accepting the fundamental nonsense that the Stalinist societies were a progressive alternative to capitalism.

The small, isolated, resource-starved rearguard of Bolshevism, the Trotskyist groups have frequently sustained their commitment to the struggle against the bourgeoisie by endorsing the political equivalents of the Book of Genesis, and occasionally the equivalents of the Koran and the Book of Mormon too!

The worst example I know of is the uncritical endorsement — as proof of the superiority of socialistic methods — of Mao's late-'50s "Great Leap Forward" in China. In reality that was an attempt at an economic forced march by the totalitarian state in which an unknown number of Chinese — perhaps 30 million: no-one knows for sure! — senselessly lost their lives. Yet you will find the weighty journal *Fourth International*, then published by Ernest Mandel and Michel Pablo, reproducing Chinese claims of success with all the credulity of a medieval peasant listening to the words of a priest announcing a new religious miracle!



Nor is it just a matter of illusions in Stalinism. In Britain the broad left — from the SWP through to Michael Foot — for decades opposed the bourgeois policy on the EC by standing on a hopeless and bankrupt little Englandism!

Many still do. Instead of endorsing any progress away from the national narrowness that bred two world wars, criticising the class nature of the emerging capitalist Europe, and seeking to serve working-class interests within that Europe, the broader left chose to "defend" working-class interests by standing on the untenable position that the British bourgeoisie itself had reluctantly had to abandon. It was, and is, ideological Ludism.

A respect-worthy and loyal working class fighter like Dennis Skinner is, on this and similar questions, an out and out reactionary compared to a John Major or a Margaret Thatcher!

The "struggle on the ideological front" is not like a physical battle, or a trade union battle, or an election. In all of those you know roughly who won and who lost. Defeat on the ideological front comes in many different forms.

It can be creeping and insidious. It can come disguised as a great new idea, or a get-rich scheme. It can seem to offer big advantages and enormous price reductions on the political and industrial front; and then you find it is no longer the same political or industrial front!

The greatest and worst defeats are those in which the working class movement and the left are driven back to take refuge in old, discredited ideas.

The worst inner political setbacks occur when we are unable to deal with the problems of the real world except by the spinning of fantasies about socialist fatherlands, or by reading alien scenarios into inappropriate situations, thus, for example, transforming Ba'thist dictators or military dictators in Argentina into "anti-imperialists". You could make a very long list from the experience of post-Trotsky Trotskyism.

The spectacular collapses of Stalinism pose a hard choice to the Trotskyist left. The truth, however unpalatable it may be, is that for decades the would-be Trotskyist movement subsisted by proclaiming the true ideas of working-class self-emancipation alongside and entwined with nonsense, some of it pernicious anti-working class nonsense. We sought reassurance, despite everything, from the world-wide social weight of the Stalinist movements.

That reassurance helped to sustain those currents of "Trotskyism" that most adroitly adapted to Stalinism, with Ernest Mandel glibly and servilely theorising the "historic process" in the same way that Karl Kautsky theorised the practice of the Social-Democratic parties before World War 1.

No more. The Trotskyist movement will now either cut loose fully, and renew itself politically and ideologically, or it will sink, still attached to Stalinism, and die. If it does not cut loose, it will deserve to die, as Bryan's poisonous populist mixture of good intentions and benighted confusion deserved to die. And did.



Those who do not learn from history are condemned to relive it

Left: the people's militia formed by Fidel Castro's revolutionary government marches through the streets of Havana in February 1961. Two months later, in April, Castro's forces defeated an invasion by US-backed right-wing exiles at the Bay of Pigs.

Castro's 26 July movement had overthrown the corrupt, rotten, despotic, unequal, US-backed Batista regime in January 1959. The revolution, led by a small band of guerrilla fighters and promising democracy, national liberation and social justice, had huge support.

But as Castro moved to nationalise US property, the US became hostile. Castro, in response, sought aid from the USSR and teamed up with Cuba's Moscow-line Communist Party. Until the late '60s, at least, Cuba remained a much more free society than any Stalinist regime, and Castro and — especially — his comrade Che Guevara remained critical of Moscow dogma.

But bit by bit the regime congealed into Stalinist shape. Now Castro is a last-ditch defender of the command economy.



Mike Leigh has a problem on his mind

Life is a dilemma

Film

Tony Brown reviews *Life is Sweet*

Mike Leigh has got a problem on his mind that he is finding difficult to resolve. It is the same dilemma, re-expressed in *Life is Sweet*, that was at the heart of his 1989 film *High Hopes*.

The similarities between the two films stand out. Leigh is saying that those who profess to be political while doing nothing active lose their inner being, and that those who maintain their spirit, regardless of their overt politics and despite the times, are better able to face the future.

In *Life is Sweet*, Wendy and Andy live in Tottenham with their 23 year old twin daughters Nicola and

Natalie. They are your typical working family, and much time, perhaps too much, is given to establishing their characters.

There is also too much of the dreadful Aubrey. The purpose of his tiresome restaurant venture can only be to satirise the pretentious eating scene. It doesn't work.

The family's foibles are amusing and readily identifiable. If nothing else Leigh has an acute ear for dialogue.

Andy is a gunner, even though he follows Spurs. He's always gunner do the bathroom, or the front door, but something gets in the way every time. He's loveable and easily conned.

Wendy is always cheery, looking for a laugh in every situation. Natalie is a serious minded plumber who works and saves for her trip to America.

Nicola is the fly in the ointment. Her shrillness and self-isolation masks her intense unhappiness and insecurity. She does get all the good one liners however.

She considers herself a feminist and socialist, and wears anti-poll

tax t-shirts.

But she spends her life as a recluse waiting only for her boyfriend to come around when everyone else is at work. Her needs are so apparent you feel like yelling out for someone to talk to her, to try to reach her.

Thankfully, Nicola's lover confronts her and tells her he wants to know her not just sleep with her. This is the beginning of an intense final fifteen minutes.

Wendy and Nicola finally talk. It's vigorous and genuine. Wendy appeals to Nicola to start living, to join a socialist group, go on demonstrations, live her beliefs.

It is not one of those guilt-laden mother daughter conversations, it is an expression of love and an encouragement for hope.

It is a very moving scene. The audience feels for them. It is a human drama, and that is rare in the cinema because emotions are too often cynically manipulated, or simply ignored.

Similarly in *High Hopes*, Leigh captures in one scene the dilemma in his central characters, and their relationship.

They have been living together for years. He is the political half, pessimistic about the world and certain that capitalism is in decay, she talks less about politics and what she really wants is to have a baby.

The revelation isn't that he supposedly believes in political action yet is so pessimistic about the world that he can't face bringing up a baby, while she has the confidence to try.

It's the scene in their bedroom where she explains why the baby is so important, that you realise that their relationship hinges on his reply.

In capturing these moments Leigh provokes his audience to feel and think.

He may not be able to resolve his dilemma but to engage us in feeling for Nicola and to be moved by her plight is itself uplifting and what cinema should be about.

Maybe his next film will have the political character involved acting upon his/her beliefs and being fortified by so doing.

Chernobyl: the effects go on and on

Television

Jean Lane reviews BBC2's *Horizon* programme on the tragic result of the Chernobyl disaster

It was the absence of anything else on Monday night (22nd) that led me to switch to BBC2 for what I expected would be yet another story about Chernobyl.

Surely after all this time, I thought, it would be just another rehash. Not being very scientific minded, I had never really understood what had gone wrong except that it was very dangerous, its effects would last a very long time and it was further evidence that the Russian bureaucrats were at best secretive and at worst responsible for the worst nuclear accident ever.

What *Horizon* showed was the detective work involved in finding out just what had happened. It also showed that the problem is not over by any means.

When the reactor blew, spewing radioactive dust over surrounding republics and eventually across Europe, the force was so great that the giant lid was blown off and came to rest precariously on its side on top of the reactor. The radioactivity was so great that it took some time before anyone worked out a way to look inside

the reactor room.

When they did it was empty. Where had the reactor gone? It had burrowed through the complex's lower floors and created a lava flow similar to a volcano.

The robots brought in to remove the dangerous debris, both in the complex and on the roof, were incapable of doing so because they broke down when met by the radioactivity. So, as a result, soldiers and scientists dressed in inadequate protective clothing removed the debris by hand!

British nuclear workers are allowed a maximum exposure of 5 Roentgens per year. Those Chernobyl workers were exposed to hundreds of Roentgens. Closer to the centre it reached 5000 Roentgens.

You can guess the conclusion. They were awarded certificates of honour and received a monetary reward, but many have died and those who survive are given little assistance.

The reactor lid will eventually fall and that will cause an enormous release of more radioactive dust.

Incredibly, the scientists who remain, still trying to work out how to fix this catastrophe, told *Horizon* that no Western scientists had visited Chernobyl, nor had any officials of the International Atomic Energy Agency.

The Western experts, with the Soviet government, have abandoned them. Such shortsightedness could well lead to many thousand more deaths.



Testing the fields outside Chernobyl for radioactivity. Western experts and Soviet leaders have abandoned those working to clean up the effects of the world's worst nuclear disaster



This is Hal Draper's dedication for his last book, *"Karl Marx's Theory of Revolution, volume 4: Critique of Other Socialisms"*

THIS VOLUME IS DEDICATED to the student and worker revolutionaries of China who fought for workers' power through workers' democracy from below in the bravest popular upheaval ever seen, against the bureaucratic-collectivist ruling regime that calls itself "Communist", and who temporarily yielded before the monstrous massacre of June 4, 1989

executed by the bureaucratic-military dictatorship, assassins of the people. The association of this counter-revolutionary tyranny with the name of Karl Marx is the biggest Big Lie in history, systematically falsified by both the Stalinist world of bureaucratic-collectivism and the decaying world of capitalism, and by the apologists of both exploitative systems. HD, June 5, 1989

LETTERS

Lessons of Kurdish tragedy

No defence for Iraq

I was pleased to see the recent editorials in *Socialist Organiser* on the Kurds.

If the US and Britain intervene to create an enclave for the Kurds, socialists should not condemn it.

If the West intervenes they will do so for their own reasons and it will not lead to a lasting and just solution but an enclave could provide a breathing space for the Kurds to reorganise and relaunch the fight for an independent Kurdistan.

The left can give the Kurds lectures on not looking to the West for a solution. But the Kurds did not look to the West for an answer to their problems. Instead they launched a revolt and attempted to create an independent Kurdistan by a mass popular uprising.

The tragedy is that the Kurdish rebellion was not supplemented by a workers' uprising in Baghdad.

The hypocritical refusal of the US to intervene over the Kurds is proof that the war over Kuwait was not fought for democracy and the rights of nations.

In the aftermath of the war it is necessary to draw a balance sheet on what the war was centrally about. The war was about control of Kuwait,

or to be more precise, about the control of the oil in Kuwait. The war was about US, Britain and co. teaching Saddam Hussein and the Iraqi ruling order a lesson. This was not a lesson about democracy and the rights of small nations. No, this was a lesson to a regional sub-imperialist power not to get too ambitious. It was a war not about destroying, but about denting, the power of the Iraqi ruling order.

Many on the left stated that the US was aiming at old style colonial conquest. It was concluded that the war was about Iraqi national rights. Many socialists then decided to "defend Iraq" in the war.

Throughout the war this line of thinking was wrong. The war was a reactionary conflict for oil and regional power, and thus neither the US nor Iraq should have been supported.

If the war was about the colonial conquest of Iraq, why did the US stop its advance in southern Iraq?

The Iraqi military collapse was underestimated by everyone. The US faced no major military obstacles in its path to Baghdad. The US and its allies did not stop the advance out of some benevolent or principled concern for Iraqi national rights.



"The tragedy is that military defeat and collapse of Iraq did not lead to a revolution in Iraq and justice for the Kurds."

The advance was stopped, as far as I can see, for three reasons:

Firstly, any US military advance on Baghdad would have led to the crumbling and the break up of the coalition.

Secondly, if the war had become a war of military conquest then the Bush administration would have faced a rising tide of opposition in the United States.

Thirdly, the US military may well have exorcised the ghost of Vietnam but the US rulers do not want to get bogged down in the direct administration of conquered colonies.

Since World War II US imperialism has followed a strategy of helping friends across the globe. This strategy can be just as vicious as direct colonial rule.

The US acting in its own brutal self-interest halted the tanks in southern Iraq. Now they probably hope to make peace with a weaker Saddam

Hussein. The Kurds are now paying for this policy with their lives.

Iraq invaded Kuwait to expand its power in the region, increase its revenue and divert internal opposition. The US went in to dent an over-ambitious regional sub-imperialist power and to protect its oil supplies. The war was reactionary on both sides.

If the war was about Iraqi national rights then why did thousands and thousands of Iraqi conscripts refuse to fight and surrender? The Iraqi conscripts saw the war for what it was. They did not want to die for Saddam Hussein.

The tragedy is that the soldiers in the coalition armies did not do likewise. The tragedy is also that military defeat and collapse did not lead to a revolution in Iraq and justice for the Kurds.

Tony Dorman
Manchester

How does the SWP do it?

EYE ON THE LEFT

By Chris Reynolds

How do they do it? During the Gulf war *Socialist Worker* changed its line from one hostile both to US intervention and to Saddam Hussein, to support for Saddam because he was "playing an anti-imperialist role", and then to simple pacifism.

And each time it made the change without any visible process of discussion or dissent among the SWP members who sell and sustain *SW*.

The same magic is worked even on political issues directly connected to immediate activity. On the poll tax *SW* shifted from arguing that only trade union boycotts could be effective, and community campaigning was a waste of time, to arguing that community campaigns could win after all. Again, there was no visible process of raising objections to the old line, debating, and finding new answers.

How do they do it? A clue can be got by close reading of a recent SWP circular, "Time to dig roots".

The circular explains: "We changed the routine of our work during the Gulf war because we found many of the old branch committee structures were an obstacle to reaching out beyond the party..."

"We will not be able to reach out and attract the political minority if we simply slide back into a reinstatement of those old structures. Nothing would be worse than a return to the routine three hour long weekly branch committee meetings."

"We suggested during the war the use of 'troikas' — the secretary, paper organiser and the recruitment officer — to lead the branches, meeting for half an hour before each weekly meeting. Where these exist the work has gone forward very well."

"But in reality the 'troikas' have not existed in many branches..." The circular goes on to propose a somewhat revised troika-type system.

In and of itself the proposal may well be sensible.

Much of the general argument of the circular is also sensible. It argues for making *Socialist Worker* sales central to SWP branch activity, involving every SWP member in those sales, and building weekly branch discussion meetings.

But what seems to be going on here — under the common-sense proposals — is the shutting down of whatever little internal discussion there was in SWP branches.

The weekly branch meetings are in fact open

forums where someone gives a talk on basic socialist politics and practical announcements are made. Detailed, serious and critical examination of *SW's* politics is not on the agenda:

I don't know whether the old branch committees discussed any political issues seriously. I doubt it. The entire culture of the SWP would weigh heavily against it. But at least the possibility was there. Now it is gone.

Between its branches and its small Central Committee, the SWP — as far as I know — has very sketchy structures. The result must be that virtually all political debate is confined within the Central Committee.

The Central Committee relates to the SWP members as a "monolithic" unit — information about differences within the CC seems to exist only in the form of rumours — so the members are atomised individual consumers of "the line" which comes down from the Central Committee.

The SWP does have a yearly conference. But — as the pre-conference bulletin for their November 1990 conference put it — "the practice of sending resolutions to conference has virtually ceased". The conference, as far as I can see, is only a forum for a couple of hundred leading activists to comment on and amend the Central Committee's proposals.

This ultra-centralised operation has developed bit by bit over 20 years.

Rational debate between SWP members and political currents outside the SWP has also atrophied — thanks to many years of sectarian tactics — and the internal and external processes reinforce each other.

Debate always carries costs. But the SWP's cost-cutting exercise, like so many others, is short-sighted. It produces irrational, unstable politics, and an organisation unable to argue those politics. Isaac Deutscher's description of the Stalinist parties in their ultra-left period in the early '30s becomes more and more relevant.

"When the European communist went out to argue his case before a working-class audience, he usually met there a Social-Democratic opponent whose arguments he had to refute and whose slogans he had to counter. Most-frequently he was unable to do this, because he lacked the habits of political debate, which were not cultivated within the party, and because his schooling deprived him of the ability to preach to the unconverted."

"He could not probe adequately into his opponent's case when he had to think all the time about his own orthodoxy and to check perpetually whether in what he himself was saying he was not unwittingly deviating from the party line. He could expound with mechanical fanaticism a prescribed set of arguments and slogans; but unforeseen opposition or heckling at once put him out of countenance."

Sometimes you cannot take offence

While I agree with Mark Holden's assessment of slogans (*SO* 482) I did think he was being a little short-sighted in his objections to the use of the word "queer".

I would question outright condemnation. This is because there are examples of "appropriation" of words and language that are used to express hatred and fear — by the oppressed — which can be progressive.

Mark's condemnation was two fold. First, that using "queer" as a strategy was ineffective: confusing to potential allies and potentially divisive. It could undermine the building of a movement against the current at-

tacks on lesbian and gay men. This may be so, I don't want to take issue with that.

Second, that it is straightforwardly offensive. Personally, he may find it so, but I do not think we can draw political conclusions about that. Mark implies we can.

Words and language are inseparable from social relations and as these change so language comes to have different meanings.

Take a trivial example of sexist language — the word "crumpet". It is trivial, ridiculous. But at the same time it has been part of a category of sexist language which suggests the consumption of women or parts of women (eg. cherry, honey, sugar, etc, etc).

"Crumpet" is now often used

by women (or by men expressing, they think, women's attitudes) towards men! This is unquestionably a reflection of women's increased sexual choices and autonomy.

Of course, for every single example of "appropriation" there are hundreds that can only be vile and offensive in intention — whatever their context. The progress of sexual freedom and equality between the sexes is limited.

I could, for instance, decide I wanted to call all women "bitches" as an expression of "sisterhood". Clearly, I would be regarded as a bit off the wall at best and probably downright offensive. You can't refer language at will.

But is it not the case that the use of the word "queer" is an ex-

pression of gay self-confidence and strength? If it is, then it would be wrong for us to make a political objection to its use.

We might object to its use in a slogan, in a particular way, tactically it may be wrong. We would certainly object to a political strategy that made the use of such words compulsory.

Words have no meanings other than those defined by a cultural context. It is possible for the language of "oppressors" to be at the same time self-confident, affirmative language of the oppressed. We can feel self-conscious about these uses but we shouldn't make political judgements about it. Sometimes you cannot take offence.

Cathy Nugent
Southwark

WHAT'S ON

"Trade unions and the law", Southwark SO meeting. 7.30, Two Eagles, Elephant and Castle. Speaker Tom Rigby

Tuesday 30 April
Lambeth Against the Witchhunt public meeting. 7.30, Lambeth Town Hall. Speakers include Dennis Skinner and Jeremy Corbyn
Meeting to organise a counter-demonstration to the 'Victory Parade'. 7.30, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square

Wednesday 1 May
"Socialists and Sexuality", East London SO meeting. 7.30, Oxford House, Derbyshire St. Speaker Janine Booth
Anti-cuts demonstration, Lambeth. Assemble 10.30, Brixton Oval. 12.00 Rally at Kennington Park

Thursday 2 May
"Their new world order", SW London SO meeting. 7.30, Lambeth Town Hall

Wednesday 8 May
"Crisis in the USSR", SO London Forum. 7.30, LSE, Houghton St, Holborn

Thursday 9 May
"Myths of Irish history", Liverpool SO meeting. 7.30, Hardman St TU centre

Saturday 11 May
"Secularism and Nationalism" seminar organised by Women Against Fundamentalism. 11.00-5.00, Wesley House, 4 Wild Court

Saturday 1 June
Socialist Movement AGM, Leeds

Saturday 8 & Sunday 9 June
"Resourcing the Future" conference organised by the Red Green Network. Kingsway Princetown College, Sidmouth Street.

Saturday 6 & Sunday 7 July
Middle East Peace Conference, organised by the Socialist Campaign Group of MPs, London

Saturday 13 July
"Cancel the Third World Debt" demonstration

Saturday 27 April
"Trade Unions and Energy", conference organised by SERA. 10.30-5.30, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square
Northampton Anti-Poll Tax Federation social. 8 till late, Racehorse Inn, £3

Monday 29 April
"Lessons of Iranian Revolution", Manchester SO meeting. 8.00, Bridge St Tavern
"Lessons from Australia — Labor in Power", Islington SO meeting. 7.30, Red Rose Club. Speaker Janet Burstall

Tube workers vote for strike

By an RMT member

London Underground workers' jobs fight got a boost on Monday 22 April.

TSSA, the booking clerks' union, announced the result of their ballot — a majority for strike action, 575 to 289.

The RMT ballot result will not be announced until 29 April, but all the signs are that it will be firmly for strike action. The TSSA result should help con-

vince any RMT waverers to vote yes.

The RMT Executive will meet on the 30th to decide the form the action will take. It is generally known that, initially at any rate, there will be 24-hour strikes.

Underground bosses are trying to intimidate workers. They have already issued letters threatening suspension and the sack for taking part in any action.

Apparently they have now printed more letters telling us we will be suspended or sacked, to

be issued after the first stoppage.

Managers will try to force staff to sign letters saying we will not take any further strike action. Not signing these letters will supposedly result in suspension or the sack.

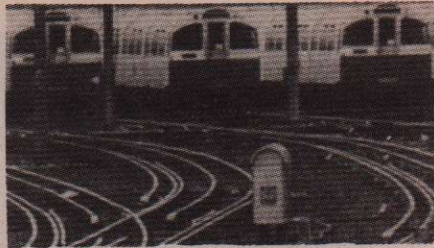
We will have to ensure that workers are united in refusing to sign these letters.

If the bosses press ahead anyway, and anyone is suspended or sacked, we will need to quickly escalate to all-out action. Otherwise management could potentially split the strike, and

activists would be wide open to victimisation.

Disgracefully, ASLEF will instruct their members to cross picket lines. Every RMT member should be talking to ASLEF members now, getting commitments from them that they won't cross picket lines.

Many ASLEF members are principled trade unionists, unlike their leadership, and will support RMT and TSSA. ASLEF members must put pressure on their leadership to unite with the other unions.



Trouble at t'Zoo



Les Hearn's

SCIENCE COLUMN

the opportunity to carry out their instinctive behaviours, feeding on unnatural diets and early death, often after nightmarish journeys. Animal "lovers" might concentrate more on these if they weren't so keen on eating them!

There are plenty of ways of improving the lot of zoo animals. One way is to encourage the natural foraging behaviour of some species. Food is concealed under the straw or leaf litter in the cage or compound.

Alternatively, food is made available on the solving of little problems, like pressing levers in a certain sequence or, for the apes, moving cage furniture around to be able to reach suspended food (or perhaps supplying simple tools, such as sticks, to enable them to reach the food).

The evidence is that animals take advantage of such "environmental enrichment". Whether they "enjoy" these activities is another matter, but there seems to be a reduction in stereotypic behaviours, such as pacing back and forth.

Many also "enjoy" various play and recreational activities, so giving animals (including mbirds) "toys" and other distractions can also enrich their environments.

Space is perhaps the major limitation on the natural behaviour of many animals, especially birds. But even here, caution is needed. Research into keeping poultry shows that chickens actually prefer cramped conditions in a perchery to the wide open land and, to the chickens, potentially dangerous spaces.

Habitats must contain areas where the animals can feel safe. Maximising living space costs money (as do many of the above-mentioned improvements). Supporters of the government's decision to spend no more on London Zoo draw attention to this limitation but curiously ignore the implication that more money is needed, not less. It is easy to say that the bigger animals should go to Whipsnade if London Zoo closes, but there are already lots of animals there.

Money would be required to buy more land and build accommodation. Neither could the other animals be just released into the wild. In some cases, their habitats are disappearing and their wild cousins are almost extinct. In others, they would not know how to find their food or escape from their predators.

Some could be found homes in other zoos but, in reality, most of them would be "put to sleep".



True to form, the Tory government has been squeezing the budget of London Zoo, while insisting that it become "commercially viable".

The consequences of such a policy are seen at the Natural History Museum, where research scientists have lost jobs and important projects have been curtailed while management tries to pull in the paying customer with popular exhibitions.

Another of the government's actions has cut the ground from under the Zoo's feet by making it impossible to charge school pupils for educational trips in school time while not providing enough money for schools to fund these.

The London Zoological Gardens are not, as might be suspected from the "quality" press, and from some otherwise fairly enlightened politicians, a sort of glorified factory farm or circus, where exotic creatures are crammed in cages for the amusement of gaping fools. They are an important educational resource; they are a centre for the conservation of many rare species; they are a centre for research into animal husbandry, veterinary medicine, animal physiology and behaviour, and ecological relationships.

It is certainly true that, in the past, many of the larger animals have been confined in too small spaces, with little to do. It is even true that many are still confined in unsuitable accommodation.

However, the zoo has made great efforts to put this right. The great apes, for example, have a fairly sizeable space, made up of sleeping room, play area and an outside wooded region. Many of the birds live in mixed society in large aviaries and can fly fairly freely.

Compared to some mythical paradise, these animals may not have an ideal life. But the real comparison must be with the shrinking habitats, infested with predators and parasites, threatened by human encroachment, and often prey to poachers.

The sudden concern for the plight of the animals is, of course, a smokescreen. Incomparably more animals suffer confinement, denial of

Red-baiters fix CPSA elections

By John Moloney

If at the next General Election you were handed an official government leaflet with your ballot paper and that leaflet described the Labour Party as communist you would be surprised and angry.

Yet a similar thing is happening in the CPSA, the union which organises lower grade admin staff and typists in the Civil Service.

With each voting pack (election addresses and ballot papers) for the NEC, the right-wing leadership has included an official union note showing who is standing for each of the three political factions which are contesting the elections.

The three factions are called Broad Left, Broad Left '84, and the Moderates. On the note, the first two are called "Broad Left/Militant" and "BL'84".

It is clear that the right wing is trying to frighten the members with the Militant bogey man.

Although the Broad Left is indeed dominated by Militant, it contains SWP, supporters of Socialist Organiser, independents, etc. The other factions could, using the same method, be called quite accurately "BL'84/Stalinists" and "Moderates/Conservatives".

In CPSA the union is divided into sections, and each section has yearly elections. In the right-wing sections, such as Ministry of Defence, similar official notes have been sent out with the section ballot papers.

Following complaints, the MoD section had to issue an all-members circular. In it, it says that various people although members of the Broad Left are not members of Militant. It also includes all the candidates who are standing independently of the factions and who had been left off the first note.

As CPSA has 25,000 members in MoD, this has turned out to be a very expensive correction.

Lambeth ballots for strikes

By Dion D'Silva

Lambeth NALGO will soon have the results of its ballot for indefinite strike action.

NALGO is calling for no compulsory redundancies following the council budget of £25 million cuts with the loss of over 600 jobs. There is a mood of anger and determination. NALGO has had the biggest meetings in its history recently.

The brunt of the cuts has fallen on the voluntary sector

and non-statutory education — traditionally the least organised sections. However, the workers have mobilised the community in opposition.

The Lambeth Anti-Cuts Campaign aims to unite council workers, tenants, service users to oppose the cuts. The council is also not announcing where further £8 million cuts will be made because of the poll tax capping, but it will have to be in the more organised sections.

The Anti-Cuts Campaign is mobilising for mass strike action on 1 May. Assemble Brixton Oval, 10.30am, March to Kennington Park.

Manchester strike set to spread

By Tony Dale

The Manchester Social Services strike is set to spread.

35 NALGO members at two care centres are on official strike. The strike, which started at Ross Place Resource Centre on 19 March, follows a series of violent incidents with staff receiving injuries. The strike then spread to another centre on Dickenson Road, Longsight.

250 workers at other establishments in the Mental Health section are due to be balloted on joining the action.

The strikers are calling for extra staff and resources. The NHS "Care in the Community" is increasing the pressure on over-

worked Social Services staff.

There are plans for a one-day department-wide strike which would involve nearly 2,000 Social Services NALGO members.

Poll tax jailings

Two Trafford anti-poll tax activists are facing the threat of jail on Tuesday 23 April for poll tax non-payment.

A demonstration has been called to oppose Trafford Council's application to jail the two. The hearing will take place at Sale Magistrates Court.

Showdown on the railways

By a railworker

The RMT is heading for a showdown with British Rail once again. The main issue is the same as in 1989 — BR's attempts to take away the union's right to negotiate at all levels.

The media is also reporting threats being made over pay: the unions have rejected 6.5%.

BR has attempted to achieve its ends of putting all workers on flexible hours and flexible pay in preparation for privatisation by using the back door.

They have proposed various "restructuring packages" for various different groups of workers: signal and telecommunications, permanent way workers, senior conductors, signalmen, Red Star parcels, etc. each one contains proposals for 7-day, 24-hour working and pay controlled by the local manager.

In the case of the signal and telecommunication (S&T) BR have rushed faster, claiming a legal obligation following from the Hidden Report into the Clapham disaster.

However, when the union rejected the package once again last December BR decided to go for individual acceptances, sending a glossy brochure to each S&T worker's home address along with a form to sign accepting.

Sacked for striking

By a Manchester health worker

"I've been terribly hurt. We've given over 250 years of service between us to Oldham Health Authority, and they sacked us."

That's how Cath Gannon, one of the 34 medical records staff from Oldham Royal Hospital, describes her feelings at being sacked by the Health Authority for taking part in an official strike.

She adds: "I've been a NALGO member since I was 16. I'm not a steward or on the strike committee, I've never needed the union's help before — I need it, all 34 of us need it now."

The sackings came after the medical records staff in Oldham had tried for months to negotiate a regrading from Grade 2, which pays a maximum of under £7,500 a year, to Grade 3.

A total of five letters threatening dismissal were sent to strikers between 27 February and 8 March, despite the fact that talks were continuing and the strikers offered a compromise deal. On 11 March dismissal notices went out after a management ultimatum: some strikers were frightened into going back to work but most, the 34, stayed out.

The hospital started recruiting scabs almost the next day.

The process of "team briefings" held by local managers at work before this date was stepped up. And individuals were button-holed; if you don't sign you won't get promoted, or taken on permanently, or (in some cases) keep your job.

Compared to management's hard sell the union appeared to be doing very little. Little by little and one by one management has now got a majority on the scheme which they implemented for those who signed on 1 April. The union had meanwhile held a referendum ballot in the S&T and got 83% for defending the union's right to negotiate on their behalf and 67% saying the package wasn't good enough.

It is this action of not using the Machinery of Negotiation but going for individuals that the RMT is arguing about. A campaign is about to start, culminating in a ballot in 6 to 8 weeks' time involving all members covered by the Machinery of Negotiation (the bulk of railworkers) arguing that if they can do this with the S&T restructuring they can do it with every other restructuring too and ignore the union.

Because of the timing the whole situation now also involves a union campaign for a pay rise of at least the rate of inflation rather than BR's 6.5%. Watch this space.

On 20 April NALGO's North West District Council supported Oldham Health Branch's call for the NEC to back a national day of solidarity involving industrial action by NALGO members; a call likely to be reiterated by a special meeting of the Health Group on Pay on 8 May.

Donations and messages of support to: Frances Sherrington, NALGO Treasurer, Cytology, Community Services, Westhulme Hospital, Oldham OL1 2PN (cheques to "Oldham Health Records Strike Fund").

Mass May Day Demonstration — Wednesday 1 May, 12-2pm, Oldham Royal Hospital, Oldham (Details from strike office on 061 624 4128).

Libraries press 6-year claim

300 library staff are set to take strike action in Manchester in support of a grading claim.

Manchester library staff have been calling for better pay for years. A NALGO regrading claim has been outstanding for six years!

Library staff are among the lowest paid Manchester City Council employees. Now, workers have said enough is enough.

The strike is set to run from Wednesday 24 April to Tuesday 30 April, closing all the city's libraries.

SOCIALIST

ORGANISER

Eric Heffer's greetings to the 'Unshackle the Unions' conference on 27 April (from 11am at ULU, Malet St, London)

I'm delighted that the conference is taking place this weekend against the anti-union laws.

It is high time there was a fight back.

Unfortunately there has been relatively little

resistance so far, and the Tory government has been able to introduce laws which are the worst in Europe.

In fact, in the USSR now, the Russians are taking Thatcher as their model to follow.

I'm delighted to see workers fighting back, as they are in Liverpool now, and there should not be laws to be used against them.

I'm sure the conference will be a great success.

The Soviet working class moves back on stage

By Tony Brown

Mikhail Gorbachev's political obituaries are beginning to be written and Western news agencies are already trying to predict his successor.

Each day the crisis in Russia worsens and the pressure on Gorbachev and his allies intensifies. It has now reached the point where he is under attack from all quarters and his increasingly desperate appeals and decrees for order fall on deaf ears.

This week his Prime Minister, Pavlov, set out in a speech to the Soviet Congress how bad the economic situation was becoming. Rather than the predicted budget deficit of 27 billion roubles, it is now estimated that the deficit will reach 200 billion roubles.

Production this year is already down by 20% and worsening. 18 million are unemployed, and food is scarce.

Pavlov laid much of the blame for this state of affairs at the feet of

"The strikes are now more widespread than just the mines. Broad sections of the population support the miners' demand for new direct elections"

the striking miners. His answer was to use force if necessary to re-open the mines and to declare a state of emergency.

Pavlov wants to use the military against pickets and to declare the railways and power stations as essential services where it would be illegal to strike.

The Stalinist Soyuz group of Congress deputies and the top echelon of the military also want a state of emergency declared and for Gorbachev to introduce more hardline policies against the miners and the dissident republics.

But the strikes are now more widespread than just the mines. Recent demonstrations in cities like Minsk show that broad sections of the population support the miners' demand for Gorbachev's resignation and new direct elections.

The miners have now been out for two months and they have gradually hardened their call for political action over their initial pay and conditions demands. Other workers in Siberia, Georgia, the Ukraine and in Moscow and Leningrad have also supported the resignation demands.

In Georgia the ports and railways



Strikers in Minsk demand Gorbachev's resignation

have been blocked by strikers.

In the past Gorbachev has been able to go overseas and pull a diplomatic rabbit out of the hat that has quelled his opposition at home. But with the failure of his trip to Japan last week, even that resource seems to have gone wrong for him.

Not only will his international prestige as a deal maker have been tarnished, the desperately important yen he was after to prop up the economy will be sorely missed.

Gorbachev's and Pavlov's order to the miners, the republics and the opposition will not work. They will not be able to force the economy to start working again at the point of a gun.

They are no longer capable of forcing the republics across the breadth of the USSR to bend to Moscow. It doesn't work like that

anymore. But there are those in the bureaucracy and the military who are prepared to give it a go.

Within the army though there is no guarantee that the ranks will support the colonels if serious conflict does break out.

40% of the army are reported to be living in poverty and there is much lingering discontent among those and their families who have returned from Eastern Europe only to be forced to live in derelict and overcrowded housing with poor food and education for their children.

The move by Gorbachev and his allies to impose control from Moscow is just as likely to tip the balance to a complete breakdown in central authority or civil war. The republics, workers, political opposition and housewives are prepared to

fight on. Their deprivation is such that continuation of the strikes won't worsen their plight.

No resolution will be possible at the point of a gun. Nothing less than a break on the bureaucracy's hold on power will be acceptable. All the recent decisions and decrees by Gorbachev and his ministers point in the opposite direction. The situation cannot go on indefinitely.

It is not so important whether Gorbachev survives or not as CP General Secretary. But it will be enormously important if the combined weight of striking workers and pensioners, the unemployed and housewives, can bring about Gorbachev's downfall.

This will once again bring the Soviet working class back on to centre stage of Soviet and world politics.

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