

Answering the New Right pages 10-11



1992: the year the tide will turn

Centre pages



The law of the Maxwells

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Bank-and-file win in giant US union



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# SOCIALIST

ORGANISER

Unite the left!

## The triumph of unreason

# Ex-USSR:

# Market

# madness

# brings misery



Yeltsin says, 'Let them starve'

Anatoly Voronov reports from Moscow

Prices are skyrocketing but still there are no goods available in the shops.

Today I spent three hours in food queues looking for potatoes, meat and bread. I went to three shops and spent one and a half hours waiting before I could find any bread. Bread prices have increased five or eight-fold in two weeks.

Inflation is running at 10% per week.

The people are disgruntled and have been discussing the recent price rises while they wait in the queues. As yet there have been no mass protests. People are simply shocked. They are

trying to calculate how they will survive.

There has been one demonstration, held in Red Square, against inflation. It was organised by the old Stalinists and was, consequently, very small indeed.

A minimum wage of 342 roubles per month has been announced by the Russian government. The problem is that this wage falls far short of the basic minimum necessary to live. 342

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# Demonstrate to stop the Asylum Bill!

By Dion d'Silva

Trade unionists, Labour Parties and student organisations are organising for the mass demonstration in opposition to the Asylum Bill in London on Saturday 18 January.

The Tories are deliberately stirring up race hatred in the run-up to the General Election. The Asylum Bill aims to target refugees as part of the sordid Tory campaign to pin

**Demonstrate!**

**Saturday 18 January**  
**Assemble 1.00, Embankment, London**  
**Called by NUS London, phone 071-637 1181 for more details**

the blame for the economic crisis on immigrants.

The government wants white workers to turn against black. The labour movement must stand firm and show its opposition to the Asylum Bill and to racism.

The Asylum Bill legislation is only the latest in a long line of racist legislation.

The Bill includes:  
 • The fingerprinting of all asylum applicants  
 • Appeals against refusal of asylum to be lodged within 48 hours

• Families of homeless refugees will not have the right to Council housing while they await the outcome of their appeal  
 • No appeal rights against a refusal of asylum



## No more racist murders!

On 6 December, the second anniversary of the racist murder of 11 year old Tasleem Akhtar, Tasleem's family, members of the Tasleem Akhtar Memorial Committee, and local people gathered in Esme Road where

she was murdered. Flowers were laid, there was a prayer, 2 minutes silence, and a poem was read out.

The alleyway where Tasleem was murdered has been blocked

off (photo above). For more details contact: Tasleem Akhtar Memorial Committee, PO Box 1854, Camp Hill, Birmingham, B11 1NJ.

(Photo: Mark Salmon)

Although the Labour Party is opposing the Asylum Bill, Roy Hattersley speaking in the Commons said: "I will not let in bogus asylum seekers". Hattersley does not want to make a fuss during

the election run-up. But the Labour Party must not give an inch to demands for harsher immigration controls. The left's message must be clear: all of Britain's immigration laws are racist —

they should all be scrapped. Labour and the unions must stress black and white working class unity, fighting both against racism and against cuts, unemployment and for decent housing.

# Strike in Hungary

John Cunningham reports from Hungary

Workers in Hungary have taken the first step in expressing their growing dissatisfaction with the decline of living

standards, rising prices and low wages.

17 December 1991 saw the first 'sztráckenyer' (literally 'breadstrike': it is difficult to translate into English but means something like 'return to basics'). It was a largely symbolic affair, limited to a two hour stoppage, but met

with an enthusiastic response from the Hungarian workers' movement.

With miners and railway workers in the forefront, over 100,000 stopped work, some for longer than the two hours.

According to the Hungarian newspaper *Kurir* (Courier), about the same number didn't strike but showed sympathy with its aims and objectives by flying blue flags or wearing blue armbands.

Some newspapers dubbed the action the 'kék cédulás' strike (literally 'blue strip of paper'). This was a none-too-subtle slur on the workers' movement implying that the number of strikers had been grossly exaggerated.

It is a double insult because it equates the chosen colour of solidarity with the rigged elections of the late 1940s, when the Stalinists took over in Hungary. The ballot slips were also blue, and Communist Party hacks often voted 5 or 6 times.

Although only two hours long, the strike was an important step forward for the Hungarian workers, particularly for those still working in the State-controlled industries who are likely to bear the full brunt of future sell-offs, rationalisations and closures.

## Market madness brings misery

From front page

roubles is nothing — it is the equivalent of \$3.50.

People are worried about the future. For instance, rents in apartments are currently low, but the Moscow flats are being privatised and it is not clear how high rents will be pushed up.

Strangely, Yeltsin's popularity is still high, although the government itself is unpopular. This is an emotional time and people have still not broken from Yeltsin.

In a way the new bureaucrats round Yeltsin are actually worse than the old Stalinist bureaucrats. They are more corrupt and greedy. They understand that their position is unstable. They want to grab what they can today in case they lose their jobs tomorrow. The old Stalinists were at least sure of their position.

The prospects for the left in the immediate future are not too good. The problem for Russian socialists is the current low level of struggle. For instance, there have been no strikes against the price rises.

The Russian Party of Labour is in the process of clarifying its general political positions.

I am very concerned about the prospects for the poorest people in Russian society. The pensioners and growing numbers of unemployed will suffer. Our job is to organise these people.

## The lie machine

## Georgian coup promises grim future

By Neil Cobbett

A military council has taken power in the ex-Soviet republic of Georgia, after storming of the parliament building.

The new rulers have announced that they will bring ex-president Zviad Gamsakhurdia back to stand trial. Gamsakhurdia's whereabouts remain uncertain; he is said to be in Azerbaijan, and possibly heading for America.

Dzhava Ioseliani, joint leader of the military council, says that the council will remain in control "until stability is regained". The council says it will hold elections, probably in April, and will organise a forum of all parties to prepare for them.

The record of the council's leaders and the activities of their supporters in the National Guard and the sinister "Knights of Georgia" give the lie to their promises of democracy.

There are at least three major armed factions within the anti-Gamsakhurdia forces: Ioseliani's nationalists, Kitovani's National Guardsmen and Mereb Kostava's militiamen.

Ioseliani and Kitovani are said to favour a gradual return to democracy and the eventual creation of a constitutional monarchy; but they are also both, reportedly, admirers of the late fascist dictator of Spain, General Franco!

One of the first acts of the military council, the supposedly unified government representing all the opposition groups, was to close down all newspapers in Tbilisi and to ban all political meetings. The "Knights of Georgia" have continued to harass and attack supporters of Gamsakhurdia.

According to the British press, support for the military council is very patchy. The military council is in control of Tbilisi, but press reports say little about where power lies outside the capital. The network of regional prefects established by Gamsakhurdia to buttress his rule remains intact, and it is reported that Gamsakhurdia has vowed to return to Georgia to wage guerrilla war against the military council.

The situation looks unstable; and the council's supporters now seem seriously split.

Gamsakhurdia was jailed for nationalist activities in the '50s and '70s. He publicly recanted but re-emerged as a nationalist leader in 1988. In the wake of the April 1989 Tbilisi massacre (when Soviet troops killed 20 protesting Georgians), Gamsakhurdia became the only leader capable of uniting the nationalist movement and its factions.

He won overwhelming electoral support in October 1990 and in May 1991, when 85% voted for him as president.

He gained the support of the Georgian intelligentsia in addition to his important "home base" in the peasantry of western

Georgia.

His economic record as president and his allegedly capricious and dictatorial style of rule eroded his support, although almost all Georgians seem to have backed his chauvinistic attitude to the non-Georgian minorities in the republic.

The attempted USSR coup in August 1991 deepened the rifts in the nationalist movement. Gamsakhurdia vacillated, and seemed to lean toward the coup-makers. He knuckled under to their demand that Georgia's newly-formed National Guard be disbanded.

National Guard commander Tengiz Kitovani went into opposition with sacked prime minister Tengiz Sigua with the support of ex-Soviet foreign minister Eduard Shevardnadze.

In September the anti-Gamsakhurdia opposition attempted a first coup. Gamsakhurdia foiled it by appealing to the peasants of western Georgia to arm themselves and march on Tbilisi. The fact that he could not do this again during the recent fighting in Tbilisi suggests he has lost mass support.

After the September coup attempt, Gamsakhurdia declared martial law. Some newspapers were closed down, some journalists were barred from press conferences, and some of Gamsakhurdia's political opponents

**"Ioseliani and Kitovani are said to favour a gradual return to democracy but both are, reportedly, admirers of the late fascist dictator of Spain, General Franco."**

were jailed, most notably Dzhava Ioseliani (whose "Knights of Georgia" were responsible for the deaths of at least four Gamsakhurdia supporters when they fired on last Friday's peaceful demonstration [3 January] in support of the president).

Much of the National Guard continued freelance activities under anti-Gamsakhurdia leaders. The Soviet troops in Georgia remained neutral, and there was no effective centre of power.

Despite the authoritarian nature of the Gamsakhurdia regime, the opposition seems to be no more than a small middle-class group in Tbilisi, supported by a couple of thousand National Guardsmen under their disaffected officers.

The new rulers do not appear to have any alternative policies, any widespread support or any real motivation outside of personal animosity and distrust of Gamsakhurdia. They were brought to power by the 2,500 National Guardsmen, not by any mass movement of the Georgian workers or peasants.



Opposition forces celebrate the capture of the Georgian parliament building in Tbilisi

## THIS WEEK

**Market madness in the ex-USSR****The triumph of unreason**

**W**hat is happening in the former USSR now is a grotesque triumph of unreason.

In its destructiveness and senselessness, it will rank in history with the carnage of the First and Second World Wars as an almost inexplicable piece of 20th century madness.

At the behest of men like Boris Yeltsin and other ex-Stalinists, men who have been through their whole lives members of the corrupt old Stalinist ruling class, nearly 300 million people are now being pitched into the maelstrom of deliberately created or intensified economic chaos.

All efforts at rational and humane control of economic life are deliberately, ostentatiously, and wilfully rejected in a mad dash to create a functioning capitalist market economy in the shortest possible time.

According to the *Financial Times*, people in Moscow were already spending an average of 80 per cent of their incomes on food even before the price rises decreed on 2 January. Now prices have gone up to three, four, or five times what they were.

Some ninety per cent of Moscow's population will be forced down below the official poverty line. Forty per cent fear that they will lose their jobs in the coming chaos, and economic experts reckon that they could indeed.

Vast numbers will go hungry or starve. Famine conditions, not widely known in the USSR since the days of the Second World War, will reappear.

**T**he ex-Stalinist aspiring capitalists say to the people: fend for yourselves as best you can; starve if you have to.

Yeltsin and his friends, egged on by the gleeful bourgeoisie in the West, want capitalism. They are as inhumanly dogmatic and ruthless about it as ever Stalin was about his version of "socialism".

Their problem is that there is not in existence in most of the ex-USSR a real bourgeoisie. There are only the beginnings of one, crystallising out of the old mafia-like ruling class and the old black-marketeers and bandits. The economy is mainly state property still, not private property. Markets are rudimentary or chaotic.

In short, where in, say, Britain, the interplay of markets and profit in a mainly privately-owned economy exists as an organic historically-evolved system which works — however badly — nothing



From long queues — to no bread at all for the poorest?

like that exists in the USSR. It can only come into existence there as a result of a long journey through a murderous chaos.

What used to exist in the USSR was a badly decrepit command economy run by the central state, which notionally, and in part really, directed and planned the economy. In Stalin's day, not only economic privileges but also stark gun-to-the-nape-of-the-neck terror was the mechanism by which those at the top of the pyramidal ruling class exercised a dynamic and coordinating control over the economy.

After the 1950s, when the terror was relaxed, the bureaucracy became fatter and more complacent. It developed into a great corrupt mafia, squatting on society.

With the working class rigidly suppressed, and unauthorised markets and entrepreneurs driven underground and into the shadows, this system had neither the human rationality of democratic socialist planning, nor the brutal economic rationality of a free market regulated system ruled by the flow of profit.

In the 25 years before 1985, when Gorbachev came to power, the vast bureaucracy frustrated many attempts to reform the system from within and from on top.

Gorbachev took over a vast,

overextended mess, where up to 40% of output went annually to arms production to sustain the empire and the competition with Europe and America. With his "glasnost", Gorbachev began to expose the bureaucracy to social criticism, trying to whip it into change. He withdrew from Afghanistan and signalled that he **"That is what they are doing now, with a brutality and savage indifference to human life remarkably similar to those with which Stalin introduced forcible collectivisation and breakneck industrialisation 60 years ago."**

would not back the puppet Stalinist regimes in Eastern Europe against their people.

Disintegration followed quickly. The prisoners in the jail-house of nations that was the USSR and Eastern Europe took the chance to assert themselves. Glasnost, with its freedom of speech, meant from the beginning a surrender of one of the key levers of bureaucratic control. It inevitably generated demands that could not be denied for more concessions and more change.

As by degrees the bureaucracy lost its monopolies and prerogatives, it proved more and more helpless and, as Gorbachev

found last August when it backed the coup against him, treacherous. Demagogues, in the first place former Moscow party boss Yeltsin, won over the people.

Gorbachev had the odium of responsibility, but less and less power to shape events. Last August the dying bureaucracy he had tried to serve and renew organised a feeble and inept coup, and broke its neck in the attempt. Power fell into the hands of those outspokenly committed to cultivate and restore capitalism.

That is what they are doing now, with a dogmatism, a recklessness, a brutality, and a savage indifference to human life remarkably similar to those with which Stalin introduced forcible collectivisation and breakneck industrialisation 60 years ago.

There are differences, of course: the mass graves that may result from Yeltsin's forced de-collectivisation will not also have in them bodies with bullets in the back of their neck.

Instead of going from the irrationality of bureaucratic "planning" in the dark, on top of a stifled people, to an attempt at democratic working-class overall planning, using market mechanisms where appropriate and to the extent appropriate within that framework, the ex-Stalinists around Yeltsin have set out on a demented scam-

ble to become capitalists.

We see naked bourgeois market relations imposed with breakneck speed and indifference to the immediate consequences.

Capitalism, even when it "works", is everywhere irrational. But its irrationality is hidden by familiarity and by checks and balances which operate most of the time. In the ex-USSR now the unreason at the heart of capitalism can be seen naked and gruesome.

Capitalism works by way of periodic crises which render the system healthy again by way of the mass destruction of wealth, before a new expansionary cycle begins. We see it happening in Britain now. In the USSR capitalism can only come into existence there as the dominant system by way of a gigantic explosion of social and economic destruction.

The peoples of the ex-USSR are embarking on a forced march in which will be encapsulated and telescoped the bloody, wasteful and inhuman experience with capitalism of human society so far.

But in the early centuries of capitalism there was no other way forward possible for humankind to advance. What is happening in the USSR is entirely unnecessary. Something better would be possible if the working class there had not for so long been stifled and poisoned by Stalinism.

**W**e know why the ex-Stalinist rulers of the ex-USSR have opted to replace their old bureaucratic system with capitalism. A man like Boris Yeltsin, who has spent his whole life as a privileged member of the corrupt old Stalinist ruling class, could hardly lead a socialist revolution in the USSR!

And we know why workers there, misruled and oppressed for so long by a grotesque and incompetent Stalinist central state, go along with the Yeltsins and sometimes urge them on. We have tried to explain these things repeatedly in *Socialist Organiser* over recent years.

And we do believe that, despite everything, despite hardships and horrors, it is better for the working class there to have the rights to think, discuss and argue it has for now, than to have the wretched, but stable, "security" of stifling bureaucratic dictatorship.

The chaos now engulfing the former USSR is the consequence, the last consequence, of Stalinism. The condition, moral, political and economic, to which it has reduced the working class that it shaped, is its latest vast crime against the working class.

All that socialists in Britain can do is to understand; to give what help we can to socialists in the former Stalinist territories; and, in the light of the horrors now unfolding, to explain why capitalism is not and cannot be a progressive alternative even to the misery of Stalinism.

"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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## Brother Laird's exciting vision

**Y**ou have to hand it to Gavin Laird, he's got style. Like all the best right wingers, the AEU's General Secretary is a past master at making his views sound fresh and progressive whilst portraying his opponents as narrow-minded reactionaries.

The classic example of this occurred at last year's TUC when Ken Gill of the MSF launched into a denunciation of 'Japanese' working methods as "alien to the traditions

of British trade unionism" or some such; Laird responded by accusing Gill of racism and then delivered a coup de grace by reading out key passages from a 'Japanese'-style agreement signed by the... MSF.

The brilliant performance was all the more effective because Laird had seized upon a real weakness of the TUC 'left'.

So it comes as no surprise to find that January's AEU Journal editorial, brimming over with radical phraseology and exciting new ideas, is penned by one G. Laird. The editorial advocates a bigger, better union, offering "unparalleled service" to members and shop stewards. The requirements of women members and the cause of Equal Opportunities are given prominence; a challenge to new technology, a breakdown of traditional craft differentials and the need for "real safeguards" for members faced with the economic power of the multinationals are highlighted; the need to come to terms with "the enormous process of change" taking place in Europe and the links with "our sister unions in Europe" are central to Bro. Laird's case. "Alongside this great development, arguments about internal structure look very short-sighted. Our activists and members are rightly proud of our past but together we need to build the future. That will require change. What that change will be is now completely in the hands of our members — exactly where it should be."

Who could disagree with all that? Who could fail to be excited by the vista conjured up by Bro. Laird? Only the "most cynical and backward looking persons surely".

Of course all this eloquence is to one objective: to secure the 'Yes' vote for amalgamation with the EEPTU, creating a super union to be called the Amalgamated Engineering and Electrical Union.

Some of us cynical and backward looking people have been opposing these developments for some time, pointing out that it would result in the EEPTU creeping back into the TUC without renouncing the scabbing and poaching activities that led to its expulsion in 1988.

Bro. Laird even had an answer to this objection, arguing that "a vote against amalgamation is a vote against the TUC"! I won't bore you with the byzantine logic that lies behind that particular claim but you have to admire the audaciousness of it.

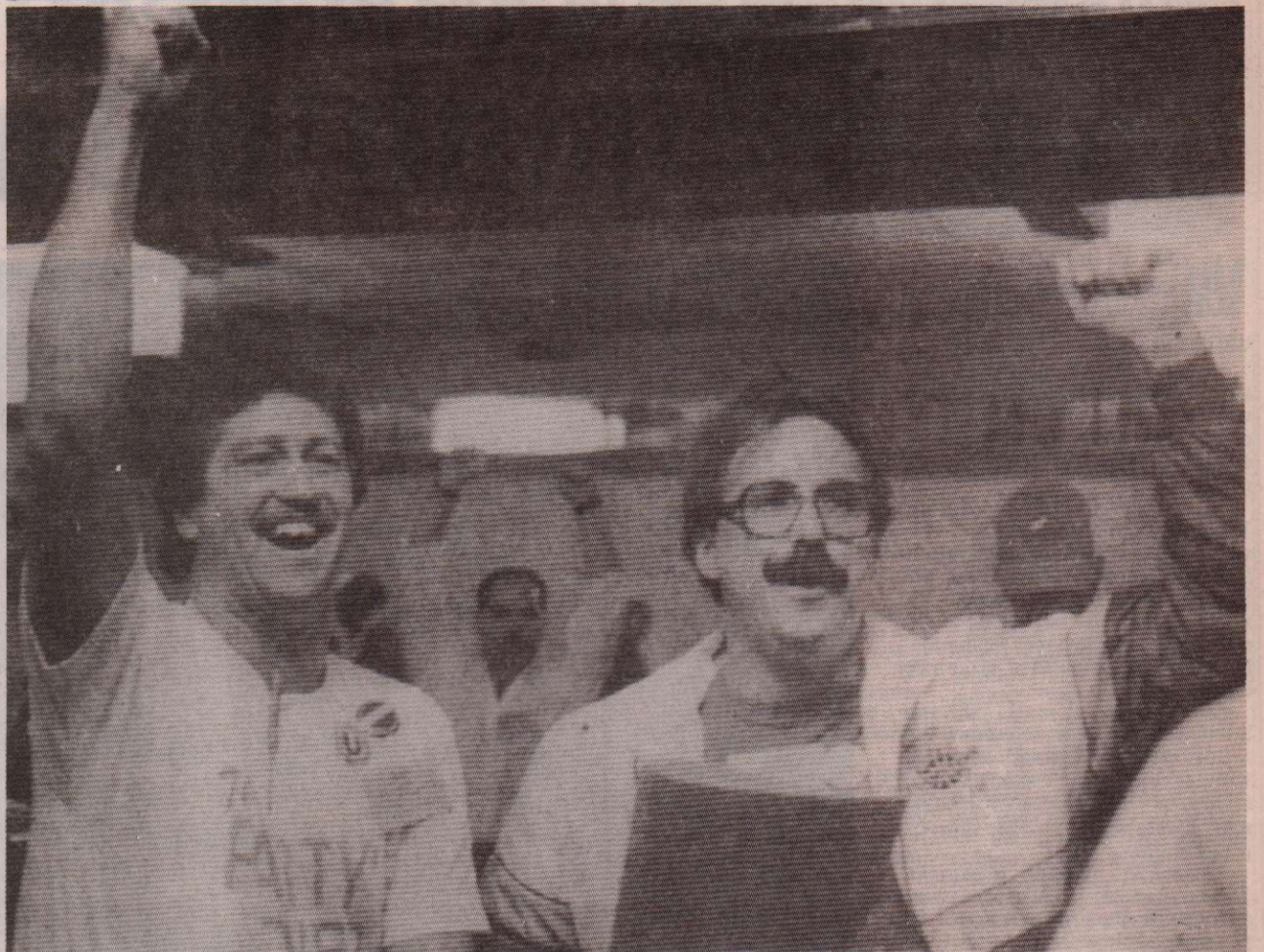
The point is that some of Laird's case is strong. A big united engineering/electrical union makes good industrial sense. Part of the reason the Broad Left's opposition to the merger has been so half-hearted and (until recently) ineffectual is that it has few answers to the kind of points Laird makes, falling back all too often upon crude appeals to AEU separatism and "traditions". The (relatively) democratic internal structure of the AEU is important and worth defending but the basic case against the merger is quite separate from this: it is that such a merger would create an immensely powerful right wing block promoting blatant business unionism within the British labour movement. The case against amalgamation boils down to class politics — on any other terrain Gavin Laird's silver tongue will win.

### INSIDE THE UNIONS



By Sleeper

## Bureaucrats and mobsters



Convention of the Teamsters for a Democratic Union in October 1990

# A great victory for union rank and file

By Hal Mercer

**J**ust once in a great while working people get to make history, to come out on top in a big fight with the bosses or their lieutenants, the trade union bureaucrats.

In the most important election facing working people in the US for decades, the reform movement in the Teamsters (IBT) has just won a tremendous victory in the first ever direct election of the President and General Executive Board (GEB) of their 1.56 million member union. The dissident Ron Carey

Slate, backed by Teamsters for a Democratic Union (TDU), soundly beat two slates fielded by the divided Old Guard officials.

The source of this rank and file challenge is the ongoing conflict between the struggle of the membership for better wages, conditions and job security, and the pro-employer Teamster leadership. The *Wall Street Journal* (12 December 1991) noted during the election that: "Many trucking and other employers, whose workers belong to the Teamsters, are worried that if Mr Carey is elected, he will be an uncertain quantity, unwilling or unable to control increasingly rebellious troops." The victory of the Carey Slate is in fact a body blow to the

Teamster bureaucracy and to business unionism.

The final count gave Carey 48.5% (188,883 valid votes), and the Old Guard candidates RV Durham and Walter Shea about 33% and 18% respectively. The entire 16 member Carey Slate was elected, leaving only three seats that were uncontested by the slate to the incumbent leaders. Of these, two, LaCroix of Canada and especially Johnny Morris of the Pennsylvania Conference, are expected to adapt to the Carey team and to be an asset.

Unfortunately, the low turnout of only 27% of the membership shows that most members believed that change is not possible, that their participation would not

make a difference. It also demonstrates the failure of the officers and business agents to get out the vote. This reveals their lack of any significant base in the membership. Despite Durham's superior war chest and the support of 78% of the local officials, he pulled only 33% of the vote.

The vote does not reflect a broad radicalisation already under way, but the ability of an organised rank and file movement to get a significant minority of the membership to vote for change. This follows on the recent Teamster convention where the membership won some important gains including increased strike benefits and the right to a separate vote on their contract supplements.

## Keating takes the job and turns his coat

Janet Burstell reports from Sydney

**P**aul Keating, once called "the world's greatest treasurer" by the *Economist* magazine, and political architect of the integration of Australian capitalism into world free trade, is the new Labor Prime Minister of Australia.

Paul Keating spent six months on the back bench after a failed challenge to Bob Hawke's leadership of the parliamentary ALP. Now he's wearing a freshly dry-cleaned outfit of old Labor clothes.

He expresses regret for having returned to the "recession we had to have". He has appointed a

new Treasurer, John Dawkins, who is in favour of stimulating the economy to create jobs, and he is about to abolish a recently introduced and unpopular \$2.50 (£1.20) compulsory charge for every visit to the doctor.

Keating and Hawke fell out over nothing other than who should be PM. Under Hawke it always seemed to be Keating in control of the harsh economic policies which punished workers. Keating's change of face and clothes has an opportunist appearance.

With Hawke's popularity declining as fast as jobs are disappearing in the recession (over 10% unemployed), Keating saw a chance. When the Conservatives received good press for their VAT package, and Labor MPs floundered hopelessly, failing to attack, Keating sat in silence. Enough MPs switched their support for Keating to defeat Hawke.

The official left of the parliamentary ALP had supported Hawke, and didn't even field a candidate for the leadership ballot. A switch to Keating by seven of the left was critical to his victory.

The next elections are due in March 1993. Keating brings to the ALP an outside chance of keeping the Conservatives out. This probably depends on how convincingly he can turn the Labor government's image back to the traditional one that differentiated it from the Conservatives — increasing social welfare and education spending, funding job creation schemes, more direct state assistance to manufacturing industry, an expansionary policy and regulation against capital's excesses.

Keating faces two huge obstacles. His record is the antithesis of this, and he is widely believed to bear responsibility for the current economic pro-

blems. The recession probably means that Keating can't deliver very much without incurring the wrath of significant sections of business, including the media.

Nevertheless, Keating is a shrewd operator and a skilled tactician and debater, with an eye for a propaganda opportunity. He will probably try to focus on a handful of popular issues which in fact won't cost all that much, but will make him look better than the Conservatives.

At best this may serve to raise workers' expectations of Labor, and be a step towards a revival of some fighting spirit.

At worst, Keating will lose the next election to the Hewson-led Conservatives, but Hawke was headed to do that in any case.

Hopefully the labour movement and the left will start to look this worst possibility in the face, in time to realise the need to stand up and fight before it is too late.



Gavin Laird

## lose control of the Teamsters



Leroy Ellis, one of the victorious candidates

# or the trade file

Now, in retrospect, the bureaucracy must wish that, faced with a government Racketeering and Corrupt Organisations (RICO) suit, they had not signed the Consent Decree (to save their jobs) under which this election took place.

In fact, they have since spent \$12 million on legal fees to fight the right to vote!

Now they have lost nearly the entire GEB as well as having had, by 1 November, 138 officials removed by the government Investigations Officer, for corruption and/or mob ties. Without TDU's intervention the government would have moved to put the IBT under trusteeship; without TDU there couldn't have been a successful Carey campaign.

For over ten years, the IBT has been granting givebacks to the employers, while keeping the membership in the dark and passive. Membership is down by some 700,000. The members resent the high living of the parasitic bureaucrats: 171 officers made over \$100,000 last year mainly by pyramiding multiple salaries and pension plans.

Even with the democratic pressure of the election, we've seen the collapse of the Overnight organising campaign, and weak bargaining in the major national contracts — UPS, freight and carhaul. However, there hasn't been an upsurge of rank and file activity in general, as indicated by grudging acceptance of poor contracts in UPS and freight, though not in carhaul. Now, in the aftermath of Carey's victory, the renegotiated carhaul proposal is expected

to be voted down again with an unprecedented turn out of carhaulers.

Despite the conservativising effect of the recession and the downturn in militancy, the Carey Slate succeeded because of the strength of TDU.

Initiated by activists, many active in earlier reform efforts, including socialists, TDU has been base building for over 15 years. Its monthly paper, *Convoy Dispatch*, reaches some 60,000 (and more recently).

They have gone from being seen as isolated dissidents to leading the fight to reject poor contracts; winning important reforms like majority rule voting on contracts; and, indeed, the Right to Vote for top officers, playing a big role at the June IBT convention; and now putting a TDU member majority on the GEB!

After years of carrying out the tactic of building a broad rank and file group (a perspective rejected in practice by most of the US left), a positive balance sheet must be drawn. By building an organisation of some 10,000 organised members, it helped create the political climate for change, and trained the troops to win. Although TDU kept a low profile, it was the backbone of the Carey campaign.

The Carey campaign, as opposed to other reform slates like that of Sadlowski in the Steel Workers, is not primarily a split in the bureaucracy but expresses a genuine, although small, rank and file movement. Most of Carey's slate are working Teamsters with a majority being TDUs; it is

not all white, nor all male. Over 10,000 members donated to Carey's shoe-string campaign. On the other hand, less than 1% of Durham's ample campaign fund came from working Teamsters.

The Carey slate campaigned on a rather vague "platform of the rank and file", but emphasised: no give-back contracts, abolishing officials' multiple salaries and pensions, no more sellouts on grievances, better pensions, a voice for women members, a fight for national health insurance, and the right to vote for convention delegates.

The campaign was directed to the "forgotten Teamster". Increasingly, it came to focus on ending corruption in the belief that the members think that crooked leaders won't negotiate decent contracts. Campaign literature emphasised that "the Durham crowd has stolen our money, take kickbacks from employers and sold out our union to organised crime."

Carey's first announcement as president-elect was that he would cut his own salary and "get the bums out".

A good start. The future will be difficult, but the rank and file victories in the IBT are inspiring reform forces in other unions as well, particularly the New Directions Movement (NDM) in the United Auto Workers (UAW). This group sent observers to TDU's recent convention.

NDM orator and co-founder of the UAW, Victor Reuther, optimistically generalised from the Teamster experience: "There is growing in the ranks a

wildfire for change. It's going to sweep this nation and you're part of it. It is not confined to any one union alone. We must build the kind of rank-and-file strength that will set in motion once again the forces of change."

With this new, albeit limited, but fighting reformist leadership in the Teamsters union, the changing mood in sections of the union is already leading to higher participation. Many workers will be drawn into activity, and can start to experience their united strength, and renew solidarity.

The biggest problem through out these developments has been the perceived role of the US government as a tactical ally against the mob-backed Teamster bureaucracy. The Consent Decree did give the reform movement the democratic space without which it could not have won at this time.

Nevertheless, this is a dangerous precedent, and the government is not yet out of Teamster affairs just because the officials named in the original RICO suit are out of office. This would be a bad model for reform movements in other unions to press for.

A small, but nevertheless important, example of the problem of government intervention is the court ruling forcing TDU to disclose the names of its supporters. This opened up TDU supporters to retaliation and intimidation.

As with TDU, the Association for Union Democracy (AUD) was ordered to reveal the names of all those contributing over \$100. This too would violate AUD's promise of confidentiality to its supporters and expose reformers to possible retribution (loss of job, not being appointed shop steward, death, etc).

Even with government oversight there were 470 written complaints of violence, threats, loss of jobs, etc. by October. Dissidents get murdered in the IBT. Revealing names can have a chilling effect on members getting involved with opposition groups.

## Mobilise students for a Labour victory!

By Janine Booth (NUS Women's Officer)

For students, the new college term has to be a term of action. Rent strikes, occupations, and the biggest national demonstration for years will put pressure on the government for more money for higher and further education — and should guarantee a big anti-Tory vote in the forthcoming general election.

An anti-Tory vote is not enough, though. As socialists we have to fight hard to turn every anti-Tory vote into a solid Labour vote. Students can play an important role in determining the next government.

Student Labour Clubs should start their general election campaign now! Getting students to register for their vote, getting Labour supporters involved in local wards and Constituency Labour Parties, and canvass-



ing halls of residence for Labour, are all part of such a campaign.

The Kinnockite leadership of the National Union of Students (NUS) is refusing to build on the action started last term. The wave of occupations showed just how angry students are about poverty, rent rises and cuts.

Yet the National Organisation of Labour Students (NOLS) is ignoring an opportunity to mobilise masses of students for Labour, worried that angry students might mean trouble for a Labour government, too.

### National Union of Students conference

## Student leaders aim to abolish conference

By Steve Mitchell (NUS Executive)

At the end of last term, students delegates from all over Britain met at the National Union of Students winter conference in Blackpool.

Despite the wave of occupations and rent strikes in the colleges, the Kinnockite leaders of NUS focused the conference debate on internal "reforms" — for the 10th conference running.

On losing a card vote to abolish winter conference, the leadership closed the conference temporarily, and reconvened only when they could confidently win an unconstitutional and totally undemocratic re-vote the following day.

The Liberals — fronting for the Labour Students (NOLS) leadership, who are too cowardly to do it themselves — are set to call an extraordinary conference to push through ratification of the abolition of winter conference. This extraordinary con-

ference, under the circumstances, will be undemocratic, attended only by sabbaticals and executive officers from Higher Education colleges, and costing NUS an absolute fortune.

The NUS leaders could also find themselves "ratifying" a decision to abolish winter conference that is in fact unconstitutional — NOLS beware!

The role of the Socialist Workers' Party at this conference was no better than usual. They have a long history of supporting the Kinnockites against the left in key elections and policy debates, and they broke with none of their traditions.

As always, they made lots of left-wing sounding speeches, but consistently voted with the Kinnockites against the left. They refused to support Left Unity amendments in the student hard-ship debate, claiming they were not left wing enough!

Left Unity amendments contained calls for occupations, rent strikes, shutdowns and demonstrations — which are apparently only left wing when the SWP calls for them!





Supporters of the Birmingham 6 welcome them from jail. The establishment still has not forgiven them

## No honours for victims of injustice

### GRAFFITI

The Maxwell saga rolls on — and it seems that no-one knew what was happening.

Chief executives happily sat in their offices all day as Maxwell pulled the strings. Like Conragate witnesses, senior figures in the Maxwell empire have denied any knowledge of what was happening.

Peter Jay, a top executive, says: "things were run on a need-to-know principle: if you needed to know, you weren't told".

So it's like the police: just the occasional rotten apple in the barrel of capitalism. I suppose you could say that never in the field of human embezzlement has so much been swindled by so few from so many.

New Year's Day furore — Terry Waite has only been awarded a grotty old CBE.

The front page of the *Sun* splutters with rage, nearly incontinent with anger. A CBE — isn't that just for worthies from the Women's Institute and directors of companies that have given middling donations to the Tory Party?

All the released British hostages received mere CBEs after all they've done... er... well, being locked up? But surely there are people missing from the New Year's Honours List...

Where are the Birmingham 6? The Tottenham 3? More innocent people locked away for years. Obviously "British Justice" extends far beyond the courtroom.

Back in the Dark Ages, people had names for their foremen, overseers and managers that reflected what they thought of them — many of them unprintable in the staid and sober columns of Graffiti.

Now a study has reported nicknames for computer-controlled machines closely following the old patterns of names for supervisors.

### A handbook for trade unionists



How to combat the employers' offensive; how to fight for trade union rights; lessons from history; and much more. £1 plus 32p postage from PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA.

Machines which monitor your work rate are particularly disliked.

The staff at the *Morning Star* have a name to describe their computer system — stolen.

The *Morning Star* offices were burgled on Saturday night. The police are apparently seeking a tall, white-haired man with a Russian accent, heard muttering "If we can't have the gold back, we'll have some technology".

Boris Yeltsin was unavailable for comment as we go to press, but is said to be having trouble loading the Nintendo games into his new console.

Where do you think this question comes from? "If an interview lasts 30 minutes, how many interviews can be conducted in 3 hours?"

Is it from one of the Standard Attainment Tests currently blighting the lives of seven year olds in the classroom? Surely 25% of seven year olds can't be getting questions like this *wrong!*

In fact, it's part of the new National Police Recruitment Test. The answer, apparently, is as many as you like so long as you have written up the statements first.

Norman Lamont, when he became Chancellor, was worried that no-one would know who he was. Fortunately now everyone knows.

Greats like "technically, the recession is over", and his claim that there will be a two per cent growth rate next year have elevated the man with the Ad-dams family hair-cut into the public eye.

Now he and his side-kick, Uncle Fester-Leigh-Pemberton, are claiming that it is *very difficult* to tell when the recession is over.

Strange, because they've been saying that they were able to tell, and very easily too, for the last 12 months.

### PRESS GANG



By Jim Denham

The temptation to have a good chuckle (or at least a good gloat) over the posthumous unmasking of Cap'n Bob is almost irresistible. But I suppose if you're a Mirror Group employee or pen-

sioner, there isn't much to chuckle about at the moment.

In the days since the old crook's financial shenanigans became front-page news, "outing" those who took the Maxwell shilling has become a favourite sport — especially over at Rupert Murdoch's News International. The list of establishment figures, pillars of industry, the City and both the major political parties, who consorted with Maxwell certainly makes unedifying reading.

The *News of the World* had great fun printing a list of "senior establishment figures" who had aided the Cap'n in his life of crime — people like Lords Donoughue, Kearton, Havers and Williams of Elvel, Sir Michael Richardson (vice-

chairman of NM Rothschild), Mr Peter Jay (Lord Callaghan's former son-in-law), Sir Michael John de Rougemont Richardson (a "foxhunting freemason who regularly dined with the That-chers")... and Mr Paul Foot. Footie also took a kicking from the *Sun*:

"For 12 years the *Daily Mirror* columnist has diligently dug the dirt on wrongdoing in high places. But what did Foot unearth about Robert Maxwell and the biggest financial scandal of the century? Not a word."

The accusation that Britain's best-known far-left journalist is a hypocrite, no better than the rest of the toadies at the court of the Captain, must have stung: *Socialist Worker*, for the defence, had to bring up Foot's long association with *Private Eye* — not something they very often draw attention to.

No doubt some of Foot's critics on the far left are going to use the Maxwell association to attack him and the SWP: it's certainly tempting, given that group's own record of below-the-belt tactics in their dealings with others on the left (notably supporters of the publication you are now reading).

On balance, I think the temptation should be resisted: we all have to earn our crust in this big, bad world and, for journalists more than most, that usually means working for some nasty capitalist swine or other.

Foot can reasonably argue that the *Mirror*, even under Maxwell, gave him a unique platform from which to put over a crude but effective anti-capitalist message to a mass audience. Of course he couldn't attack his own

employer in the pages of the *Mirror* but even in the light of recent events, that was probably a price worth paying. So I won't be joining the self-righteous chorus of those who, for whatever motives, want to put the boot into Foot. (But I might allow myself just a little chuckle).

Meanwhile, the *Mirror* and its sister publications appear to have no owner just at the moment — apart perhaps from the National Westminster Bank. Editor Richard Stott is leading a management buy-out attempt, but the front-runners for eventual ownership of some or all of the Mirror Group seem to be Pearsons (who own the *Financial Times*) and Tiny Rowland, proprietor of the *Observer*.

The *Guardian* recently published an article by Tom Bower, author of *Maxwell, the outsider*, an unauthorised biography that the Cap'n attempted to suppress in his customary litigious manner. Bower revealed in the *Guardian* that no less than five articles he has written about Maxwell remain unpublished because editors feared writs. He then went on to quote an *Observer* article attacking the British libel law "which allows unscrupulous tycoons to gag those who question their methods".

Bower recently had another article rejected by a British magazine after the editor was threatened with a writ if publication went ahead. The article was about Tiny Rowland.



More chuckles

## Thatcher the feminist?



### WOMEN'S EYE

By Liz Millward

It is not often that I agree with the *Sunday Express*, so I turned to an article there by Emma Soames on "Feminism in the '90s" expecting to be outraged and horrified.

In fact, the piece made a number of sensible points; for example, that legislation like the Equal Opportunities Act has not brought the dramatic changes hoped for, and true observations such as that many of the feminists of the 1970s now have children,

and less time and energy for politics.

"Even [in] the far left of the Labour Party...active protests have now been replaced by power breakfasts where professional women network over coffee and croissants."

But the problem with discussions on this level about feminism's "decline" is that they only relate to a tiny handful of women. The talk is all of a few women getting to "the top", rather than improving *all* women's lives. Nannies, networking, and "power breakfasts" are hardly relevant to the vast majority of women.

There may be a case for quietly burying 1970s feminism, along with a number of its disciples (nominations on a postcard, please) and having honestly assessed its successes and failures trying to start again. But, of course, there is no such thing as a "clean slate", and whatever the failures of '70s feminism, we can't pretend it never happened.

What we can do is try to build a women's movement which learns from past mistakes. We have had a woman "at the top", and watched her ensure that no other women would be allow-

ed to join her.

Margaret Thatcher's power was not used to help women, although women, and the women's movement, helped put her there. We're now back to an all-male cabinet.

For the women's move-

ment to make lasting changes it should refuse to be interested in whether a few women get to "the top". We are concerned for the millions of women at the bottom, and must judge our successes and failures by their fate.



Women's liberation demo, 1971. Whatever the failures of '70s feminism, we can't pretend it never happened. We can only learn the lessons

# The law of the Maxwells

Colin Foster reviews  
*Maxwell, the outsider*,  
by Tom Bower. Revised  
edition: Mandarin books,  
£4.99

On 5 December 1991, the Maxwell Communications Corporation declared itself bankrupt. One of the world's biggest media businesses had collapsed just one month after its boss's death.

Tom Bower's book traces Robert Maxwell's path to the final orgy of swindling which turned his business empire into a hollowed-out ruin in the years before his death. Along the way, the book says a lot not just about Maxwell individually, but about the way the modern capitalist system works — who gets rich, how, and at what cost to whom.

Maxwell learned his "instinctive sense for dealing which refined businessmen in London and New York came to loathe and fear" from his father and grandfather, and other Jewish small traders, in his home village, then just on the Czech side of the border between Czechoslovakia and Romania.

The skills of the huckster and fixer served Maxwell as his basic tools of business throughout his life. He coupled them with great energy and boldness, a remarkable talent for languages (by his twenties he spoke nine fluently), and quick-wittedness which enabled him, for example, to pick up enough about the scientific issues covered in his journals which he published, or about new information technology, to talk impressively to people specialising in the field.

He read very few books, it seems; he never learned to write any language with ease; and he had no special skill or knowledge about the productive processes from which he would draw his fortune — printing and journalism.

In 1945, aged 22, Maxwell became an official of the British military administration in Berlin. By 1947 he had set up two companies in Britain. One was a general trading enterprise, and the other struck a deal with the celebrated German scientific publishers Springer Verlag to distribute their books and journals outside Germany.

The scientific books and journals business was his staple, but he also traded in almost everything else, ducking and weaving through the intricate web of trade controls which operated in the '40s and early '50s.

Bower describes one surreal example. Maxwell and an associate shipped chemicals to East Germany, bartering them for china, glass and textiles to go to Argentina. The trade in Argentina was for 2000 tons of pork bellies.

Britain's Ministry of Food condemned the pork bellies as unfit to eat. Maxwell fobbed off most of the meat on Austria, then a desperately poor and hungry country under Russian occupation. "I warned [Maxwell's associate] that he would poison a whole nation, but everyone just thought it was a hoot", recounts Maxwell's secretary from that time.

Austria could not pay any cash, any more than Argentina. It offered prefabricated houses. Maxwell also had cement, traded by East Germany for the rest of the meat.

The houses were sold to Canada, America and Cyprus, and the cement to Canada for the foundations



Maxwell's wealth was made at the expense of thousands of workers

of the houses. The deal finally flopped when a leak on the ship taking the cement across the Atlantic set it solid.

Trade like this must have convinced Maxwell that the whole capitalist world was only a bigger and wealthier version of the smuggling and cattle-trading of his home village. The remarkable thing about Maxwell's career is how well this view of the world served him, even in the sophisticated boardrooms and office suites of the City and of Wall Street.

Berlin, according to Bower, brought Maxwell other important contacts apart from Springer Verlag. "At one stage during his posting in Berlin, either willingly or unwillingly, Maxwell compromised

**"Maxwell's approach to trade unions was like his approach to business rivals: cajole them if he could, swindle them if possible, and if all that failed, get heavy."**

ed himself with the Russians. The KGB claim that [Maxwell] signed a document which promised to assist the security agency if required"

Maxwell kept close contacts with Moscow from then on. In 1954 he got a deal to translate and publish Soviet scientific papers in the West; it would bring him in a lot of money after the USSR's success in launching Sputnik, the first-ever satellite, in 1957, impressed the West.

In 1968 — such, writes Bower, is the "account given by Soviet intelligence officers" — the KGB reminded Maxwell of his document signed in Berlin, and arranged a special meeting for him with Yuri Andropov, then head of the KGB and later General Secretary of the CPSU and Mikhail Gorbachev's

patron.

Just what Maxwell did for the KGB, Bower does not know. All that is public is the fact that Maxwell often used his newspapers, his publishing empire, and his platform in Parliament while he was a Labour MP from 1964 to 1970, to transmit pro-Stalinist propaganda.

In the late '70s and early '80s Maxwell published a series of toadying biographies of East European despots, larded with extra praise in prefaces by Maxwell himself. He hailed Nicolae Ceaucescu's "constant, tireless activity for the good of his country", and credited Todor Zhivkov with building a "prosperous and happy nation".

In 1951, Maxwell took over a failing book wholesaler, Simpkin Marshall, and ran it until 1954 when it went bust. He brought all his companies under one roof in an old bottling plant on Marylebone Road, London.

Maxwell sat in a large office, playing the tycoon and ordering in large meals from the Savoy Hotel. "On the first three floors were 400 partially unionised Simpkin Marshall employees who worked amid stacking shelves which were strung between old bottling machines. Above them were the staff [of Maxwell's scientific publishing business], most... former Czech and Polish soldiers.

"On the top floor, across gangplanks laid over the open roofs, was an office set aside for Rosbaud [in charge of the scientific journals]... over another roof was an office housing [staff] deeply immersed in barter deals... Under one roof, deals were being struck in German scientific journals, Argentinian pork bellies, and practically every book currently published in Britain".

Here, for the first time, Maxwell came up against the prime difference between the petty trading economy of his home village and modern capitalism: *the working class*. Then, as always afterwards, he treated the productive workforce as an irritating complication to the real business of trade. Within weeks of taking

over, he was striding around the place shouting "I want it done yesterday", and demanding that 150 jobs be cut.

In 1967 Maxwell launched a new business, selling encyclopaedias, and in 1969 Maxwell tried to fix a merger between his publishing firm, Pergamon, and the American company Leasco. The deal lurched into scandal. Maxwell was accused of fiddling Pergamon's financial figures. It ended with an official Department of Trade and Industry report which declared that Maxwell was "not... a person who can be relied on to exercise proper stewardship of a publicly quoted company", and Leasco getting control of Pergamon without Maxwell.

Maxwell, however, retained control of a crucial offshoot of Pergamon, a company which had sole rights to distribute Pergamon's publications in the US. Using that lever, he was able to push Leasco into abandoning Pergamon as unworkable, and selling it back to him in 1974.

In 1981, Maxwell got back into the capitalist big-time by taking over the large, but loss-making, British Printing Corporation. Plenty of people were willing to forgive Maxwell for the fiddles indicted by the DTI. Courtaulds boss Lord Kearton declared, "I felt that his wrongdoings were small change compared to a lot of happenings in the City".

Maxwell immediately demanded that 2500 jobs be cut in the British Printing Corporation. His approach to the trade unions was like his approach to business rivals: cajole them if he could, swindle them if possible, and if all that failed, get heavy.



Warrington, 1983: Eddie Shah's attack on the NGA was funded by cheap loans from Maxwell

The print unions, fumbling and dithering as they tried to deal with a technological revolution in their trade with the concepts of narrow-minded craft unionism, were defeated, and Maxwell made the company profitable.

It was that success, and the wealth, power and fame it brought him, which set him off on the spiral of speculation and self-indulgence which led to ruin. In 1984 he bought the *Daily Mirror*, and made it so much a creature of his whims that at times it was, as Bower puts it, like a Maxwell family photograph album.

Then he started on a chase for ventures, purchases, and attempted purchases — in France, in Eastern Europe, in Israel, in America, and across a range of businesses in Britain. It was his greatest success in this frantic search for expansion which led to ruin. He bought the US publishers Macmillan at an inflated price, and took on a load of debt which he was increasingly unable to carry.

In Maxwell's enterprises, the business of increasing his wealth and power was inseparable from the business of displaying wealth and power he had already. He had huge and luxurious offices built for himself, he ordered huge banquets (at which, according to Bower, Maxwell would always be served first, and with the biggest helpings), and he ostentatiously treated his top managers like lackeys, expecting them to jump to his orders at any time of day or night.

Business would be done by phoning someone with whom he wanted to do a deal and fixing a private plane and private helicopter to bring them to Maxwell's office in London, where, during the discussions, Maxwell would make a show of receiving messages and having telephone conversations in several languages with presidents, prime ministers and other prominent people across the world.

Tacky? It certainly was. Bower describes Maxwell's fortieth wedding anniversary banquet, where, after the dinner, his seven children had to stand one after another as a list of their O-levels, A-levels, and university degrees was read out. Yet, so Bower writes, the guests "could [not] deny that this occasion was memorable".

This, it seems, is what life in the capitalist class is really like. Bower, despite the fact that Maxwell tried his best to suppress the first edition of his book, is much more admiring than hostile to Maxwell, as he indicates in an off-putting passage in the preface:

"Thanks to Maxwell, I have become even more fearless. Whenever a professional adviser submits his account, I offer him half and hope to settle for less. Above all, I have learnt that Lex Maxwelliana is to savour the sheer enjoyment of life".

Tell that to the *Mirror* pensioners, or to the thousands of workers sacked by Maxwell in the course of his career.

# Orange Labour?



## AGAINST THE TIDE

By Sean Matgamna

It looks, doesn't it, as if the Tories have lost the next election? Everything is going wrong for them, everything is out of control. Despite Kinnock's craven immobility, Labour might win the election!

What if Labour "wins" the next election and forms a government but without an overall majority? Right now the opinion polls suggest that this is a serious possibility. Then Kinnock will do what James Callaghan did in 1977 and after when Labour no longer had a majority — he will wheel and deal with the smaller parties and do trade offs for support to keep his government in power.

Deals like those of the '70s with the Liberal Democrats are not likely to push Kinnock's Labour Party far off the course its leaders would follow anyway. Unless the improbable happens and Kinnock concedes P.R. to the Liberal Democrats in return for support or partnership — and I think that is very improbable — no dramatic policy shifts are likely to result.

But what if, for example, the Liberal Democrats hold out for P.R. and a Labour Government does a deal with the Ulster Unionist MPs, who will number at least a dozen?

That is something else Labour did in the '70s!

Dramatic shifts in British government policy on Northern Ireland would be the minimum price of a Unionist deal with Labour. This seems to me to be one of the things to look out for and warn against.

There is not much in the record of the last Labour government — certainly not after 1975 — which we can be proud of. But nothing is quite as shameful as what happened in Northern Ireland under that government.

A systematic reign of terror was inflicted on the Catholic popula-

tion, and events were set in motion which culminated — after the Tories were back in control at Westminster — in the hunger strikes of 1981 in which 10 Republicans were allowed to die of starvation. One reason the Labour government allowed the British Army to do what it did in Northern Ireland after 1976 was Labour's need for the support at Westminster of such Unionist MPs as the late Harold McCusker.

It was no less a man than Michael Foot, long time tribune of the Parliamentary Labour left, who did the wheeling and dealing with the Orange politicians. Among other things, he negotiated with them a big increase in Northern Ireland's representation at Westminster (from 12 seats up to 17).

The need to neutralise or gain the support of Unionists at Westminster was only one factor shaping Labour's policy, or, to be more precise, the policy Labour allowed the Army and the "Security Services" — the same "Security Services" that were busily conspiring to undermine and discredit the Labour government — to carry out.

But it was certainly a factor and probably a big one. Right now, Unionist politicians are hoping for a rerun. They might get it. Let us look back a little closer at what Labour did then.

The Tories tried using the big stick against the Catholics when they came to power in mid-1970. All they achieved was to stoke up the deep fires of Catholic resentment and to help the IRA grow into a powerful movement with mass support. The effect of internment in August 1971 was the exact opposite of what was intended by its architects. It made much of NI ungovernable.

When the paratroopers ran amok and shot 13 unarmed men dead for marching in a peaceful demonstration in Derry on 30 January 1972, the horrified outcry against this savagery made the British government change course.

They abolished majority — that is Protestant — home rule in Northern Ireland, and sought to create institutionalised power sharing with a guaranteed place in a Belfast government for representatives of the Catholic people.

After bitter pro-Unionist opposition they managed to set up such a system at the beginning of 1974, resting on parties representing a minority of Protestants and a majority of the Catholics. In February 1974, the miners' strike led to a General Election which

brought Labour back to power.

In the same election, the Protestants voted massively for Unionists opposed to the Belfast power-sharing government (based on a Northern Ireland parliamentary election 6 months earlier). A powerful Orange general strike broke out in May 1974 against the power-sharing executive and a feeble Council of Ireland then being set up. The Labour government buckled and the power-sharing executive collapsed.

This would have been a good thing if the Labour government had drawn the necessary conclusion: that since the Protestant majority — for whose protection from all-Ireland Catholic domination the Six County state had been set up — could not be trusted with majority rule over the Catholics, the whole structure had to be radically overhauled on an all-Ireland and maybe British Isles basis.

Labour concluded nothing of the sort. It called elections for a Northern Ireland Constitutional Convention in which Catholics and Protestants would try to work out a modus vivendi within the Six County framework. But there was no hope of this — it is improbable they ever thought there was. The majority of Catholics wanted power-sharing and had now won — by way of the IRA military campaign — a veto on Protestant majority rule; the majority of Protestants would not have power-sharing or links with Dublin at any price.

After a year the Assembly collapsed.

And then the Labour government committed a gross betrayal against the Northern Ireland Catholics.

In the last 3 years of Labour rule, the Catholics got nothing but savage repression. While Michael Foot and his friends hobnobbed with the Unionist MPs at Westminster, the Army and the RUC did the sort of things the Orangemen wanted doing in NI.

The British Army started a drive against the Republicans which included systematic mass house searches for arms — in practice, they went about the Catholic districts wrecking houses, and furniture, sometimes repeatedly. This went on for years.

After Bloody Sunday, when the Tory government abandoned the big stick, political prisoners had been given some political rights in jail: Labour took away those rights and began to try to crush the prisoners by "criminalising" them. They resisted in the jails for years, culminating in the hunger strike in 1981.

One consequence of the repression unleashed by Labour after 1976 was the growth of mass Catholic support for the Provisional IRA and Sinn Fein, especially at the time of the hunger strike and after. Election results showed that more than one in three Catholics backed Sinn Fein. There was a move away from the middle-class Catholic nationalist party, the SDLP.

To stop the peaceful nationalists shrinking and Sinn Fein from continuing to grow, new political "initiatives" were started in the '80s.

In November 1985, a London-Dublin agreement was signed which, against the tremendous indignation of the Protestants and widespread resistance, gave Dublin a political say in the running of Northern Ireland.

Socialists should not give positive backing to that agreement, but even weak Dublin involvement in Northern Ireland on behalf of the Catholics, is better than what they had before. The scrapping of this agreement is something the Orange politicians hope to gain if they hold the balance of power at Westminster after the General Election.

A hundred years ago and then again 80 years ago, Irish Nationalist MPs holding the balance of power at Westminster forced the Liberals to bring in Home Rule Bills: the Unionists now hope to be in the same position and get the concessions they want.

As the Six County entity recreated, within a smaller area, an intensified version of the all-Ireland Protestant-Catholic conflict, so — in the '70s and maybe in the '90s — has been recreated the political role at Westminster that in times of instability the Irish MPs used to play — with the Unionists playing the role the Nationalists used to play.

Regular readers of *Socialist Organiser* know that we are as far from the identikit left's demonisation of the Northern Ireland Protestants as we are from that left's demonisation of Israel and "Zionism". [In principle it is the same issue in both cases].

The Northern Ireland Protestants have an inviolable right to their identity and they should not be forced against their will into a united Ireland under majority Catholic rule without any protection for the minority.

We believe that the only solution is a united Ireland, but that the only possible or desirable united Ireland is one in which the Protestants have regional autonomy.

But no good can come from another attempt to beat down the Catholics: this is neither desirable nor possible. The Catholics will not be beaten down. A step back from the London-Dublin agreement of 1985 to the policies of the late '70s, or anything like it would be the beginning of a new cycle of horror inflicted on people who have known little else for over 20 years.

Make no mistake about it: the present Labour leadership are capable of that! The Front Bench which rushed — on the initiative of one-time leftist Margaret Beckett, it seems — to support demands that the government should pick up the bill for the crass stupidity of the super-rich speculators, the Lloyds "Names", when they got into trouble, in order to show Labour's good will towards the whole species of financial parasites — that Front Bench is capable of anything!

It is capable, for example, of once again inflicting internment without charge or trial, as the price of Unionist support at Westminster.

The new upsurge in the Provisional IRA's campaign and the continuing intractability of the Northern Ireland conflict make internment a real possibility in the period ahead. There might be a "happy coincidence" of Army pressure for internment and Labour's need for Unionist support at Westminster.

We can not know exactly. But the left must stand on watch.



Republican demo 1974. Any more attempts to beat down the Catholics will be 'neither desirable nor possible'.



A victory for Labour need not mean a tripping policies

# Tur

1992 is the year the political tide will turn!

The year the Tories can be driven from office, and a Labour government returned!

The year the labour movement will begin to get its nerve back! The year the "free-market" Thatcher chickens will come home to roost for the bourgeoisie!

The year in which the right-wing conventional wisdom of the 1980s will be routed by the social and economic consequences inflicted by its devotees and high priests on the working class!

It is the year in which the left can begin to get its bearings again.

Some of these predictions depend on what socialists do — the revival of the left, for example. Yet others are virtual certainties, or have already begun to happen. The market mania which is the core of Thatcherism is already being discredited, and so is the labour movement's own diluted version of Thatcherism, retailed by no-gut Neil Kinnock.

Consider these points. ONE: The Tories are in tremendous difficulties. Everything is going wrong for them.

The economy is in a deepening slump. Unemployment is rising again. All the bourgeois experts expect it to keep rising, and to be 2.2 million, on the Government's rigged official count, by the end of 1992. The Tories will not be able to engineer the sort of "election boom" that helped them win in 1983 and 1987.

They are seen to be a divided party on Europe, and they cannot control the political schedules of European politics.

Their squawks about Labour policies meaning high taxes have little impact on people disgusted by the Tories' rundown of the National Health Service. The



## WHAT WE THINK



Photo for Kinnock and Hattersley's right

# On the tide in 1992!

economic miracles they claimed to have worked are seen by more and more people to have been con-artists' affairs.

What once seemed their most solid achievement — spreading home ownership — has jack-knifed on them, as tens of thousands of families are turned out of their homes because they can not keep up the mortgage payments.

Kinnock may yet help the Tories snatch victory from the jaws of defeat. But if the Tories win the coming election, it will only be because Neil Kinnock and his "team" have convinced the electorate that they are almost indistinguishable from the Tories, and passive, shifty, and unreliable as well.

The chances are that the tide is now flowing too strongly against the Tories for a "Kinnock miracle" to save them.

**TWO:** Labour is on course to form a government. Whatever Kinnock intends, that will begin to change the face of British politics, and of the working-class movement.

Such a Labour government will be caught in a tremendous contradiction. For most of a decade, Kinnock and his friends have purged and battered the Labour Party, trying to reshape it as a continental-style social-democratic party.

They turned themselves from parliamentary leftist phrasemongers, without theory or social perspectives, into pale-pink Thatcherites, or duck-egg blue neo-socialists. It was plain that in office Kinnock would try to be like Gonzalez's Thatcherite "socialists" in Spain, Hawke's Australian Labor Party, or Lange's New Zealand Labour Party.

Those "socialists" ran their

countries' contemporary and parallel versions of Britain's Thatcherism. They embraced and advocated the "spirit of the age" in the 1980s, and Kinnock waited for his call to do the same in Britain.

It was never by any means a certainty that the British labour movement would allow Kinnock to get away with it, but it was certain that he would try.

And now where is he? The New Model Labour Party is likely to come to power when Thatcherism is being thoroughly discredited, and the market mania of the 1980s is being succeeded by widespread recognition that the social consequences are unacceptable even if it works the miracles it claims to — and it does not.

Already, in Australia, Paul Keating, once the most aggressive free-marketeer in Bob Hawke's cabinet, and now prime minister in place of Hawke, has signalled an about-turn, cancelling health service charges, for example.

In these circumstances, Kinnock in power is not likely to be able to sell neo-Thatcherite Gonzalez-Hawke policies to the labour movement. Pressure will build up in the labour movement for traditional reformist and interventionist action by the Labour government. The labour movement will redefine itself in conflict with a Kinnockite Labour government!

All those on the left who refuse to fight with everything they can muster to kick the Tories out and put in a Labour government are being criminally foolish.

We can offer no guarantees that the labour movement will revive quickly or evenly once the Tories are out and Labour is in. The memory of the bitter Thatcher years

may induce many to back a Kinnock government uncritically for a long time.

We do not know: but it is a certainty that the only way the mass labour movement will begin to revive politically is by way of the experience of kicking out the Tories, putting Labour in, and then confronting a Labour government trying to administer slump-ridden British capitalism.

**THREE:** The neo-liberal euphoria of the 1980s is everywhere now dissipating in face of the slump and aggravated social chaos and dislocation.

The triumph of marketism in the Stalinist world is accompanied by the exposure of its limits and consequences in the West; and it will quickly be accompanied by exposure of its terrible and lunatic consequences in the East.

A socialist counter-offensive is now becoming possible in a way it has not been for a long time. The search for answers to conditions like those in Britain will compel workers to reassess the socialist case — the case for real socialism, this time, not Stalinism.

The legacy of Stalinism is still a dead weight on the left. For the bourgeois anti-socialist propagandists, Stalinism still functions as a great anti-socialist scarecrow. They are still served well by the plausible lie that they have taken over for their own purposes from Stalinism, that Stalinism was the real socialism.

But those lies will lose their power as marketism loses its lustre, and workers are driven by circumstances — and helped by publications like *Socialist Organiser* — to dig deep for the truth about socialism.

**FOUR:** For all the reasons above, the left will begin to get its bearings.

The way forward for the left can be outlined in a few sentences.

*Go on the offensive against the ideologists of the New Right!* The Right has never been right about anything. Even on Stalinism, the Trotskyist left was better and more consistent in its condemnation, clearer in its understanding, and more comprehensive and consistently democratic in its alternative to Stalinist elitism. The Right were able only to counterpose their own bourgeois elitism to the elitism of the Stalinists. Go after the Right!

*Fight for a Labour government!* The Labour Party is the mass party of the working class, its only possible governmental alternative to the Tories. Those socialists who "re-

ject" that movement and refuse to fight for a Labour government

"because of Kinnock" are in fact abandoning politics for a preaching socialist sectarianism or a neo-anarchism. (The SWP combines both — and then on election day usually adds "vote Labour" to ingratiate itself with Labour supporters!). Any socialist who voluntarily abandons the labour movement to the Kinnockites is simply not serious.

The serious left must regroup and fight for a Labour government.

*And the left must organise our own forces* to be effective in making our propaganda and in the battles of the class struggle. That is what the Alliance for Workers' Liberty exists to do.



Car workers fight Labour-imposed wage restraint, 1978.

# The myths and reali

Continuing our ongoing offensive against the ideas of the New Right, Martin Thomas replies to David Marsland's argument for the free market and against socialist planning, published in the new Alliance for Workers' Liberty pamphlet, *Socialists Answer the New Right*.

Capitalism encourages and allows individuals to plan for themselves; socialism means planning by Big Brother, which is unfree and anyway does not work. So David Marsland argues.

In fact planned co operation on a large scale was introduced into human life by capitalism, not by socialism. Modern methods of production involve intricate networks of cooperation linking thousands of people.

Under capitalism all that planned cooperation is shaped and regulated by the competing drives for profit of a minority of wealthy owners; and the planning is done despotically, from above, by those owners. Working-class socialism certainly does not mean replacing "unfettered command" by private capitalist owners with "unfettered command" by the state.

It means making the planned cooperation social and democratic; and regulating it so as to provide for every citizen comfort, security and, by cutting work time, free time.

## Is planning workable?

David Marsland argues that planning on such a large scale cannot work. The central administration cannot conceivably gather all the relevant information fast enough. A market economy, by contrast, provides information where it is necessary in a decentralised way.

There is some truth in this argument. In the dispute which David Marsland cites between Hayek and the maverick socialist economist Oskar Lange, I think Hayek was right. Lange's scheme, where the socialist administration is supposed to act like a socialist version of that theoretical fiction of academic economics, the "Walrasian auctioneer" who simultaneously finds prices to balance supply and demand in every market, is unworkable.

But Lange was a maverick. Marxian socialists have long argued that, because of the difficulties of centralising information, a

workers' government would have to combine broad strategic planning with the use of markets (real markets, not Lange's pseudo-markets) for a long time.

Only the broad patterns of investment, social provision, and income distribution would be planned. Not all that planning would be centralised, any more than big capitalist corporations do all their planning in their head offices.

There would be tensions in the combination of planning and markets. A lot of experience from capitalist societies, however, shows it would be workable. Some highly successful capitalist systems, such as Japan's or South Korea's, have had effective government planning of major investment. It has been capitalist government planning, done bureaucratically, undemocratically, corruptly, and in the interests of profit. There is no reason to suppose that democratic planning would be less workable.

And then the working class, the great majority of the people, would no longer toil only to enrich the top 10 per cent, who in Britain own 53 per cent of all marketable wealth and almost all land and shares. Everyone could have a decent job, and the excess of what the workers produce over their own direct consumption would go to social provision and to socially-controlled investment.

We could get rid of the vast waste and duplication arising from capitalist competition — and its offshoots, such as advertising, excessive packaging, and so on — and economise on the labour currently used to provide luxuries for the rich. Cutting the competitive drive for profit would also cut the roots of conflict between nations, and open the way to redirect the huge resources currently spent on preparations for war.

We could ensure decent public services — health, education, child-care, transport. With improving technology, the working week, and thus the *control of the economy over human life*, could be cut, to allow free time for a society which is a free association of free individuals.

## Can we do without markets?

How fast the use of markets could be reduced, and when and how it could be reduced to nothing, is a more difficult question. That reduction, I think, presupposes that the burden of drudgery to meet our material wants is cut to a low level, and that those material wants themselves become stable and are satisfied. As Trotsky put it, it awaits the time "when the steady growth of social wealth has made us bipeds forget our miserly attitude towards every excess minute of labour, and our humiliating



"Any plans you make can be ruined from one day to the next."

fear about the size of our ration".

The argument of Hayek, and other apologists for capitalism, rests on the axiom that it will never be possible to remove that "fear about the size of our ration" — that it is unchangeable human nature always to want to consume more, sooner. A competitive scramble for rations is therefore inevitable, and the market is a more flexible, dignified and efficient way to organise it than policemen and queues.

That argument, to my mind, is circular: it takes the patterns of behaviour shaped by capitalist economics, calls them human nature, and then triumphantly concludes that capitalism fits human nature! Obviously no one can say for sure when, or if, a cooperative commonwealth could erode the anxious greed for property bred into us by capitalism. But even if it never could, even if socialism could never get beyond an uneasy compromise between democratic planning and markets, we need to get rid of capitalism.

For David Marsland's claims for capitalism do not stand up. The best gloss that can be put on his claim that capitalism encourages and allows individuals to plan for themselves is this: that the market informs those individuals of the limits put on them by the need to fit into a society based on large-scale cooperation (as capitalism is), and does it in an efficient way, allowing the individuals to make dignified choices within those limits.

## Ideal markets and real capitalism

If that claim be true, it amounts only to saying that the market is a good way of telling workers that they are condemned to scrape by, in a life of drudgery and worry, largely shut out from access to the wealth and

culture built on their labour. No doubt the discipline of the market is preferable to the slavedriver's whip, and it does leave the worker a choice about how to scrape by.

But capitalism disrupts workers' plans for their lives even within those limits. With high interest rates and unemployment, some 80,000 people lost their homes last year through mortgage repossessions; there must have been hundreds of thousands who avoided repossession only through desperate scraping by. Any plans you make in a capitalist economy can be ruined from one day to the next when you are thrown out of work; and millions are thrown out of work, forced on to the dole queue or into marginal jobs, all the time.

Marx put it like this: "The sphere of commodity exchange is a very Eden of the innate rights of man. It is the exclusive realm of Freedom, Equality, Property, and Bentham...Bentham, because each looks only to his own advantage...When we leave this sphere, a certain change takes place in our dramatic personae. He who was previously the money-owner now strides out in front as the capitalist; the possessor of labour-power follows as his worker. The one smirks self-importantly and is intent on business; the other is timid and holds back, like someone who has brought his own hide to market and now has nothing else to expect but — a tanning."

David Marsland claims to defend capitalism. In fact he — like all the others who have undertaken the same grim task, Hayek, Friedman, and so on — defends only an idealised picture of "the sphere of commodity exchange".

Marx was only half-ironic. Free-market capitalism, as compared to serfdom or slavery, does bring a real expansion of freedom and equality. But



"The driving force of capitalism is not consumer demand, but profit."

# ties of capitalism



David Marsland argues that "inequalities are required as the engine of economic progress... They are a major source of incentive, aspiration, and ambition."

In an idealised free-market economy made up of millions of small workshops or farms, this argument would have force. By making sure that the efficient workshop did better than the slovenly one, the market would promote progress.

It is also true that a workers' government would at first need inequalities as incentives. Skilled and conscientious workers would get more than unskilled and idle ones.

But the idealised free-market economy has never existed and never will exist. Even if it did exist, it would be a cruel and arbitrary system for those many whom it recognises only as "dependents" — those too old or sick to work, housewives, and children (that is, *everyone* in a large and important part of their lives). And the major inequalities in capitalist societies today have nothing to do with differentials between more and less productive workers.

A series of excellent books — all written, be it noted, by supporters of capitalism — have recently told us a lot about what the rich actually do, and how they get rich. Read *Liar's Poker*, *Barbarians at the Gate*, or *Maxwell: the outsider!*

People who are very skilled and diligent at caring for children or the old, or educating, or scientific research, or engineering, or even production management, do not get rich.

The skills and efforts encouraged by huge "incentives" under modern capitalism are those of the huckster and the wheeler-dealer. No doubt the skills of the energetic deal-maker and the fixer will be needed in a cooperative commonwealth, as they are needed in the labour movement today. But why should those skills be rewarded by huge riches? Why do they need to be?

Moreover, the evidence is that when those skills are rewarded by huge riches, they are corrupted rather than refined. The Robert Maxwells, the John Gutfreunds, the Henry Kravises, the Ross Johnsons, become foolish self-indulgent despots, if not outright crooks.

centuries by capitalist rule and capitalist trade.

In Britain people do not starve. It seems to me rather sick to give great credit to capitalism for this fact, when technology today allows only five per cent of the workforce to produce more than enough food for everyone.

Even in relatively rich Britain, a survey published in June last year found that hundreds of thousands of small children go without enough to eat at least once a month because their parents are short of cash; well over a million have "nutritionally poor" diets. Diseases of poverty such as rickets have reappeared.

Some hundreds of thousands — no-one knows exactly how many — are homeless. Yet David Marsland asserts that "real poverty" is "obsolete", and the illusion of continuing poverty is sustained only by "the Poverty Lobby's spurious identification of economic inequality with poverty".

No-one equates poverty with economic inequality. A millionaire and a billionaire are economically unequal, but the millionaire is not poor. However, a homeless family in Britain today living in a council-provided bed-and-breakfast place is *poor*, even if their food, their clothing, their amusements, and even the squalid room they live in, would look like wealth to a medieval peasant.

Human beings are social animals. Human life is not just biological survival as individuals, but life in society. To get out of poverty means more than not starving or freezing to death; it means being able to take a normal and dignified part in society.

Capitalism does create poverty. Regularly and routinely, workers are paid no more than the value of their labour power, which is defined by a "living wage" adequate to keep the working class fit for work. Regularly and routinely, workers are *poor* relative to the riches they produce for the capitalist class and its hangers-on. And, while the averagely-paid worker generally scrapes by in modest comfort, regularly and routinely capitalism throws millions out of their jobs. Capitalism cannot work without unemployed people, and without those unemployed people being unable to maintain even a working-class standard of living.

The pauper existence of the unemployed may mean starvation, or it may mean only discomfort and misery. It matters which. Capitalism modified by reforms imposed by the labour movement is better than unmodified capitalism; liberal capitalism is better than capitalism mixed with archaic or semi-feudal survivals; prosperous capitalism is better than stagnant, backward capitalism.

None of that should make us "marvel at the market's gifts to mankind" — or to tolerate the fact that, under capitalism, so many human beings have to give up so much of their dignity, their energy, their hopes and their happiness to a cruel and inhuman market.

capitalism is not just a system of individuals making free and equal exchanges in a market-place. Behind that market-place stands a system of production where the worker is unfree and unequal. The apparently free and equal exchange between buyer and seller of labour-power means in fact that in return for a routine pittance, scantier or more ample as it may be, the workers have to labour under the dictatorship of the capitalist and to increase the wealth of the capitalist.

## Does capitalism mean "consumer sovereignty"?

And real capitalist markets do not correspond with the "ideal" of efficient, reliable balancing of supply and demand. At almost all times outside wars, capitalist economies generate vast armies of the unemployed and marginally employed, people defined by the system as "excess supply" of labour-power. Two and a half million people are jobless in Britain today even according to the government's rigged statistics; the true figure must be well over three million.

David Marsland identifies capitalism with "consumer sovereignty". The idea is that the market, by transmitting signals from final consumer demand, ensures that the economy develops as consumers want.

At best this would mean only that capitalism satisfies the wants which capitalism creates — for our wants are in large part created by capitalism. It is not as if there were wants embedded in human nature, right back to the Stone Age, for BMW cars, Nintendo games, and, for that matter, volumes of Marxist theory, and now at last capitalism has satisfied them.

In fact capitalism does not satisfy the

wants which capitalism creates. Signals are sent through the market only by consumers with *money*, not by human wants or needs. The whim of the rich is satisfied; the desperate need of the poor is not.

Capitalism does not even satisfy the most basic physical needs of millions. An increasing number of people in the world today — some hundreds of millions — live on the edge of starvation. The poor countries of the Third World are just as much a part of world capitalism, with its patterns of uneven development, as are the relatively rich countries of the West.

Moreover, the big strategic investment decisions which shape the course of the economy are not dictated by consumer demand. At best market signals convey information only about *now*, not about the time, five, ten or fifteen years away, for which those big investments must be planned. Even enthusiastic supporters of free-market capitalism worry about its tendencies to "short-termism", or going for short-term gains at the expense of the long term.

*Social* needs which cannot be satisfied by the selling of individual commodities to individual people — such as the need for a sustainable relation to the environment — generate no market signals at all.


The real driving principle of capitalist economics is not consumer demand, but *profit*. Clearly there are human wants more or less independent of the prevailing mode of production, and those wants influence consumer demand which in turn influences profits; but consumer demand is also shaped and limited by the drive for profit. The market is not the only way to provide people with choice about what to consume. A public library can offer a better choice of books than a capitalist bookshop; a good subsidised works canteen can offer better choice than a streetful of capitalist fast-food places.

## Does capitalism destroy poverty, or create it?

Nevertheless, argues David Marsland, "capitalism destroys poverty". He argues this in a capitalist world where 1500 million people in two subcontinents, sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, have an *average* food consumption of only 2200 calories per head, while the World Health Organisation sets the minimum for health at 2600 calories! That the poorest countries often have governments calling themselves "socialist" does not lift the blame from capitalism. From Nigeria to Bangladesh, these are *capitalist* countries, shaped over

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*"None of us expected capitalism would be re-invented, without any serious resistance from the working class."*

# Stalinism and the century of the unexpected

Moshe Machover contributes to our continuing discussion on the class nature of the Stalinist states.

I have read with interest the statement "What is Stalinism?" reprinted in *Socialist Organiser* 502, as well as the ensuing discussion in SO 506 and 508.

It is worth pointing out that the two views voiced in this debate — *Socialist Organiser's* (which seems to be almost identical to mine) on the one hand, and that expressed by Chris Arthur and Hillel Ticktin on the other — are in agreement over some important theoretical points.

Both SO and the *Critique* comrades reject the orthodox Trotskyist doctrine that regards Soviet-type societies as "transitional" formations between capitalism and socialism, presided over by "degenerated" or "deformed" workers' states. Equally, both you and the *Critique* comrades reject the rival doctrine, favoured by most heterodox Trotskyists, who regard those societies as state-capitalist.

Both you and the *Critique* comrades agree that Soviet-type societies are *sui generis*. But you differ on whether the ruling bureaucracy is (or was...) a class, as you assert (I think correctly), or a mere elite. More importantly, you regard those societies as representing a specific mode of production, whose historical role was to implement by non-capitalist means some of the transformations — the early stages of industrialisation and modernisation — which elsewhere were achieved by capitalism.

In this sense you regard that mode of production (again, correctly, in my opinion) as parallel to capitalism. The *Critique* view is that these societies are a piece of historical nonsense, "defective embryos" incapable of proper functioning and survival.

To some extent, these differences are merely semantic. But not entirely. Behind them lurk issues of greater theoretical import than the diagnosis of Soviet-type societies.

Chris Arthur lets one cat out of the bag when he repeats, with complete approval, Trotsky's well-known argument: if this is a new mode of production, then it must either be more progressive than capitalism or less progressive. If it is more progressive, then we face centuries of this mode of production. (Here Trotsky added something that Chris omits: he claimed that in this case the new mode of production must spread *throughout the whole world*). If it is less progressive, then history can regress. In either case, socialism is doomed.

Underlying Trotsky's argument — with which Chris, and I suspect also Hillel, concurs — is an over-schematic view of human history, according to which modes of production correspond to epochs, each lasting several centuries. These follow a single unilinear sequence, starting from primitive communism and progressing steadily towards the communist future. According to this

***"It is, of course, true that the Soviet type of socio-economic formation has proved to be extremely unstable and relatively short lived. But then some modes of production are less stable than others."***



view, virtually all parts of humanity go through the same stages in the same order, albeit sometimes at an unequal pace.

Real human history has never been like that. Marx himself recognised an Oriental mode of production ("Oriental Despotism") which evidently never existed in Europe. On the other hand, most of Asia — the home of the vast majority of the human species — never went through a feudal mode of production (Japan is one of the rare exceptions to this rule!).

Similarly, although the *institution* of slavery was very widespread, most human societies never went through a slave-based mode of production, in which a major part of the surplus product is produced by slaves. Moreover, detailed study of non-European history has revealed the existence of several modes of production unknown to earlier generations of Marxists. Some modes of production were very widespread; others were confined to relatively small societies. Some were extremely stable; others much less so.

It seems that virtually the whole of humanity is destined to go through the capitalist mode of production (which, by the way, has proved to be very stable — far more so than most Marxists have been prepared to admit). But in this respect, as in several others, capitalism represents an exception rather than the rule.

In other words, the true picture is one of considerable complexity. Far from forming a single linear succession, modes of production evolve along lines that sometimes bifurcate and diverge, and sometimes re-converge.

The bureaucratic mode of production represents one such bifurcation in history. It did in fact spread beyond the Soviet Union, but not *throughout the world*. With two notable exceptions (East Germany and Czechoslovakia) it spread into "underdeveloped" countries where for various reasons the "normal" development of capitalism was blocked or stunted. In some cases it was imposed partly or even largely by external Russian force; but these cases cover only a small part of the population of (what used to be) the "Second World".

For the most part, this mode of production was implemented by the initiative of a modernising elite, mainly of middle-class origin, that seized power from a workers' state (Russia) or led from the start its own revolution under a stolen red banner (China — the largest nation on earth — Vietnam, Yugoslavia, Cuba...). Having achieved power, that elite converted itself into a ruling class.

In order to deny that this is a mode of production, the *Critique* comrades have to fly in the face of reality and deny the enormous initial achievements of those countries in the fields of industrialisation, modernisation and education. Hillel goes as far as to say that the surplus produced in the Soviet Union (and presumably also in China and other Second World countries) was mere rubbish, useless waste. If so, it is incomprehensible how the "non-class" that appropriated this surplus could not only live in lavish affluence, but also maintain a huge social apparatus of internal repression and a formidable armed force to defend and sometimes extend the domain of its rule. Apparently this "non-class"

***"In order to deny that [Stalinism] is a mode of production the Critique comrades have to fly in the face of history."***

knew a thing or two about recycling waste to good effect.

Hillel actually contradicts himself when he accepts the analogy between the USSR and "Neanderthal Man". No serious anthropologist will agree to the description of *Homo neanderthalensis* as a "defective embryo not having vital ingredients for life". What *Homo neanderthalensis* probably does represent is a bifurcation in the evolutionary history of the genus *Homo*, a species (or subspecies) that was eventually displaced by *Homo sapiens*.

It is, of course, true that the Soviet type of socio-economic formation has proved to be extremely unstable and relatively short-lived. But then, some modes of production are less stable than others.

It is true that Hillel Ticktin was one of the few people on the left who predicted the disintegration of the Soviet Union (from 1975 onwards). But this does not prove that his theory is necessarily correct. In order to forecast the terminal crisis of that system it was, of course, necessary to look closely at the reality of the Soviet Union, rather than be content with repeating old Trotskyist formulas. It is to Hillel's credit that he observed that society closely; we all owe him a debt for his writings on Soviet reality.

However, he was by no means the *only* one

to forecast the demise of that system. I, for one, made similar predictions in the 1970s, while defending a theoretical conception very similar to the present position of *Socialist Organiser* (see *The Century of the Unexpected* by John Fantham and myself, published in 1979 by Big Flame). I cannot claim any credit for this, however, because my own analysis of the crisis of the state-collectivist mode of production was largely based on the brilliant and seminal Marxist analysis contained in the famous "Open Letter" written by Kuron and Modzelewski in 1964.

These two Polish militants argued in detail that Poland (like other Second World countries) was a society under a new mode of production, which was based on class exploitation but was non-capitalist, and in which the role of ruling class was played by the central political bureaucracy.

They further showed that while this mode of production was quite successful in implementing the early *extensive* phases of industrialisation and modernisation, it became increasingly dysfunctional when it came to the more advanced, *intensive* and sophisticated phases. A period of terminal economic and social crisis set in. They concluded that:

***"As the economic crisis cannot be overcome within the framework of present production relations, so, too, the general social crisis cannot be overcome within the limits imposed by prevailing social relations. A solution is possible only through the overthrow of prevailing production relations. Revolution is a necessity for development."***

True, in 1964, Kuron and Modzelewski expected and hoped that the coming revolution would be a socialist one, led by the working class. But so did we all. None of us expected that capitalism would be not so much restored as re-invented in those countries without any serious resistance on the part of the working class.

The reason for *this* grave error has little to do with this or that analysis of Soviet-type societies. It has everything to do with the profound misconception (to which both *Critique* and *Socialist Organiser* seem to adhere even today!) that the present era, beginning from 1900 or 1914 or 1917, is a "transitional" era from capitalism to socialism, in which capitalism is "moribund" and "decayed" and is given a new lease of life merely due to the subjective failure of the workers' movement or the betrayals of its leadership.

But this is the beginning of an altogether different debate.



The distrustful Martin (Hugo Wearing)

# Trying to do without trust

## Cinema

Belinda Weaver reviews *Proof*

The notion of a blind photographer may seem weird to some people, but Martin, the blind photographer in *Proof*, takes pictures for a reason — to get proof that what

he heard or sensed when he took the photo was real, was the truth.

This is important to him; it's his way of ensuring that people don't lie to him. He began using the camera as a boy, to try to catch his mother, of whom he was suspicious, in a lie. When she describes a garden in which a man is raking up leaves, he takes his first picture to try to prove that there is no man, that his mother is deliberately deceiving him. When, hurt, she asks him why she should

lie to him, he turns to her in anger: "Because you can!"

As an adult, Martin is no different, still prickly and suspicious of people. His camera is his way of keeping them at arm's length, of showing how little he trusts them.

Yet despite his lack of trust, he's still dependent on people for the descriptions of the pictures he takes. He needs their eyes to help him make sense of the world.

When he meets Andy, an amiable dishwasher in a restaurant, he seems to relax for the first time, to let himself be helped. Andy describes his pictures, and gives him friendship. Messy, open-hearted and cheerful, Andy is the opposite of Martin, who's brusque and cold-hearted, even verging on the callous in his treatment of his young housekeeper Celia, who's in love with him.

But Celia has plans for revenge, and what she tries to do forms the plot of the story, which is all about trust — when to give it, and who deserves it.

The film is neatly constructed, it has good performances, and there are some funny moments, so it's worth seeing. It's a little hard on Celia, perhaps too hard, so that we end up feeling sorry for her and the way Martin treats her. But we also feel sorry for Martin, not because of his blindness, but because of his stubbornness and his unwillingness to trust. They, not his lack of sight, are his real disabilities.



Martial law, Dublin 1921

Now more subtle methods were used in negotiation.

Ireland was offered dominion status (self government, de facto independence, like Australia and Canada). The representatives were also threatened with "immediate and terrible war" if they did not there and agree to sign away the Irish Republic in whose name Dail Eireann acted, and agree to accept the King of England as the King of Ireland.

The majority of them did that: civil war followed in Ireland. *The Treaty* dramatises those negotiations.

## The Treaty Periscope

*The Treaty*, ITV,  
Wednesday 15 January,  
9.00pm

*The Treaty* was negotiated early in 1921 between representatives of Dail Eireann, set up by MPs who seceded from the Westminster parliament in January 1919, and the leaders of the British imperialist government, led by David Lloyd George.

For two and a half years Britain had used mass terror against the Irish.

# Capitalism and slavery

## Books

Anne Field reviews  
"Columbus: His Enterprise"  
and Eric Williams' "Capitalism and Slavery"

Hans Koning's "Columbus: His Enterprise", is an ideologically 'right-on' kind of book. It is part of the challenge to what Koning justifiably calls the "Eurocentric white-race oriented teaching of history".

Written in 1976, the book has now been republished by the Latin American Bureau as part of its preparations for next year's 500th anniversary of Columbus's historic voyage to the Americas.

At the level of debunking the mythology which has been spun around Columbus and his voyages — a mythology which will doubtless be given a fresh lease of life next year — Koning's book is a success.

In other respects, however, the book does not make any sense at all.

According to Koning, capitalism was brought into being by a new outlook on life, rather than the other way around: "A new individualism began. At its best, it was to bring in the Renaissance, and its near worst, early capitalism". This is the only mention capitalism receives in his book.

Koning's historical analogies confuse rather than clarify. In his dealings with the Spanish monarchy Columbus used "what is now called salesman's psychology". He was "a worthy, if somewhat pathetic, predecessor of New York City's Madison Avenue".

The Spanish conquerors of the Americas had a "gangster mentality". The behaviour of Columbus and his followers in the Americas is likened to the Vietnam War. Columbus's voyage of 1492 is "the drama of a murderer coming ever closer to his unsuspecting victims".

But why was Columbus such a nasty person? Because, explains Koning, he was "a man of his race... he was a typical man of the white West". Other races might behave cruelly, accepts Koning, but "what sets the West apart is its persistence, its capacity to stop at nothing".

This approach to history reaches its climax in Koning's description of the Second World War as "the great white-race civil war".

Koning calls for "an atonement of past crimes". (All 500 years of them?) "If we do not learn from history, we are doomed to repeat it", warns Koning. So the next time someone "discovers" America, they should behave differently from Columbus?

Koning deals not in terms of historical development but in terms of timeless moral categories — and even then not always accurately.

"The fateful year 1492" was the beginning of "an era of genocide, cruelty, and slavery," he writes. In its earliest period of development, capitalism *did* resort to slavery in the Americas. But the further development of capitalism as a mode of production *abolished* the slavery which had been an element of all pre-capitalist forms of society (including those of the pre-Columbus Americas).

At the end of the day, Koning's view of history is that of the backward-looking opponents of capitalism of 200 years ago. The "man of the white West" has fallen from a state of grace. He has corrupted what the French philosopher Rousseau called "the noble savage".

Koning might be successful in debunking one mythology in which the past 500 years have been cloaked. But he merely ends up replacing one mythology with another.

Eric Williams' "Capitalism and Slavery" is not an ideologically 'right-on' kind of book.

On the very first page, Williams talks about Columbus's "discovery of the New World", a phrase he uses repeatedly in the book. He talks about "Negroes" and "the Negro race". He describes the historian Carlyle as "personifying reaction at its blackest".

Williams' use of the term "anti-imperialist" has nothing in common with its current connotations. Williams' "anti-imperialists" are the industrial

capitalists of the nineteenth century who campaigned for free trade to replace the preferential treatment enjoyed by the produce of Britain's colonies!

And yet Williams' work, written in 1944, is one of the greatest books about slavery ever written. Entire bookcases in libraries have been filled with works written in response to Williams' arguments.

Williams analyses the development of slavery in the Americas after their "discovery" in terms of the development of capitalism. He understands slavery in terms of historical development and economic need, and not abstract morality: "The eighteenth century, like any other century, could not rise above its economic limitations".

He does not waste any time on "wouldn't it have been nice if..." speculations. The expansion of capitalism, the emergence of a unified world economy, made slavery necessary at one stage of development, and superfluous at a higher stage: "The capitalists had first encouraged West Indian slavery, and then helped destroy it".

Nineteenth century capitalism was the age of industry, not hand-picked sugar. It was the age of free trade, not protective customs duties to guarantee a market for colonial produce.

Slavery in the colonies was an obstacle to the further development of capitalism. So capitalism swept it away. The opponents of slavery were "not only the humanitarians, but also the capitalists".

And Williams argues more controversially, the humanitarians were liars. They "exaggerated the horrors of the Middle Passage (from Africa to the Americas)" in order to add weight to their demands for abolition of the slave trade. The horrors of the Middle Passage were "not something unusual or inhuman, but part of the age".

Before Williams, abolition of the slave trade and slavery had been portrayed as the selfless act of great men of virtue. Williams cut through the cant. Abolition, dictated by economic need, was a case of "lucrative humanity". At a stroke, Williams shattered the self-satisfaction fostered by bourgeois historians.

"Capitalism and slavery" is a book which bears the stamp of its time, such as uncritical use of the term "Negro". (The Trotskyist C.L.R. James also used the term without any equivocation). Whatever Williams' limitations as a politician (he later became Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago), the book is a starting point for any serious Marxist discussion about slavery.

In the run-up to the Columbus quinqucentenary, Williams' work merits republication far more than does that of Koning. His book is a historical polemic, whereas that of Koning is a personal whinge. More importantly, Williams, unlike Koning, has not just a sense of history but also an understanding of it.



Why was Columbus such a nasty man? We cannot know why in terms of timeless moral categories, but only in terms of historical development



# Stop BT! Telecom workers say no to sackings

By a central London BT engineer

Telecom workers in London are taking industrial action in defence of fellow workers over 60 who are being sacked.

Members of Westminster Branch of the NCU started their action on 6 January in order to

stop BT management from enforcing compulsory redundancies without any compensation on several of their members over 60.

BT are looking to make massive staffing cuts in the next few years and the over-60s are an easy group to target. Though there is a voluntary redundancy scheme, it is highly unlikely that enough people will be found to go voluntarily (people over 60

are not eligible for the scheme because they are classified as retired).

Even whilst BT was negotiating the voluntary redundancy scheme with the union last year they were planning compulsory redundancies.

The NCU nationally has tried to defend the over 60s by challenging the dismissals through the courts, but the test case was lost and BT have been

confirmed in their policy of retiring people at 60.

It is absurd that what should be a benefit to working people — early retirement — has been turned into a weapon of staffing cuts. There is a possibility of extracting some form of compensation for those over 60 from BT — for example, six months pay — but this does not help those over 60 who are forcibly retired after only a few years' service and a small pension, with five years of the dole to look forward to.

The best way to get justice for the over 60s is to have co-ordinated solidarity: all members defending those over 60 and taking action. If we allow BT to pick off the over 60s then it becomes harder to defend the next group they target.

Westminster NCU is taking action now. Long Distance Faraday branch are balloting on action this week. Westminster are taking limited action in the form of withdrawal of "goodwill", no substitution for management grades, and an overtime ban (except for rota or call-out).

## A dangerous precedent

# Walt Disnae work here anymore

Applicants for jobs at the new Disneyland in Paris should note the decision of a French labour inspector that Disney's ultra-stringent personal appearance/hygiene/grooming code infringes personal freedom and French labour law.

Indeed, when interviewed, Disney's head of "Human Resources" said that Walt himself wouldn't have got a job due to his fondness for a drink or two and... his moustache.

Staff at Disneyland will be referred to as the 'cast' and when working could be considered as being 'on-stage'. All Disney's squeaky-clean reputation.

Hence, hiring conditions include: no smoking at work (anywhere); earrings (for women) no larger than a penny; no moustaches and beards on men; only one ring per hand; female staff must wear tights however hot the weather; only natural hair dyes; men's hair off the collar; no fat people, staff must be "harmonious in size and weight"; deodorants must be used; staff must bath or shower once a day.

For working under such anti-individualistic conditions, non-management staff will be paid up to £12,500 and managers from £14,000.

No-one should have to put up with nonsense like this at work. Once a few firms get away with it, it'll create a precedent.

And, finally, the grooming officer investigate reports of two giant rodents in the complex answering to the names Mickey and Minnie...



## CPSA Broad Left rally:

# A wasted opportunity

By a London civil servant

1992 is showdown year for civil service pay.

If the Tories get away with increased use of performance related pay, and smashing national pay bargaining, it will be a blow from which civil servants will find it hard to recover.

The Tories' pay strategy is part of an overall scheme to attack the jobs and conditions of civil servants through, amongst other things, privatisation, the setting up of Agencies, and the contracting out of jobs. All this will render the civil service unions weak and ineffective.

The response of the CPSA (Civil and Public Services

Association) right-wing executive has been to downplay these threats, say there is nothing we can do, and therefore, most likely, we should accept whatever outrageous pay deal the Treasury throw at us.

The NUCPS (National Union of Civil and Public Servants) are taking these threats more seriously and are holding a NUCPS pay conference early this year.

The CPSA has not been on strike over pay since 1987. Since then, a right-wing executive has negotiated and forced through deals of low increases which included performance related pay and local pay differentials. With national pay bargaining under direct attack it is vital to unite with other civil service unions (notably NUCPS and IRSF) to defeat the Tories.

The response therefore of the CPSA Broad Left (BL), where

Militant supporters hold key positions, is both a disgrace and a tragedy. A motion at BL conference in November last year was unanimously carried, calling for a conference to be held to discuss pay.

Socialist Organiser supporters called for a working conference jointly organised with NUCPS and IRSF, at which motions would be debated and which would be built seriously in order to reflect the mood of the thousands of members who are angry about low pay.

Instead, Militant have organised a low key rally, which has not been built for (many BL members have not received notification), to which only NUCPS BL members, out of all the other civil service workers, have been invited, and where motions can come only from regional BL groups (most of which will not meet before the date of the conference, 11 January).

The event will be nothing more than a showpiece for Militant and John McCreddie (the BL's General Secretary candidate, and the Derek Hatton of the CPSA).

BL members who attend should make the best of a bad job and use Saturday as a planning meeting for a serious conference in the near future, to be organised with NUCPS and IRSF activists to hear motions and to plan the campaign for a no vote to the pay offer, and to build for the all-out strike action needed to defeat the Tories over pay and thus set back their grand plans for the civil service.

## ES strikers stand firm

CPSA members in the three main offices involved in the Employment Service (ES) dispute have voted to continue their nine-month strike against management threats to remove safety screens from public offices.

Strikers at Forest Hill, Marylebone and Bristol offices will have their strike pay reduced from 100% to 50%. A national levy has been organised to raise the shortfall. Other ES offices will be asked to volunteer to join the main strikers.

CPSA strikers need to develop a bold strategy to win. There should be a meeting of all ES activists to plan the way forward. It is vital that the strike is spread and other options are considered such as the occupation of offices.

# Dead drunk

Les Hearn's



## SCIENCE COLUMN

Readers who have Rover-indulged in alcoholic beverages over the festive period may be familiar with certain unpleasant after-effects.

These are partly due to the presence of various impurities in the drinks, some of which are relatives of the drunkenness-inducing ethanol (ethyl alcohol).

These include propanol, butanol, etc., higher alcohols which give spirits some of their particular taste, but the deadliest is methanol (methyl alcohol) or wood alcohol.

This is widely used in industry and is cheaper than ethanol. It is added to industrial ethanol to make methylated spirits. Thus rendered poisonous, meth does not attract excise duty. Some alcoholics do drink meths and suffer long-term damage as a result.

The result of drinking larger amounts of methanol is more serious. Victims suffer from pain, vomiting, blindness, paralysis, madness, coma and even death. This has been seen most recently at the New Year in Bombay, where up to 100 customers of a government-owned bar have just died. For the equivalent of about 4p, the drinkers, mainly low-paid workers, bought a shot of "Country Doctor" Liquor, containing enough methanol to kill them. 22 were found dead outside the bar when police arrived after midnight, while 32 died within half an hour of arriving at hospital, according to newspaper reports.

Adulteration of alcoholic drinks is quite common in India. The practice is to water down the legally produced liquor and then add the cheaper methanol to restore the "kick". It is wise to check the seal on a bottle before drinking from it. 200 died from a similar incident in New Delhi last October. They had been drinking sura, a tonic.

Ironically, survivors were said to be being treated in hospital with whisky and in fact ethanol is one of the best antidotes to methanol poisoning. The reason for this can be understood by looking at how the body deals with ethanol.

Ethanol is broken down by an enzyme in the liver, called liver alcohol dehydrogenase (LAD). This turns the ethanol into

acetaldehyde. Subsequently, this is converted into acetic acid and then broken down in the normal way for energy. If not needed, it is converted into fat, as dedicated drinkers may know.

But LAD is also capable of breaking down other alcohols and when it gets to work on methanol, it turns it into formaldehyde. Unlike the sweet-smelling acetaldehyde, formaldehyde is a pungent, irritating substance. Its solution is called formalin, and is used for preserving biological specimens. Its action on those who drink methanol is a sort of pickling from the inside.

It works by attacking proteins and sticking their strands together, denaturing or coagulating them (rather like what happens to egg white when boiled). The proteins cannot do their jobs and the cells die.

For some reason, the cells of the retina and optic nerves are particularly sensitive, hence the blindness.

Something similar happens when ethylene glycol (anti-freeze) is drunk. This was added to some wines to make them taste sweeter in

*"Adulteration of alcoholic drinks is quite common in India. The practice is to water down the legally produced liquor and then add the cheaper methanol to replace the 'kick'."*

the Austrian wine scandal of a few years ago. LAD converts the anti-freeze into an aldehyde which is then turned into oxalic acid. This works by combining with calcium and causing disruption to the actions of muscles, leading to convulsions.

Methanol and ethylene glycol are both examples of chemical Trojan horses. Harmless in themselves, they are taken in by the unsuspecting body and converted into a deadly threat.

Treatment is possible if started early enough because LAD prefers to work on ethanol. Give enough ethanol to the victim and the methanol is crowded out. It can then be excreted from the body in the urine.

Hangovers are partly due to the body starting to break down the small amounts of methanol naturally present in most alcoholic drinks, after the ethanol has all been used up. Having "a hair of the dog" alleviates the symptoms by crowding out the methanol again and giving it time to be excreted.

The standard treatment for methanol and anti-freeze poisoning is therefore to give ethanol, but this is not the recommended way of getting a free drink.

# A weekend school organised by the Alliance for Workers' Liberty Socialists and the Trade Unions

Manchester Town Hall, Albert Square, Manchester

This school is designed to provide information for and provoke discussion amongst socialists in the trade unions.

It will be an event at which the voice of the rank and file will be heard. London Underground workers fighting job losses, engineers campaigning to stop the AEU/EETPU merger and offshore workers who are building a new independent union will all be able to put their case.

We will also be discussing broader issues of socialist theory with the aim of drawing the lessons of past defeats and setbacks so that we can rebuild and renovate the working class movement for the battles of the future.

With this in mind, the immediate focus of the school will be the upcoming general election, the prospects for a Labour government and the tasks facing socialists in the trade unions in the year ahead.

Sessions include:

- The state of the movement and the coming general election
- European unity and the future of the labour movement
- Strike strategy — how to fight and how to win
- Public service strikes and emergency cover — the cases for and against
- Effective workplace and branch organisation
- Fighting sexual harassment at work
- Arguing socialism in the workplace

- Organising the rank and file: a history of the minority movement
- Round table: where now for the left in the unions?
- How to deal with "Japanese" working methods
- Karl Marx and the trade unions
- The case for a Workers' Charter

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# SOCIALIST

ORGANISER

## Help your socialist paper!

The fund drive for money to help *Socialist Organiser* is continuing in the run-up to the General Election.

*Socialist Organiser* is aiming to raise £10,000 and extra regular income to improve the quality of our paper during a crucial period for the labour movement.

*Socialist Organiser* is unique. We combine revolutionary socialist ideas with a willingness to get actively involved in the day-to-day struggles of working-class people. Everywhere there is a fight back, you will find *Socialist Organiser*, helping in the immediate battles but also trying to map political horizons.

Right now it is vital for socialists to work for a Labour victory. *Socialist Organiser* has run major features taking on the right-wing free-market ideology of the Tories. We also encourage new activists to join the Labour Party to challenge the right-wing, anti-socialist grip of Kinnock and his friends.

Socialist activists need *Socialist Organiser* — and your paper needs your help.

### How you can help

We aim to raise £10,000 to buy new equipment. As of 7 January we had raised £6174.33 from fund-raising events and from readers' donations.

Why not make a donation now? Send cheques and postal orders (made out to *Socialist Organiser*) to P O Box 823, London SE15 4NA.

### Join our 200 Club!

Our 200 Club is a regular monthly draw where participants have a chance of winning a £100 prize. Entry costs as little as £1 per month. Profit from the 200 Club goes to help *Socialist Organiser's* drive to expand.

For more details of the draw, ask your local SO sellers, or write to us at the London office, P O Box 823, London SE15 4NA.

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## Sackings met with all-out strike:



# GEC workers show how to defend jobs

By Dan Judelson

More than 350 workers at the GEC Alstom Switchgear plant in Higher Openshaw, Manchester, are on all-out indefinite strike.

They are taking action against compulsory redundancies that

management are trying to introduce. All five unions represented at the site — AEU, GMB, MSF, EETPU, APEX — are taking part in the strike which has official backing following a mass meeting and a secret ballot in favour of action.

The action began as soon as the first compulsory redundancy was announced on Friday night when the workforce walked out as they

had promised to do ever since it became clear that compulsory redundancies were management's favoured tactic.

The official picket began at 7am on Monday morning with all the strikers in attendance. The entire shopfloor workforce is out, along with an estimated 50% of office workers. The strikers believe that the decision to make people redundant has been taken centrally: "he [the plant managing director] has got his orders and we have our mandate by the union membership, which is being supported 100%", said Laurence Boyle, acting Chair of the Shop Stewards Committee. "You can't just keep accepting things like this...we can't all work in McDonalds or B&Q", he said.

The strikers are confident and determined. All lorries making deliveries to the site have been successfully turned away and much needed support is being built. The strikers are in the process of contacting other GEC-Alstom plants in, among other places, Crawford and Colchester. One striker suggested holding a whipround to pay for a delegation to go to France (Alstom's HQ) to build support among workers there.

The workforce is now paid mon-

thly instead of weekly and with the dispute coming so soon after Christmas the strikers are in dire need of financial as well as moral support. On the first day of

*"The strikers are confident and determined. All lorries making deliveries have been successfully turned away and much needed support is being built."*

picketing an ambulance driver stopped outside the gates and ran over with a fiver.

Many such donations will be necessary to help sustain the strikers in the fight. Cheques should be made payable to AEI Shop Stewards' Committee Fund, and sent to Dave Hughes, 23 Prince Edward Avenue, Manchester M34 1AS.

## Yes, there is an alternative

The GEC workers have provided a magnificent example of how to fight back and defend jobs.

But their stand is just the beginning of the fightback. As well as standing firm in every workplace workers need a unified and coherent response from the whole of the labour and trade union movement.

We need to get over the message that there is an alternative to the Tory jobs massacre.

A cut in hours to 35 per week across the board would create hundreds of thousands of new jobs. Work-sharing without loss of pay would save workers from the scrapheap.

Government money for an arms conversion programme and much-

needed public projects (housing, hospitals, schools, railways) would create new jobs meeting real needs. And a public programme of training and re-training at trade union rates of pay — instead of the current rundown of training and adult education — would give workers access to new skills.

Despite the slump, the Tories and bosses are not invincible. We beat the Tories on the poll tax. With a strong trade union fight back, we can beat the Tories and the bosses on the jobs front too.

What's more, a powerful movement of industrial resistance can only help to increase working class confidence and thus in turn brook the prospects of a Labour victory in the upcoming general election.