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SOCIALIST

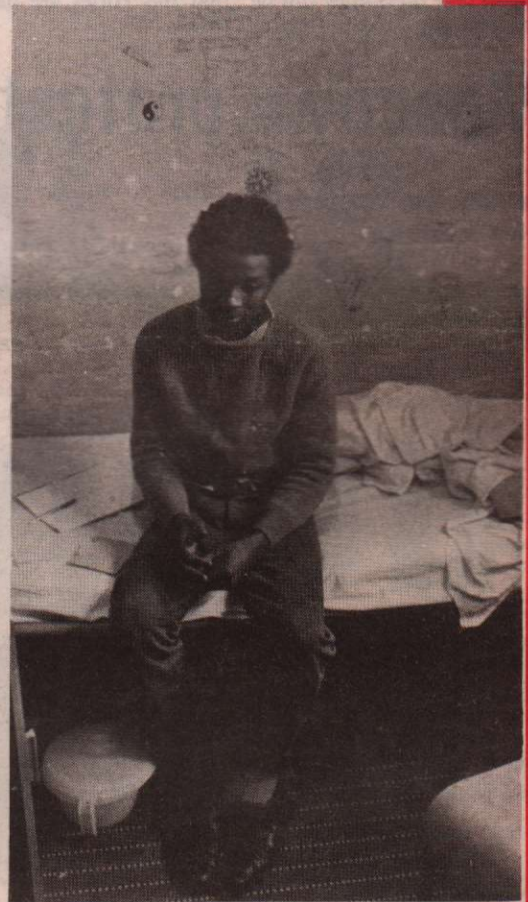
ORGANISER

Unite the left!

Demonstrate against the Asylum Bill

London: assemble 1.00pm, Embankment
Edinburgh: assemble 11.00am, Kings Stables Road

Stop the racist Asylum Bill!



By Sab Sanghera

The Asylum Bill must be stopped! The Bill is an attempt by the Tories to step up racism in the run-up to the election. They believe it is a vote-winner.

The labour and student movements must not let the Tories get away with targeting refugees and black people. We must say quite plainly that the Tories are trying to divert attention from a failing economy, and that we will not stand for racial intolerance. We must make this Tory-

sponsored racism backfire on the government. We must get rid of the Tories.

Join the Labour Party and the campaign to get rid of the racist Tory government!

What is needed now is a united response to the Tories — black and white — in opposition to the racist

Asylum Bill and to the appalling situation that many workers find themselves in.

Unemployment and terrible housing must be combatted by any movement which is fighting racism.

White workers must join with black to win jobs, decent services and housing. But the only way we

can achieve permanent working class unity is if white workers fight for the rights of black workers.

Black and white — unite to fight against racism and for socialism!

More on the Asylum Bill on page 12

Kick the Tories out!

Poll tax victims will lose their votes

Amnesty for non-payers!

By Steven Holt

Recent evidence is that every many Labour voters have been disenfranchised from voting in the coming General Election by the Tories' poll tax.

In Hackney, there are one quarter fewer people registered than last year, and it is certain that many less well-off people in Hackney and other areas have avoided registering for the vote to avoid paying the poll tax.

All this in spite of the fact that the hugely unfair, unpopular and ultimately unworkable poll tax has surely been a major factor in the Tories' loss of popular support.

The Trafalgar Square demonstration and mass non-payment campaigns have shown that the Tories can be beaten on some issues

without waiting for an election.

Mass non-registration will hurt Labour's chance of winning many marginal seats, especially in areas where the poll tax is high.

The Labour-controlled Association of London Authorities, has staged an advertising campaign to persuade working class voters to register, but a more appropriate way to deal with this problem would be to attack it at its source.

The Labour Party and trade unions must campaign for a poll tax amnesty now.

In the run-up to the election, it is certain that the Tories will think up various little bribes to get the votes of pensioners, women and other groups.

To this, socialists should counterpose a poll tax amnesty, which would help many people far more than the largely cosmetic promises that the Tories are likely to offer.



A year since the "blood for oil" war in the Gulf

Exactly a year ago, America and its allies began to bomb Iraqi targets. Before the war was over, up to 200,000 Iraqis had been killed.

One year on, Saddam Hussein is still in power in Iraq. Above: a young victim of the bombing.

Ravenscraig: the closure can still be stopped

By Mary Cooper

The public announcement by the British Steel (BS) board last Wednesday of the decision to close the Ravenscraig steel plant in September comes as a serious blow to the workers in what is left of the Scottish steel industry.

The closure will mean the loss of the remaining 1500 jobs at the plant. The knock-on effect on the already blighted area of Lanarkshire will be an estimated 13,000 further job losses. By any reckoning, the impact of British Steel's "restructuring" plan, if successful, would devastate the living standards of working class communities throughout Lanarkshire — some of which are already suffering from unemployment rates in excess of 25%.

The response of the Joint Shop Stewards' Committee to last Wednesday's decision to bring forward the closure was one of meek acceptance. The reason for this defeatist decision to surrender, taken by the JSSC, is the failure of the ten-year campaign to "save Ravenscraig".

This campaign, launched by the STUC a decade ago, was a classic example of the Communist Party-inspired "broad cross-class" conception of campaigning, supposedly uniting Tories, businessmen, churches, liberals, SNP and, lastly, the labour movement to "save our Scottish steel industry".

The result of this so-called campaign has been a fiasco for the workers in the Scottish steel industry, decimated by closure after closure, wave of redundancies after wave of redundancies, which after a decade has had a cumulative effect on the militancy of the workers in the industry.

The final nail in the coffin of this farcical campaign came last Wednesday with the closure announcement of Ravenscraig.

As one ex-worker in the strip mill explained to SO: "Ten years ago Tommy Bremman, the chair of the JSSC, at the ISTC conference, was arguing for defiance of the Tory laws and the cuts, refusal to pay fines and even a general strike if the Tories tried to use the Tebbit laws against the union. A couple

of weeks ago Bremman 'graciously' accepted a CBE in the New Year's honours, this sums it up for me.

"When Scholey [Chairman of BS] made the announcement, the chickens of the STUC campaign came home to roost. The Tories washed their hands of the situation, the Labour Party said it was terrible and a new buyer must be found. The only people who can take away credit will be the SNP who committed themselves to renationalise Scottish Steel if they win at the general election."

In many ways, the reaction of the Labour Party leadership in Scotland to the BS decision has been the most disgraceful of all.

In the run-up to a general election where the SNP are playing a radical card all that Donald Dewar could come up with in response to the demand for nationalisation by the next Labour government or Scottish Parliament was: "My view, and the view of my party, is that it is not the way forward, and those who argue for it are simply sloganising."

The Dewar plan to save the plant now consists of begging some multinational to take over the plant and run it in any way they see fit.

The battle is not over, however much Dewar and Co. want it to be. The workers of the neighbouring Dalzell plant have come out with a far more defiant stance against the BS board and have offered a joint campaign to Ravenscraig workers to save both plants.

There has also been a groundswell of opinion in the Scottish Labour Party against the passivity of the leadership. The priority in the coming weeks and months ahead must be to link up the cause of Ravenscraig and Dalzell workers in a campaign to defend jobs against the axing plans of the BS board.

Furthermore, activists in the Labour Party must mount a campaign within the party, in the run up to the Scottish conference in March, to commit the party to renationalise British Steel under workers' control — with no job losses — in the immediate aftermath of a general election.

The labour movement must stand by the workers at Ravenscraig and it is the duty of the left to ensure that this becomes reality.

Moscow: protests against price rises

Anatoly Voronov reports from Moscow

There have been two demonstrations, organised by the old Stalinist Communist Party of Russia, in central Moscow. The demonstrations were about 2,000 strong and

called to oppose the price rises.

Although they have had coverage in the West, they are not considered very important here.

It is difficult to know exactly what to do now. People are stunned. The main job should be to organise the wage workers. This section of society has no-one to represent them. This is our job.

We need a workers' party.

All the queues have lengthened. The price rises have not affected supply or the amount of goods available to working people.

The new bureaucrats — these men are Yeltsin's people, members of parliament and top functionaries — are corrupt.

Official Party shops which were for the exclusive use of the old bureaucrats are being transformed into new enterprises for the privilege of the new bureaucrats.

Gabriel Popov, the mayor of Moscow, was recently listed as one of the five most wealthy men in Russia. This man is a public servant!

We just have a change of personnel among the bosses.

Yeltsin has still maintained some of his popularity. He is currently hoping to divert attention away from the economy towards the issue of the Black Sea fleet. He wants to stir up nationalism to channel people's attention.

The government has issued its programme for the so-called compulsory privatisation of light industry, catering and services. But, already, some analysts suggest that this programme cannot be fulfilled.

There are no real legal or official structures for this to happen.

They plan to gain 92 billion roubles from this privatisation, but who will pay? The only people who have money have got it by dubious means.

The lie machine



Men standing on trapdoors with nooses around their necks probably have flashing fantasies of miraculous escape. Nervously awaiting the verdict of an electorate, the Tories have flashing fantasies of once again "getting" Labour on "defence" as they did in 1987.



The silence of Robert Maxwell's disorganised sons is a willing companion to the silence of paper like Today and the Daily Mail when the fat old pirate was alive, a cheque book in each hand and a clutch of libel writs between his teeth!



On a very cold day last year candidate Martin Lewis turned on the central heating for the old people in his block of flats when Lambeth council had decreed that the weather was warm. Now he might be disciplined!



They have used every undemocratic trick in the

Defend student democracy!

From back page

building the 12 February demonstration.

We are in the run-up to a vital general election. If the leaders of NUS want a change of government, they should free our time to campaign on that, not saddle us with an irrelevant conference.

The conference will cost! Money will be siphoned away from campaign budgets such as on housing, on education and on welfare. In addition, there will be no childcare and no Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Conference.

This move is just the latest undemocratic manoeuvre used by the leaders of NUS. Our democratic NOLS leadership tried to call such a conference last summer during the vacation! At last national conference they unnecessarily suspended conference and illegally called a re-vote on Reform.

They have used every undemocratic trick in the

book to get their way.

It seems to me that the leaders of Labour Students (NOLS) — enthusiastically backed by the Liberal Democrats — want to scrap winter conference because they want to cut down on democracy and accountability in order to shield themselves against their members. An NUS leadership that betrays student struggle and takes poll tax out of staff members' wages needs such protection!

Last term saw them embarrassingly out of touch with the real needs and opinions of students.

If NOLS and their co-conspirators are not stopped, the whole democratic fabric of NUS will be torn and diminished.

I urge every student unionist to stand up for democracy and oppose this conference.

- Sign the enclosed statement.
• Write to the National Executive Committee.
• Lobby your Executive or Council if they discuss the issue.

If this conference does take place, ensure that your college elects delegates who will defend NUS democracy and vote to stop NUS being hijacked by an unprincipled minority.

Janine Booth, NUS Women's Officer

• For more on students, see Women's Eye, page 6.

Northampton students occupy

By Pat Markey

Three hundred students packed an extraordinary general meeting at Nene College, Northampton, on Monday 13 January, to protest at the exorbitantly high rents charged at the college halls of residence.

Most of the rents are £42 per week, some of the highest in the country for the services provided. Rents are so high, both at the college and in the town,

that some students have been forced to buy property!

The main focus of the meeting was to plan an initial 24-hour occupation next Monday 20 January. The college authorities cannot afford to be too complacent.

The college is seeking university status and doesn't want its image tarnished.

The spontaneous foot-stomping at the end of the meeting summed up the determined mood. As student union President, Kevan Osborne said: "We've all known Nene for being apathetic, but this marks the end of 'Apathy College'."



Belfast: the result of the IRA's method of forcing radical change in Northern Ireland

Why the IRA is bombing London

As everyone knows, Britain is now in the grip of a long pre-general election campaign. The big-scale IRA bombing offensive in Northern Ireland and in London is part of that campaign.

It is the IRA's attempt to force discussion of radical change in Northern Ireland back on to the agenda of mainstream British politics where it has not been for the last 6 years, since the Anglo-Irish Treaty was signed in November 1985.

IRA bombs once more ripping out the centres of Northern Ireland's towns and cities, where the number of sectarian killings has risen horribly over the last year, testify that the 1985 Agreement has solved nothing in Northern Ireland.

But the politicians continue to insist that things are not too bad.

Northern Ireland Secretary, Peter Brook, potters about between the leaders of the Northern Ireland political parties setting up "talks" or "talks about talks". The politicians are supposed to be working towards agreement on the setting up of a new structure of self-government in Northern Ireland, in which Catholic and Protestant leaders would share power. But they have been "working on" that for many, many years. Most Northern Irish people do not take it seriously and many of those — Protestants — who do, feel threatened by it.

Underneath the comings and goings of the leaders, Northern Irish society continues to exist chronically divided and at odds with itself.

The wall cutting Berlin in two came down two years ago; the high, corrugated iron walls in Belfast which divide Catholic and Protestant areas, or, rather, keep them apart, still stand, grim proof of an utter failure to 'normalise' Northern Irish society.

The shooting and bombing war has now been going on for 21 years! The IRA cannot win it because, despite the myth with which they hypnotise themselves, the implacable basic opposition to their desire for a united Ireland comes not from Britain, but from a Protestant-Unionist segment of the Irish people who form the compact majority in north-east Ulster.

The British cannot win because they cannot in present Western European conditions use that over-

whelming violence against the Northern Irish Catholics which alone would quell their revolt — the level of violence Britain routinely inflicted on Irish Catholics for centuries.

Northern Ireland as a going concern lasted 50 years, under Protestant majority rule and with the Catholic one-third of the population as second-class citizens, kept down by a mini-police state. It collapsed in ruins in 1969.

Now, as for two decades, there is stalemate. Life in Northern Ireland is dominated by a low-level, vicious, simmering war and by politicians irresponsibly playing bloody games of charades in the ruins.

Britain's fundamental role is that of maintaining the status quo, and the Northern Ireland six county entity it set up in 1920 — long after that entity has collapsed and thereby proved itself untenable.

In 1985, Britain admitted Dublin, under solemn international treaty, to a share of the political power in Belfast. It has made Catholics feel less isolated; it has embittered Protestants and made many of them even more paranoid about 'Dublin'.

Nothing very much has changed on the ground. There is mass poverty and unemployment, unequally distributed between Catholics and Protestants. The IRA's new car-bomb campaign against the centres of Northern Ireland's cities will make that economic situation worse.

The evidence of 21 years suggests not only that neither side can win,

but also that neither side will "go away".

It is likely that in conditions like the present, the IRA can make this kind of war indefinitely. They believe they can keep on making it longer than the British can go on taking it.

They believe, against all the evidence, that they and the Catholic community can win or benefit from the communal civil war that will, for certain, follow a British withdrawal without a political settlement. The truth is otherwise.

If the IRA tomorrow were to get their "victory" and Britain were to declare itself willing to pull out immediately, unless there could also be a prior political settlement between the Catholics and the Protestants, then, after British withdrawal, the IRA could gain nothing it now fights for. Nothing!

There would not be a united Ireland, but a Protestant war to achieve their own self-determination from Catholic majority rule in an all-Ireland state, a murderous, bloody, fratricidal civil war like that in Yugoslavia now, followed by repartition and the emergence of a smaller Protestant state.

Both Protestants and Catholics would be killed or driven out of areas where they are now a minority.

That is as certain as anything can be in politics.

The Provisional IRA are not warriors for Irish freedom and unity as they want to be; not the true heirs to Ireland's centuries-long battle for independence, but the political-

ly demented gravediggers of all hope of ever uniting the Irish people, Protestant and Catholic, in a common, mutually acceptable Ireland.

That is not what the brave and devoted men and women of the IRA want to be, but it is what they are. It is what their military campaign, killings and bombings alike, will achieve if it succeeds in the goal they set for it and forces Britain to withdraw, without a political settlement.

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"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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Green glasnost

THE POLITICAL FRONT

By Pat Murphy



One of the few short-term pleasures of the collapse of Stalinism is the sight of various Stalinist parties around the world suddenly discovering and then denying the generous backhanders they have been receiving for years from Moscow.

The heat of public exposure has spread to Ireland. Documents published recently in Moscow claim that payments of \$50,000 were made to the Workers Party last February and the year before.

There is evidence of further payments in previous years. Moscow citizens, in their present predicament, could be excused for feeling peeved that so much valuable hard currency was exported to the Stalinist bureaucrats' apologists abroad, but the Workers Party leaders' main concern is to shield themselves from embarrassment and to deflect the blame onto each other.

The Workers Party has denied the allegations, say they sought no such donations and have no evidence of receiving any — but they also announced that they were launching an international investigation and hinted that money may have been paid into a personal account.

This could be true, but more likely the party's "Eurocommunist" leadership will try to shift any guilt by association with the Soviet Union onto the "hardliners" who have opposed recent changes in the party's policies and image; in common with most of Europe's so-called Communist Parties, the Workers Party have become keen advocates of the social market — an idea first promoted in Britain by the ultra-left David Owen as he left the Labour Party of the early 1980s.

The Stalinist ghost will be harder to shake off than this, however. All of the leadership played a role in supporting the Eastern Bloc dictatorship, extolling their virtues and taking advantage of every opportunity to junket in societies where trade unions and independent socialist parties were banned. The party conference annually heard fraternal delegates from the GDR, USSR, Cuba, etc, and the party leader Proinsias de Rossa, now keen to deny the reports from Russia, was a frequent Intourist guest.

Whether this money, or any money, was actually given is really beside the point. The fact is that the Workers Party has a long history of collaboration with the anti-working class regimes of Eastern Europe which, like other such parties in Europe, it is now brushing under the carpet with no effort at political accounting or explanation. It is perhaps worth remembering that many of the people in our labour movement who denounce the Provisional IRA in Northern Ireland on principle as anti-democratic and "anti-worker" are also keen advocates of the Workers Party as an alternative.

There must be another cumbersome but correct slogan in there somewhere — "Neither a green nationalist Ireland nor a police state but a federal workers' republic."



Proinsias de Rossa



Black youth and anti-racists fight the fascists, Lewisham, 1977

How to fight lessons from

The last time the British fascists grew to become a major threat was during the 1970s.

The Anti-Nazi League was formed to combat the fascist threat.

Mark Osborn examines the lessons.

In the local London elections in 1977, the fascist National Front polled 120,000 votes. In August 1977, black youth and anti-racists in Lewisham, south London, fought the police and fascists during an NF march.

This was the first time the police used the now familiar riot uniform of shields and helmets.

The Anti-Nazi League (ANL) was launched three months after Lewisham. By 1977 there had been five years of sustained fascist activity. Local anti-fascist groups existed in most towns. And the ANL was able to build a strong anti-fascist youth culture, bolstered by Rock Against Racism.

The rise of the fascists

Thatcher's Tory government of 1970-74 created political space for the racist far-right. In 1972, racists turned away from the Conservatives when

Heath allowed British passport-holding Ugandan Asians to settle in Britain.

Heath stood in honourable contrast to the previous Labour government.

In 1968, Home Secretary, James Callaghan, had refused to allow Kenyan Asians — similarly expelled by an "Africanising" government — into Britain.

The right-wing leaders of the Labour Party had caved in to nationalism and racism. But the "official" left opposition in the labour movement — the Communist Party and Tribune left — were little-England, anti-European nationalists.

Their campaigning against Europe would also help to fertilise the ground for the extreme nationalism of the neo-Nazis.

By 1974, 615,000 were unemployed. The miners' strike of February/March 1974 forced Heath into an election which he lost. Wilson formed a minority Labour government after an election in which 54 NF candidates got 77,000 votes.

Labour called an election in October 1974. They won a majority but the NF's 90 candidates polled 112,000.

Meanwhile, Kevin Gately, a student, was killed when anti-fascists fought the police and NF in Red Lion Square, central London. He was the first person to be killed on a demonstration in Britain since 1919.

After 1975, the Labour government and the union bureaucrats attacked the working class with wage controls. Inflation was running at over 20%.

Strike rates dropped off and real wages fell by 10% in two years. In 1976, the

Chancellor, Denis Healey, introduced International Monetary Fund cuts.

By February 1976, 1,200,000 were unemployed. Compared with the post-war past, this was a huge figure, a big shock.

During the May 1976 elections, the Nazi National Party got two councillors elected in Blackburn. The NF got 43,000 votes — averaging 18½% in Leicester.

In the two months following the May elections, there were three racist murders.

Later, the SWP would claim that the ANL had stopped the fascists. Essentially, this is untrue.

The fascists were eclipsed by the insurgent Tory right. Thatcher had replaced Heath in 1975. Her claims that "this country might be swamped by people of an alien culture" helped to stretch the Tory Party's appeal rightwards. Her "radicalism" helped too.

After the Tories' 1979 election victory, the fascists dwindled and split. Some of the ideological right looked back to the Tories. Some white workers who might have voted NF out of disillusionment with the Labour government, either returned to Labour or stopped voting.

The politics of the ANL

The ANL was the most successful of a series of stunts organised in the mid-'70s by the SWP.

The core of the ANL was the SWP, but it was fronted by an assortment of celebrities.

Because the dignitaries were not very left-wing, the politics were watered down to hold it together.

Its politics were summed up by the slogan on its badges: "Nazis are no fun".

True, but the question was: what would the ANL do to stop them?

The immediate problem was face-to-face confrontation in opposition to fascist marches. Fearing pressure from notables — like the football manager, Brian Clough — the SWP/ANL failed to oppose the fascists on the streets.

The worst example of this was the second major ANL carnival, held in London in October 1978. The fascists organised a march to coincide with the carnival.

The National Front demonstrated in Brick Lane, east London, where a beleaguered Asian community had suffered years of racist abuse. A few miles away, 50,000 anti-racists enjoyed themselves at an ANL rock concert.

Apparently, Tony Cliff, a few weeks later, admitted that the SWP/ANL had been wrong — they should have confronted the fascists in Brick Lane.

No such change of mind came from Socialist Challenge (the current Socialist Outlook and Socialist Action) who continued to claim that it was right that the carnival had gone ahead.

But the damage had been done. The ANL had been discredited — rightly — in the eyes of many.

Socialist Organiser has an entirely different record. The first issue of our paper, in October 1978, called for labour movement action to defend Brick Lane.

We helped a few hundred anti-nazis confront a larger fascist march.

While Socialist Organiser supported the ANL, we highlighted its basic political weaknesses.



Anti-fascists demonstrate in Germany in Frankfurt, 1989, after members of the National Democratic Party were elected to the council

the fascists — last time

When the SWP/ANL called for state bans against the fascists, we pointed out that such bans were always double-edged.

The left was likely to suffer at the hands of a state which is more sympathetic to the Nazis than to the left.

We called for mass mobilisations to confront the fascists and opposed educating the labour movement and youth to believe that the state was a potential ally.

Socialist Organiser wanted a movement capable of combatting more general race issues, not just fascism. The SWP/ANL steadfastly refused to campaign for the scrapping of all immigration laws. The logic of holding together an organisation which had the Federation of Conservative Students affiliated, meant that it could not take up such issues.

Of course, challenging such policies in an organisation run by the SWP was very difficult. The ANL was very undemocratic.

The SWP are relaunching the ANL. The Stalinist boil, Socialist Action, is central to the newly-formed, invite-only Anti-

Racist Alliance.

The infighting on the left should stop. We face a serious situation. Although the immediate threat in Britain is less serious than the 1970s, the situation in Europe is much worse.

In France, the fascist Front National is polling 20% of the vote. In some towns they are the largest party. In Eastern Europe, anti-semitism is re-emerging. Economic crisis and discredited 'socialism' is leading to a revival of the far-right.

The fascists have gained in Austria, Belgium, Germany and Sweden. There will be a spin-off for the British nazis.

And in Britain, Major's "softer" Toryism has replaced Thatcher — creating more room to the right of the Tories.

At the same time, the racism stirred up by the Asylum Bill is being picked up by the British National Party in the election run-up.

Clearly, we should demand that the left unites: we need one anti-racist/fascist movement. And, because we are talking about the SWP and Socialist Action, we need to demand democratic organisations.

Apparently, the Anti-

Racist Alliance has signed up the right-wing Tory Richard Shepherd and various Liberals as sponsors. It seems they have learned *nothing* from the 1970s. Will these people support a campaign opposing all immigration controls? Or confronting the nazis on the streets?

A movement worth having would be politically strong enough to take up these issues.

Any serious fascist threat — in the end — can only be stopped by the labour movement.

Any anti-racist campaigning must be capable of relating to the genuine fears of unemployment, terrible housing and bad services.

Racism is sometimes the perverse answer white workers resort to if they can find no other alternative.

Anti-racist campaigns must advocate at least a minimal alternative social programme. We must fight for jobs for all, for decent housing and services. We must say to white workers that only by uniting with black workers can they win these demands. Divided, the bosses will beat us.

Anti-racist campaigning which simply presents anti-racism as a nice moral choice is not living in the real world.

Many of the socialists who push this sort of policy are in fact demoralised and have actually given up on the working class and, in particular, white workers.

Lastly, an anti-racist/fascist movement must not only be able to tackle anti-black and -Asian racism, but also combat anti-semitism.

The left must not only allow the handful of anti-Zionist Jews to participate,

but must make anti-racist campaigning accessible to Jewish community organisations.

Frankly, this is going to be the hardest issue for much of the left and some black activists to tackle.

Groups like the SWP are smash-Israel, "left" anti-semites to the core. Most of the left not only wants the destruction of Israel (i.e., the Israeli-Jewish nation) but blames all except a handful of world Jewry — all but the anti-Zionist Jews — for the actions of the current Israeli state.

"Left" anti-semitism often merges into, covers for and boosts more traditional forms of anti-semitism.

The left must realise how dangerous is its hostility to Jews.

Anti-semitism is an ancient hatred which has not gone away. The left is in fact preparing the way for a growth of anti-Jewish hatred. We must insist that the left's systematic hostility to Jews stops and is replaced by genuine opposition to anti-semitism.

The little-England labour movement left, campaigning against Europe in the early-'70s, helped the NF to get a working class base later in the decade.

In France, Jean-Marie Le Pen's Front National were boosted by the eclipse of Communist Party and previous nationalist CP campaigns (if you love your country, join the Communist Party).

The left can't gain from exploiting nationalism and anti-semitism. Giving such ideas a platform in the labour movement is to create a further anti-working class timebomb within our own ranks.

Why the IRA is bombing London

Continued from page 3

In fact, the signs are that Britain is preparing not for withdrawal but for a new round of repression. Britain might even now be preparing to try once more the policy of interning suspects without charge or trial.

If the coming UK general election produces a hung parliament, and a government forced to trade for Orange Unionist votes at Westminster, then a new round of repression against the Catholic community will most likely be the result of present IRA efforts to put Ireland back on the immediate agenda of British politics!

The IRA, which mushroomed into a powerful mass movement as a result of the Catholic community's response to internment in 1971, would consider that a victory of sorts because it would push more and more Catholics towards them.

But it is Britain which has over-all control. Britain is ultimately responsible for what happens in Northern Ireland.

A Labour government after the next election should face up to the fact that no real progress can be made in Northern Ireland so long as the present framework — the framework imposed on the Irish people by a British government and its Orange allies 70 years ago — is taken as fixed and unchangeable. The facts of modern Irish history are unanswerable!

Northern Ireland was supposed to give the Protestant Irish minority self-rule, and to prevent the creation of an oppressed Protestant minority in an all-Ireland state. Seventy years later, what is the result?

The Protestants do not have self-rule and are bitterly hostile to the present arrangements;

there is now, as for 20 years past, a bitterly alienated and oppressed minority, the Catholics within the Protestant Northern Ireland enclave — where even the Protestants are no longer allowed self-rule! — who are a bigger minority in the six counties than all the Protestants would have been in a united Ireland;

there is chronic, simmering warfare and sectarian murder on both sides;

there is no sign of any solution within the partition framework. The six county framework should not be tinkered with but broken!

Is there any solution? There is probably no quick, glib, easy, fast-acting solution. There could be the beginnings of a solution.

The solution to the chronic Catholic-Protestant antagonism and to the war between the British overlords and IRA which it generates, is to create a united Ireland on a federal basis, with self-rule for the Protestants in their own areas, and the right to keep whatever link they want with Britain.

Such a solution would not evoke mass enthusiasm in Northern Ireland now, any more than does the timid and weak sketch of it negotiated by Dublin and London in 1985. But it would, unlike the present arrangement, be a framework that could take on autonomous life in a short while, as people once more took up the work of governing themselves in their own areas, without the possibility of oppressing any other part of the Irish people.

A Labour government that wanted to do more than mark time in Northern Ireland, a Labour government whose leaders had determined that under no circumstances would they do or allow to be done in Northern Ireland what was done there under the last Labour government, when savage repression of the Catholic community was at the very centre of British policy for years — such a Labour government would set out to solve the Northern Ireland conflict along these lines. It won't of course.

The left should nevertheless advocate such a policy; it is the only possible basis on which Northern Ireland working class unity, above the bread and butter trade union level, could be built. It is the only way in which forces can be assembled in Northern Ireland which will be able to fight for a socialist solution to the monstrously destructive capitalist exploitation and degradation which ravages the working class there.

The British left has been less than adequate so far where Ireland is concerned. Under the last Labour government, when unspeakable things were being done in Northern Ireland against the Catholics, the sectarian British left made itself irrelevant by refusing to discuss or advocate any policy for a British Labour government in Northern Ireland other than immediate withdrawal. They thereby made themselves irrelevant, and this in turn made it easier for the Labour government to get away with — literally — murder in Ireland.

The "Troops-Out-Now-and-Nothing-Less" left, despite its intentions, was not a sensible force concerned with the real problems of Northern Ireland and having something sensible to say to the mass British labour movement about them. It was its very opposite.

Drunk on "revolutionary" fantasies about an Ireland that does not exist outside their imagination, the left was an irrelevant detail, blurred and merged almost indistinguishably, with the vast, mainly chauvinist segment of British "public opinion" which wanted Britain to scuttle and run, whatever the consequences in Northern Ireland.

This time round, if Labour forms a government, the left must not exclude itself from serious politics on Ireland, or let itself become indistinguishable from the know-nothing—"let the Irish kill each other" British chauvinists.



October 1978: Socialist Worker builds a carnival. Socialist Organiser mobilises to confront the fascists

Truth is the first casualty...

GRAFFITI

The Battle of Waterloo, someone once said, was won on the playing fields of Eton. In our news-conscious times, things are a little different. The Gulf War was won in the office of Public Relations firm Hill & Knowlton.

The firm was paid £5.6 million to help manipulate the media and the US government into an early shooting war — the organisation payrolling the deal, "Citizens for a Free Kuwait", is more correctly known as "The Emir for Oil Profits".

It seems that one of their greatest coups was manipulating a US Congressional hearing. One of the headline-grabbing revelations that came out of the hearing after the invasion was that Iraqi soldiers had looted incubators from Kuwaiti hospitals, leaving babies to die on the floor. The figure of 100 was bandied around. Much public outrage followed and calls for swift and savage action against the Iraqi occupation were amplified.

Middle East Watch, a respected independent human rights group, followed up reports. Firstly, the doctor in the hospital in question told investigators that the Iraqis touched none of their incubators.

So where did the stories come from? One of the two witnesses to the story at the Congressional hearing was Nagirah al-Sabah, who claimed she personally saw and buried 40 babies.

And who is Nagirah? — the daughter of the Kuwaiti ambassador to Washington, a man who has already been accused of waging a propaganda campaign of lies against Iraq with the intent of precipitating the war. As they say, truth is the first casualty...

Do you remember John Major's vision of a classless society? — perhaps not.

The official figure for the number of classes to be got rid of would now appear to be 12 — as suggested by Tory Transport Minister describing the possible number of classes on a privatised British Rail.

This was by way of attempting to clean up his own mess after remarking that privatised rail services should provide a "cheap and cheerful" service for typists, and a more luxurious service for businessmen and the like.

The Minister (who hasn't stepped on public transport for years, not even "Extremely Rich Reactionary Bastard Class") proceeded to respond to the fact that he's put his foot in his mouth by attempting to see how much of his leg he could swallow when he promised to buy chocolates and flowers "for all the secretaries" in his Department.

Is Stalin being rehabilitated in Russia? Forget the small gatherings of the Old Guard protesting at the banning of the CPSU. This weekend, Soviet time itself will go back to old Stalinist ways.

A year ago, all clocks went forward an hour to correct one of the "errors of Stalin". Now it seems that while Stalin was wrong about everything else, he could at least tell the right time — on Sunday (19 January) the clocks are going forward again, correcting an er-

roneous correction of Stalin's errors. *Socialist Organiser* will leave comments about "forward to Stalinism" to the *Morning Star*.

Last week, Fleet Street slavishly repeated the "Labour Tax Scare" stories from Conservative Central Office. "You could be £300 worse off under Labour", screamed rabid front-page headlines.

There was probably a story somewhere starting a rumour that children's pocket money will be taxed.

The *London Evening Standard* did particularly well in toeing the Tory line with "How to protect your savings from a Labour government". What followed was really useful advice for anyone with over £76,000 in savings, which is hardly likely to be a significant number amongst the *Standard's* readership.

And what was Labour's response to this? Did it do so much as issue one of its carefully-worded statements saying that underfunding of the NHS would be reversed within 5 years, unless the money runs out?

No. It actually fell to comedian Stephen Fry to write a reply arguing that there is something to be said for taxing the rich to pay for welfare and services.

It would seem that a comedian is considerably more serious than Labour's much-hyped Front Bench team.

There are a whole series of anecdotes about the Soviet planned economy eg. to meet the quota for 2 tons of nails, a two-ton nail would be forged, millions of right foot shoes would be made and no left, and so on.

It seems that Major and Waldegrave with their "Patient's Charter" are repeating the errors of Stalin. They have, in effect, imposed an "operations quota" on the NHS.

No-one should have to wait more than two years for an operation. As a result, the number of people who've been waiting for more than two years has fallen from 51,000 in March of last year to 34,000. But at what cost?

It seems that NHS managers, like their Soviet counterparts, are playing "meet the quota". This involves not putting people on the waiting list if it is already too long, postponing urgent operations to clear backlogs of non-urgent operations and so on.

The five-year plan will be met — meantime, the standard of health care declines.

Somewhere in the south Atlantic is a windswept rock which has just had to import 26,000 male sheep because the local flock is so inbred, and whose only other claim to fame is being the subject of a pointless war in the early '80s.

How appropriate then that it should have announced an annual holiday — "Thatcher Day".

Her regal self will be going there to be presented with bouquets of red, white and blue flowers, whereupon she'll make a speech almost certainly employing the royal "we".

Perhaps we'll all get lucky and she will be asked to live out her days as some kind of honorary monarch on the other side of the globe.

The Tories' recycled smears Taxing times ahead

PRESS GANG



By Jim Denham

Do you remember the "Summer Heat on Labour" campaign? Michael Howard, the then-Tory Party chairman, called a press conference in late June of last year at which he revealed that detailed Treasury analysis of Labour's spending pledges proved beyond doubt that Kinnock planned to clobber us all with massive tax increases.

None of the assembled hacks thought to ask what the hell the Treasury was doing spending its time churning out material for the Tories' election campaign.

Thus it was that for much of July, the headlines were dominated by dire warnings of the "tax agony" in store for the average low-paid company director if Kinnock and his fearsome crew of class-warriors ever gained power.

The *Express* and the *Mail*, in particular, went to town over the terrifying prospect of earnings above £20,280 be-

ing subject to national insurance contributions under Labour. The "Summer Heat" campaign rather fizzled out when it became apparent that most people didn't realise that earnings above £20,280 were not subject to national insurance.

And then some of the more independently minded sections of the media started doing their sums and concluded that the overall tax burden for most people had actually increased under the Tories... Summer became autumn and Michael Howard was disposed of, along with his Mistress. The planned October general election was called off.

Last Monday Chris Patten called a press conference to launch the Tories' "Labour's Tax Bombshell" campaign. Treasury figures showed, conclusively, that Labour planned to make us all thousands of pounds a year worse off.

The *Mail* and the *Express* carried headlines warning of a "Labour Double Budget Blow", the "£1,000 a Year Cost of Labour", etc, etc. Mr Paul Johnson, writing in the *Mail* last Tuesday, warned that "electing Labour will be a financial disaster for the energetic, the able, the ambitious, the hard-working and the skilled. It will be a vicious body-blow to those who create wealth and to anyone who wants to get on in the world."

Meanwhile, the latest NOP polls show that 71% of voters would prefer increased public spending to tax cuts, and Labour has increased its lead



Chris Patten

over the Tories by 6%. The *Mail* and *Express* have now turned their attention to (of all things in this day and age) Labour's defence policy and Trident. Oh dear: we've got four more months of all this.

Mr Gary Bushell, one-time associate of various NF-supporting "Oi" bands, has left the *Daily Star* to re-join the *Sun*. When the bearded neanderthal defected from Wapping last year, editor Kelvin Mackenzie told him, "You're much too right wing for us, anyway", adding a jolly "Fuck-fuck-fuck-off!" Now Gaza is returning to

his natural home, complaining that "there were more drunks on the *Daily Star* than you see along the Embankment" — an allegation that the *Sun* gleefully published.

Lawyers representing *Star* editor Brian Hitchen have written to the *Sun* threatening legal action over this monstrous slur upon the character and integrity of Mr Hitchen and his staff.

The *Sun* printed the letter, adding: "We will contest the action vigorously and will be surprised if Mr Hitchen can find anyone sober enough to stand up in court." Let's hope this one gets to court.

Women students must fight back



WOMEN'S EYE

By Liz Millward

You might think that women are the only group not affected by the current dodgy deals in the National Union of Students (NUS).

The NUS Women's Campaign is autonomous, having its own officer and committee, and controlling its own budget.

Unfortunately, the only guarantee women have of keeping these things is the continuation of a healthy democracy within NUS.

And NUS democracy is looking very pale and ill at the moment.

The right wing inside NUS, want to ensure power for themselves for ever, by abolishing one of the two

annual policy-making conferences, and shrinking the National Executive Committee from 21 to 12 people. Of course, they are quite at liberty to do this (or to try to do it) and the left's best policy is to keep on turning up and voting against it. At least until now.

As women know from the experience of setting up the Women's Campaign, it takes a long time to change the NUS constitution. Women in NUS had to fight every step of the way, but when we got our changes, we knew that we had solid support.

All the years of debate meant that the changes were democratic and well-understood.

This much democracy is too much for the right wing. After losing no less than 10 votes on abolition of Winter conference, they stepped outside the democratic process to ensure a majority — in a vote which should never have been taken.

They are now hoping to consolidate their 'victory' by means of an extraordinary conference, which they hope will push through all the rest of the changes. It is worth emphasising that this is the only way to get the changes through, because they cannot get a majority democratically.

The extraordinary conference has delegates appointed rather than elected, and can be called by just 25

out of 850 colleges at a few weeks notice. Lots of colleges will be disenfranchised by lack of time, and most students simply won't know anything about it.

The changes the right wing hopes to make will reduce the number of people on the National Executive and 3/4 of the places will be single member seats: that means that the largest single group will win every one of those places.

If the largest single group stands no women — tough. If the largest single group has a lousy policy on women's issues — tough. The largest single group will have a majority on the National Executive and it will have its own way.

The membership will not be able to hold them accountable, because there will only be one conference a year, which will be too short to do anything but elect new officers. By that time, the damage will have been done.

As if that wasn't bad enough, the National Executive also set the budgets — including the budget for the Women's Campaign. If the NEC majority doesn't like what the Women's Campaign is doing, they can cut off the money. The Women's Campaign only has control of its budget after it's been set. If it is set at £5 a year, there is nothing anyone could do about it, until the next conference — a year hence.

And, having stepped outside the democratic process once, how much easier to do it again? To hold a dodgy vote, and an extraordinary conference and "reform" or abolish the Women's Campaign. Why not get rid of

"...our rights depend on the democracy of the union. Without democratic rights, we are dependent on the 'goodwill' of the right wing. I don't trust them."

the nasty left-wing Women's Officer? I'm not saying that they will — but they could if it would serve their interests.

If the National Union wanted these changes, conference would have voted for them. They have been debated 10 times. The only way the right wing can get them through is undemocratically. And that is bad news for women in NUS, because our rights depend on the democracy of the union. Without democratic rights, we are dependent on the "goodwill" of the right wing, and I for one don't trust them.

Liz Millward is a member of the NUS Steering Committee.



"Down with fundamentalism" is the slogan painted on a wall in Algiers

Algeria: between two dictatorships

By Colin Foster

On 12 January, the army took power in Algeria and cancelled the second round of the country's first ever general election, due on the 16th.

The fundamentalist Islamic Salvation Front was way ahead of all other parties in the first round, on 26 December. Now either the Islamicists will do a deal with the army, or they will mobilise their mass support on the streets, either smashing the old structures of power or being smashed by them. Either way the prospects are grim.

300,000 people demonstrated in Algiers on 2 January against the Islamicist threat, while also opposing the discredited old regime. Several thousand Algerian workers in France marched on a similar demonstration in Paris on 5 January.

Those demonstrations were called by the Socialist Forces Front (FFS), the second-placed party in the first round

elections of 26 January. The main base of the FFS, apparently, is in the Berber areas of the country (which face discrimination from the Arab majority) and among teachers, office workers, students and so on in the main city, Algiers. It is led by Hocine Ait Ahmed, who was a prominent leftist in the nationalist movement, the FLN, during the war for independence from France, but was then forced into exile when the FLN became Algeria's ruling party in 1962.

Ait Ahmed has denounced the army coup. The Algerian Communist Party (PAGS), however, had already called for the army to step in and stop the second round of the elections.

The main trade union federation, the UGTA — which was long a government-controlled front, but now has to compete with an Islamic trade union movement — has formed a joint "Algeria Defence Committee" with two bosses' federations and some women's organisations. It supported the FFS demonstration on 2 January, but will probably

now rally behind the army.

From the 1960s to the late 1980s, the FLN ran Algeria pretty much like a Stalinist state. The state controlled almost all industry, and the FLN together with its ancillary movements claimed a monopoly of political and social activity.

When prices for Algeria's main export, oil, were rising

"State terror on the model of Iran, and of 'fascist' proportions, must be very likely indeed if the Islamicists smash the old power structure."

in the '70s, the FLN was able to develop industry and to expand education and health provision far beyond what the French colonial regime had offered. Industrial output grew at 8 per cent per year from 1965 to 1980.

As oil prices sagged in the 1980s, and the programme of forced-march national industrial development came up against its inherent limits, the regime lurched into stagnation, corruption and discredit. Industrial output per head did not grow at all between 1980 and 1988.

79 per cent of Algeria's export earnings are consumed by payments on its huge foreign debt. Unemployment is very high, especially among the young.

In the mid-'80s the FLN started Gorbachev-type reforms. A wave of strikes and riots in October 1988, sparked by food price rises and food shortages, forced the regime to hasten its steps. It legalised political parties and in June 1990 held free elections for local governments.

The Islamicists swept the board in those local government elections, and — accor-

ding to their opponents — used their control of the local authorities to make sure that their supporters were registered and mobilised to vote on 26 December. That first-round general election had been scheduled for June 1991, but the Islamicists, reckoning that they had not completed their preparations, forced a postponement through strikes and riots.

The Islamicists' slogans are "Austerity, abstinence, rejection of the Western world". They have denounced democracy as an imperialist trick, and their posters declare that they will impose Islamic principles "by persuasion or by terror".

The backbone of their support is small shopkeepers, students, and other middle-class people; but the Islamicists have won the support of millions of poor, jobless, and disillusioned youth by appearing to offer a radical alternative both to the old "socialist" FLN and to the new "liberal" free-market FLN.

According to *Socialist Worker* (11 January) a "Khomeini-like regime" is "very unlikely" in Algeria, and *SW* is very emphatic that the Islamic Salvation Front is not "fascist".

In fact Islamic state terror on the model of Iran, and of "fascist" proportions, must be very likely indeed if the Islamicists smash the old power structure and then try, as they must, to consolidate their grip and to deal with Algeria's economic troubles. If they do a deal with the army, it will be to safeguard the old FLN elite rather than ordinary women, workers and students.

For Algerian women, workers, and democrats, a lot depends on whether the 300,000 who demonstrated on 2 January can be organised into a force capable of mobilising independently against the Islamicists and winning the disillusioned youth away from them.

Class politics are long overdue

LETTER FROM AUSTRALIA

Janet Burstall reports from Sydney

"Fightback" is the extraordinary slogan issued by the conservative Liberal Party, in support of a new policy to bring in a form of VAT, to be called GST — Goods and Services Tax.

Liberal leader, John Hewson, claims that his economic package will change the way of life of Australians and create 2 million jobs by 2000.

Socialists will not be surprised to hear that this economic package will redistribute wealth further from the poor to the wealthy, by shifting taxes away from income, and reducing income tax payable by the top earners.

It also proposes such severe cuts in the public service, that Australia would have a much smaller public sector than any OECD country, even Tory Britain.

It is particularly racist in aiming to refuse any social security payments to immigrants until they have lived in Australia for at least 2 years.

The rhetoric in which this redistribution of wealth is clothed strikes an obvious chord:

"It's time for Australians to fight back against the Labor Government's economic mismanagement and policy failures that have resulted in the worst recession since the Great Depression.

"Australians have seen their living standards eroded over the last 8 years under the pressure of inflation, taxation and unemployment.

"They have seen nearly 1.5 million Australians unable to find the work they seek, and unemployment among our young people around 30%."

Of course, Hewson does not suggest that these are problems of capitalism.

The Liberals go on to say of their package:

"It is also a strategy that requires some difficult decisions (as in reduced government expenditure) and a major reform of the taxation system..."

"These changes are essential if jobs, incentive, opportunity and reward are to be restored to Australians... in a way that is equitable and enables many other reforms that will make our society more genuinely fair."

More cynical readers might think that Hewson doesn't

believe a word of this, and that it is pure political sales talk, as he wouldn't get many votes if he openly declared that he intended to make the rich richer and the poor poorer.

The response of the tabloid press in Sydney (if it's in the gutter, British tabloids are in the murkiest parts of the sewers), Kerry Packer's *Telegraph-Mirror* (a.k.a. 'the Terror') has been to run dozens of case stories on how much better off the chosen individuals will be.

An opinion poll taken a couple of days after the policy release suggests that support for Hewson's package is not dependent on anticipation of personal benefit — 51% favoured Hewson's proposals, 53% believed them to be fair, and 56% agreed they would be good for the country.

Yet only 38% thought that they would be better off if the package were implemented, and 23% thought it would make no difference.

Only 27% believed it would make them worse off, but 32% thought it unfair.

Hewson's package makes a show of providing a radical answer to economic problems.

The left of the ALP and the unions have given in years ago to Hawke's right wing, deliberately capitalist programme.

They have been saying that the climate is not right to be radical, workers are too conservative in hard times, and too insecure to consider radical policies, their main concern being their own personal well-being.

The initial approval for Hewson's package shows the left's reasoning to be a pathetic rationalisation of their own inability to challenge Hawke and class inequality in Australia.

The official left can only campaign vigorously against Hewson's package if they're also prepared to get stuck into Hawke and the record of Labor in government, a record also of their own complicity.

There were enough grumbings in the ranks, though, to put Hawkes and Keating off a VAT when they floated the idea several years ago.

It's long overdue that politics be conducted in recognition that Australia is a class society.

If a radical approach from the right can win support, how about a radical approach from the mainstream left and the labour movement? If it doesn't happen soon, we'll have a Hewson Government on our backs, a ghastly expansion of misery and deprivation, and an even tougher fight on our hands.

Here's something against which we must organise, and out of which we could build a positive alternative.

"The left of the ALP and the unions have given in years ago to Hawke's right wing, deliberately capitalist policies. They have been saying that the climate is not right to be radical, workers are too conservative in hard times..."

Defend democratic gains!

The following are excerpts from a statement put out on 2 January by an Algerian Trotskyist group, the PST, linked to the LCR in France.

The PST has always disputed the legitimacy of these elections, whose anti-democratic rules do not come from a Constituent Assembly expressing the will of the people.

The method of election favoured client voting and the big parties, thus strengthening the weight of the FIS [Islamicist] vote as a protest vote against the FLN... The

voting procedure was made complicated to exclude the illiterate, but the FIS was able to mobilise the means to get in the votes of women and illiterates.

The success of the FIS confirms its dominant position, but the PST does not recognise it as representing the majority of the people, since it received only 3.2 million votes out of an electorate of 13 million, even if the unjust method of election should give it a majority of seats on the second round.

We call for mobilisations to defend cultural and democratic gains. The PST will act jointly with all those who defend democratic liberties, but, while unqualifiedly opposing fundamentalist dictatorship, we will never be among those calling for military dictatorship.

How the Tories stumbled into slump

By Chris Reynolds

The wine of Thatcher's so-called "economic miracle", on which so many journalists and pundits got drunk, is fast turning back into water again, and stagnant, murky water at that.

Unemployment has been rising since March 1990. It is now 2.5 million on the much-fiddled official figures. On the basis of calculation used before the Tories took office in 1979, the total would be 3.6 million.

The consensus of some 23 economic forecasters in universities, think-tanks and banks, is that unemployment will continue to rise in 1992, averaging 2.7 million (official); or 3.8 million (real) over the year.

Manufacturing output fell 4.5 per cent in 1991; fixed investment (buildings, machinery and so on) fell 11.5 per cent, and the experts expect it to fall by another 1.4 per cent in 1992. The Engineering Employers' Federation is even gloomier, expecting a further 6 per cent drop in fixed investment this year.

Roughly 200 businesses are going bust each day. Most are small; some, like the Maxwell Communications Corporation, are big. Many of the rip-roaring profiteers of the 1980s have been ruined, disgraced or forced on to the defensive.

House prices fell 3.5 per cent last year. Few people can afford to sell houses, because they will not get

enough to cover their mortgage payments, few people can afford to buy, because interest rates are so high and they have to expect house

Lies, all lies

"We can already discern some of the forces that will lead to recovery", said Norman Lamont on 13 February 1991.

By 19 March he was even more definite. "There are good reasons to expect that the recovery will begin around the middle of the year". On 29 April: "Recovery is just around the corner".

By 8 July, the "corner" — the "middle of the year" — should have passed. Lamont put a bold face on it: "Growth in the UK should resume in the second half of the year".

On 9 October the line was: "The green shoots of economic spring are appearing once again".

And on 20 December: "I am still looking forward to recovery gathering momentum next year". Just as everybody was looking forward to Lamont's statements gathering truth.

values to decrease further; the housing market is deeply depressed.

What the Tories tried to call a slight wobble when it began in 1990 has turned into a full-blown, and unusually long-lived, slump.

The Tories helped it happen with their "Lawson boom" in 1987-8. Easy credit and income tax cuts set off a surge of spending, and helped

the Tories to win the 1987 election.

They also drew in a flood of imports, and pushed imports much higher than exports. The Tories had prided themselves on making British manufacturing industry "lean and mean" in the early 1980s. In fact, the early-'80s slump had wiped out whole areas of manufacturing. Since the mid-'80s, for the first time since the Industrial Revolution, Britain has routinely imported more manufactured goods than it exports. As Britain's North Sea oil windfall tapered off, at the end of the 1980s — and almost none of its riches had been invested in new productive capacity — the weakness of British manufacturing signalled itself in a grievous "trade gap".

The "trade gap" could not have continued long without triggering a disastrous decline in the value of the pound relative to other currencies. The Tories pushed up interest rates.

High interest rates slowed down spending (and thus imports), and attracted money-capital to Britain. They also burst the bubble of the easy-credit boom.

The average household in Britain now has debts equivalent to 114 per cent of its yearly disposable income. That is a higher figure even than credit-happy America (103%), let alone France or Germany (about 75%). For tens of thousands of families, the crunch has come with their home being repossessed. There must be hundreds of thousands who are managing to hang on to their home, but only at the cost of great anxiety and hardship.

Businesses, too, had borrowed heavily and are now forced into retrenchment if not ruin.

The Tories have tied their hands



by joining the European Exchange Rate Mechanism. They had little choice. British capitalists know that capitalism is becoming more international and integrated, especially in Europe, and they want to be part of the emerging Euro-capitalism.

For the same reason, John Major's "triumph" in getting a British opt-out on the plans for a single European currency means little. It may even mean that Britain's integration into a single Euro-currency is speeded up; the other 11 EC countries may proceed faster without Britain, and Britain would surely go in with a Euro-currency once it is developed. Not to go in would destroy the City of London as a financial and banking centre, and no capitalist government would do that.

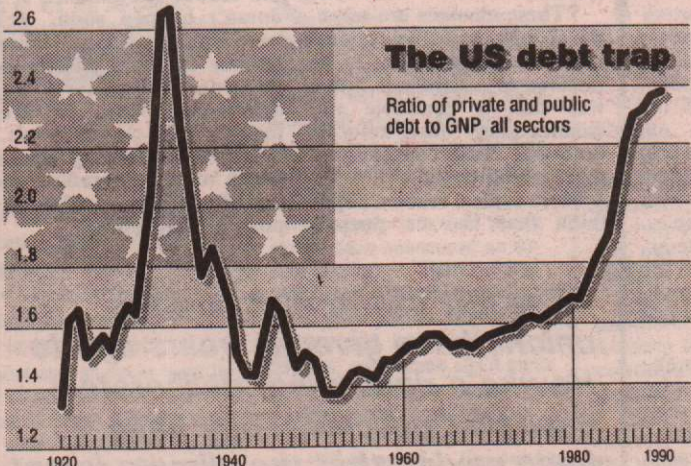
British capitalism is tied in to Euro-capitalism, like it or not. But British capitalism has lower labour productivity, and higher overhead costs — military spending — than the other big European economies. Euro-discipline thus means high interest rates, tight credit, and austerity, on pain of devastating

trade imbalances and currency

For another reason, too, Britain's recovery from the current slump is unlikely to be fast or strong, and even a further downturn is possible. The other major capitalist economies are slumping too. Industrial output in the US started declining in mid-1990. It went back up a little after the quick end of the Gulf War, but began going down again in November 1991. Some industries, like cars, are in deep trouble, and General Motors has just announced huge job cuts.

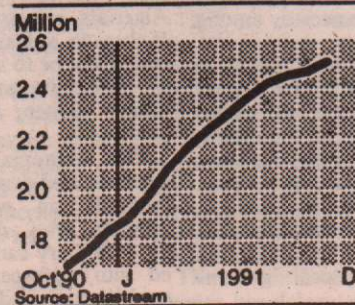
Germany was relatively booming until mid-1991, but slumped in the second half of last year. In Japan, as in Britain and the US, a credit "bubble" has burst. Sky-high share prices and land prices have crashed; as the effects worked themselves through, industrial output declined at the end of 1991, and fixed investment is expected to be stagnant in 1992.

The whole capitalist world is in a hangover after the credit-spiral orgy of the 1980s.



The US economy has a bigger overhang of debt than at any time since the 1930s

UK Unemployment

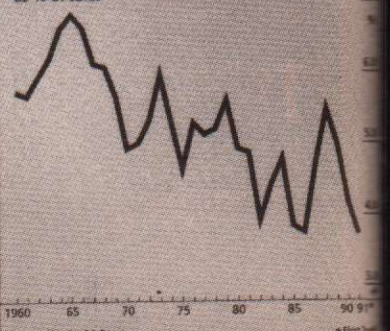


Unemployment has been rising since March 1990, and now stands at 2.3 million of the official figures — or 3.6 million on the basis of calculation used before the Tories started fiddling the statistics

Profit rates have slumped in the US, and the trend is down

Going for broke

Net profits of industrial companies as % of sales



Why capitalism has crises



Slumps are built into capitalism. By the nature of the profit economy, capitalists always strive to increase their capital as fast as possible, without any planned relation to the growth of consumption — which is, in turn, systematically limited by the capitalists' drive to keep down wages — and so periodically they "over-produce".

The system goes through cycles, roughly correlated with the life-span of major machinery.

In the first part of a boom, capitalists generally do not invest much in new machinery. They expand production by mobilising capacity already installed but previously unused, and by hiring extra workers.

That phase builds up profits which enable them to invest heavily at the next stage. The limits of existing capacity; the ageing of the machinery and the need to control the gains which workers can generally make in time of full-order books and rising employment, by replacing workers with machines — all these considerations push the capitalists towards buying new equipment.

The industries producing machinery and equipment boom. In the nature of capitalism, this period of boom leads to dodgy speculations and downright swindles. Some of them fail. The boom falters. Capitalists start to retrench, by cutting back their purchases of new equipment.

The slight faltering in the general expansion translates into a sharp downturn for the businesses producing machinery and equip-

ment. They lay-off workers, or go bust. That reduces consumer demand, and starts the whole economy on a spiral down into slump.

As the slump develops, stocks of unsold goods, stocks of money-capital seeing no adequate profitable outlet, and "stocks of unsold labour-power" — that is, armies of unemployed workers — all multiply.

As wages are pushed down, labour discipline is tightened, and

"The system goes through cycles roughly correlated with the life-span of major machinery."

much fixed capital becomes available at knock-down prices, however, the slump creates the conditions for a new boom. The cycle starts again.

All sorts of complexities can modify the course of the boom-slump cycle. The most important of these, in modern capitalism, is the interaction between the different national economies, and the possibility of trade and currency crises which can set off slumps in output, jobs and income.

Tory chaos opens way for Labour

The Tories face a general election held in the middle of a slump — and, what is even worse for them, a slump hitting hardest at their main bases of support.

As the *Financial Times* put it (10 June 1991), "When one southern Tory MP mentions that his brother has been made redundant, and another comments how difficult it is 'to get one's son a job in the City', unemployment has clearly moved up the political agenda".

In the early '80s, the Tory policy of "sweating out" the slump destroyed great chunks of industry. But the workers thrown on the scrapheap were mostly Labour voters anyway; the towns and cities reduced to desolation and despair were Labour strongholds.

This slump is much more evenly spread. Tory-voting white collar workers, and Tory-voting small business people in Tory-voting areas are suffering too.

In 1983 and 1987 the continuing house price boom, and the Tories' repeated hand-outs to the middle-

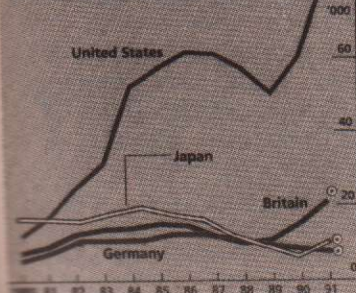
class, by way of selling off state enterprises cheap, were still generating a sort of mini-boom for a lot of people amidst the general depression. After the October 1987 stock market crash, and the house price slump of the last two years, that mini-boom has gone sour.

Ever since John Major took over from Thatcher as Tory leader, the Tories have been scrabbling for sops to offer and ways to get some sort of pre-election boom. They will keep trying. Their chances of success are small. The discipline of the Exchange Rate Mechanism and of the ever-growing integration of Britain into Euro-capitalism, limits their options.

If the Tories should win the coming general election, it can only be because the feebleness and shiftiness of Neil Kinnock have given it to them.

Closing doors

Number of bankruptcies



Bankruptcies are booming

Marx on credit and crises

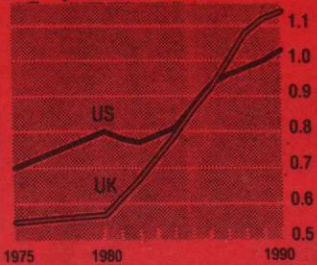
"The credit system appears as the main lever of overproduction and overspeculation in commerce solely because the reproduction process, which is elastic by nature, is here forced to its extreme limits... The credit system accelerates the material development of the

productive forces and the establishment of the world-market. It is the historical mission of the capitalist mode of production to raise these material foundations of the new mode of production to a certain degree of perfection. At the same time credit accelerates the violent eruptions of crises and thereby the elements of disintegration of the old mode of production.

"The two characteristics immanent in the credit system are, on the one hand, to develop the incentive of capitalist production, enrichment through exploitation of the labour of others, to the purest and most colossal form of gambling and swindling, and to reduce more and more the number of the few who exploit the social wealth; on the other hand, to constitute the form of transition to a new mode of production".

Capital, volume 3, p.441

Ratio of household liabilities to disposable income



The "Lawson boom" was built on easy credit, which has left huge levels of debt in Britain

When is a ruling class not a ruling class?

By Chris Arthur

I agree with Moshe Machover (SO 511) that modernisers in backward countries may be represented as adopting Stalinism as a non-capitalist road, allowing a forced march to "catch up".

How successful it has been is an empirical question hard to assess. How does one balance a space programme against grinding misery for the masses deprived for years at a time even of soap and sanitary towels?

Nonetheless, it still has to be shown that Stalinism created a new "state collectivist" mode of production. That means demonstrating its law of motion, under what form the surplus is expropriated, and how this is achieved. Here "state capitalism" falls at the first fence because the surplus is clearly not appropriated in the form of surplus value (but in the main of use-values) and it is available not in proportion to one's capital, but to one's political position.

In these respects Stalinism is more analogous to feudalism (indeed, a *Readers' Digest* article once characterised the USSR as "state feudalism"), each member of the nomenklatura being allocated a fiefdom.

In trying to understand what a ruling class is, it is important to grasp that appropriation of surplus is not a sufficient condition to define the core of the class, it is necessary that the surplus be produced under its direction.

To give some familiar examples: the Mafia lives off surplus value; landlords live off surplus value; money lenders, from your local loan shark up to the Rothschilds live off surplus value; but only in-

dustrial capital produces the surplus. This then is the core element, because the relation of exploitation is internal to the mode of production.

But the landlord does not particularly care whether you are a worker, a shopkeeper, a farmer, a businessman, a mine operator, or whatever, just as long as the rent is paid. Of course he depends on the surplus being produced, but his relation to its production is external: to put it crudely, he "rips off" his share.

This model was clearly in Trotsky's mind when he characterised the Soviet elite as a gigantic parasite. In his view, unlike capital,

"Because no new mode of production was stabilised, the system could not run itself..."

it had no essential role to play in production, but exacted tribute in virtue of its political power, having politically expropriated the proletariat.

The doubt that came into my mind when reading this was put, but not answered, by Trotsky himself when he wrote that the nationalisation of the economy "created a new and hitherto unknown relation" between the state and the production of wealth. If a factory manager is appointed by a Ministry and the district party secretary, and if the surplus is immediately at the disposal of the state, is not the relation between the state and production less an external parasitical one, and more an in-

ternal organising one?

Moshe must assume the latter is the case. But I find it a tricky question. If we return to basics we must start not from the form of state but from the form of production. It is not production for profit. It is not production for need. It is production for targets laid down external to the logic of the production process itself.

In the case of capitalism we know that the law of value transmits from factory to factory the socially necessary labour times for any item, and that capital flows and technological innovation are mutually reinforcing. In the case of production for need we might imagine some mutually informative institutionalisation of producer/consumer relations. But Stalinism contains no such feedback loops! The so-called plans were meaningless because the information available was so corrupted by the political distortions of the system. And where the plan was fulfilled, it was often only in the letter but not the substance. The state interfered in the economy, eg. appointing personnel, administering prices, nominating priorities, but the system did not regulate itself in accordance with some inherent logic of its productive capacity.

Thus I would argue that the well-known phenomena of a rapid expansion of basic factors of production (steel, etc) followed by a chronic paralysis when diverse, sophisticated, products were required, and by total collapse when the growing "noise" in the information system scrambled it completely, and the bureaucrats ceased to fear the bullet, should not be interpreted as effects of some economic law but as a sign of a lack of law.

A combination of political factors (coercion and voluntarist enthusiasm) got things off the ground, but because no new mode of production was stabilised the system could not run itself when these political pressures diminished.

Finally, the only coherent theory of "state collectivism" I know of sees the core of the new ruling class arising from the "managerial revolution": the key class of the future is not the owners, nor is it the workers, it is the class whose power derives from its being the brains of the ever more complex and integrated productive process.

This does not seem relevant to Stalinism in which the technically qualified people, including some factory directors, and "professionals" generally for that matter, are much worse off in relation to production line workers than in the West. Indeed it is these people who are frequently enthusiastic about the current overturn in the hope that capitalism will reward them better, both absolutely and relatively.

The whole experience demonstrates the wisdom of Marx's insight that economics is decisive over politics. The elite wanted to be a ruling class, and it seemed they had all the power anyone could wish for, with the KGB, the GULAG and the house-trained party millions; but they could not ground themselves on production; they could pour out "plans", "decrees", "orders", "reforms", but they could not deliver the goods — it's as simple as that.



17th Party Congress, 1934: the "Congress of Victors"

Learning from

By Martin Thomas

What can a post-mortem tell us about the Stalinist systems? I think it indicates that they were state-capitalist — an opinion shared, despite Moshe Machover (SO 511), by Kuron and Modzelewski in 1964.

Chris Arthur (SO 506) argues that the collapse of Stalinism shows that it was "not a genuine new mode of production"; the bureaucracy is nothing so solid as a class; Hillel Ticktin is right. Ticktin himself (SO 508) summarises his views: Stalinism had "no fundamental economic law". It was a "temporary formation", a "defective embryo", in limbo.

In fact the revolutions of 1989-91 have shown that the bureaucracies have a remarkably solid base in "civil society". The old tyrannies were smashed — and power slid easily into the hands of an alliance of the bulk of the old bureaucracies with small groups from the middle class. After their governments have been toppled, the bureaucrats have kept their domination of the armed forces, the civil state machine, the means of production. They have shown themselves to be a social class.

The current economic breakdown in the USSR shows that it had no mode of production only if such breakdown has been constant for the last 60 years. It has not! The developing collapse shows by contrast that the old system was not a permanent state of collapse or a lawless limbo.

Ticktin suggests that the Stalinist USSR had no economic growth. Yet the USSR and Eastern Europe today are shaped by whole social classes (the bureaucracies, the technical and professional middle class, the urban working class) largely generated by Stalinist economic growth. Quibbles about the low quality of technology in the USSR can not define those classes out of existence.

Thus far I agree with Tom Rigby (SO 506 and 509). Stalinism was "a limited parallel to a certain stage of capitalist development" — not post-capitalist, and not a system in limbo. The bureaucracies were ruling classes. These are the conclusions most important for politics.

But Tom Rigby then wants to label the Stalinist systems "bureaucratic collectivist" (BC). I think this label serves only to blur

the question of exactly how the Stalinist systems fit into the era of capitalism, just as Ticktin's word-play only evades questions about how they are supposed to fit into the "period of world transition" (as Ticktin, following Mandel, sees it).

In the decades-long debate about "bureaucratic collectivism" and "state capitalism" (SC), disputes over labels have often confused argument over substance. Yet there was substance. In all variants, SC meant capitalism, BC meant something beyond capitalism. The new BC era might be considered better for the working class than capitalism (by Isaac Deutscher, for example), or worse (by Max Shachtman in his later years, for example), but in any case it was post-capitalist.

For the decisive social class, the BC class, the class which, for that era, regulated development, BC was the new order through which they went beyond the bounds of capitalism. All socialist advocates of the BC analysis argued that BC was only a very limited post-capitalist order; but it was post-capitalist.

There was a dispute of substance about what classes generated the Stalinist systems, and what classes those systems generated. The advocates of SC could ask: where did these new BC classes come from within capitalism? How did they fit into Marxist theory? (The mystery is doubled if BC is after all not post-capitalist). Did BC generate a wage-working class similar to that generated by capitalism? And if so, how? (I am glad to see Tom Rigby agreeing that it did generate such a working class).

The theorists of BC had an impressive counter-argument: if the Stalinist systems were only variants of capitalism, why were the capitalists so hostile to them? Why were they generated by revolutions against the capitalists? Weren't the theorists of SC closing their eyes to the manifest fact of a new class hostile to both socialism and capitalism? A new class within capitalism which could break the bounds of capitalism and create something post-capitalist?

The collapse of Stalinism in the USSR and Eastern Europe sheds light, I think, on those disputes of substance. It shows that Stalinism was not post-capitalist. And mere political revolutions — without the shattering of the old state machine or the old ruling class — have put the Stalinist systems clearly on the road to "ordinary"



Mass grave at Chelyabinsk for victims of Stalin's Terror. More than 80,000 were thought to have died here in the 1930s



Of the 1966 delegates, 1108 were shot on Stalin's orders in the next five years. At least 20 million died in the Great Terror

The collapse of Stalinism

capitalism. The new class hostile to both socialism and capitalism does not exist.

As the totalitarian, or semi-totalitarian, wrench-grip on the societies of Eastern Europe has been released, the spontaneous economic trends of the substructure are revealed: not collectivist but capitalist. And in the overview now available of 60 years of Stalinism in "origin, development and death", the Stalinist twist on the usual laws of capitalist development looks not anti-capitalist, but nationalist.

Today the Stalinist bureaucrats see both the futility of trying to get further on a nationalist, autarkic model, and a chance to make themselves the core of a ruling class which will operate in world-market capitalism.

Too many SC writers have tried to "prove" that the development of Stalinism was simply some ultimate expression of the logic of Capital (just as analyses of many things other than Stalinism have been perverted by similar schematism).

"How did the Stalinist regimes twist their market economies? [They] were not anti-capitalist but nationalist. They reflected the interests of nationalist petty-bourgeoisies."

The last two years show that the Stalinist systems were "inorganic", "deformed", politically-determined, and primitive forms of SC, not organic products of capitalism's economic tendency to monopoly. They have also shown us the limits of the "deformation": it did not transform capitalism into something completely different, with different social classes and productive forces.

The fallback BC argument has been that SC is by definition impossible. Capitalism is defined as a system governed (or mainly governed) by market forces, or as a system where money buys everything, and so SC is ruled out with no more ado. Or, to put the argument in less logic-chopping form: to extend the concept of capitalism to cover state-monopoly

economies is to extend it so far as to make it meaningless.

This argument has some force against SC theories which tend to deduce the capitalist nature of Stalinist systems from the mere existence of markets (Bordiga), of a despotic plan (James and Dunayevska), or of competitive accumulation (Cliff). But it has no force (to my mind, anyway) against an account showing the Stalinist systems as capitalist systems wrenched out of shape by identified forces, for identified reasons, with identified peculiar results still lying within the capitalist epoch.

The Marxist method as I understand it should not operate with schematic "models" of capitalism, or whatever, but (as Trotsky put it) "give to concepts, by means of closer approximations, corrections, concretisations, a richness of content and flexibility... even a succulence". Marx, Engels, Bukharin and Trotsky all recognised the theoretical possibility of SC, while indicating that it would be a pathological form of capitalism.

The last two years refute "classic" BC theses. Tom Rigby agrees that Stalinism was not post-capitalist, but still sees it as BC: a sort of decaffeinated BC, a BC "parallel" to capitalism but outside it, on a different plane.

In SO 506 he writes: "Whether we should award Stalinism the title Mode of Production with a capital 'M' and a capital 'P' is of zero importance". (Why? Isn't it very important for our historical perspective on Stalinism, the classes that generate it, and the classes that it generates?) In SO 509 he argues that Stalinism was "governed by a law of development", one "not analogous to the laws of capitalist development" — the law being that it could copy capitalist technique (at high cost) but not innovate or achieve high quality.

This "law" (quoted from Trotsky) is important. But there are good reasons why Trotsky did not see it as the comprehensive "law" which regulated [Stalinism's] origin, existence, development and death as a social organism". It begs many questions. Why was it "capitalist technique" which the bureaucrats introduced into the USSR at such high cost? Why did they want to? Why was poor product quality fatal? Economic systems have lived for centuries with much poorer-quality goods than the USSR has.

Look at it another way. In the Stalinist systems the workers were wage-workers. They sold their

labour power, were paid wages and bought food, clothing, etc.

Now any system developing from capitalism would perforce be a market economy, for a long time at least. But a workers' state would shape the patterns of investment, of production choices, and of distribution, in a distinctively anti-capitalist way; a BC state would shape them in another way, also anti-capitalist.

The question, then, is: how did the Stalinist regimes twist their market economies? According to anti-capitalist imperatives, or capitalistic patterns? What does the post-mortem tell us about that?

Wages were set at social subsistence level, as under capitalism. Profits were grabbed and controlled by a small minority, who enjoyed vast privileges over the majority. The collective profit-grabbing class aimed for wealth not just in the form of particular use-values — be they dachas or bombs — but in general, unlimited form. The organisation of production, the choice of technology, the lack of consideration for the environment and for other social costs and benefits which cannot be reckoned on the market, all paralleled or mimicked capitalism.

The State regulation systematically twisted the economy towards cheap, basic consumer goods and, often, fairly full employment, to assist totalitarian control; towards greater investment in heavy industry; and towards autarky (trying to construct a national economy independent of the rest of the world). Consequences followed, including those in Tom Rigby's "law of development".

All those twists were, surely, not anti-capitalist, but nationalist. They reflected the interests not of an anti-capitalist class, but of nationalist petty bourgeoisies. The Stalinist regimes differed from the "ordinary" SC widespread in the Third World, but to the extent of a political revolution. The Stalinists' great and bloody battles with private capitalists were not anti-capitalist but nationalist. Their aim was not to move society away from capitalism to a new order, but to develop national capitalism. In other words, they undertook "a limited parallel to a certain stage of capitalist development".

To call Stalinism post-capitalist — that is, to use the label BC with real substance — is now shown to be false. To try to define it away as a mysterious wandering of history into a limbo, or into a parallel plane, is to evade a broad Marxist overview by playing with words.

The workers must retake political power

By Duncan Chapple

Over the past month, the unfolding bourgeois revolution in the former Soviet Union has deepened.

The USSR has been replaced with a 'commonwealth' which lacks even the formally-democratic structures of the USSR.

Prices of goods have risen sharply; some by as many as seven-fold. Capitalism has not yet been introduced into the former republics of the USSR, but working people are paying the price for the bureaucracy's moves towards restoration of the capitalist system.

In the new commonwealth, democracy has been put to one side. The leadership team around Yeltsin in Moscow excludes both working people and other bureaucrats from decision-making: the ruling bureaucracy in Ukraine has had to issue supplementary shopping coupons to lessen the cut in the living standards of the Ukrainian workers.

Clearly, the Ukrainian bureaucracy differ from the Yeltsin team, yet it is the Yeltsin team who have unmediated power over monetary policy across the new commonwealth.

It would be a massive step backwards if a market system controlled by capitalists rather than by working people comes to dominate these republics. 60% of Russians, according to a recent poll, do not believe that a transition to a market economy would improve their lives. It is necessary for socialists to put forward a line of action that will allow workers and their allies in the former USSR to block restoration and move towards retaking political power.

There are three central elements to an action programme for the former USSR. Firstly, it is necessary to argue for civil and democratic rights for all so that the organisations of working people are not fettered by the state; secondly,



Yeltsin: Mr Market Misery

workers' control must be introduced as widely as possible, including over hiring and firing, the distribution of food and foreign aid, and in workplaces; thirdly, it is necessary to convene an all-commonwealth Constituent Assembly, elected on the basis of universal, direct and secret ballot, to institute the direct political and economic control of working people.

The demand for a Constituent Assembly unifies the struggles of working people and their allies in the former USSR against the different manifestations of the bureaucratic reconstruction.

We aim for a more democratic system than an Assembly: we are for the delegate-based democracy of workers' councils. But the struggle for such an Assembly is an important part of the fight for working class power.

What the discussion is about

In his contribution to this discussion Moshe Machover (SO 511) expressed the opinion that the position of Socialist Organiser on the class character of the Stalinist states is that they are, or were, "bureaucratic collectivist".

He interprets the summary of our position in SO 502 (an excerpt from a document published in 1988) as "bureaucratic collectivist".

Of course, a text once published is open to many different interpretations, and Machover is free to make what he likes of the SO text. But it was not understood by us to embody a "bureaucratic collectivist" position. In fact, it embodies views common to both "bureaucratic collectivists" and "state capitalists" in Socialist Organiser.

It seems to us that the argument "state capitalist" or "bureaucratic collectivist" (a distinct form of class society that is neither capitalist nor working class) concerns issues outside of the ground covered in SO's 1988 document.

Socialist Organiser has no other for-

mal position as to the exact sociological characterisation of the Stalinist states; we decided to have an open-ended discussion, of which the present exchanges are part.

Given the very extensive agreement between "state capitalists" and "bureaucratic collectivists", despite the differences in sociological evaluation, we thought that no good purpose would be served by saddling the organisation with a preemptive decision arrived at by majority vote, and opted instead for an open-ended discussion, free of factionalism and thus, we hope, open, honest and scientific.

Whether the 1988 document is "more state capitalist" or "more bureaucratic collectivist" is not, it seems to us, a useful thing to discuss. Opinions will differ, but it does not matter.

It is a bridging document designed, by summarising the common ground in SO (a few "workers' statist" and a few "Ticknites" partially excepted), to allow the scientific discussion to develop freely.

The Editor

What the new asylum laws will mean It's the same the whole world over

By Steve Cohen

Two years ago, Omayya Wehbe and her 4 children fled Lebanon and sought asylum in Germany. The family was put in a government hostel while her claim was being considered. The hostel was regularly attacked by neo-Nazis and the residents had to arm themselves with knives and sticks to mount a 24 hour guard against the thugs.

Omayya's seven-year-old son was attacked and temporarily blinded by chemicals sprayed in his eyes. The authorities refused to allow her to live elsewhere in the country. In December, she tried to escape to Canada, but was arrested by British immigration officials whilst in transit at Heathrow. The family has claimed asylum here. The Home Office is trying to refuse her on the grounds that, under the Dublin Convention, an asylum application can only be made to one European Community state.

Omayya Wehbe's case highlights two crucial aspects of Britain's proposed new asylum laws. Firstly, the creation of a Fortress Europe with all EC countries combining to exclude refugees. Secondly, a parallel attack throughout Europe on black people by organised racists on the streets.

History as lies

"We will restore the reputation that Britain has enjoyed for over 50 years of being a country that accepts refugees as a moral duty". This was one of Roy Hattersley's contributions to the Parliamentary debate on the new Asylum Bill. This was, appropriately, November 5th, since it is simply a lie that there has ever been a golden past where the UK has welcomed refugees.

It has been all dross. In recent years whenever a country has started to produce refugees, Britain has imposed visa controls on those wanting to flee — for instance, Sri Lanka 1985, Turkey 1988, Uganda 1991. The 1987 Carriers' Liability Act, which transforms airlines into spies for the immigration service by compelling them to check documents, was initially passed to keep out Tamils fleeing from Sri Lanka.

The first immigration controls

The first ever immigration control, the 1905 Aliens Act, was designed solely to keep out refugees. It was aimed against Jewish people fleeing persecution in Eastern Europe and Tsarist Russia.

The Act excluded "undesirable immigrants". An undesirable immigrant was defined as a person who "cannot show he is in a position to obtain the means of decently supporting himself". Immigration Appeal Boards were established to refuse admission to 'bogus' refugees. This is the same function Adjudicators will have under the new Asylum Act.

The decisions of the Immigration Appeal Boards were reported in the *Jewish Chronicle*. A typical case was that of Aaron Hecht Milifiore: "One of his children he said had been killed in a pogrom. His family then fled in a state of panic and frenzy, and in the confusion he had become separated from them, yet the immigrant was rejected on grounds of want of means" (*Jewish Chronicle*, October 25 1907).

Britain and the holocaust

After the Nazi takeover of Germany, restrictions were again placed on Jews. In particular, a visa requirement was imposed in May 1938 on nationals of Germany and Austria — that is, on Jews trying to flee fascism.

The British government expected Jews, wearing yellow stars, to travel to British embassies in Nazi countries, to argue for visas. The then Home Secretary, Sir Samuel Hoare, justified this in language parroted by every Home Secretary since: "There are obvious objections to any policy of indiscriminate admission. Such a policy would not only create difficulties from the police point of view but

VOICE FROM THE ALIENS

About the Anti-Alien Resolution of the Cardiff Trade Union Congress.

We, the organised Jewish workers of England, taking into consideration the Anti-Alien Resolution, and the uncomplimentary remarks of certain delegates about the Jewish workers specially, issue this leaflet, wherewith we hope to convince our English fellow workers of the untruthfulness, unreasonableness, and want of logic contained in the cry against the foreign worker in general, and against the Jewish worker in particular.

It is, and always has been, the policy of the ruling classes to attribute the sufferings and miseries of the masses (which are natural consequences of class rule and class exploitation) to all sorts of causes except the real ones. The cry against the foreigner is not merely peculiar to England; it is international. Everywhere he is the scapegoat for other's sins. Every class finds in him an enemy. So long as the Anti-Alien sentiment in this country was confined to politicians, wire-pullers, and to individual working men, we, the organised aliens, took no heed; but when this ill-founded sentiment has been officially expressed by the organised working men of England, then we believe that it is time to lift our voices and argue the matter out.

It has been proved by great political economists that a working man in a country where machinery is greatly developed produces in a day twice as many commodities as his daily wage enables him to consume.

A pamphlet produced by Jewish Trades Unionists, in opposition to the 1905 Aliens Act.



Capitulation to racism and anti-semitism is one of the oldest traditions of the British labour movement. Back in 1905, Jewish trade unionists (left) had to campaign against the TUC's support for the 1905 Aliens Act (which sought to restrict mainly Jewish immigration to Britain). Today it is the rank and file of the working class movement who must oppose our own leaders like Roy Hattersley (above) who are only too keen to scapegoat 'bogus asylum seekers'. A racist labour movement is no use to anybody, except the bosses.

would have grave economic results in aggravating the unemployment problem, the housing problem and other social problems" (House of Commons, March 22nd 1938).

This can be compared with the welcome given to Nazis entering the UK after the war. The then Labour Lord Chancellor said "I am willing to risk their being Nazis — and I think they probably are, so long as they are highly-skilled technicians" (House of Lords, March 10th 1946).

Of course, the present tightening of immigration controls is also a block on Jews fleeing the increasing and violent anti-semitism in the ex-Stalinist states.

What the new Asylum laws will mean

Ever since the Commonwealth Immigrants Act of 1962 there have been harsher controls against black people from the Third World.

These have been introduced by both Labour and Tory governments. The 1968 Commonwealth Immigrants Act, taking away the right of entry to East African Asians with British passports, was Labour's main innovation. Under the last three Tory governments, there has been an onslaught — ranging from attacks on Asian arranged marriages to the 1988 Immigration Act restricting rights of appeal and bringing in further criminal penalties. The Asylum Bill is simply a further and more confident acceleration.

Some of the Bill's proposals are:

- All asylum applicants to be fingerprinted
- Families of homeless refugees to lose their full rights to council housing whilst awaiting a decision on their claim
- All appeals against refusal of asylum to be lodged within 48 hours
- No appeal rights where an Adjudicator asserts an applicant "does not have an arguable claim for asylum"
- The refusal of an asylum application will give the Home Office power to remove any other immigration status — such as being a student
- The undertaking of political activities in the UK by an asylum seeker will itself be grounds to refuse the claim if the Home Office asserts that the activities "were calculated to

enhance his claim to refugee status"

• In addition to those contained in the Asylum Bill, there are further proposals. For instance, Legal Aid is no longer to be available for advice in any immigration matter, whether or not it is to do with asylum. This shows that the new changes are not just about asylum-seekers, but are directed against all migrants and immigrants.

The outlines of the new proposals were made public in parliament by Kenneth Baker, last July. However, for 3 months prior to that there had been a concerted softening-up exercise by the press to popularise the idea of more restrictions. For instance:

- On April 25th, the *Star* attacked a family claiming social security on the grounds "They are about as British as a chapatti butty".
- On May 27th, the *Daily Express* denounced political asylum as a "United Nations loophole".
- Incredible stories were invented to show asylum-seekers were 'bogus'. On July 3rd, the *Sun* claimed "They often pay pals to whip them or burn themselves with cigarettes to con investigators into believing they are torture victims".
- The government is not at the mercy of the media. They feed off each other. The new proposals were deliberately leaked to the press, weeks in advance of their parliamentary announcement. The *Mail* reported them on June 10th. On June 28th, the Prime Minister made a crucial speech preparing the way for the new proposals. He called for tougher laws throughout Europe. On June 29th, the *Sun* headlined this as "PM in race war alert. Major calls for migrant curb".

The whole world over

Britain's employment of immigration controls extends to the corner of what is left of its Empire. At the same time as introducing its Asylum Bill, it is forcibly sending back Vietnamese refugees from Hong Kong and is refusing to allow all but the wealthiest Hong Kong citizens to settle in the UK.

None of this is happening in isolation. Immigration barriers are being erected

throughout all the centres of imperialism against immigrants, migrants and refugees — not so much to lose their labour as to control it.

As Europe, Japan and the USA compete against each other, they all erect their own fortresses to regulate the flow of a cheap and intimidated workforce.

• The plans for 1992 and the European Community bear an uncanny similarity with the Asylum Bill. In October 1991, the European Commission circulated a document against refugees. Its ideas included a fast-track procedure for rejecting "manifestly unfounded applications" and tougher fines on airlines for bringing in undocumented passengers. The way the European wind is blowing is shown by Italy's (mis)treatment of Albanian refugees last August. The degree of violence used by the state authorities has not been seen since Mussolini. The *Guardian* reported "Italian police opened fire last night as thousands of Albanian refugees seeking to avoid deportation tried to break out of a football stadium in which they were being kept".

• The United States has had a long history of denying entry to refugees fleeing right-wing and military governments. It is presently engaged in sending out gun boats to intercept and turn back Haitians fleeing from a military coup. At the same time, it welcomes refugees from Cuba.

• In 1989, Japan introduced new immigration legislation. It made it a criminal offence for employers to hire workers without the 'correct' immigration status. These employer sanctions turn bosses into agents of immigration control on the shop floor. Similar laws already exist in the USA and in many EC countries. In 1978, one of the last acts of the Labour government was to publish the report of the Parliamentary Select Committee on Race Relations and Immigration — which argued for the introduction of employer sanctions in the UK.

Who is bogus? Roy Hattersley or the refugees?

In the parliamentary debate on the Bill, Roy Hattersley said "I have made it clear that I will not allow in the bogus asylum-seeker" and "No-one I know wants the open door policy on immigration".

Hattersley makes exactly the same distinction as the Tories between 'economic' or 'bogus' refugees and 'political' or 'genuine' refugees.

The new Asylum Bill will, in any case, keep out many political refugees who have what the law describes as a 'well-founded fear of persecution' in their own countries. This is the Bill's purpose.

However, as socialists, we have to assert that there is no such thing as a 'bogus' refugee. The only reason why there is migration from the Indian sub-continent, from Africa and the Caribbean, is because the UK, along with other imperial powers, has created poverty and mayhem in these massive areas of the world through economic exploitation made possible by political power and military force.

The Parliamentary Labour Party has said that it will vote against the Asylum Bill. This is not for reasons of principle. It is simply because Hattersley claims he has a more 'effective' method of excluding 'bogus' entrants. His plan is to criminalise 'the agents of bogus asylum-seekers and immigrants'. What he means by this is the introduction of employer sanctions. This is the route by which the Labour leadership wants to enforce immigration controls.

As socialists, our only position can be one of opposition to all restrictions. It is often said that some controls are 'reasonable' or 'natural'. However, there is nothing reasonable or natural about them. Controls did not exist a century ago. There was a long, racist campaign to implement them. What is required now is an anti-racist campaign to destroy them.

Steve Cohen is author of *That's Funny, You Don't Look Anti-Semitic*.



Kathleen Turner has been mugged — by idiot scriptwriters and by a pea-brained director and producer. Photo: Hollywood Pictures Company. All rights reserved

Turning gold into dross

Cinema

Belinda Weaver reviews *V.I. Warshawski*

If the men (and I stress the word men) who made *V.I. Warshawski* were transplant surgeons, they'd replace healthy organs with diseased ones. They're wilfully, arrogantly ignorant.

The fact that audiences are staying away in droves from their movie won't faze them; they'll simply complain that films about female private detectives don't sell.

This one certainly hasn't, but the fault is theirs, and theirs alone.

They had good material in their hands, and they trashed it.

Sara Paretsky's six *Warshawski* novels have a faithful following, and all of them could have been made into watchable movies. They're tightly plotted and fun to read. But the dummies who got hold of them decided the audience didn't have the brains or the concentration to follow a complex plot, so they made up their own piffling story. They threw away the plots and filled in the space with clichés, a string of unrelated oneliners stitched together with sentimental slop, and a boat chase.

The film is an insult. All that's left of the novels are the characters' names. For no discernible reason (it doesn't help the film any) the filmmakers have even changed the way the characters act. Mr Contreras, *V.I.*'s fond, fussy neighbour, is transformed into a stingy landlord; Murray Ryerson, her newspaper contact, becomes her longtime

lover. Why?

The worst transformation is wrought on *V.I.* herself. The filmmakers obviously didn't like *V.I.*, didn't approve of her ragbag mixture of toughness, feminism, vulnerability, and independence, not to mention her politics (all the novels have *V.I.* fighting corruption — in insurance, shipping, real estate development, the US health system, the chemical industry, and so on). They didn't believe a woman would have the principles or the drive to follow through on a tough, dangerous investigation. So they gave her a motive, they gave her the same treatment Sigourney Weaver got in *Aliens*, they gave her a kid to protect.

Can anything be more offensive than this? After trashing *V.I.* at the start with a vicious crack about a "female dick", the filmmakers turn her into a mother figure. That way, she's doing what they consider right — she's fallen victim to the don't-

mess-with-my-lion-cub syndrome, and any threat to men (that women might be as smart, as tough as they are) is removed. She's not an independent sexy woman any more — she's a mum.

Once they've established that, out go the high heels (one of the insane selling points of this crap movie) and in come the jeans and the trainers (after all, mum's can't be sexy, can they?). They go one further. After a beating, when *V.I.* has had an injection to help her sleep, she starts wittering on about whether she'd be a good mother. The filmmakers obviously think valium is like truth serum. It's a credit to Kathleen Turner, who's quite good as *V.I.*, that she doesn't try too hard to put this bit of nonsense over.

If they were going to throw away everything that made the Paretsky novels distinctive (the plots, the characters, the politics and the sense of place), why did these ignoramuses bother with them at all? Why not just make their own woman private investigator flick? They must have wanted the assurance of a known "brand name" as a selling/advertising point. But books aren't like coffee or washing powder, where the difference is largely in the packaging. The insides matter. Selling this movie as a *V.I. Warshawski* story is a swindle.

This film seems to sum up everything that's gone wrong with Hollywood movies. Dummies call the shots. The money was there to make a good film; the tedious boat chase alone, with its tricky overhead shots and Chicago skyline, must have cost a packet, and no-one would have missed it.

Had they filmed one of Paretsky's novels, instead of rehashing every TV cop show cliché they could find, they could have made a film that pleased Paretsky fans (who would have come back for more), as well as other people looking for a good time. They could have gone on to film the other books, since nothing pleases Hollywood more than sequels.

But they didn't. They took a potential goldmine and turned it into dross. That's the new Hollywood.

Vinyl junkies of the world unite!

Music

By Paul McGarry

The long-playing record is dead. Or so the flurry of articles in the press would have us believe. The decision by W.H. Smith to cease stocking vinyl has been picked up by the media as signalling the end of an era.

The argument is persuasive. It goes something like this: just like those musty old '78s gave way to LPs, progress has given us the Compact Disc which is more convenient, and ensures more convincing production of your favourite music. The proof of the pudding is in the sales figures. We buy CDs and cassettes, not LPs.

There is, of course, more than an element of truth in the music business version of things. As usual, it is only one side of the argument.

Hopefully, this unravelling of the issues will go some way to explaining why right-minded people like myself get so bothered about the whole thing. It's a mixture of injustice, good old-

fashioned capitalist exploitation and wrong-doing that motivates me putting pen to paper. And no little addiction to the 12-inch wonders.

First, the injustice. It's my humble opinion [and most of the hi-fi industry's] that LPs, given a decent sound system, sound better than CDs.

CDs tend to sound unreal, synthetic and brash.

But that's not the point. I want the choice to listen to LPs and not to be forced to get those rickety and expensive replacements, the CD players.

Here's the exploitation bit. It costs less to produce a CD but they sell for

"If Beethoven wanted you to listen to the last movement of his 9th symphony first, he'd have written it that way."

a third more than LPs. So if W.H. Smith doesn't stock LPs, they make more money — and so does the music industry.

The theory is that the newly-converted CD owner is likely to pursue his or her old LP collection on CD.

Not that too many of my old favourites are on CD, and, when they are, they're very expensive and more than likely made from inferior master tapes which sound dreadful.

The CD does win out on convenience. But those programming features do seem a bit daft. If Beethoven wanted you to listen to the last movement of his 9th Symphony first he'd have written it that way. Ditto Pink Floyd, the Sex Pistols et al.

I'm loath to admit the possibility of the over-riding motivation for this addiction. I love records. Folding out the sleeves, looking at grooves, putting them on the turntable, is an experience to which sticking a little plastic disc in a slot doesn't match up.

Vinyl junkies can be found in any music store. Last night I found myself in Virgin's store on Oxford Street. After having to ask an assistant where the records were, I found the depleted racks being busily thumbed through by a fellow junkie. "You just can't get a copy of the Grateful Dead's 1979 triple live set," he told me. An unsurpassable injustice, I thought, as I tried to track down Joni Mitchell's 1980 double live album.

I bet that bastard Neil Kinnock won't do anything about it if Labour wins.

Dynasty goes anti-Japanese

Television

By Amy Gilbert

"Dynasty — the reunion" aimed to tie up the loose ends left by the last cliffhanging episode of the long-running soapie. It didn't tie them up so much as pretend they hadn't happened.

Adam was mysteriously single again; Fallon had escaped burial alive in a collapsing cave (peanuts to a woman who'd spent weeks on a flying saucer); Alexis had survived a potentially fatal fall over the banisters by landing on Dex (ex-husbands have their uses).

Blake was in gaol; and Krystle supposedly out of a coma, though, as ever, it was hard to tell. What really made it seem like old times was that both Adam and Steven had brand new faces and no-one seemed to notice... Plus ça change...

One thing that hadn't changed was its progressive views on women. Basically, "Dynasty"'s view of women matches the *Sun's* — Alexis and Krystle the glam grannies, Sammy Jo the blonde bimbo, grovelling Jeannette the faithful servant, and so on. Alexis at least had the fun of camping it up — her outfits looked as if they'd been designed by Fallon's flying saucer pals. Krystle, despite the plot that had her programmed to kill Blake, was a non-starter, though you had to give points to the mad Swiss doctor for trying to knock something into her tiny brain. Most people would have given up after seeing her shoulder pads.

What was new was the coded anti-Japanese paranoia that was the heart of the plot. American capitalism is very nervous about the Japanese buying up their businesses, hence Blake's fears about a sinister "Consortium" plotting to buy up America, and his determination to be the white knight who would stop them.

It's probably not the scriptwriters' fault that this just sounded like sour grapes from the man who lost his company to the Consortium. The idea was a dog from the start. Free market capitalism can hardly be free if people cry foul from the minute they end up on the losing side. As the ads warn us, the value of investments can go down as well as up. Blake's fading eyesight had obviously overlooked the small print.

Even his speech to Consortium boss Van Dorn (which was supposed to be a big moment) was a flop. When Blake proudly proclaimed that he had always put country before profits, my jaw dropped. Eh? Exactly when did you do that, Blake? Ever? He's always been very much Mr. Hardball. He just hides it better than Alexis.

I won't miss "Dynasty". It's not even good escapism any more. Its black and white view of the world with good capitalist Blake and bad capitalist Alexis is nonsense — they're both dreadful. The piffling anti-Japanese message was so overwrought that it was counterproductive. Sinister Orientals have been done to death in Hollywood, and it was a big mistake having the woman baddie be black. People really aren't as thick as the makers of "Dynasty" seem to think they are.

Join the Alliance for Workers' Liberty!

The case for a socialist revolution to replace capitalism remains as strong as ever.

In the Third World, capitalism today means increasing poverty, misery and hunger, imposed in order to meet the interest payments demanded by international banks.

In the advanced capitalist countries unemployment is high and rising, and the welfare systems won by decades of working-class reform effort are everywhere under attack. In Eastern

Europe and the USSR, the rush towards capitalism will turn millions into paupers.

Capitalism can inflict defeats on socialism and the working class. It can never abolish the working class, and so it can never abolish the class struggle and the ideas of socialism.

The Alliance for Workers' Liberty was set up in May 1991. It declared then: *We need a crusade to clarify and restate the ideas of socialism, free from all taint of Stalinism, and to help the political reconstitution of the working class.*

That crusade is even more urgently needed now. The AWL is supporting the *Stand Up For Real Socialism* campaign launched by *Socialist Organiser*. It strives to tie together work in that campaign with daily activity in the trade unions and workplaces, in the Labour Party, in anti-poll-

tax groups, in colleges, and on the streets; and to link all that activity with a drive to educate ourselves politically and organise a stable, cohesive, alert contingent of Marxists.

Contact the AWL c/o PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA.

Support your socialist paper

The fund drive to help *Socialist Organiser* continued this week. We have collected

£6,203.93 since October. Our target is £10,000.

Donations and fundraising will be used to help *Socialist Organiser* buy new equipment. With the new machinery we will be able to produce a better looking *Socialist Organiser*.

Socialist Organiser also wants to expand our coverage and our influence in the labour movement and broader campaigns. The political case is overwhelming. *Socialist Organiser* offers a precise, articulate, unique view of the world for Labour Party, trade union and student activists.

As Stalinism collapses in the East and new battles open up against capitalism, we need to fight for a democratic, revolutionary socialist alternative.

We are, simply, indispensable.

...And we need your help.

How you can help

Make a donation to help our fund appeal. Cheques and postal orders, payable to *Socialist Organiser*, to PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA.

Join our 200 Club

Our 200 Club is a regular monthly draw. The prize is £100 each month. You can enter the draw for as little as £1 per month. Additional money from the 200 Club goes to help *Socialist Organiser*.

Ask your SO seller, or write to us at PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA.

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

Manchester Town Hall, Albert Square, February 8th and 9th

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

Tickets — £5 waged/£2.50 unwaged

Professionally staffed creche. Social including disco on Saturday evening.

For more details contact Tom on 071-639 7965 or write to PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA.

Times: 11.30 — 5.45, Saturday; 10.00 — 3.45, Sunday. Registration from 10.30 on Saturday

Fighting to win: how to beat the racists and fascists

Where to find your Socialist Organiser meetings

Thursday 16 January

Glasgow Poly, 1.00. Speaker Mark Sandell
North London College, 1.00. Speaker Mark Osborn
Glasgow, Partick Burgh Halls, 7.30. Speaker Jon Pike.
Nottingham, International Community Centre, Mansfield Road, 7.30. Speaker Nick Lowles

Monday 20 January

Queen Mary & Westfield College, 12.30, Societies Room. Speaker Jill Mountford
Lancaster University, 1.00. Speaker Mark Sandell

Teesside Poly, Room A110, 6.30. Speaker Nic Brereton
Manchester University, 1.00. Speaker Richard Love
Hull University, 1.15

Wednesday 22 January

Keighley College, 1.00. Speaker Jo Bishop
Bradford College, 1.00
Newcastle Poly, 2.00. Speaker Habda Rashid
Essex University, 6.00. Speaker Paul Ramsamooj
Northampton, Emerald Club, 7.30. Speaker Tom Rigby

Manchester, Town Hall, 8.00. Speakers Gail Cameron and Nik Barstow

Thursday 23 January

Poly of North London, Holloway Road site, 1.00
Monkwearmouth College, 1.00. Speaker Habda Rashid
Park Lane College, 12.30. Speaker Mike Fenwick
York University, 1.15. Speaker Nick Lowles
St John's College, York, 7.00. Speaker Nick Lowles
Newcastle, Rossetti Studios, 7.30
Sheffield, SCCAU, West St, 7.30. Speaker Pete Radcliff

These meetings are sponsored by the Alliance for Workers' Liberty. For details of *Socialist Organiser* in your area, phone Mark on 071-639 7965

Leeds, Swarthmore Centre, 7.30
Brighton, Great Eastern pub, 7.30. Speaker Sab Sanghera

Friday 24 January

Richmond College, 1.00. Speaker Paul Ramsamooj
Goldsmiths College, 1.00. Speaker Jill Mountford
Huddersfield Poly, Conference Room, 1.00. Speaker Mike Fenwick

Thursday 30 January

Liverpool Institute, Room 58, 12.30. Speaker Gail Cameron
London SO Forum meeting, LSE, 7.30

Is the 'fingerprint' unique? Doubt over DNA



Les Hearn's

SCIENCE COLUMN

Seven years ago, a powerful new forensic test was introduced — DNA "fingerprinting". Since then many criminals have been convicted and innocent people exonerated on the basis of DNA testing.

However, small amounts of doubt have crept in about its reliability in a few cases.

The test does not involve analysing the whole of the DNA. That would take several years and several billion pounds to do and is, in fact, the purpose of the international Human Genome Project. Instead, DNA from a few sites on the chromosomes is "chopped up" by certain enzymes which always go for particular features.

This gives rise to a set of fragments which would be the same sizes for DNA from the same person. These fragments are separated according to those sizes to give a pattern which should be unique for that person. But is it? This question has two aspects.

One relates to the reliability of the work carried out by DNA testing laboratories which, in some cases in the USA, was found to be rather sloppy. The other aspect relates to the assumptions behind DNA matching.

People who are related share some DNA in common and it is always possible for the DNA at particular sites to be the same. This should be allowed for by taking DNA from several sites. In principle,

the chances of the DNA being identical at, say, four sites would be very small for close relatives and astronomically small for unrelated people.

But there is a very large assumption here. It is that the population of the world is thoroughly mixed. In practice, it is not and some communities are extremely close knit. The chances of two people having the same DNA at chosen sites start to increase.

The question is "Do the chances of a random match become high enough to cause serious doubt as to the identity of a criminal if there is no other evidence?" In some cases in the USA and Australia, the answer has been "Yes" and people have been acquitted in these cases. The defence argument was that DNA fingerprinting was based on assumptions of genetic mixing found in general populations and that it had not been shown that such assumptions were valid for minority populations such as Hispanic or Vietnamese ones.

The controversy has erupted into the scientific press with the publication in the US journal *Science* of a paper by Richard Lewontin and Daniel Hartl highly critical of the claims of the DNA testers. Lewontin has previously been prominent in arguing against those who claim that IQ scores measure "intelligence" and show that intelligence is largely inherited.

The article argues that the DNA test methods are "liable to potentially serious errors". Contrary to the assumption of genetic mixing in ethnic groups, they say that these groups are made up of "multiple subpopulations that are genetically diverse". This leads to a far higher chance that two individuals from one of these subgroups would share the same pattern.

In addition, they say that the statistical methods currently used are inadequate. Unusually, the editor of *Science* invited defenders of DNA testing to reply in the same issue. In addition, it seems that the FBI tried to get the paper withdrawn before publication.

It would seem that much more research into the genetics of populations will be needed before DNA fingerprints can be accepted without question in all cases.

WHAT'S ON

Friday 17 January

"Labour and the general election", Huddersfield Poly SO meeting, 1.00

Saturday 18 January

Bloody Sunday demonstration, Glasgow

Sunday 19 January

London Labour Party Socialists: "Fighting the Witchhunt", 2.00, Lambeth Town Hall, Brixton

Tuesday 21 January

"The state of NUS", London Left Unity meeting, 7.00, ULU Student Union, Euston

Wednesday 22 January

"South Africa at the crossroads", SW London SO meeting, 8.00, Lambeth Town Hall, Brixton

Saturday 25 January

Bloody Sunday demonstration, London

Socialists answer the New Right

Participate:
Basil Sturton (Brixton College)
Gareth Whalley (London School of Economics)
David Whittard (West London Institute)
Morris Thomas (LSE)
John O'Malley (Editor, Socialist Organiser)



£1.50 plus 38 pence p&p from PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA.

INDUSTRIAL

Stop the AEU/EETPU merger! Jordan can be beaten!

By an AEU activist

The AEU National Committee, which is the rank-and-file policy-making body of the union, voted in December to accept the principle of merging with the EETPU.

The voting went along the usual left/right split. Some right-wing delegates who were initially against the merger ended up voting for the merger swayed by the fact that the left-wing leaders, Airlie and Butler, had voted for the merger on the Executive Council.

The report-back meeting of activists in my area, although in disagreement with the outcome,

was pessimistic about combatting the inevitable surge of propaganda from the union leadership and media urging the membership to vote 'yes' in the ballot which follows.

Full-time officials stressed that they could not openly oppose the merger because it was now union policy, which they were obliged to support.

Even the thought of a forthcoming meeting with an Executive member, putting forward their position, worried activists.

Some thought the meeting should be boycotted; they feared that ordinary members would be dazzled by the leadership and their 'professional' ability to shoot down the arguments of a mere activist who tried to argue the case against the merger.



... and Laird too!

Thankfully, it was decided to protest outside before the meeting but then to go in and argue why we should be against the merger.

Activists must have confidence in their ability to confront and defeat the leadership on this

issue.

It is possible to defeat the merger — when the issue has been discussed at District Committees, Shop Stewards' meetings and in the workplace, opposition to it has been strong.

Activists need to be organising more workplace meetings and putting out their own propaganda spelling out what this merger will mean, and why the vote should be 'no'.

This merger would create an immensely powerful right-wing bloc promoting blatant business-unionism within the British labour movement.

We must fight against it now. Opposition needs to be co-ordinated swiftly since the ballot is expected to take place in the next couple of months.

A test case for NALGO's strategy

By Rob McLoughlin,
Bury NALGO Branch
Secretary

Bury — the borough with the biggest BCCI losses outside the Western Isles — has announced cuts of £9 million and 450 redundancies.

The job losses were proposed by the Labour-controlled council after the unions had rejected "options" which included an increment freeze, paying all allowances at the lowest rate and scrapping the trade union facilities agreement on the basis that "the unions have to take their share of the cuts".

The council has demonstrated its contempt for the principles of collective bargaining by instructing management to put the

poisoned chalice on offer to individual workers. At the same time, a corporate campaign has been initiated to intimidate workers into accepting voluntary redundancy, and the NALGO branch has evidence of a number of instances where people have been singled out for "special advice" on their futures.

NALGO is facing the brunt of the attack, with 250 workers listed for the sack in mid-December.

In mid-January, with the meetings of NALGO's Greater Manchester local government branches and a District Local Government Committee behind us.

"Mixed emotions" perhaps best sums up our mood.

We sense that there is a colleague or two within the district who would like to believe that our dispute consists of a loony

left branch upsetting a reasonable Labour council.

However, the open and public threat of compulsory redundancies, and the failure of Jury council to enter into anything like meaningful negotiations or release detailed financial information, have been accepted by colleagues of good sense as clear indications that our employers are well out of order.

The branch is not looking to other branches within the district to fight our battles for us. We shall adopt appropriate measures as defined in the national strategy — working to existing contracts, non-cooperation, embarrassment tactics, selective strike action and all-out strike action. Some of the measures are in place already and what we want, and feel we are beginning to get, from the district is involvement and support.

It seems that the assault on ser-

vice conditions was developed at a meeting of all Chief Personnel Officers in the Greater Manchester area but only proceeded with by Bury. This raises the question of whether Bury is seen as a "test case" — or a "maverick authority". The national strategy says:

"To counter the employer's tactics of copying cuts initiatives first tried out in one particular authority it will sometimes be necessary to identify a particular local dispute as being a "test case" for other local authorities and to offer to that particular branch support at a much higher level." (Passed by NALGO's special 1991 conference)

We believe that Bury is a "test case" and that any attempt to define what is going on in Bury as the actions of a "maverick authority" would be a sell-out of the national strategy and the membership.

DSS Newtown jobs victory

"Morale is really high, we are returning to work confident and determined."

That's how Lawrence Chapple, CPSA DHSS Section Executive member, summed up the mood at Newtown DSS office the end of their sixteen-week long staffing strike.

After refusing to talk to the strikers, concede the need for more staff, or discuss a return to work agreement, management have been forced to back down

on all three counts. The CPSA at Newtown has won four new permanent posts, meanwhile, the neighbouring Wrexham office has received an increased complement of five even though they took no action!

Lawrence was keen to stress that this was not the end of the campaign. An overtime ban has been imposed on Newtown but the battle for extra staff had to involve every DSS worker:

"What has happened at Newtown sets the scene for a na-

tional staffing campaign in the DSS. Strike action — in some form or another — across the whole country is what is needed now."

Finally, Lawrence was keen to thank all those people who had shown support and solidarity with Newtown. Particularly those offices in Wales which came out in solidarity on December 13.

If you want more information about the lessons of the Newtown dispute, contact Lawrence on 0938-555476.

Opportunity lost for united fight

By a civil servant

In a week when civil servants were informed by the Tories that national rates of pay would be scrapped and pay increases would, in the main, become performance-based, Militant supporters in the CPSA Broad Left "organised" an

unofficial pay conference that can only be described as a sick joke.

The ending of national pay bargaining has implications well beyond the issue of pay.

Whilst the main issue for low-paid lower-grade civil servants is pay, it is equally important that conditions of service and job security are severely threatened.

The very existence of the national civil service unions is under threat.

The CPSA Broad Left pay conference was called in anticipation of the failure of the right wing CPSA Executive to mount an immediate and strong response to the Tories.

The conference should have been organised jointly with the other two main civil service unions — NUCPS and IRSF.

Instead, 75 Broad Left supporters sat in a cold room in Birmingham at a rally-type event where many Broad Left members had been disenfranchised from

putting up motions and to which NUCPS members were invited — but only to listen.

The one NUCPS member who attended was allowed to speak (but not vote) only after Militant supporter, and chair of the conference, Doreen Purvis, gave in to uproar and disgust from people who were not Militant supporters.

Purvis tried to rule out of order an emergency motion calling for a recall conference — the sort of conference this one should have been.

The motion was put but narrowly defeated.

The debate on pay centred around Militant supporters refusing to support an SWP motion which talked about industrial action and an actual claim.

The Militant appear to be saying nothing except "defeat the offer". To which most members will say, "and then what?"

We need answers for members now. To defeat the Tories' pay plans and secure a decent increase, we need to campaign around a claim and to argue that industrial action will be necessary.

Militant appear to want to fudge the issue, thus providing no credible and honest answers. No wonder the conference nearly ended in a punch-up!

The shape of things to come

By a London Civil
Servant

While the leaders of the Civil Service unions are discussing changes to our National Pay Agreements, one Agency has jumped the gun and tabled proposals to completely change the pay and grading structure of its staff.

The Agency is the QEII Conference Centre, which runs an

up-market conference hall, specifically designed to house inter-governmental meetings.

The proposals would mean staff being paid according to the nature of their jobs, not what grade (AO, EO etc.) they were. Also, for a section of the staff, overtime payments would be scrapped in return for some extra money on their basic pay, but, under the new system, there wouldn't be any upper-limit on the hours worked in a day.

So, if senior management get their way, staff couldn't refuse to work weekends — they could end up working seven days a

week.

These proposals were given to the unions on the 29 November. The Agency wanted staff to sign the new contracts by 1 January! Of course, the unions have knocked that idea on the head and have recruited the bulk of the staff.

The performance pay that the Agency wants to introduce, may give a foretaste of what the Government has in store for the rest of the Civil Service.

Pay increases will be determined by the staff's annual report. A bad report will lead to either no pay increase or even a pay cut!

COHSE, NALGO, NUPE: New union — the faceless bureaucrats behind it

By Nik Barstow, Editor,
NALGO Action

One of the largest unions in Britain might come into being next year with most of its members knowing little, and caring even less, about the merger that will create it.

A report from the NECs of NALGO, NUPE and COHSE going to a special conference on March 4 looks set to allow a ballot on merger to go ahead which could create a 1½ million strong public sector union by July 1993.

For the press, the main feature of the report will be proposals to ensure that the majority of the members — women — will be 'proportionally represented' on its National Executive... and that issue is likely to be concentrated on by activists.

Activists who care about unions being democratic and representing all their members will welcome the proposals, and a plan for 'reserved seats' for the lowest-paid women members who earn less than £5,000 a year...but behind this 'radicalism' the union leaders have avoided some key issues.

Above all they've said nothing which really gives a reason why a 'super-union' should be created, except that it will be bigger. Activists will be arguing that there are positive reasons for a merger if we have a charter of demands for public sector workers to overcome divisions between white collar and blue collar workers in local councils, the NHS, further education, and utilities — simple things like a minimum wage, a 35-hour week for all, equal conditions, and a joint campaign to defend the public sector.

The union leaders, by contrast, have come up with a 'defensive' plan to prevent the worst problems of falling membership on the one hand, and to calm the worst fears about lack of democracy on the other.

Faced with losing the merger plan, the NECs have largely conceded that an annual conference should be held, that members should have access to adequate funds, and that the union should be led by elected, lay-members not full-time officials.

All these things were issues they had wanted to duck, but were forced to respond to by last year's NALGO conference — and the threat that campaigns for a democratic merger would grow very fast if they didn't back down.

But there are still practical points that need raising to win the type of democratic fighting union activists want to see — a

powerful union with a real industrial base: where the leaders on the NEC are directly elected by, and accountable to, workers in each public service in the union.

By contrast the NECs have a plan for regional and service NEC members, and have sneaked in having elections only every two years. Where the service groups based on each public service unite the workforce in communal campaigns to overcome divisions, the NEC have sneaked in, in the small print, a plan for 'sectors' which keeps divisions between white collar and blue collar workers.

Activists will also want guarantees that branches have the wherewithal to campaign. The NECs have half caved in with a series of promises on funds which need tightening up

"Activists will welcome reserved seats for the lowest-paid women members... but, behind this 'radicalism', the union leaders have avoided some key issues."

so that the union on the ground keeps a set percentage of subs income.

So where does that leave women in the merged union — if the other changes are agreed in a far stronger position, but the backdoor approach of the bureaucracy needs bringing out into the light. Despite all the talk about a democratic union their plans for four representatives for women are about election systems, not self-organisation, and into the bargain they talked about power for the NEC to 'introduce fairness through sanctions' — an untrammeled right for them to disqualify conference delegations, withhold funds, or impose women-only elections in branches.

The double-speak about fairness and democracy tied up with these sort of plans is likely to put workers off, convince them that a 'super-union' will be a bureaucratic monster. It is now the activists, if they can advance the real case for merger and build on the concessions they've already forced out of the leaders, who will have to win the arguments with the one-and-a-half million trade unionists who need one big democratic union.

Save Hackney trade union support unit

Hackney Trade Union Support Unit (TUSU) is threatened with closure by Labour-controlled Hackney council.

After a 50% cut in its grant in March 1991, the council is now carrying out a review of its work, with council project officers unofficially confirming that they have been informed that funding will cease from March 1992 onwards.

It is clear that the unit's future is in doubt because it offers a collective approach to working class people's problems and because it actively supports all workers in

struggle, refugees' rights to be in Britain and because it works to break the isolation of the local Turkish and Kurdish community from the British labour movement. In other words, the council doesn't like the place because it supports the struggles and activities of working class people.

The work of TUSU has included: supporting strikes; running education courses; taking trade unionism into the schools; helping to organise Kurdish and Turkish workers; trade union recruitment, advice, information and solidarity.

Help the unit to continue. Contact: TUSU, Liberty Hall, 489 Kingsland Road, London E8 4AU.

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Defend student democracy!

GEC ALSTHOM



GEC workers are leading the fight back against job losses. Photo: John Smith (Profile)

Management threaten 130 more jobs

GEC strikers must win!

By Dan Judelson

Another 130 compulsory redundancies are being threatened at the GEC-Alsthom Switchgear plant in

Manchester.

These come on top of the previously announced 95 that provoked the strike currently taking place.

More people than ever were on

the picket line the morning after the new redundancies were announced, a week after the strike began.

The strikers have dug in for battle. They have built themselves a wooden shelter and are expanding the picket to cover the site 24 hours a day.

Support and donations have been coming in from a variety of other workers. At the GEC-Alsthom plant in Crawford, union members are each paying a strike levy of £2 a week.

Donations have also been received from GEC, Volvo Components and Leyland DAF (all in Preston). From Manchester, the MSF branch at ICL Gorton (near the GEC Higher Openshaw site) and the RMT at British Rail marshalling yards in Levenshulme have sent money and support, as have NALGO Housing.

The CGT in France, where Alsthom has its HQ, have sent a letter of support. At the time of

writing, it was thought that French GEC Alsthom workers had occupied their plant.

Manchester Labour Euro MP, Eddie Newman, has visited the picket line and issued a press release in support of the strikers.

At the KARA bakery, immediately across the road from GEC, workers have been inspired by the strikers' example. Faced with compulsory redundancy by an anti-union boss, they have joined the Bakers' Union and are discussing possibilities of strike action to save their jobs.

Invite the GEC strikers to your workplace. organise collections and levies.

Their fight is your fight! The battle against unemployment starts inside the factory gates!

Donations to and speakers from Dave Hughes, 23 Prince Edward Avenue, Manchester M34 1A8.

Last week's SO reported the attempt by Labour Students (NOLS) and other right-wing groups in NUS to call an extraordinary NUS conference on the issue of "NUS reform". "Reform" here means restructuring NUS to make it less democratic and therefore safer for the leadership. This letter from Janine Booth, Women's Officer of NUS, is being sent to every college in the country.

Dear Student Unionist,

I am writing to you about an important development in NUS. You will know already that the leaders of NUS want to call an Extraordinary NUS Conference in late February to discuss NUS Reform.

Along with many other concerned student union activists, I am opposed to such a move because I believe it is both anti-democratic and counter to the principles of the student movement.

This Extraordinary Conference is planned to take place one month from now, lasting a single afternoon.

Though this conference will radically alter the structures of NUS, and, in my opinion, if the leaders of NUS have their way, it will destroy a whole area of NUS democracy, the majority of NUS's members will have no opportunity for a proper democratic discussion of the issues.

This Extraordinary Conference called by only 25 colleges out of 850 NUS affiliates, is a deliberate attempt to circumvent NUS's democratic structures!

It will be a small event, of which most student unions will have had too little notice, and little chance to discuss the vital issues on which it will take binding decisions.

Delegates to the conference will not be elected by cross-campus ballot. Many delegations will be hand picked by Executives, and therefore unrepresentative of the spectrum of opinion within their college.

Many colleges, especially those in the FE sector, will not be able to send delegates.

The constitutional provision for such conferences exists to enable NUS to respond quickly to emergencies. This is no emergency! NUS Reform has been discussed at NUS conference every year for five years!

Student hardship and the alarming rise of racism and the far right are the real emergencies facing our movement.

But on questions like that the NUS leaders are sluggish to the point of disinterest! Consider their attitude to the 12 February demonstration. This conference will divert our energies away from

Turn to page 2

National Demonstration Against Student Poverty Assemble 12.00, Battersea Park, London Wednesday 12 January Called by National NUS

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