

What is Islamic
fundamentalism?

page 7



**AEU members
fight EETPU
merger**

page 5



For Socialist Renewal!



For Workers' Liberty!

**Boris Kagarlitsky on
the Moscow
demonstrations**

page 2



**Uproar over
student "Special
Conference"**

page 4



SOCIALIST

ORGANISER

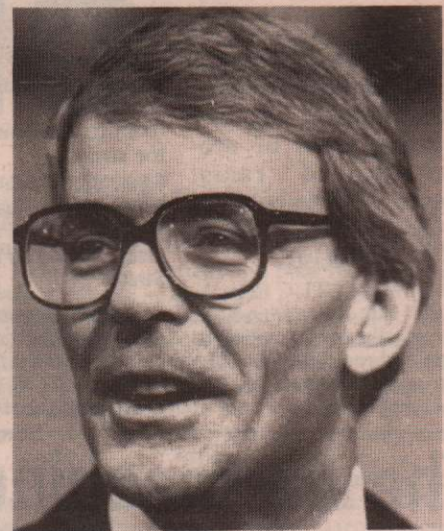
Unite the left!

Election bribes multiply

The Tories

think you

are stupid!



Wage rises, Citizen's Charters, NHS waiting-list scams – that's how the Tories hope to bribe their way to another term in office. See inside, page 3.

Kick them out!



Mary Robinson in Belfast

This is Mary Robinson, the long-time liberal left activist who unexpectedly won the Presidency of the 26 County Republic of Ireland last year. She was visiting Belfast, where she is known as being sincerely committed to the idea that the Protestant-Catholic conflict can only be resolved by

agreement between the peoples of Ireland and not by coercion of any sort.

She favours abandoning the Republic's constitutionally enshrined claim to the territory of Northern Ireland. The importance of this historic visit and the need for conciliation was underlined by the tragic spurt of sectarian killings with which it coincided.

Swedes strike against racism

Immigrant workers' organisations in Sweden are alarmed at the increasing levels of neo-Nazi-inspired racist violence. They have called for working class action against the racists.

The Swedish TUC is backing the call for a one-hour general strike in opposition to racism and racist attacks. The strike will take place on Friday 21 February.

Searchlight and Anti-fascist Action are organising a picket of the Swedish Embassy at the junction of Upper Montague Street and Montague Place, London W1 (tube: Baker Street).

5.00-7.00, 21 February; Swedish Embassy at the junction of Upper Montague Street and Montague Place, London W1 (tube: Baker Street).

Similar actions are taking place in Newcastle, Manchester and Edinburgh.

The left in the student movement, Left Unity, are

calling student protests in support of the Swedish workers.

Mark Sandell (NUS NEC) commented:

"We have to be clear: the Swedish workers are showing the way to beat the Nazis. Students must show their support".

Contact Searchlight

The anti-fascist journal Searchlight can be contacted at: 37b New Cavendish Street, London W1.

The lie machine

The Provisional IRA (PIRA)'s killing of 7 Protestant building workers near the Teebane crossroads in the mainly Catholic county of Armagh gave Protestant sectarians an excuse to run wild. They killed five Catholics at random in a bookie's shop and there have been other, less spectacular, random killings of Catholics. A demented RUC constable killed 3 people at the Republican offices on the Falls Road and then shot himself.

An Phoblacht (The Republic), is the paper of the PIRA and Provisional Sinn Fein. It gives much space to denouncing the sectarianism of Protestants. It justifies, as it must, killings like those at Teebane and sees nothing sectarian in them: its attack on Protestant sectarianism is therefore, in the circumstances, nothing less than a hypocritical, sectarian incite-



ment. An Phoblacht surpassed itself with its front page of 6 February: the "Blood on British hands" is the blood of the innocent Catholics killed by Protestant sectarians stoked up by Teebane. It is part of an "unmerciful onslaught" on "the nationalist people" say those who justify Teebane! [Above.]

Implicitly, these people believe



that there are two Irish nations, their own Catholic, good one, and the other, the bad, Protestant-Unionist one! An Phoblacht is worse than the foul, British tabloids this column usually features because its writers call themselves socialists including editor, Rita O'Hare. They are neither socialists nor republicans, but blinkered Catholic sectarians!

Behind the Moscow demonstrations

Boris Kagarlitsky reports from Moscow on the demonstration against price rises last weekend

The demonstration of Sunday 9 February was organised to oppose the policies of the Russian government.

The demonstration was organised by the hard-line, traditionalists — one of the two Stalinist factions emerging from the ex-Communist Party of the Soviet Union — the Russian Communist Workers' Party (CWP).

It actually presents a problem and a challenge for the non-Stalinist left. The demonstration was a big success for the CWP.

They have actually managed to break out of the Stalinist ghetto.

I have just spent two hours in a meeting of the Moscow branch of the Party of Labour, discussing how to relate to this newly-legitimised Stalinist current.

A new situation is being created. Not only are these Stalinists an emerging force, but it is also clear that the Democratic Russia counter-demonstration was a complete failure. I think it marks the end of Democratic Russia as a popular movement.

Democratic Russia's protest was not only smaller than the CWP's, but it was very confused and heterogeneous.

Some of their people were not actually sure they were on the right demonstration. There has been a psychological collapse inside Democratic Russia.

The CWP were organising around the slogan: Down with the government!

The Party of Labour originally decided to boycott the CWP demonstration. The Moscow branch of the Party of Labour decided today that this was a mistake. It would have been better to join the demonstration using our own slogans.

In fact, the crowd was not very content with what they heard at the CWP rally.

The Party of Labour is also demanding an end to this government. But we address the question of the democratic transition.

We need a return to power based on Soviets elected by the people and new elections.

We want an economic shift

away from the economic barbarism of the monetarists towards a sort of left-wing Keynesianism. We want extensive investment in the public sector and democratic planning.

The CWP never proposed any concrete alternatives. They only say "Down with the government". And demand "a return to the dictatorship of the proletariat".

The Party of Labour is calling a protest rally for 21 February.

Most of the Party of Labour's work is on less high-profile issues. We are building a stable base but without the big crowds.

For example, we are organising around defence of creche facilities and childcare provision. Our public childcare is currently very good — much better than in Britain — and it will be destroyed if the government gets its way.

Wealth and integrity

According to Guy Cramer, acquitted on Monday 10 in the Barlow Clowes trial, the convicted fraudster Peter Clowes conveyed an image of "extreme wealth and great integrity".

More accurately, Clowes displayed great wealth — and if you do that, you generally don't need to bother about the integrity.

Instead of investing new customers' money, Clowes

had been using it — what of it he did not siphon off — to cover repayments and interest demanded by older customers. The scam could continue as long as the flow of new cash was big enough.

The principle was the same — though the details were more crass — as in the huge savings and loans [building societies] collapse in the US.

As in the US, the taxpayer will pay most of the bill — £150 million to Clowes' investors.

Battle for jobs continues:

Support the GEC strikers!

The strike for jobs at GEC Openshaw is attracting more and more support as it enters its sixth week.

Just one example: Stalybridge and Hyde Labour Party donated £100 from its own funds at its AGM last week as well as holding a collection among its members.

Such acts of support are repeated a dozen times a day.

As the GEC strike becomes a rallying point for all who want to

fight for jobs and against the redundancies of the Tory economic disaster, the strikers are moving for more national attention for their fight.

On Tuesday 11 February a delegation of 50 strikers travelled to London to lobby GEC HQ and take their message to parliament, as GEC boss and profiteer Lord Weinstock was called to appear before a Commons Committee. The strikers are also taking their

message across national boundaries to GEC workers in the rest of Europe.

Now is the time for every workplace, trade union and Labour Party branch to ensure they are making regular collections for the GEC strike, to ensure victory for this jobs crusade.

Rush messages of support and donations to Dave Hughes, 23 Prince Edward Avenue, Denton, Manchester M34 1AS.

Chinese workers defy the Stalinists

"China's Free Union has been formed, and ten years from now we will win a decisive victory", declares a defiant manifesto issued last month (according to Reuter reports) by underground trade-union organisers in China.

Since Mao Zedong's Stalinists took power in 1949, independent trade union organisation has been impossible in China. (It was hardly less difficult before, under the brutal rule of Chiang Kai-Shek.) The official "trade unions" were government-controlled: during the Cultural Revolution they were even formally

abolished for a while.

The mid-'70s upheavals after Mao Zedong's death generated a democratic movement which seems to have continued to operate, on a small scale, underground, and facing great repression, ever since. In May-June 1989 the workers and students briefly rose up and took control of Beijing, only to be crushed by a government which evidently had managed to keep control of the peasant majority of China's population and the largely-peasant army.

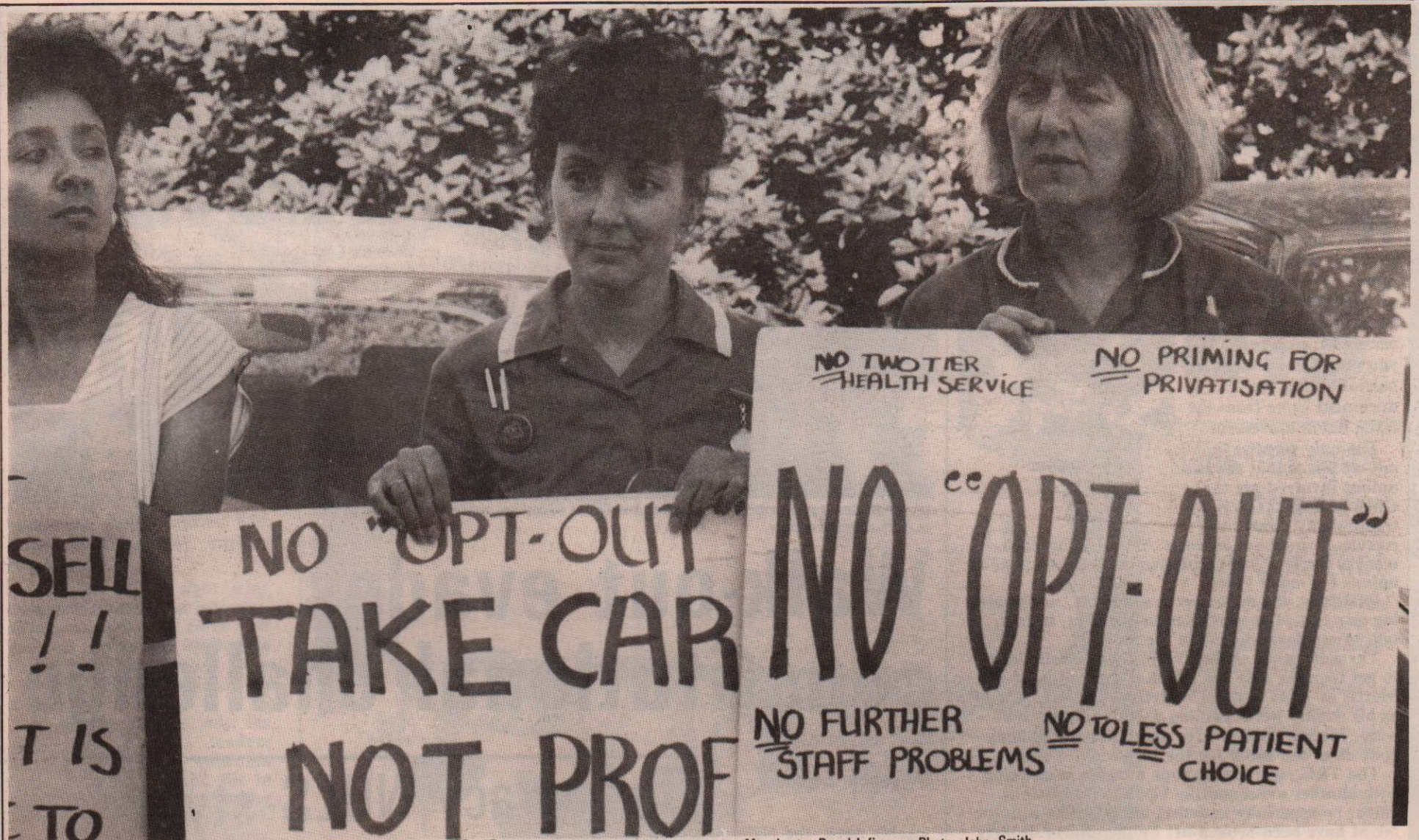
Independent trade unions and "workers' federations" were set up in Beijing and other cities, and then crushed and driven underground.

Unlike their counterparts in Eastern Europe and the USSR, the Stalinist rulers in

China have managed to keep tight political control while shifting the economy towards market mechanisms. About half of industrial output, and almost all agricultural output, is now from private enterprises, and most prices are allowed to move freely: but all political and trade-union organisation is illegal, and the labour camps still hold many millions.

The combination has made the Chinese bureaucrats the darlings of the Western bosses and politicians, who rarely let their perfunctory protests at China's ruthless political repression disturb their profitable business there.

But the Chinese workers are still organising, and they will make their voice heard — maybe in less than ten years.



The Tories lie about destroying the NHS. Patients and health workers know the truth. Nurses fight against opt-outs at Manchester Royal Infirmary. Photo: John Smith

The Tories think you are stupid

Can the Tories buy enough votes to tip the balance their way in the general election? Are there enough soft nuts and short-memored idiots out there who can be placated with political placebos like the Citizen's Charter and the Student's Charter? Is the British electorate, or a big enough part of it, as idiotic as the Tories think we are?

These are now the big questions in British politics as we drift closer and closer to the tripwire for the

election — constitutionally it must be held by July — and bribery, fear-mongering, and dirty tricks are revealed as the Tories' strategy for victory — combined with the slickest, most shameless and yet also the most transparent conmanship in many a long year.

Students have been pushed below the poverty line, the lives of thousands of them made impossi-

"Bribery, fear-mongering and dirty tricks are revealed as the Tories' strategy for victory."

ble. Will student votes be won by giving them a charter guaranteeing that there will not be delays in paying out their miserable grant cheque (if they are lucky enough to get one). The Tories hope so.

Teachers have had their wages held back for years. Now they — together with health workers and others — are to get an overdue and still very inadequate wage increase, just in time for the general election.

They got one 5 years ago just before the last general election. If the Tories win this election, they may pass a law renaming general election time as "Xmas"!

Will enough teachers be grateful enough now to give the Tories what the Americans call a "pork barrel" vote come the general election? The Tories think so!

The NHS is being cut down and

slowly dismantled by the Tories. They have been doing it for years. They lie and they lie and they lie about it. Are they destroying the NHS? No, of course not! They are not running the Health Service into the ground, it is better funded than ever before. Statistics prove it! All talk of cuts is Labour lies and dirty propaganda.

Are there enough idiots out there who believe them? The Tories think that there are!

Even wealthy Tory-voting hospital consultants now appear in the papers talking about the number of people who die needlessly because of the Tory "reforms" and who would not have been dead under the old NHS.

Can the Tories and their tabloids bamboozle enough people into believing their lies about what will happen to the NHS if they win the election?

They think they can! Jobs are disappearing at a phenomenal rate. The Tories, after 13 years in power, can't blame Labour, but they insist, at the bottom of the worst slump in decades, that things would be worse under a Labour government. Can this fear-mongering work?

The Tories think their tabloids can make it work.

The Tories have a full-blown dirty tricks department at Tory Central Office, with files, dossiers and smear sheets on Labour MPs.

There is now such a demand for scandal in the tabloids, and so much money to be made from it, that this market is attracting its own supply of material offered by criminals who break into Labour MPs' premises and into the offices

of their solicitors.

And not only Labour MPs. Last week, Paddy Ashdown was 'outed' for a 5-year old affair. Here the difficulty is judging whether all the break-ins are unconsciously being orchestrated by the impersonal "hidden hand" of the market — the money tabloids offer — or are the work of the consciously-directed "hidden hands" of the "security" services.

It is anything but straightforward. The soft smear on Ashdown has only boosted his popularity. But wasn't this predictable? Was that the intention then?

But still, the Tories expect the British electorate to accept this dirty

"Never in the British history of politics has a gang of political cut-throats dared openly to display such naked and undisguised contempt for the electorate as do this Tory gang."

political climate and not punish them for it!

The list is long and could be expanded. Never in the British history of politics have a gang of political cut-throats dared openly to display such naked and undisguised contempt for the electorate as do this

Tory gang.

Can they get away with it? We refuse to believe that! If their dirty tricks and their fear-mongering and their lies do succeed in winning them another 5 years in power, then it will be Neil Kinnock and his friends they have to thank for it. These demoralised reformists who dare not even speak of reforms, do not campaign seriously against the Tories.

They play the game by the Tories' rules — in which the Tories and their press barons and their millionaire backers have all the advantages.

But we refuse to believe that the British people are the fools the Tories think we are. No! Too many people have now been saying between gritted teeth for too long — Kick the Tories Out!

Advisory Editorial Board

Graham Bash
Vladimir Derer
Terry Eagleton
Jatin Haria (Labour Party Black Sections)
Dorothy Macedo
Joe Marino
John McLroy
John Nicholson
Peter Tatchell

Members of the Advisory Committee are drawn from a broad cross-section of the left who are opposed to the Labour Party's witch-hunt against Socialist Organiser. Views expressed in articles are the responsibility of the authors and not of the Advisory Editorial Board.

"The emancipation of the working class is also the emancipation of all human beings without distinction of sex or race."
Karl Marx

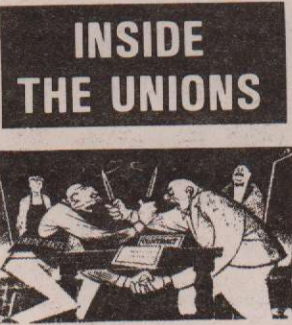
Socialist Organiser
PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA
Newsdesk: 071 639 7965
Latest date for reports: Monday

Editor: John O'Mahony
Published by WL Publications Ltd,
PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA
Printed by Trident Press, Edenbridge
Registered as a newspaper at the
Post Office

Articles do not necessarily reflect the views of Socialist Organiser and are in a personal capacity unless otherwise stated

GMB/T&G: merger in the air

A fairly innocuous document entitled "Training for Britain's Economic Success" recently arrived on the desks of various educationalists, MPs and personnel managers. As you might guess from its patriotic title, the document came from the trade union movement.



By Sleeper

The only surprise in any of this is that the two unions involved are the GMB and the TGWU — traditionally rivals for recruits throughout industry. The training document is the first joint initiative between the two unions for many years.

Officially, the document is a one-off, not signifying any sort of special relationship. But, in fact, talk of amalgamation is in the air.

The right wing of the TGWU is especially keen to get together with the GMB. The election of Bill Morris as T&G General Secretary and Jack Adams as his deputy were crushing defeats for the right wing, forcing them to give up all hope of gaining control of the union for the foreseeable future.

The T&G right's only hope now lies in merging with another union and the GMB is the obvious choice — especially now that merger talks with the NUM have been broken off by the miners' leaders (the prospect of a TGWU Power Group led by Scargill filled many a regional secretary's heart with terror).

No official merger talks have begun yet and neither John Edmonds nor Bill Morris have made any public statements on the matter. But speculation about a merger was fed to the *Financial Times* by one of the ex-student bureaucrats who now inhabit the GMB's press office, and the TGWU's demoralised right wing have seized on it like drowning men clutching at straws.

The prospect of a get-together with the GMB is especially attractive to the T&G right because they reckon that in any merged organisation, wily John Edmonds would outmanoeuvre Bill Morris (for long, a particular object of hatred for the T&G right) at every turn.

GMB/TGWU merger makes some sense from an industrial standpoint. The crucial question for the T&G left in deciding their attitude ought to be democracy: at the moment neither the GMB nor the T&G are exactly models of internal democracy and a merger could give the left the opportunity to put forward proposals for an entirely new democratic structure. On the other hand, a merged organisation might well end up embodying the worst aspects of both unions' rule books.

I'll reserve judgement for now, but one worrying fact is this: the people within the T&G who are most keen on the merger are the very people who are most resistant to any suggestion that the T&G's regional secretaries should be elected.



TGWU right wingers look to a merger with GMB led by John Edmonds (above) to give them back control



Left Unity supporters organise to fight student poverty; the Kinnockites mobilise to destroy NUS democracy

Walk-out evades constitutional challenge

By Janine Booth

This week, the National Executive of the National Union of Students looked set to pass a motion to suspend the NUS "Extraordinary Conference" on 4 March until the validity could be checked of the 25 requests from college student unions for the conference.

The current and former chairs of the Steering Committee of NUS (the committee charged with running NUS conferences) had said that they thought that not enough of the requests received had been through the correct procedures. It was only reasonable to do a little investigating to ensure that NUS was abiding by its own constitution.

But no! When it looked as if they might be outvoted, NUS President Stephen Twigg and his crony Mary Wimbury upped and left. The meeting appeared still to be quorate, so another crony, Richard Hermer, hurriedly said: "Don't count me — I'm on my way out" and scuttled out of the door. And that was that. Inquorate.

Not only are the NOLS faction which leads NUS and their allies behaving undemocratically, they know they are behaving undemocratically and they don't give a toss. They will cheat in order to get their way and are completely blasé about the methods they use.

In the same NEC meeting the left did score one victory. Liberal Democrat MP Simon Hughes, famous for being the beneficiary of the binge of homophobia that was the Bermondsey by-election in 1982, had been booked to speak at the NUS National Demonstration. No homophobes on our demo platform, said Left Unity, and after a vote his invitation was withdrawn.

The defence of Simon Hughes was an embarrassing plea that Bermondsey was a long time ago, it wasn't all his fault, he's a very nice man, etc... not just from the NEC's Lib Dem member, but from Kinnockites too.

Democracy NOLS-style

Below we reprint a letter from Tom Franklin, NOLS NUS officer to Sam Peters and Mary Wimbury, NUS NEC members. Tom is keen to point out that delegates to the extraordinary NUS conference have to be elected. He also seems worried that students won't be bothered to turn up!

- What to do:
1. Give details of when special conference is and the motions deadline.
 2. Ask if they will submit

a motion.

3. Ask them if they are going to send a delegation.

4. Ask them how they are going to elect the delegation (remind them that it doesn't have to be by cross-campus ballot).

5. Approach only those that are pro-reform. Colleges that are anti-reform need to be handled with care. For instance, it would be worth persuading the NI colleges that reform is going to benefit them, and so they should be in favour. There is no point, on the other hand, of approaching Essex University!

6. Ask them when they will know who is going, so

that you can phone them back and get names plus affiliations.

7. If a pro-reform college isn't planning to send a delegation, try to persuade them otherwise. If they are definite (sic), then try to persuade them to send one person, because this will mean that at least the card vote can be used.

8. Take copious notes, and report all information back to me.

Tom Franklin, NUS Officer

Mary, try to concentrate on the Polys, then do the FEs. Cheers, Tom.

Abuse of the ANL banner divides anti-fascists

The SWP and anti-semitism

By Richard Love

The divisions in the anti-fascist movement are getting deeper.

Jewish students at Manchester Poly have responded

to the setting up of the SWP's "left" anti-semitic rubbish on the Middle East on Anti-Nazi League (ANL) stalls with a General Meeting motion to effectively "No Platform" the ANL.

The Poly's Union of Jewish Students want to stop

the ANL becoming a union society.

Obviously we should support the SWP/ANL's right to organise and have a union society and a budget. This is a matter of basic democracy. The SWP are not fascists.

On the other hand, the SWP are left anti-semites. They also — in the mid-'80s — supported the banning of Sunderland Poly's Jewish Society for "Zionism".

It is hardly surprising and quite justified that Jewish students hate the SWP.

The SWP also open the ANL up to attack by using it as a democracy-less party front.

The fascist National Front's literature has already noted the divisions in the anti-racist movement. The SWP are just making matters worse.

The Poly Labour Club's position for affiliation to all anti-racist campaigns and for unity against the Nazis in the fight against racism and anti-semitism is gaining support.

Pamphlets from AWL

Arabs, Jews and socialism

The debate on Palestine, Zionism and anti-semitism (including "Trosky and Zionism")

£1.80

A Workers' Liberty pamphlet

£1.80 plus 32p postage

A tragedy of the left

Socialist Worker

BRITISH JUSTICE

CATALYST

£2 plus 32p postage from PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA

Stop the AEU/EETPU merger! No to business unionism!

Rank and file revolt against the officials

Voting is continuing this week on the proposed merger between the engineers' union (AEU) and the electricians' union (EETPU).

The aim of the right wing leaders of both unions is to construct a powerful force for business unionism inside the trade union movement.

It is therefore vital to stop the merger.

A glimpse of the way the AEU and EETPU leaders operate and of the potential power of the rank and file in these two unions, is provided by these two articles from the Offshore Workers' Union paper, *Blowout*.

They tell of the rank and file revolt against the National Agreement in the engineering construction industry.

A revolt on an unprecedented scale is now sweeping the engineering construction industry as workers repudiate the recently signed National Agreement for the Engineering Construction Industry (NAECI).

Sizewell and Sellafield nuclear sites are involved, as well as Shellhaven and St Fergus oil terminals.

More than 2,000 workers at the Sizewell nuclear site have signed a petition demanding radical changes to the agreement. Among the changes they want is an end to compulsory overtime and bell-to-bell working.

Shellhaven MSF shop steward Paul Hewitt pointed out: "This is not a protest about money. It is about putting a nail in the coffin of this agreement — either it must be changed, or it must be scrapped."

Much to the consternation of the national officers of the signatory



unions (AEU, EETPU, GMB, MSF and TGWU) and the bosses, shop stewards and activists picketed the negotiations in London.

They called for a ballot before any deal was signed. Jim McFall, national officer of the GMB, speaking on behalf of all the signatory unions, promised that consideration would be given to calling a shop stewards' conference before any settlement was reached. The workers got neither the ballot nor the conference.

The deal has enraged the offshore bears, particularly the trade-off agreed in return for the cut in the

"A national stewards' committee would seriously undermine the national officers' ability to control the members."

working week to 38 hours. The first hour of overtime must be worked for no extra payment. The national officers also gave away the Friday

teabreak. The bosses are on record as seeking an end to all scheduled teabreaks. This is seen as the first move in that direction.

Leaving aside the anger over the continual erosion of long-cherished conditions, the main focus of discontent is the nature of the agreement itself. There is deep dissatisfaction over the lack of consultation and accountability. The agreement prohibits any actions or decisions at rank and file level. The national officers are seen as having a cavalier disregard for their members.

After the debacle surrounding the signing of the '92 agreement, it now seems inevitable that we will see the development of an effective National Shop Stewards' Committee.

Employers and union officials undoubtedly view these developments with considerable unease. Such a committee would seriously undermine the national officers' ability to control the membership. It is after all this control that the unions sell to the employers. Any deviation is vigorously put down by them.

Link up with the EETPU rank and file!

A EU members should link up with rank and file electricians — like these on the Wapping picket-line — and not with scabmaster-general Eric Hammond and his cronies.

Remember, it was Hammond who organised scabbing at Wapping!

Fighting unity on the ground is what is needed, not a shared prison!

Shop floor campaign grows to stop the AEU/EETPU merger

Shopfloor opposition to the AEU/EETPU merger is a lot deeper rooted and resilient than Jordan and Hammond think.

Last week the leaders of the two unions confidently predicted a landslide four-to-one majority in favour of merger.

By March, when the result is announced, they are going to look pretty silly.

One of the strongest regions of the AEU — the North East — is in open rebellion. Two former AEU executive members, George Arnold and Len Edmondson, have declared that they will campaign to block the merger. At a meeting of 30 leading Tyne and Wear

convenors, only one, the national committee delegate, argued for merger.

Meanwhile, in the North West, activists from the Liverpool, Preston and Manchester district committees have agreed to put out a leaflet with the slogan "Vote no to merger, we don't need a bosses' union".

At British Aerospace Strand Road, Preston, thousands of leaflets have already gone out arguing the case against merger as they have done at Ford's Dagenham plant.

In Northampton the left-wingers on the district committee are leafletting every major workplace with the message "Stop the merger! Vote no to a bosses' union".

Meanwhile, the latest *Engineering Gazette* argues against opposing the merger on the grounds that (i) the defence of AEU democracy is the supreme principle; (ii) AEU democracy — the national committee — has voted for merger; (iii) therefore, you can't oppose the merger.

This is no different from saying that if we are democrats we should roll over and die in the face of the elected Tory government's attacks on working people!

Jimmy Airlie and Roger Butler can continue on their path to self-destruction. The AEU rank and file is made of stronger stuff.

Vote NO to a bosses "Dream Union"!

WHY DO OUR EMPLOYERS AND THE TORIES APPROVE THE MERGER?
Keneth Clark: "The EETPU is a good trade union. It should be allowed to remain as it is." "If Eric Hammond isn't given a go-round by the Tory government he does well to get in."

WHY DO WE WANT TO MERGE?
"The EETPU is a good trade union. It should be allowed to remain as it is." "If Eric Hammond isn't given a go-round by the Tory government he does well to get in."

MERGE AND LIVE WITH UNIONS COMMITTED TO DEFENDING THEIR MEMBERS' INTERESTS AND CONDITIONS.

DON'T MERGE WITH THE EETPU!
VOTE NO!

Produced by "Engineers Against the Merger"
If you want to help, contact Paul Hill (0934 34050) or Dave (011 9044 755170)

Northampton Engineers leaflet

AEU leaders intimidate and threaten stewards Lessons of the steel erectors' strike

The late 1980s saw a boom-time in construction in London's East End. Thousands of steel erectors converged on the Docklands Development from all over the UK.

All members of the AEU, their wages and allowances were regulated by NAECI. At that time the AEU had tied itself into a two-year deal.

The erectors organised the unofficial Inner London Shop Stewards' Committee to campaign against the pitifully low wages and inadequate lodging allowance. An overtime ban was slipped on which led to a lock-out by the employers, Cleveland Bridge and RDL.

This led to an all-out stoppage by 1,000 erectors which paralysed sites across Docklands and the City of London.

The AEU moved swiftly to try to

kill the action, ordering an end to the overtime ban. The stewards' committee stressed that it was not politically motivated or anti-AEU. A smear campaign that the committee's real intention was to form a breakaway was categorically denied.

The employers would not talk to the stewards committee and read the riot act with the AEU at a National Joint Council meeting. They demanded that the union bring its members to heel. The committee put forward a shopping list of demands. The employers, through the union, made an offer which was rejected as inadequate. The men stood their ground.

The all-out, indefinite, stoppage started to bite, costing property developers involved in huge projects across the city, a fortune. In a bombshell intervention, they asserted that if the employers could not find a solution, they themselves

were prepared to act outside the national agreement.

In an improbable alliance between the striking workers and the property magnates, the employers and the union were rebuked. Stating forcibly that they wanted a speedy settlement and the men back to work, the developers publicly endorsed the strikers' assertion that the basic wage, at less than £5 an hour, was "inadequate".

The return-to-work formula eventually conceded the erectors' demands. The pressure on the employers became intense as the strike showed signs of spreading outside London. Significantly, the shop stewards were present at the negotiations. This was seen at the time as a major development, loosening the hold of the national officers on the NAECI.

The offer from the employers was, in cash terms, reasonably good. However, it came with no

guarantees to protect the leaders from blacklisting, as many were to find to their cost. Indeed, the ruthlessness which even the AEU was prepared to use to kill the action extended to severe intimidation of its own shop stewards. National officer T. MacLean threatened withdrawal of their credentials.

The London Shop Stewards Committee did not develop as had been hoped. Calling a national meeting in Manchester some months later, they sought to mobilise a nationwide campaign to change the NAECI. Although they emphasised that the meeting was for all workers of all unions covered by the national agreement, the response was disappointing. Those workers are now paying the price for their own apathy.

Copies of *Blowout* are available from OILC, 52 Guild Street, Aberdeen

GRAFFITI

Back in the ex-USSR

GRAFFITI

Back in the days of Stalinism in the USSR, virtually no-one could get to the West — visas were reserved for the upper echelons of the bureaucracy. Now, anyone can fly to the West on one of Aeroflot's luxury airliners.

The only catch is that there has just been a massive price hike in airfares. In December last year, a single fare from Moscow to London was 2,000 roubles — now, it's 35,000. That's over 4 times the average annual salary.

The latest victim of the economic collapse of the former USSR is Masha, a 32-year old elephant at Volgograd zoo, who died as a result of malnutrition.

Her keepers had apparently been eating the elephant's food. How much longer before the animals themselves start to disappear?

Two weeks ago, 30,000 CPSA and NUCPS (the 2 main civil service unions) members in London took a day's strike action over a London weighting claim.

A week later, APEX members in the CPSA Research Department went into negotiations with the right-wing CPSA National Executive demanding an increase in — you guessed it! — London weighting.

They are asking for less London weighting than CPSA and NUCPS members. They were turned down! CPSA members required on any picket lines outside CPSA HQ!

Socialist Organiser readers might have seen TV reports on the latest campaign by Labour-controlled Southwark council to add to the London homeless.

Posters depicting a family threaten the eviction of 1,250 tenants this year alone, unless rent is paid.

These scare tactics are due to the fact that Southwark council is owed more money in rent arrears than any other council. This situation is the result of Tory cuts, massive unemployment and low pay amongst Southwark council tenants and incompetence beyond belief in Southwark council — have you

ever tried claiming Housing Benefit from them?!

Anyone meeting a Southwark councillor — in particular, the leader, Sally Keeble — can only be amazed at the small-minded stupidity of the majority of these careerists and fake Labour Party members.

This latest stunt has been justified on our screens and in the press by former left-wing Chair of Housing, Mark Howarth.

Once the darling of the left, Howarth fought rate-capping, the poll tax and opposed rent rises. Now he is in the business of putting families on the streets and children into care and he does his dirty job with the self-righteousness that only ex-lefties can muster.

Most old-fashioned Labour right-wingers and even the Liberals would have shown a bit more reluctance and regret.

From our Whatever Happened to the Almost Unforgettable What'sisname Department:

Ever wonder what happened to Gerry Lawless, the left's leading professional Irishman for two decades? He greatly influenced Socialist Worker's line on Ireland at the end of the '60s.

Then he was at the centre of the International Marxist Group for most of the '70s, founding the Troops Out Movement.

He was a figure on the Mandeliste left internationally too: one of their European papers, Austrian, I think, once interviewed him, gushing: "His very name means 'outlaw'. Literally!"

His influence was always malign and destructive and often personally motivated.

Together with his close comrade in arms, the Scots Celtic nationalist Bob Purdie, Lawless regularly published very pretentious, but not even halfway competent "analyses" of Irish affairs in the IMG press.

Purdie finally decided — rightly! — he'd been talking rubbish all his life and abandoned revolutionary politics for academia and "good causes".

And Lawless? Our illustration is from the *Sunday World*, Ireland's equivalent of the *News of the World*. Lawless now works the rear end of the "Royal-watch" racket. Poor and shoddy stuff even of its sort. But better, all in all, than the old "Marxist" analyses he did in tandem with Honest Bob Purdie!

Smears, smut and sanctimony

PRESS GANG



By Jim Denham

There must be something wrong with me because, try as I might, I just cannot get myself worked up about the Ashdown Affair.

Of course, the behaviour of papers like the *News of the World* and the *Sun* was despicable — but would you seriously expect anything else under the circumstances?

In many ways, the sanctimonious sermonising of the "quality" press (and BBC's "Newsnight") against the tabloids was the most blatantly hypocritical aspect of the whole business.

The *Independent* "signalled" the story on Tuesday by printing

a large front-page photograph of Ashdown speaking at a British Coal Society lunch "as the political row over break-ins and smears intensified"; the prominence given to the photo must have seemed inexplicable to most of the paper's readers but it sent a clear message to Ashdown himself and (together with the *Scotsman*'s decision to break the story that day) more or less forced Ashdown into the open.

Having helped to break the story, the *Independent* then (on Thursday) had the gall to publish an unbelievably self-righteous front page editorial ("Politics, Press and prurience") that concluded: "Regrettably, the tabloid British Press has created a market for information about the sexual lives of public people. Whoever stole the documents concerning Mr. Ashdown's affair reckoned there was money to be made from their sale to the *News of the World*."

"If that market is dented by the public disgust aroused by such transactions, some good will come from yesterday's needless revelations."

But it wasn't just the "quality" press who wanted to have their cake and eat it: the Liberal Democrats, supposedly committed to press freedom, joined the calls for draconian "privacy" laws the moment their man came a cropper; and for all the high moral tone of Mr. Major's pronouncements on the affair, it became apparent that the Tories had been preparing a dossier of their own on Ashdown, dealing with such matters as his liking for the occasional fag and a glass of whisky.

"What is the Sunday Times's odious editor Andrew Neil up to?"

It all seems a great deal of fuss to make over a trivial, five-year-old "story" that turns out to have done its "victim" (ie. Mr. Ashdown) no harm at all in the opinion polls. Meanwhile, the *Mail*, the *Express* and the *Sunday Times* continue to churn out

their anti-Labour propaganda almost as a matter of course.

In its "Kremlin Connection" smear having fallen flat, the *Sunday Times* tried another anti-Kinnock angle this week: an extraordinary non-story about an attempt by a former Scotland Yard officer to link Kinnock with an "escort girl". The *Sunday Times* acknowledged that the smear was "totally false" yet still ran the story on its front page.

The same edition carried an even stranger editorial accusing the Labour Party of "the most wide-ranging attempt to intimidate the press in recent times" — apparently on the grounds that the Labour Party had dared to defend itself against the "Kremlin Connection" story the week before.

What is the *Sunday Times's* odious editor, Andrew Neil, up to? The answer just might be that the paper "has mounted a major investigation, unearthing hitherto unpublished sources into the making of Neil Kinnock". Mr. Neil promises that the results of this investigation "may be considered fascinating and damaging". In other words, the "intimidation" accusation against Labour is what might be called a pre-emptive strike.

Corroding the spirit



WOMEN'S EYE

By Belinda Weaver

In desperation, the Tory government has announced plans to give public service workers a wage rise, timed to go into pay packets just before the general election. They hope this will bring a "feel good" factor and win them votes.

They're more likely to meet a "feel angry" factor. A measly six per cent is all that nurses and midwives will get. Doctors further up the pay scales will get a bigger increase, around 8 per cent. Why, when they're already getting more than nurses? Is it because they're more likely than nurses to vote Tory? Six per cent is an insult, and can only serve to drive more nurses and midwives out of the NHS.

When I gave birth to my daughter in hospital eight months ago, midwives then were demoralised about their low pay and, most of all,

about the continual, grinding, demoralising, penny-pinching cuts.

To balance its budget, the hospital had started a policy of sending all women home 24 hours after giving birth unless we had complications. Many women were happy to go home so soon; but sometimes the midwives had to order out women who were worried and frantic. And the women in the maternity ward all needed a lot of care.

"The feeling on the ward was warm and positive, hardly like a hospital at all. It was a living disproof of the Tory axiom that the 'cash nexus' is the only efficient and realistic link in society."

There was no mixture of "old hands" and brand new mothers. All the women were fresh from the labour ward, except those who had stayed longer because they needed special care (after caesarean deliveries, for example) and those who had been brought into hospital early because of complications before birth.

All of us had to be given a series of standard checks — blood pressure and so on — and many of us needed painkillers after difficult births. Some needed help with bathing, and with breast or bottle feeding, and most of us needed reassurance, help and advice.

The work on a maternity

ward is unending. Just teaching new mothers how to breastfeed is a very time-consuming process — it's not as easy as it looks.

Yet, on my ward, which could accommodate up to 18 women and their babies, there were only two midwives rostered at any one time. The midwives were rushed off their feet.

Despite all that, the care received was tremendous, and the feeling on the ward was warm and positive, hardly like a hospital at all. It was a living disproof of the Tory axiom that the "cash nexus" is the only efficient and realistic link in society. None of the midwives did their job in the spirit of doing the minimum necessary to collect their pay packets.

I don't think any of them wanted to be rich. Unlike bankers or speculators, none of them had any chance of becoming rich however well they did their job. They did want a decent wage and decent conditions to do the job.

Since then, the National Childbirth Trust has officially advised all pregnant women to take a tin of Ajax into hospital with them, because cuts and privatisation of cleaning mean that bathrooms and toilets may not be safe.

There were dozens of miserable, sometimes tiny "economies" like that. We had to bring nappies, cotton wool, and everything else in ourselves because the hospital could not afford to supply anything. When I had trouble with my stitches after the birth (one broke down), the doctor told me it was hospital policy to use cheaper catgut. In the labour ward, the midwife's job was made more

difficult because the bed I was on had jammed and could not be lowered and raised as it should be.

The only men's toilet in the whole maternity hospital had been shut (no money to fix it), so the midwife had to recommend to my husband one he could use as long as none of the senior staff were around. And so on.

None of these cuts threatened life or destroyed health care. They had not yet reduced the service to the shambles you see in some repeatedly-cut local authority services. But they made the work harder and meaner.

The generosity and zest of the midwives who helped me cannot last for ever in the face of ever-increasing cuts.

The Tories do not want a free universal public health service. They want private health care for those who can afford it, and a pauper service for the rest of us. And now, with the election coming, they try to cover up with cynical tricks.

All these tricks — the manipulation of waiting lists, the keeping down of nurses' pay, the scandal of "efficiency" measures which increase the number of managers 1800 per cent (between 1986 and September 1990) and the number of administrative staff by 14% (between 1981 and 1990), while cutting the number of nurses — all these tricks are corroding the health service.

The corrosion has not yet killed the NHS. But it has put it in danger. When I thanked the midwives on leaving hospital, my promise to them was that I would do all I could in the campaigns to save the NHS and get it properly financed again.



Gerry Lawless takes a break from rummaging in royal dustbins to pose in his republican trenchcoat for the *Sunday World* camera

"The FIS are the moral victors of the coup."

Eyewitness in Algiers

Algeria is sliding towards civil war. On Sunday 9 February, the new military-run government declared a state of emergency and banned the Islamic-fundamentalist FIS, the party which came out ahead in the elections on 26 December.

Violent clashes had been escalating since Friday prayers on 7 February, and the FIS had called a mass protest for 14 February.

Socialists and trade unionists in Algeria face repression from two sides, from the military and from the fundamentalists.

By Chawki Salhi

At a moment when the regime seemed to be prepared to use legal means — with 341 appeals about electoral malpractices being filed — to combat the FIS's success and head off a fundamentalist tide in the second round, a coup put a violent end to the electoral process.

In fact the appeals would only have allowed 12 of the 188 seats the FIS gained on 26 December 1991 to be clawed back. The army could not accept cohabitation with a fun-

"It is clear the regime has simply won itself a temporary respite."

damentalist party that it had been instrumental in repressing only the previous June. Reprisals would have been inevitable.

Events succeeded one another apace: a petition from military officers, the deployment of troops, the resignation of President Chadli, the establishment of a State Council and then the suspension of the elections.

The coup was greeted by a widespread feeling of relief. The hysterical anxiety that had seized the modernist middle layers at the prospect of a fundamentalist government gave way to satisfaction (although it would not be possible to talk of enthusiasm; the fact that this is an anti-democratic coup d'état cannot be hidden).

Even among the FIS's popular electorate there was relief that there were no victims; civil war had been feared. In everyday conversations you could hear a sort of renunciation of democracy and popular sovereignty; there is great confusion and no clear outcome of the crisis. The most tense are the FIS's own militants while the youth have responded to this coup that has deprived the FIS of victory with a sort of dumb anger.

No reaction should be expected from the FIS which, in the confrontations of last June, took the measure of its powerlessness in the face of the army. The order of the day in the fundamentalist camp is: "be patient, fast, pray; this is not yet the time".

The regime is on the offensive, hoping to push the FIS into making mistakes, and now arresting their chief for calling on soldiers to follow the path of God. It seems that the military are intending to maintain some semblance of democratic forms, but they must dismantle the FIS or at least cut it

down to size. In passing they want to create a party of their own that can rival the FIS. Perhaps the former ruling party, the FLN, will be buried once the FIS has been contained.

But the new government, headed by historic FLN leader Boudiaf, who has been brought back from his exile in Morocco, will lack all credibility since the ballot box has already spoken in favour of the FIS.

It is clear that the regime has simply won itself a temporary respite and that social realities will soon make themselves felt again. The FIS, or rather fundamentalism, is the moral victor of the coup which has made it the legitimate representative of the people.

The FIS's leadership has been unable to stop the coup, but after a few months, when the regime's inability to deal with the country's economic problems becomes apparent, who else but the fundamentalists are in a position to step forward as the representative of the disinherited people?

Islamic fundamentalism, what it is...

The banal idea that the fundamentalists are rooted in Islam is contradicted by the history of the FIS which has seen it first gain the youth politically before winning them over to religious practices.

When people attribute an Islamic essence to Algerian society, they do not explain why it took until the 1980s for this essence to manifest itself on the political level.

Fundamentalism is the party of despair, drawing its strength from



"To support the regime is to abandon the people to the FIS"

the apparent failure of rational solutions to the problems of humanity and the absence of any other source of hope.

Is fundamentalism fascism? Insofar as the latter term refers to something violent and repressive, then yes. But the problem is more complex if the Marxist analysis of fascism as a regime of last resort for a hard pressed capitalist ruling class is applied.

Yes, fundamentalism can introduce the qualitative change in the relation of class forces which has eluded the Algerian regime since the 1970s. It can violently

reduce the average wage, abolish social benefits, close and sell of public enterprises and change the rhythms of work — all basic conditions for Algeria to be integrated into the world market.

Yes, fundamentalism is accepted with a sinking feeling by a bourgeoisie which hesitates between the coup d'état and cohabitation. However, imperialism has not yet made up its mind whether to allow a regime that threatens regional stability to be crushed by the weight of the foreign debt, or to collaborate with a regime of mass terror that can rapidly carry out the

International Monetary Fund's adjustment plans.

Like fascism, fundamentalism appeals to nationalism. But in the latter case it is the nationalism of a dominated and oppressed nation that finds itself too close to the European Community to develop freely. The latter will not intervene because of massacres or prohibitions; it will be the threat of the collapse of vassal regimes that will concern it.

Yes, fundamentalism intends to suppress socialist parties, as Sahnouli stated at Setif last May. Yes, it is hostile to trade unionism, since its own union, the SIT, promotes collaboration and rejects the opposition between bosses and workers. However it has not developed alongside the workers' movement, but rather in its absence as a sort of monstrous substitute. It has not forged its militia in the struggle against social protests and its night of the long knives (the elimination of fascists opposed to the rich) will be more complicated.

It is of course a mass petty bourgeois movement and draws its support from the growing mass of the declassé and rejected in a capitalist society in crisis.

Islam is not the religion of an old order confronting a democratic revolution; on the contrary it is a substitute for a national identity in the face of a colonialist and imperialist West. It is the very rise of the FIS that allows us to begin to raise the issue of the separation of religion and politics.

Fundamentalism is not fascism, even if they have certain features in common. To confuse the terms would lead to emptying the concept of fascism of all content.

... and how to fight it

The traditional recipe of revolutionaries for fighting the danger of a fascist or fundamentalist dictatorship is the workers' united front.

However, in our situation this has no practical meaning. There is no mass Communist or Socialist party while trade unionism is yet to free itself from the hold of the bourgeoisie, even if one cannot say that the various leaderships of the UGTA union have always been merely adjuncts of the ruling National Liberation Front (FLN).

Despite this absence, it remains true that the road chosen by the democrats, that is, compromise with the very regime responsible for the failure, can only swell the ranks of the fundamentalists in the long run. To defeat the fundamentalists it is necessary to win the youth of the popular

neighbourhoods away from them, while at the same time continuing the fight against liberalism and resisting the plans of the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

The enterprises must once again become the centre of the struggle of the oppressed; while the revolt of the marginalised neighbourhood youth will remain the strike force of that struggle, it cannot provide political leadership to the popular masses.

We are not indifferent to the prospect of the arrival in power of the FIS which would suppress our liberties. Before the recent charm offensive, we heard several times from the mouths of FIS leaders that our party would be prohibited, and even our right to live challenged. Indeed, any dissimulation of this danger in the eyes of the masses would be unpardonable.

However, to go from that to

supporting the regime responsible for our despair is to abandon the people to the FIS, since the liberal economic policy will lead to ever-increasing misery and thus to the growth of the fundamentalists.

The compromises between the union leaderships and the government will cost us dear, giving legitimacy to the fundamentalist trade union, the SIT. The time has come to construct a pole of reference for the trade unions as the nucleus of the union leadership needed. The idea of a militant union forum, floated in 1989 but never carried through, is the only one that would allow us to avoid the fate of setting up a pseudo-union.

In time, the working class will mobilise. We have to ensure the emergence of an alternative built in struggle that can seize hegemony from the fundamentalists.

Tory dirty tricks?

Thirteen years Tory dirty tricks

The Tories have been in power for 13 years. They came to power with a programme of cuts, privatisation and union-bashing.

They deliberately boosted unemployment in the early 1980s to sap the self-confidence and combativity of the working class.

Then they lied about what they were doing! Unemployment became a consequence of greedy trade unionists demanding too much from their bosses.

Cuts and privatisation were necessary for "economic

Election lies are the tip of the iceberg, argue Jim Denham and Mark Osborn

health" — and, of course, "economic health" was intended for everyone's benefit!

Then they lied to cover their tracks. Unemployment figures were massaged. We were told health cuts were, in fact, spending increases.

The Tories are a vitriolic, class-conscious party who have attacked the working class in the interests of the capitalists. They are cheats and liars — this is their record.

The scandal of unemployment

The official government unemployment figures for December 1991 say 2,546,000 people are out of work.

In 1979, when the Tories were first elected, there were 1½ million workers on the dole. Superficially it seems that unemployment has risen by one million.

In fact, if the figures are calculated on the 1979 basis, current unemployment stands at

3,647,000. The Tories have "lost" over a million unemployed workers by altering the way the numbers are worked out!

The government has altered the method of calculating unemployment 30 times since 1979.

In his budget speech of March 1990 John Major predicted that growth would return to 2.75% in 1991. The *Financial Times* commented that Major was right — only he got the sign wrong. *The British economy actually contracted by*

2.5% last year.

Redundancies in 1991 were in excess of one million — well over 3,000 per working day.

Now, on average, there are 21 claimants chasing every Job Centre-notified vacancy. In London the figure is 61 applicants for every job.

But do not worry! This is in your long-term interests. Chancellor Norman Lamont says that unemployment is a price worth paying to get inflation down!

Lamont is now notorious for his promises about the end of the recession:

- "Recovery is just around the corner" (April 1991).
- "Growth in the UK should resume in the second half of the year" (July '91).
- "Green shoots of economic spring are appearing" (October '91).
- "I am looking forward to recovery gathering momentum next year" (December '91).

But the slump is not over. It is getting worse. The signs are that the recession that hit the service sector and the South East last year has spread to all other branches of the economy.

Unreleased figures for unemployment in January 1992 reveal a rise of around 30,000 out of work. In the last two weeks of January the following redundancies were announced: Burlington (560); BA (300); Sun Alliance (800); British Steel (120); BP (400); civilian jobs at the Royal Navy and Royal Airforce (2,800).

In the last two weeks more jobs have gone at Fords and in the pits.

Here is conclusive proof that the slump is not over and manufacturing is affected as well as the service sector.



Hear no truth, see no truth, speak no truth... Photo: John Harris



In 1979 Geoffrey Howe promised no increase in VAT. It has doubled since then.

"Watch my lips"

The Tories are accusing Labour of lying about their tax intentions. Hypocrites!

Before the 1979 election, Geoffrey Howe said the Conservatives would not raise VAT.

In 1979 VAT stood at 8% and 12.5% on luxury goods. When they were elected, the Tories quickly increased VAT to a flat-rate 15%.

VAT now stands at 17.5%. Averaging out the 1979 figures, this means the Tories have doubled VAT.

Democracy? Not for the workers

Remember all the fuss about a ballot during the great miners' strike of 1984-85? The miners were solid, but still the press raged about "democracy".

But the Tories changed their tune in 1988 when the seafarers balloted for industrial action. It was widely anticipated that the ballot would show a heavy majority to strike.

What did the bosses do? Praise democracy in action? No, they got a court ruling saying the votes could not be counted. The ballot boxes are still at the union HQ — uncounted and unopened.

Remember the sanctimonious

crap about the need to obey the law and pay your poll tax? It would seem there is one law for the rich and one for the poor. When the Tories' chums at Tesco and Sainsbury's decided to break the Sunday trading laws the government gave a nod and a wink for the go ahead.

This is a matter of freedom! Except if you want to join a union at GCHQ...

Now the Tories have refused to sign the EC Social Charter. They are the only European government to do so. However, they have signed the EC declaration on Animal Rights...It would seem there is one law for the animals and one for the workers.

ars of ricks!



Tories cheat the poor

Sir Claus Moser is, frankly, not a Trotskyist. He is a former head of the government's statistical service. He has become so concerned about Tory abuse of statistics that he told the *Independent*:

"In official statistics and research, nothing is more important than integrity. Once the public start questioning the integrity of government statistics, they are questioning the integrity of the government itself."

What is bothering Claus? One issue is the "trickledown effect". Trickle-down was the government's ideological justification for making the rich richer. There was supposed to be a trickle-down to the poor.

The figures showed that between 1981 and 1985 the income for the poorest tenth of the population

had risen faster (8.4% after housing costs) than incomes for the whole of the population (4.8%).

Ministers boasted about the success of capitalism in helping the poor.

Nicholas Scott, the Minister for Social Security, said: "Since 1981 the poorest people have not only shared in rising prosperity but have actually done better than the population as a whole" (1988).

You may not have heard much about trickle-down recently. This is because not only are the figures wrong, the real figures show the opposite — there has been a "trickleup".

Real incomes for the poorest 10% of families, after housing costs, fell 7% between 1979 and 1987. Real incomes for the top 1% (after housing costs) rose 72%. The revised official figures showed the poorest tenth a bit better off over 1981-5, but less so than average.

In 1988 when Youth Training was introduced, the government issued a guarantee that there would be a YT place for all 16 and 17 year olds.

They used this as an excuse to deprive 16 and 17 year olds benefits.

In 1991 there was a shortfall of 5,000 YT places.

The YT allowance is now £28 per week (for the first year), then £35 per week. If the allowance had increased with inflation it would now be £55 each week.

The Higher Education grant is now £2,845 (London) and £2,265 elsewhere. It has been frozen since 1989 and in real terms has fallen by 31% since 1979.

The Tories have introduced full-cost fees for overseas students. Student access to housing and other benefits during the summer vacation has been abolished. This has cost each student a minimum of £1,100 per year.

Unemployed people are now better off than students. The average unemployed income in London is now £77.35 per week; on average students receive £67.40 a week.

Health: cuts and lies

The Tories are boasting that there has been a record decrease in the numbers on operation waiting lists for more than two years.

The decrease has *nothing* to do with the introduction of profit-making trusts, or internal National Health Service markets. There are two reasons for the decrease:

- The Tories have thrown millions of pounds at the problem in a one-off, pre-election binge. They want to have *something* good to say about the NHS.

- It is now difficult to get onto a waiting list. The Tories have started to create waiting lists to get onto the waiting lists!

The Tories also brag that more people are being treated in hospitals than ever before. These are the reasons:

- There is an increasingly elderly population. So an increase is only in line with that.

- Some patients are being deliberately admitted to the wrong ward. When the "mistake" is put right, the hospital can charge a Health Authority twice and the figures show two patients being treated.

- People are being sent home early and then readmitted in another form of double-counting patients.

Meanwhile, Health Minister Virginia Bottomley has been caught up in the scandal of cutting the numbers of hospital beds. Caring

Virginia says "we cannot afford to have people lingering around for a recuperative holiday. We are not catering for people who do not have a home or who have nowhere to go!"

And it is not just beds that are being cut back — since 1986 the number of nursing staff has fallen. But there is one growth area. In the same 1986-91 period the number of

"Since 1986 the number of nursing staff has fallen. But there is one growth area: in the same period, the number of hospital managers increased by 1,800%."

hospital managers increased by 1800%!

And the manager's job is to bust the health service unions. The way is being led by the introduction of Trusts in, for instance, ambulance services. They do not make profits — that would be insensitive — instead they have "income generation budgets".

Some Health Authority budgets have run out. In Medway, for example, all abortion services have been stopped.

Life in a property-owning democracy

The building of council and housing association homes for rent has slumped under the Tories.

In 1977 there were 126,000 such properties built; by 1991-92 the number had fallen to 35,000.

Numbers are not being boosted by private sector building. House completions were around 200,000 in 1991.

But private sector home building is not much consolation for those who have just had their property repossessed. Mortgage repossessions reached 80,000 last year. There were 5,000 repossessions in 1981.

Meanwhile, 145,000 households registered as homeless in England in 1991. The figure was under 10,000 in 1970.

The census officials did their



Squalid, run-down estates are home for millions as a result of Tory cuts in local government funding.

best to provide decent homelessness figures for the government. The 1991 census found no-one sleeping rough in Birmingham or Cardiff!

Roundtable examines the issues

Where now for the left in the unions?

Sheila Cohen, editor
Trade Union News

I think it's important for socialists in the unions not to get too carried away with internal union politics, in terms of trying to win positions on national union executives, and trying to put resolutions through conferences.

In the workshop on trade union bureaucracy, we discussed how, through the activities of many

dedicated left wingers in the T&G and the AEU, Jones and Scanlon got elected and left-wing stewards sat back and thought that everything would be alright now.

Now we've got a left executive in the T&G which doesn't seem to make a lot of difference to members on the ground. The left in the unions isn't in a particularly healthy state.

The union Broad Left organisations, in many cases, are extremely mysterious. We should ask: what the hell's going on here? We should open them up.

Of course, there are much

healthier left currents in the unions. A lot of work should be devoted to supporting those and getting membership involvement in them.

The activists in the trade unions, perhaps, particularly in the industrial arena, who are determined to fight from a total gut class standpoint, are the crucial elements in the trade union movement for socialists to discuss with. I say 'discuss with', advisedly.

Many people on the left see politics as rather romantic, out there, and they are not interested in basic trade union issues.

In fact, basic trade union issues

are essential in getting towards an awareness of socialism. What really projects workers into an awareness of what society is all about, is struggle.

I don't want to sound like the SWP. But time and time again, relatively conservative workers are brought by struggle to see society in a completely different way.

You saw it in the Wapping print workers, probably the most right-wing, racist bunch of workers you could come across. They actually saw the police in action on that picket line, and some of them have had a rather different attitude

towards the police than before.

It's very, very important to have some sort of vehicle being run by socialists in the trade unions that can get a grip on the insights that can be experienced by workers in struggle, to structure them into some sort of ongoing awareness.

For a short time in the late '80s, there was an organisation called 'Solidarity Network' which, unfortunately, appears to have drifted by the wayside. It was set up by rank and file strikers to keep ex-strikers together so that they could continue to discuss the lessons of their dispute; and to get people whose lives had been changed by a dispute — it does change people's lives — to continue in that context.

I feel there is an immensely greater potential in the workplace

"Activists in the unions who are prepared to fight from a total gut class standpoint are the crucial elements."

among ordinary trade union members for participation in the union than is normally recognised. I did some research about trade union organisation and what struck me was that, even in the most apparently apathetic local trade union organisations, like a NUPE hospital organisation, the branch secretary would walk around the hospitals and be besieged by members coming up to him, saying this has happened to me, that has happened to me, what can you do about it?

It's not true that people are apathetic, that they're passive, that they're not interested. That's the whole essence of trade unionism: people come up against problems, because of the class position they're in.

I think that that potential for participation has got to be taken up at a grassroots level.

That can be very difficult. I belong to an NUJ chapel which is supposed to be a good strong chapel, but we can't have workplace meetings if there's no issue around because people can't be bothered to come to them. I'm sure a lot of us face that problem.

I think it's very important to get workers together at workplace trade union meetings and discuss everyday concerns whenever possible. We must find out what's actually happening in the workplace, what people are bothered about. We must fight to have workplace trade union meetings.

I'm not a great one for legislation on trade union matters, but I think the Labour Party should be fighting for guaranteed time for workplace trade union meetings.

I hope *Trade Union News* can act as a mechanism for promoting discussion and debate in the unions. The downturn can give us the opportunity to look at strategies so that when there is an upturn, there might be a few more political ideas around in the rank and file leadership about where to go from here.

Sheila Cohen and Jim Denham were taking part in a roundtable on "Where now for the left in the unions?" at the recent AWL Industrial School. NUT Executive member Andy Dixon's contribution will appear next week.



Saltley Gates Birmingham 1972

The picket of Saltley Gate in February of 1972 was an event of historical importance for the British trade union movement.

Like virtually all innovations of working class struggle, the flying mass pickets of the miners' strike, of which Saltley was the most dramatic, came from rank and file initiative.

The major core of the pickets from the Yorkshire Area were under the leadership of Arthur Scargill, at that time a minor local leader.

The first few days brought small numbers of miners from other areas. The determination of the pickets, numbering a few hundred at that time, to stop the lorries taking coke out of the depot, soon captivated the imagination of both the miners and other trade unionists.

Generally, they were unsuccessful in physically preventing scab lorries getting across. But the demonstration of mass solidarity by the pickets and the implicit consequences for future picket line breakers, turned many away. The first days brought many frustrations. Messages of support from other areas of the NUM were received, but promises of more pickets never materialised. A trainload of Scots miners was reported to have been cancelled by their officials.

The Yorkshire pickets were billeted in Birmingham through local trade unionists and those unable to find a bed often slept on the floor of the university student unions.

Many meetings were organised at workplaces with shop stewards, where rank and file miners explained the reasons and the need of their new tactic of the mass picket.

Talking with student revolutionaries of the

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

post-'68 generation, the miners were warm in friendship but bemused at their refusal to unite inside the left of the Labour Party. Condescendingly the student revolutionaries explained the obsolescence of the Labour Party, and in more drunken moments some talked about guerrilla warfare to the further bemusement of the miners.

But after the first week of the mass picket, it was clear that the police were growing in confidence in dealing with the picket lines. In between the confrontations the police turned round and chatted to the pickets and offered them Polos.

The police on the lines were replaced at very frequent intervals so that the convivial

atmosphere would not affect their determination. And it didn't stop the police laying into the pickets when the time came, arresting them by the dozen, and snatching their leaders.

If the miners were to be successful it was clear by the weekend that they needed drastic reinforcements. And it was to come in the following week, in an amazing wave of solidarity.

Responding to the Birmingham East District Committee of the AEUW call for a strike, 40,000 downed tools on the Thursday. On that morning, the workers of Birmingham turned up in their thousands on the picket line. It was nothing less than a festival of solidarity.

The Chief Constable of Birmingham, seeing the situation was impossible, agreed to close the gates. A roar passed down the streets outside as they clanged shut.

And still the trade unionists poured in. Hundreds of workers from Fort Dunlop marched on the depot chanting 'Close the gates! Close the gates!' On hearing that the gates were closed they changed their chant to 'Open the gates! Open the gates!', wanting the moment of victory to be relived in their presence.

Arthur Scargill, addressing the assembled thousands from the roof of a dilapidated toilet outside the gates, claimed the Saltley Gate closure to be a major victory for the working class in this country. And despite TUC codes of conduct and declarations of abhorrence and intimidation of mass pickets by trade union and Labour leaders, flying pickets were firmly established at Saltley in the arsenal of the British working class movement.

Peter Radcliff.

THE UNIONS



Good, old-fashioned trade unionism: Bromsborough CWS workers occupy in defence of jobs. Photo: Paul Herrmann

Jim Denham for the Alliance for Workers' Liberty

"The trade union movement is in a pretty bad state. It's had a battering since 1979. TUC membership has gone down to 8 million from over 12 million in 1979.

"The left in the trade union movement is in a hell of a mess.

"Take the *Engineering Gazette*. This is the remnants of a once-powerful broad left in the AEU. It couldn't even get its act together to campaign for a "No" vote in the merger with the EETPU.

"It can scarcely be exaggerated what a disaster that amalgamation is likely to be. The *Engineering Gazette* did announce that they were opposed to it for about two weeks in November. Then they dropped it, mainly because their leading light, an ex-Stalinist called Jimmie Airlie, voted in favour of it at the AEU National Executive.

"In the CPSA, the Militant tendency have a long history of considerable power and influence. They've actually got the Deputy General Secretary, a fellow called John Macreadie, but he behaves just like any other union bureaucrat.

"You'd never know that he is

supposed to be a revolutionary socialist. He abuses his position to attack, in a thoroughly sectarian way, other sections of the left.

"The NALGO Broad Left has been a madhouse for years now. The leadership varies from year to year between the SWP and the Militant.

"It's the SWP in charge at the moment. They use the Broad Left for SWP rallies, inviting Chris Harman to come along to talk to them about the class nature of the Soviet Union and how important it is to have a state capitalist analysis in the NALGO Broad Left.

"Friedrich Engels once said about a sectarian organisation which claimed to be Marxist at the end of the last century, that the best service they could do the working class, would be to wind themselves up and dissolve. To be honest, we can say that about most of the organisations of the left which are active in the trade unions.

"That sounds like quite a sectarian thing to say. But that's a misunderstanding of what 'sectarianism' means. Arguing your case forcefully, even aggressively, may be a bad thing to do in and of itself, but it is not sectarian.

"Marx described sectarianism as putting the interests of your own little group, of your own sect, in front of those of the class as a

whole. That's what sectarianism is. And in that sense groups like the SWP and the Militant are sectarian, in the classic, literal sense that Marx meant it.

"Almost as bad can be the professional, "non-sectarian" sectarians who hang about on the periphery or the fringes of the SWP or other left groups and, all too often, dominate trades councils and turn them into rumps and talking shops.

"They'll take grand stances on Ireland, Palestine, gay rights, abortion — I'm not saying that

"There is a crying need for a non-sectarian rank and file movement."

those issues aren't important, but the left always wins because there's no-one else there except for the left.

"They'd lose the vote on these issues if it was a representative meeting, if manual workers from the industrial unions were coming along. Instead, the trades council is a talking shop for the left sects and their hangers-on.

"There is a vacuum on the left. Whenever we have the opportunity in the trade union movement to put forward our ideas we've actually got a tremendous response from serious, non-aligned working class people.

"We've always had a good response when playing on an even playing field, if you like, against people like the SWP and Militant.

"There is a crying need for a non-sectarian rank and file movement. I think that can come from various sources. *Trade Union News* has an important role to play in that process.

"The Socialist Movement Trade Union Committee, despite various shortcomings with it, has a lot of potential.

"After the General Election, whatever the outcome, the need for that kind of movement is going to be all the more important.

"If the Tories get in, we are going to face a stepping up of the drive on anti-trade union laws.

"Despite Major's softer image —

he's got a nice guy image, his Man at C&A image — Major actually has the same poisonous anti-working class venom running through his veins that Thatcher had. He's just a bit more polite about it, puts a bit more of a human face on it.

"Sometimes the Tories' venom against the working class is such that I think they don't know what lies in their own best interests. They're even proposing now to do away with the Bridlington Agreement, for God's sake, something that has been used to police the working class and to make life easier for the bosses. Such is the Tories' hatred of the unions that they are even proposing to do away with that.

"If Labour get in there will be a brief honeymoon period, but I think that a lot of workers' self-confidence is going to be boosted. There are going to be major struggles because a lot of expectations that workers have in a Labour government will be disappointed. You can almost guarantee that some sort of incomes policy, of wage restraint is going to be brought in. I foresee very big struggles over that in which sections of the left will cop out, as they did last time under the Social Contract.

"The Social Contract was sold to the working class on the basis of the support of people like Jones and Scanlon, great heroes of the left. It wasn't the right wing which sold us the Social Contract — it was the left.

"Underlying all our work has to be politics. I'd like to close with a little anecdote.

"I started work in a large car factory in British Leyland in the mid-1970s. Someone had spotted me reading the *Guardian*, and asked me "Are you a Communist?" I ummed and ah-ed. "Depends what you mean by Communist".

"I should point out that the shop stewards' committees had been controlled for years by the Communist Party and its convenor was a leading member of the Communist Party.

"Eventually I said, "I am, in the classic sense, but I'm not a member of the Communist Party," and they said, "Well, just as well. We bloody

hate Communists around here because they're all in the gaffer's pocket."

"It's a very odd form of anti-communism, but it was literally true. The CP was in the gaffer's pocket, and the reason for it was that British Leyland had been nationalised and, from the point of view of the Stalinists in the Communist Party at that time, that meant that it was something qualitatively better than private industry, even verging on socialism.

"From their bureaucratic standpoint, it meant that the plant had to be made to work, had to be made to seem superior to private industry, under the old private owners.

"That was their conception of politics and the reason they sold out struggles. You only ever saw the convenor when you had a 'downer', which was a short strike, and he came and shouted at you to go back to work.

"That wasn't because he was corrupt. It was because his politics were so limited, his conception of socialism so bureaucratic, that stopping strikes was what he thought was the correct and responsible thing to do.

"I think our conception of socialism is a very different one. It can be summed up in the words of Karl Marx, "the creation of socialism has to be the act of the working class emancipating itself"."

NEW PROBLEMS NEW STRUGGLES



A handbook for trade unionists by Socialist Organiser and Workers' Liberty £1

A comprehensive guide to the issues of today and the lessons of the past. £1.00 plus 28p post

A weekend of discussion

Over 80 trade union and Labour Party activists attended the Alliance for Workers' Liberty industrial weekend school, "Socialists and the Trade Unions", last Saturday and Sunday 8-9 February.

Discussion focussed on drawing out the lessons of the defeats our movement has suffered over recent years and exploring policies to rebuild the movement.

Over the coming weeks, we will be reprinting some of these discussions in the pages of *Socialist Organiser*.

The school also provided an op-

portunity for Alliance for Workers' Liberty activists in various unions and industries to hammer out plans for their political work.

The underlying theme of the entire school was the necessity of rooting socialist politics in the workplace.

A Manchester postal worker spelled this out in the closing session: "You can have all the Marxist views in the world, but if you are not prepared to try and win workers to them, to get up at half-past four in the morning to sell papers and give out leaflets, then your ideas mean nothing and, what's more, you haven't really grasped them in the first place."

Stalin's great crime abroad

AGAINST THE TIDE

By Sean Matgamna



In Spain in July 1936 the so-called "Popular Front", a loose coalition of left and not-so-left parties, won the general election. Spanish society was sharply polarised already, five years after the dismissal of the king and the declaration of a Republic. Now it flew apart. The army, airforce and navy mutinied, led by a junta of Fascist generals, the most important of whom turned out to be Francisco Franco, an army general.

The weak-kneed leaders of the Popular Front were at first inclined to surrender to them. But then the Spanish working class took a stand. They broke open the arsenals in cities like Madrid and Barcelona, disarmed the reactionaries, and erected barricades to defend themselves and their Republic against the advancing fascist armies. "No Pasaran!" they shouted — they shall not pass!

They did not pass. The fascist advances were halted, amidst bitter fighting. The bourgeoisie, the powerful Catholic church, and much of the petit-bourgeoisie rallied solidly around the fascist armies; only their "shadow" — an individual here and there — remained in the Republican-controlled areas, as Trotsky pictured it at the time.

This meant that half of Spain was in the hands of the working class and their peasant allies — armed, mobilised, the undisputed power! Fascism and right-wing authoritarian governments had been spreading throughout Europe like a plague: Italy, Germany, Hungary, Poland, Austria (where the Vienna workers had fought on the barricades in 1934, and lost). Its advance was stopped now in Spain. The tide could be turned!

If the workers and peasants had done what was done in Russia after 1917, then the fascist armies would have fallen apart; then peasant soldiers would have been won over to a programme of agrarian revolution; Franco's Moorish troops, from Spanish colonial Morocco, would have been won over had the Spanish Republic liberated Morocco. The socialist revolution would have spread north, to France and beyond, into Germany.

And the workers and peasants already had control of the Republican areas! But, tragically, they did not consolidate but lost that power, and they were then overrun by the fascists. There were two reasons for this: the political confusion and ineptitude of the various groupings on the left, and the activities in Spain of gangster Stalinism.

The biggest revolutionary force in Spain was the anarchist trade union movement, the CNT. Not believing in the legitimacy of any state, the revolutionary anarchists, some of whom, like the famous Durutti, led the armed resistance to Franco, refused to build a working class state. The less revolutionary anarchists became convinced that some state was after all necessary if the fascists were to be beaten and backed the popular front government! Some of these "anarchists" became ministers in it, and stayed ministers even when the government turned on their comrades!

The best big left group, the POUM, joined the Republican government in Catalonia (around Barcelona) in conditions where they had responsibility but no control, thus crippling themselves.

This confusion alone might well have ruined the Spanish revolution. The activities of the Stalinists made ruin a certainty.

A smallish party in 1936, the Spanish Communist Party (PCE) grew because of its policies and because the Republic, undermined by the subtle hostility of countries like Britain, and facing the armed intervention of



Fascist chief General Franco (centre) flanked by Cavalcanti and Mola

German and Italian fascist armies and aircraft on the side of the fascists, came to depend on Stalin's Russia for arms and equipment (for which it paid in gold). The PCE was the party of the USSR.

Stalinists poured into Spain; they organised international support, and sent international brigades of soldiers to fight for the Republic; and they sent in legions of Stalin's secret police, the GPU, to take control in the Republican areas.

Their political "line" was that socialism must wait. This was no socialist revolution but the "defence of — bourgeois — democracy". What Stalin was really up to was trying to convince the European bourgeoisie that they did not need fascism to control the working class: Stalin would do it for them, in return for certain concessions.

With this policy, the Stalinists became the substitute for the shadow-like bourgeoisie, most of whom were physically in Franco's camp, defending their interests. They did the work in the Republican areas which the fascists did in theirs! They drove peasants off the land they seized, and beat down the revolutionary workers, and those anarchists, POUMists and Trotskyists who championed their interests.

Soon there was a Stalinist reign of terror in the Republic, modelled on what was going on in Russia. Socialists like POUM leader Andres Nin were kidnapped, tortured and killed in the GPU's Spanish prisons. The working class was held in an iron — Stalinist — grip. The revolution was ruined.

The arteries of the revolution thus drained from within the Republic, the Republic, ruled by the Stalinists in the name of the bourgeoisie, could not even defend itself. The peasants and soldiers in the fascist-held areas did not revolt. The military balance tipped against the Republic. The fascists overran Spain, clinching their victory in March 1939, six months before the outbreak of World War 2 — which could perhaps have been averted by a socialist victory in Spain.

After the destruction of the Russian revolution itself, what they did in Spain is the single greatest crime of the Stalin gang.

For us today the important thing to tell the labour movement, and young people interested in socialism, is that the working class in Spain *did* revolt, *did* save the Republic in 1936 and '37, *did* seize control of society in Republican Spain, and *could* have made a socialist revolution if it had not been betrayed by the Stalinists within its own ranks.

"The Spanish Civil War: the view from the left" (*Revolutionary History*, Vol 4, Nos. 1 &

2) is a priceless dossier of pamphlets, memoirs and biographies mainly written in the '30s, about the defeated Spanish Revolution.

"From the left" means, here, from people to the left of the PCE. In fact, this covers a very wide spectrum indeed.

Trotsky, looking back just before he died, pointed out that compared with the full-blown Stalinism of the mid-'30s, even the right wing of the old Bolshevik Party, Bukharin, etc., whom Trotsky considered pro-capitalist in the 1920s, were *on the left*. So it was in Spain, with the "right wing communist" followers of Bukharin and Brandler. At the end, the Stalinists in Spain were at the *extreme* right wing of bourgeois politics; even some of the vague socialists and left liberals who had formed the early governments in Republican Spain were, as Trotsky pointed out, to their left.

"The Stalinists could do what they did because they were a powerful, rich, unscrupulous, military-police-led organisation. But those characteristics would not alone have allowed them to win. The mistakes of the left — in the sense used in this book's title — were an essential part of their victory — and of the victory of fascism."

For that reason, I feel this volume is somewhat ill-conceived. For understanding the Spanish Revolution the differences within the left are far more important than their common "leftism" vis-a-vis the Stalinists.

Suppose the Russian right had won in 1917-1918, then the impulse to defend and vindicate "the left" against their murderers would be honourable and understandable. And yet for *understanding* how the right came to triumph and for learning lessons for the future, the differences *within* the left between, say, the Kamenev-Stalin wing of

Bolshevism in April 1917 and Trotsky and Lenin then would be far more important than their common "leftism". As Marx analysed and criticised the various "left" groups which operated in Paris in 1848 and '49, and on that criticism laid the foundation for a new left-wing movement in the future, so we would have to relate to 1917, had things gone against us.

And so too, we must relate to Spain.

The Stalinists could do what they did because they were a powerful, rich, unscrupulous, military-police-led organisation. But those characteristics would not alone have allowed them to win. The mistakes of the left — in the sense used in this book's title — were an essential part of their victory — and of the victory of fascism.

And not just the mistakes they made after July 1936. Some of the decisive mistakes were made earlier. The Stalinist party gained much of its strength because it won over the bulk of the Socialist Party's youth in 1934.

They were given a clear field to do this because the Spanish Trotskyists felt themselves too pure to join the Socialist Party, as Trotsky urged them to. This was, they felt, the party of the "traitor socialists", who had to be fought, the party of the International to which belonged "the murderers of Rosa Luxemburg", as indeed it was.

The Marxists had broken with them long ago and that was that. Independence was now a principle. Erecting such "principle" into an icon outside of time and circumstances, confusing political independence with formal organisational independence, they abstained from the real politics of this movement. The Stalinists gained, and what they gained was turned to deadly use against the Spanish working class, including the Trotskyists.

It is in the analysis of such stages on the road to the victory, first of Stalinism in Spain, and then of fascism, that precepts for revolutionary practice now will be found.

This work, done at the time by Trotsky, can be found in the Pathfinder Press volume, *Leon Trotsky on the Spanish Revolution*. Some of the material in "The Spanish Civil War: the view from the left" expounds Trotsky's point of view. The justification for such a collection is that it allows those who want to study it, clearly to know, directly, and compare the nuances on the left, and this is no small advantage.

• "The Spanish Civil War: the view from the left", *Revolutionary History*, Volume 4, Nos. 1 & 2, £12.95. Order from 111, Riverside Close, Mount Pleasant Hill, London E5 9SS.

"His research is part of the quest for a Theory of Everything."

Hawking, the universe, and God

SCIENCE COLUMN

By Les Hearn

Stephen Hawking is a strong candidate for best-known living scientist, but, whereas many know that he researches into the origins of the universe, and is in a wheelchair, the more accurate features of his life and work are somewhat hazy.

Kitty Ferguson's book* goes a long way to dispelling this haziness. Her goal was to understand his theories and explain them to her readers and in this she has certainly succeeded. Indeed, she is perhaps more successful than Hawking himself, though her goal is to explain a little, rather than a lot.

Hawking's work is in a field of interest to many but of little con-

ceivable practical value. The subject is cosmology, the study of the universe, and his research is part of the quest for what has been called a Theory of Everything (ToE). Such a theory, "a complete description of the universe we live in", is not as impossible as it seems. Many complex natural phenomena are explainable with quite simple sets of rules.

These rules, governing gravitational and electrical forces, for example, are quite good at explaining the universe's present behaviour, but what about the distant past, when the universe was much smaller, denser and hotter than it is now?

A ToE must explain the existence of the known forces and it must specify the boundary conditions, the initial conditions, at the start of the universe. Preferably, no arbitrary elements should need to be put in. The ToE should be able to predict the strengths of the forces, the masses of electrons, etc.

As a starting point, Hawking applied the theory of black holes to the young universe. Black holes ex-

ist where matter has collapsed under its own gravity until it is crushed out of existence in a singularity, a point with no size but a lot of mass. Its gravitational field is so strong that nothing, not even light, can escape from anywhere inside a surface known as the "event

"Hawking supposed that the universe, now expanding in all directions, must once have been concentrated in a singularity. But why had it suddenly exploded?"

horizon", at some distance from the singularity.

Hawking supposed that the universe, now expanding in all directions, must once have been concentrated in a singularity. But why had it suddenly exploded? It seemed that the laws of physics

(LOP) could not operate under such conditions, rather a drawback for a physics researcher!

Returning to black holes, Hawking showed that they were not in fact black, that they could emit radiation (ie. had a temperature) and that very small ones would ultimately explode with the power of millions of hydrogen bombs. This was all a consequence of the application of quantum mechanics (QM) to something predicted by Einstein's theory of general relativity (GR)! The reconciliation of QM and GR is an essential prerequisite for a ToE.

Hawking then used QM to get an insight to the nature of the early universe. According to Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle (HUP), the universe could not have been compressed into a single point. It would have been smeared and fuzzy as time and space dimensions became confused (just like me when I try to imagine this).

Hawking's later work involves a consequence of HUP which is "wormholes" in space-time, through which time travel (for elec-

trons) may be possible, or through which new universes may start! Perhaps our universe is a bud off of another universe.

While Hawking has had these thoughts, he has been becoming more and more disabled with Motor Neurone Disease. He now requires, and can afford, round-the-clock nursing and communicates via a computer and voice-synthesiser. He has had and still receives a fantastic amount of support from others. Ferguson interweaves his life and work in a sensitive way.

Ferguson is particularly interested in the relationship between cosmology and theology. Hawking's comments seem guarded and diplomatic but he admits to not believing in a personal god. He prefers to "use the term God as the embodiment of the LOP". She takes this as evidence that "Hawking is not an atheist"!

I thoroughly recommend this short, readable and enjoyable book.

* *Stephen Hawking: Quest for a Theory of Everything*, Kitty Ferguson, Bantam, £4.99.

The childish voice of Authority

Film

Gerry Bates reviews Jean Vigo's re-released classic *Zero de Conduite*

The head teacher in *Zero de Conduite* has a big desk, an impressive beard, and a stately manner. He represents Authority.

Yet we can see quite well that the actor under the beard is a dwarf, looking like a small boy.

In that single, simple and economical, image, Jean Vigo conveys more than millions of dollars' worth of special effects have managed in many later films. *Zero de Conduite* (roughly, "no marks for good behaviour") is a deservedly classic film from 1933, now re-released and showing in London.

It was filmed in just 17 days, and then banned by the French censor. It could not get a screen-

ing in France until 1945.

Set in a boys' boarding school, the action becomes more and more absurd until it flowers into full scale revolt, with the boys on the school roof and the teachers and their visitors standing round helplessly in the yard below.

The film starts with two boys travelling by train to the school at the start of term, and showing off to each other with new pranks and tricks they have learned in the holidays. They are met at the station by a teacher, grim-faced, austere, pompous, and in full control; but as the film progresses the boys' actions become more deliberate, more planned, and more purposeful, while the petty despotism of the teachers appears more and more childish and more and more frantic.

It is a short, slight film, and does not make more out of the story than it will bear: there are no portentous moments, or excursions into a nihilistic philosophy of total revolt. See it if you get a chance.

The pillow-fight turns into a mock Catholic procession



Set Kelley on the Queen!

Television

Mick Ackersley reviews *Elizabeth R* (BBC1, last Thursday)

The Western democracies are being ruined by welfare handouts. With that statement most bourgeois and most landed gents and their ladies would emphatically agree.

But not all of them would say it in public. Few even on the Tory right wing, depending as they do on popular favour, would say it plainly.

Guess who let it slip out "on camera" before millions of viewers last week? Our benign and sovereign lady, Elizabeth Regina!

She probably thinks it should all go to her and her awful brood instead!

This was a public relations job pure and simple — a bland, calculated, controlled trade-off between maker and subject: good publicity for cooperation; the chance to come in and "look around" with a camera for a favourable and bland "looking around", and a blind eye where appropriate.

Experts say that the strategy is to use the still popular Queen to off-

set the unpopularity of her horrendous and despised brood. That is a bit like living off your capital.

There is a rumour that American exposé-merchant Kitty Kelley, biographer of Ronald Reagan and Frank Sinatra, is now turning her attention to "our" Royal Family. More power to her!

Periscope

I'm Alright Jack, the 1960 Peter Sellers movie satirising trade unionism. Sunday, 16 February, 10pm, Channel 4.



With the Emir of Kuwait

Socialist Organiser fund target reached

£10,000 raised!

Socialist Organiser's fund drive reached the target of £10,000 last week.

Donations from readers and a huge collection at last weekend's "Socialists in the unions" school raised slightly over £3,000. The money

was raised in cash, cheques and pledges from supporters and friends.

Well done and thanks to every comrade who has made a donation or helped in the fundraising.

This is a real step forward in the building of a revolutionary socialist tendency.

The £10,000 is to be spent on new equipment which will help to produce a better paper.

200 Club

This week we received nine more entries into our 200 Club.

The 200 Club is a monthly draw. You can enter for £1, £5 or more a month.

The winner of the draw receives £100.

Surplus money goes to help the paper. Why not join? Write to SO, PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA for more details.

Anti-racist action

Fighting back!

Monday 17 February

Lambeth Anti-Racist Alliance meeting. 7.30, Lambeth Town Hall. Speakers include Tony Benn

Thursday 20 February

Islington ARA meeting. 7.30, Central Library, London N5

Friday 21 February

Anti-fascist benefit at Sunderland Poly

Picket of Swedish Embassy; junction of Upper Montague St. and

Montague Place W2. 5-7pm.

Saturday 22 February

Mass picket against the BNP. Bridgen Shopping Centre, Sunderland. 12.30-3.00

Demonstrate!

Close down the HQ of the British National Party. Meet at 12.00, Saturday 22 February, St. Nicholas Church, London SE18

Anti-Racist Action, PO Box 2578, London N5 1UF. Anti-Nazi League, PO Box 2566, London N4 2HG.

Glasgow SO dayschool

"Socialists and the election", speakers include: Ronnie MacDonald (OILC), Hillel Ticktin (Critique), Tom Rigby (AWL) and from the

Democratic Left.

Saturday 29 February

Registration from 11.00, Queens College, £4/£2

• Followed by a social

This week

Thursday 13 February

"End student debt", Leeds Poly Left Unity meeting. 4.00.

Friday 14 February

"End student debt", Leeds University Left Unity meeting. 4.00.

Monday 17 February

"A fighting NUS", Left Unity meeting at Nene College. 6.30

Tuesday 18 February

"Labour and the economy", Labour Party Socialists meeting. 7.30, Manchester Town Hall. Speaker: Bruce Robinson

Socialist Organiser — our meetings this week

Thursday 13 February

"Ireland: a socialist answer", North London Poly SO meeting. 1.00, Kentish Road site.

"The state and revolution", Newcastle Poly SO meeting. 2.00.

"Fighting racism and fascism", Essex University SO meeting. 6.00. Speaker: Sab Sanghera

"Fighting racism and fascism", Brighton Poly SO meeting. Speaker: Paul McGarry

"Ireland: the debate", Keynes College, Kent University. 7.00. Speakers include Tom Rigby

Thursday 20 February

"Ireland: the debate on the left", Manchester SO forum. 8.00, Bridge Street Tavern. Speaker: Pat Murphy

"Fighting the poll tax", Glasgow SO meeting. 7.30, Partick Burgh Halls. Speaker: Danny Rafferty

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

"Exploitation of wage-labour is the heart of capitalism"

We stand for workers' liberty!

The politics of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty

We live in a capitalist world. Production is social; ownership of the social means of production is private.

Ownership by a state which serves those who own most of the means of production is also essentially "private".

Those who own the means of production buy the labour-power of those who own nothing but their labour-power, and set them to work. At work they produce more than the equivalent of their wages. The difference (today in Britain it may be more than £20,000 a year per worker) is taken by the capitalist. This is exploitation of wage-labour by capital, and it is the basic cell of capitalist society, its very heart-beat.

Everything else flows from that. The relentless drive for profit and accumulation decreases the judgment of all things in existence by their relationship to productivity and profitability. From that come such things as the savage exploitation of Brazilian goldminers, whose life expectancy is now less than 40 years; the working to death — it is officially admitted by the government! — of its employees by advanced Japanese capitalism; and also the economic neglect and virtual abandonment to ruin and starvation of "unprofitable" areas like Bangladesh and parts of Africa.

From that comes the cultural blight and barbarism of a society force-fed on profitable pap.

From it come products with "built-in obsolescence" and a society orientated to the grossly wasteful production and reproduction of shoddy goods, not to the development of leisure and culture.

From it come mass unemployment, the development of a vast and growing underclass, living in ghettos, and the recreation in some American cities of the worst Third World conditions.

From it comes the unfolding ecological disaster of a world crying out for planning and the rational use of resources, but which is, tragically, organised by its ruling classes around the principles of anarchy and the barbarous worship of blind and humanly irrational market forces.

From it come wars and genocides: two times this century, capitalist gangs possessing world-wide power have fallen on each other in quarrels over the division of the spoils, and wrecked the world economy, killing many tens of millions. From it come racism, imperialism, and fascism.

The capitalist cult of icy egotism and the "cash nexus" as the decisive social tie produces societies like Britain now where vast numbers of young people are condemned to live in the streets, and societies like that of Brazil where homeless children are hunted and killed on the streets like rodents.

From the exploitation of wage-labour comes our society in which the rich, who with their servants and agents hold state power, fight a relentless class struggle to maintain the people in a condition to accept their own exploitation and

abuse, and to prevent real democratic self-control developing within the forms of what they call democracy. They use tabloid propaganda or — as in the 1984-5 miners' strike — savage and illegal police violence, as they need to. They have used fascist gangs when they need to, and will use them again, if necessary.

Against this system we seek to convince the working class — the wage-slaves of the capitalist system — to fight for socialism.

Socialism means the abolition of wage-slavery, the taking of the social economy out of private ownership into common co-operative ownership. It means the realisation of the old demands for liberty, equality, and fraternity.

Under socialism the economy will be run and planned deliberately and democratically: market mechanisms will cease to be our master, and will be cut down and re-shaped to serve broadly sketched-out and planned, rational social goals.

We want public ownership of the major enterprises and a planned economy under workers' control.

The working class can win reforms within capitalism, but we can only win socialism by overthrowing capitalism and by breaking the state power — that is, the monopoly of violence and reserve violence — now held by the capitalist class. We want a democracy much fuller than the present Westminster system — a workers' democracy, with elected representatives recallable at any time, and an end to bureaucrats' and managers' privileges.

Socialism can never be built in one country alone. The workers in every country have more in common with workers in other countries than with their own capitalist or Stalinist rulers. We support national liberation struggles and workers' struggles worldwide.

What are the alternatives now? We may face new wars as European and Japanese capitalism confronts the US. Fascism is rising. Poverty, inequality and misery are growing.

Face the bitter truth: either we build a new, decent, sane, democratic world or, finally, the capitalists will ruin us all — we will be dragged down by the fascist barbarians or new, massive wars. Civilisation will be eclipsed by a new dark age. The choice is socialism or barbarism.

Socialists work in the trade unions and the Labour Party to win the existing labour movement to socialism. We work with presently unorganised workers and youth.

To do that work the Marxists organise themselves in a democratic association, the Alliance for Workers' Liberty.



To join the Alliance for Workers' Liberty, write to PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA.

Militant: what do we stand for?



THE POLITICAL FRONT

Mark Osborn analyses Militant's What We Stand For (1986) by Peter Taaffe

This is less "what we stand for" and more "A brief summary of one of the two ideas we kneel in front of".

The pamphlet is the Militant's schema to be applied for socialism in Britain. It goes like this:

"The cry that Militant would establish a socialist Britain by violence is a red herring.

"An entirely peaceful transformation of society is possible." How? "On the basis of a bold socialist policy backed by mass mobilisation of the labour movement".

What policy? "Nationalisation of the top 200 monopolies through an Enabling Bill in parliament". And what about the state? "The generals imagine they could use the army...Such a movement would be paralysed by an appeal to the ordinary soldiers."

The Marxist programme is no longer necessary for the workers in order for the class to take power — the working class is necessary to enable the Marxists, using their programme, to take power.

This is not from Marx — the liberation of the working class must be the action of the class itself — this is socialism from above with concentration on nationalisation from the top rather than working-class control from below.

And the problem is that it will not work, if by "work" we understand the liberation of the working class as the first step to the liberation of the whole of humanity.

Again, from Marx, the revolution is not only necessary to break the old order, it is also necessary for the ruled. In order to become fit to rule the working class must go through the experience of revolution, entering fully into politics, decision-making and actively shaping the future through democratic, working-class organisations.

The idea that the British working class can take power peacefully is nonsense.

Ask the question: under what conditions could there be a peaceful revolution? All the following would have to occur quickly and

simultaneously: the capitalist class, parties and state disintegrate and become so demoralised they are unable to regroup and start a civil war; a workers' party and working-class organisations have domination; the international capitalist class are unable to invade.

OK, it is possible to imagine. But it is unlikely. So why base a programme on it, particularly when it reinforces existing prejudices on the British left that a peaceful, parliamentary transition is possible?

Surely it is better to assume there will be violent resistance from the ruling class and warn the working class in advance.

But this is part of the point. Some Militant members will tell you they do not actually believe this rubbish — it is just necessary to say peaceful transition is possible in order to relate to British workers.

The effect is a lie to the class and confusion amongst their members. And, as the programme was written as a programme for Labour, and they have just left the Labour Party, who will implement the programme?

What do Militant really think? God knows. And it is becoming less clear as Taaffe and Co. move piecemeal and dishonestly away from Militant's old, now discredited, "perspectives".

The key issue ignored by "What we stand for" is Stalinism. It always was difficult to defend the idea that the Soviet ruling class was the working class, or to defend the Soviet genocide in Afghanistan, or to believe the Soviet -style societies were post-capitalist. Nevertheless, these were Militant's policies, despite the fact that not many of their members understood or could defend or even knew about them.

The Militant now accuse Ted Grant of standing by this old junk. They accuse Grant of believing the collapse in Eastern Europe is a world historic defeat for the workers. But Grant is only being logical.

Talking to a Militant member outside their Con-way Hall rally last week, they are a real mess. For instance, they say that the bourgeois Eastern European revolutions of 1989 began as political revolutions and then, very quickly, became counter-revolutions. So, why support them?

They actually want to support the revolutions, and the only way to do so, and square the circle with some basic politics is to say, the revolutions were part of a long process which is, as yet, unresolved.

This is just to avoid the issue. The ground is now clear for capitalist restoration in Eastern Europe. To say this issue is not resolved is idiotic.

So, comrade Taaffe, you are obviously beginning to stand for something else — perhaps you would be good enough to fill us in on the details. Tell your members too!

Militant is now in such a condition that not only do its members not know what it stands for, neither do its leaders.

Ford job cuts should be fought

By Gerry Bates

Ford has announced 2,100 more job cuts this year, bringing its British workforce down to 38,000 from 72,000 in the early '80s.

National union leaders have condemned the job cuts without any hint of a fight against them, but Alan Lloyd, convenor at Ford's Southampton plant, has called for industrial action if there are any compulsory redundancies.

In 1988, the Ford workers' pay dispute was the starting signal for a general revival of industrial militancy in the "Lawson boom". Ford workers still have the power to give a lead to the whole working class. Shop stewards from the different plants should get together to plan resistance to the job



In 1988, Ford workers started the pay offensive of the "Lawson boom" years

cuts. And links need to be made with Ford workers in other countries, especially in Europe.

The new job cuts are indeed, as the Ford bosses say, not just a response to the current slump, but part of long-term plans for trimming and restructuring the whole car industry world-wide, and especially in Europe.

Just the same week, Fiat announced that it would cut 10,000 jobs, Mercedes warned of layoffs, and BMW said 3,000 jobs would go. A few weeks

before General Motors published plans for cutting 76,000 jobs in the US.

Traditional car markets are levelling off; almost all West European countries have one car for every two or three people now; expanded car sales in Eastern Europe (currently 1 car for every 22 people) and in the Third World will be a long time coming, on the current depressed trends.

And Japanese companies are steaming into the European

market. Sweetheart deals, signed by short-sighted trade unions like the AEU at Nissan, have enabled Nissan to get maximum productivity with effectively no trade union organisation.

Unless trade unionists in the giant car firms get together across Europe, at least, and map out a common strategy, one of the most powerful sections of the working class could be chopped up bit by bit in the coming years.

Underground: stop the Company Plan!

By a Central line guard

If the Tories and the tube bosses get their way, April 1 will see the introduction of their Company Plan — their revenge on tube workers (and passengers!) for the strikes of '89 which stopped dead their "Draft 3A/Action Stations" attacks on train-crew, station staff and services.

The '89 strikes caused massive disruption and showed the enormous potential power of tube workers. The Tories' 1990 Employment Act aimed at preventing wildcat strikes was a direct response to tube workers' actions.

Due to a fatal mixture of chronic underfunding and managerial incompetence, a financial crisis developed in 1990 with a £100 million plus deficit. After an initial recruitment freeze, tube bosses came back in early '91 with a cuts package which was basically a job-cutting exercise affecting mainly but not exclusively station staff.

This allowed the sectionists in ASLEF (the drivers' union) to argue against taking any action and for scabbing on strikes by RMT who had voted to take action against the cuts.

Management and unions, however, came to a last-minute deal with both sides backing down from confrontation.

This brings us to November '91 when management announced their Company Plan: 5,000 plus jobs to go out of 21,000; contracting out of cleaning, train maintenance, permanent way (track) and signals; the creation of "line-based business units", ready to be sold off; massive productivity changes — flexible rostering, Japanese working

methods etc.; "licences" for jobs — reapplying and requalifying for your own job; an end to seniority and salaried status; performance-related pay and personal contracts.

So what's happening now? Currently, talks are taking place over the machinery of negotiations. Management tactics are to prevent a legal ballot from being held: as long as "talks over talks" continue, there can be no "failure to agree" over the contents of the Company Plan.

The union bureaucrats desperate not to rock the boat before the election don't want strikes no matter what.

The Labour Party transport team and even RMT-sponsored MPs have given no commitment other than to "review" the Company Plan, so keeping our heads and hoping for a Labour government isn't an option that offers anything to tubeworkers.

Joan Ruddock MP has insisted the contractors will stay on the tubes under a Labour government and Peter Snape MP (RMT sponsored) put it more bluntly: "You're worried about 5,000 jobs? Well, I'm worried about 1 job — mine! I've got a 900 majority in West Bromwich". Well, at least he's honest about it!

Given this situation, it's clear what we need. The machinery of negotiations talks is a blind alley. We need a "failure to

agree" on the Company Plan and to try for a legal ballot. However, we know management will use any trick they can to get the ballot declared illegal and the judges and courts will bend over backwards to help them.

We can't let the Tory laws and Tory judges tell us how to fight our battles or we'll have lost before we've begun. Tubeworkers need to be convinced to take action in defiance of

"What we face on the tubes is neither isolated nor unique."

the law if necessary and the quickest and best way to win is by all-out action, legal or illegal.

If tubeworkers join together in a united fight, we can stop the Company Plan dead in its tracks.

In 1989, tubeworkers did just that, giving a magnificent example to workers across the country. However, here we are a couple of years later, faced with worse cuts and more job losses, privatisation, etc. The point is that it's not enough to take militant action in defence of the status quo.

The bosses have their Company Plan. Well, we need a Plan too — a Workers' Plan for the Underground.

Southwark strike called off

By a Southwark NALGO member

The strike in the Borough Treasurer's Department in Southwark ended on Monday 10 February after the strikers accepted an offer from the council which

reinstated or redeployed to satisfactory jobs all the 38 people originally threatened with compulsory redundancy in that Department.

The meeting took place the afternoon before a council meeting at which the council threatened to sack all the 200 NALGO members on strike if they did not return to work the next day.

NALGO's National Official threatened the strikers that they would not support them and would deny any strike pay if they stayed out.

As Southwark NALGO was heavily overdrawn on its account, the strike could only continue if the NEC did give full take-home pay to the strikers.

The strike meeting was unwilling to vote for a return to work until the threats of all redundancies were withdrawn and the existing redeployment and redundancy procedures were scrapped and replaced by ones agreed with the unions. The combination of the

A workers' plan would have to include demands like: massive increases in investment in the Underground; a 35-hour week with no loss of pay; a minimum wage of 2/3 of average earnings; an increase in London weighting; the return of guards to OPO lines; all stations to have at least 2 members of staff; positive action for women and black workers; cheap fares; the Underground to be run by the workers and passengers.

These ideas need to be fleshed out and developed but they aren't just wishful thinking. They are the only real solution to the crisis on London Underground Ltd.

More generally, what we face on the tubes is neither isolated nor unique.

Redundancies — at GEC or Fords or a thousand other workplaces; privatisation/contracting out — on BR or in the NHS and schools; Japanese working methods — all across industry; performance-related pay/personal contracts — BR again and the civil service and across the public and private sectors; workers face the same attacks as a result of the economic crisis.

But it is not our crisis. It is the bosses' crisis. We need to develop workers' answers and to fight for them. Or we will end up paying the price.

Civil service pay — the campaign must start now

By Steve Battlemuch, CPSA DSS SEC

As the April 1 deadline gets closer, CPSA and NUCPS leaders are continuing their talks on a new pay agreement for the civil service.

No "offer" for this year's pay has been made but the Treasury's initial proposals on a new agreement have been circulated. [Leaks suggest that the offer will almost certainly be 4%]

NUCPS have called a Special Pay Conference for March 19 (although Leslie Christie, tried to get their executive to call it off last week but failed).

In CPSA all we have are bland circulars from John Ellis which tell us not to worry too much and trust the NEC!

It's hard to put any trust in our current "Moderate" NEC — only a couple of weeks ago, an NEC member, Anthony O'Connor, addressed a CPSA meeting and stated that he

believed the Tories would withdraw their pay proposals because of the General Election and because they are worried that the "Two million civil servants in London and the South-East would vote Labour"... when we informed him that there are only 1/2 million civil servants in the whole country, he was speechless. How can you trust this shower?

The Tories' proposals include an extension of performance-related pay which for the first time removes the automatic yearly increment for those members not on the maximum of the scale.

Progress up the incremental

scale will now be based on performance markings from annual reports.

The proposals also include giving all Departments and Agencies the flexibility to introduce their own pay agreements which will break up national pay bargaining.

Hanging around waiting for the outcome of the pay movement survey is a waste of time. Activists should be putting forward a bold claim along the lines of £35 extra per week, 35 days annual leave and a 35-hour week.

Such an approach has more chance of capturing the imagination of the membership than sitting around waiting for the Tories to set the agenda.

This year's offer and the result of the negotiations on the new agreement are not expected until mid-March. The unknown factor is the General Election.

Will the Tories decide to push for a deal before April 9? And, if so, will CPSA's leaders willingly go along with them?

I suspect we could well be bounced into a ballot just before the election — if so, the left could surely use this to its advantage in pushing for a rejection of the deal: why sign a deal with a government which is about to lose an election?

Brain-of-Britain, John Ellis's only comment on the election is that it might disrupt the pay ballot!

The imminence of the ballot should be concentrating the minds of all CPSA/NUCPS activists — joint open meetings on pay preparing the ground for a "Vote No" campaign are vital. Set them up in your area as activists are already doing in Nottingham, Sheffield, the South-West and London.

NALGO's general election campaign

By Tony Dale, Manchester NALGO

NALGO set to spend £2 million on general election campaign" were the newspaper headlines last week.

The campaign has been launched to "attack the government's policies on public services". It will be the most expensive campaign ever run by a British trade union.

While NALGO is not affiliated to the Labour Party, the campaign message will be clear: get the Tories out.

This campaign is to be welcomed. It is interesting to contrast NALGO's spending on the election, £2 million, with Labour's election campaign costing £6 million.

For a union not affiliated to the Labour Party this seems a strange and contradictory decision. But NALGO is changing quickly.

Up to the 1960s NALGO was very clearly a guild for local government officers. The in-joke was that NALGO stood for "Not A Lot Going On". Until 1961 there was no provision in the constitution for calling strikes. Affiliation to the TUC only took place in 1964. There was no official recognition of shop stewards until 1978.

It was only in 1970 that NALGO sanctioned its first official strike by cleaning workers in Leeds. The 1989 national pay strikes in many ways represented the union coming of age.

The reasons for NALGO wanting the Tories out are obvious. Local council services and the NHS have borne a heavy cost for 13 years of Tory rule. Another Tory government will further threaten their future.

The NALGO campaign flows from a debate at last year's NALGO conference.

In the run-up to that conference Socialist Organiser supporters had been instrumental in moving motions condemning "the continuous attack on and destruction of public services by the present government for 11 years", and calling for "a major campaign from now until the general election to underline the importance of defending and advancing public services and manufacturing industry".

The motion passed by Manchester and Bury branches, and with the support of the North West and North Wales Districts was the only conference motion on the general election. Conference overwhelmingly passed it. The £2 million "Tories Out" campaign flows directly from this motion.

In the election NALGO's intervention could play a crucial role in swinging the result and in helping a Labour victory. A Labour victory will give council workers and health workers greater confidence in fighting to defend and improve jobs and services.

It is a sad note that most of the organised left chose to ignore the debate at conference and view NALGO's general election campaign as an irrelevance and a distraction.

At NALGO's Broad Left AGM held last weekend, the combined forces of the SWP and Militant heavily defeated a motion calling for the Broad Left to campaign for a Labour vote in every constituency.

Looking at such antics it is useful to remind ourselves of Karl Marx's view that sectarianism is placing the interests of your own group above the interests of the workers' movement as a whole.

The Industrial Front

The Offshore Workers' Union — OILC — has now been officially recognised as a trade union by the government's certification officer.

"This is a historic development, making OILC the only trade union dedicated exclusively to the interests of Offshore workers", commented Ronnie MacDonald, OILC spokesperson.

Striking cleaners have won their battle for union recognition at

Cardiff's Ely hospital. This represents a significant retreat by the anti-union contractors who were determined to destroy COHSE as a force among the cleaners.

Gateways are to sack 3,000 workers. USDAW officials responded with an unbelievable piece of belly-crawling: asking to be consulted about where and when, but saying that they "understood the position the company is in".

The same USDAW spokesperson ruled out industrial action.

SOCIALIST

ORGANISER

Unite the left!

HQ committee set to veto local choices

High-handed tactics damage Labour's chances

A feeble bribe for students

By Alice Sharp

In an effort to buy some young people's votes the Tories have come up with a "Student's Charter".

Like its counterpart, the Citizen's Charter, this is a PR job which aims to pit the "consumer", in this case the student, against the workers in public services.

It promises the right to receive your grant cheque or loan within a specified period. The fact that the grant cheque is pitifully inadequate and the majority of students are not entitled even to that doesn't feature in this charter. Instead, the

**Left Unity
Conference for Student left
Beat the Blues**
Weekend of debate and
discussion
**14 & 15 March
Manchester**

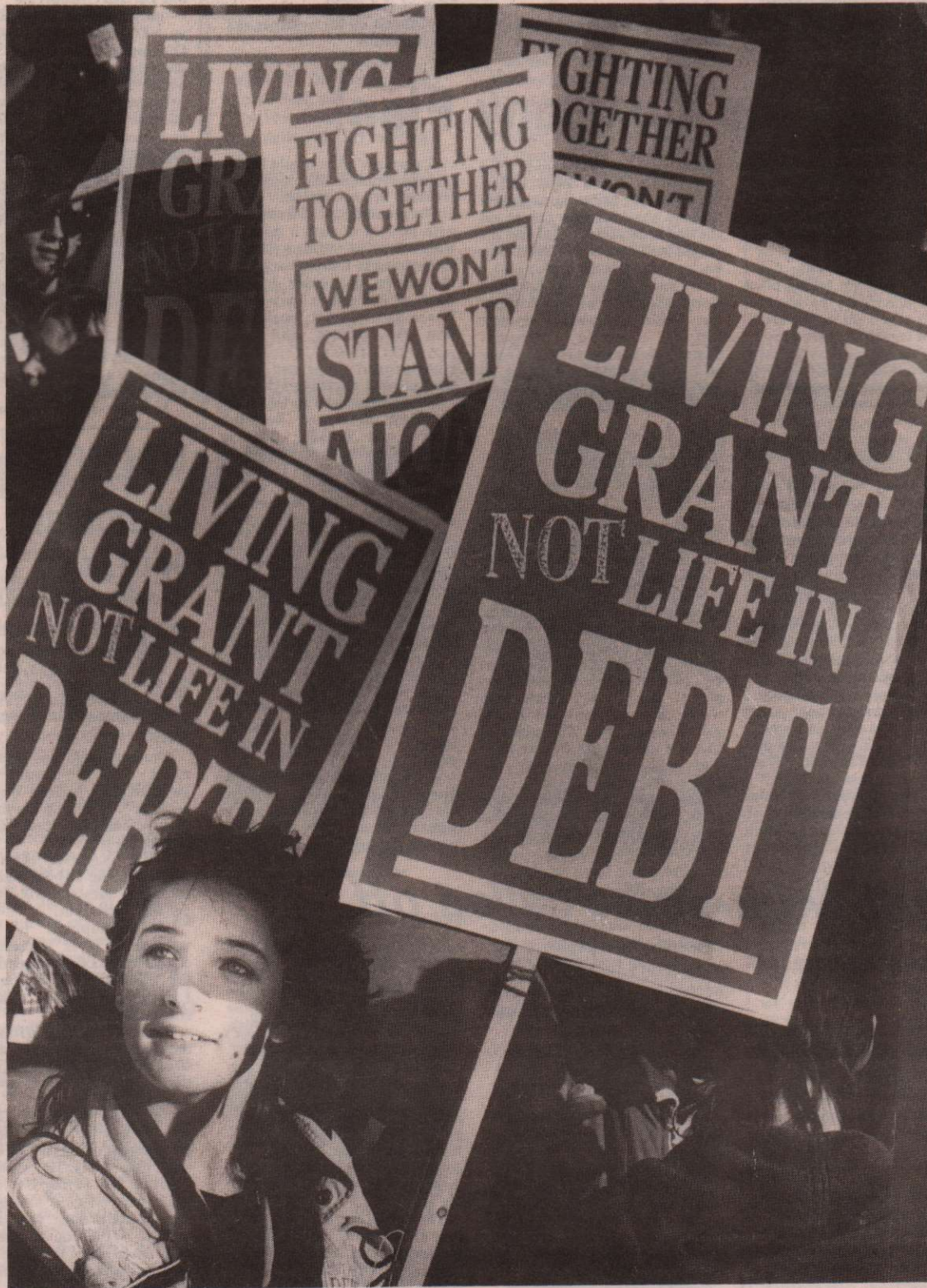
• The General Election: mobilising the student vote • The next Labour government: will it deliver? • Building the LG&B campaign • The case for socialist feminism • Fighting racism and fascism • Which way forward for NUS?
For further details phone Jill or Paul on 071 639 7967

Tories want to use students as a cudgel against local education authorities ruined by cuts who are slow to process grants.

The right to play a part in determining your lecturer's pay increase depending on his or her performance also figures in the charter. There's no mention of the right to adequate study facilities and materials, a well-stocked library, or an end to overcrowding in lecture rooms. The Tories are all for us having "rights" — as long as it will not cost them anything.

These consumer charters are an election stunt, with the added bonus of setting one group of workers against another.

According to press speculation, a possible addition to the charter will be voluntary membership of the National Union of Students and student unions. Some Tories see this as an opportunity to carry out longstanding plans to destroy



NUS and local unions. Others are worried such attempts would spark off action by students just before the election. Indeed it would!

The charter is aimed at higher education students ignoring the vast majority of students who are in the further education sector.

All students want the right to

a full living grant, adequate and safe accommodation at affordable prices, and an end to sexual and racial discrimination and harassment. All students should have the right to useful employment at trade union rates of pay when they complete their studies.

Adequate childcare facilities on all campuses, democratic

local control over education, full representation by students in all college committees and structures, guaranteed union autonomy — these are some of the demands that would actually turn education around.

Students, like the rest of the population, are not likely to be fooled by the Tories' crass electioneering.

Labour Party leaders, according to the *Guardian* of 11 February, are "willing to risk controversy by excluding candidates with large numbers of nominations" as they rush to get candidates in place in all constituencies before the General Election.

Such crass bulldozing is likely to lose Labour some key marginals: but for Kinnock and Hattersley, beating the Tories matters less than bashing the left.

A special panel has been set up by the National Executive Committee to decide shortlists for four constituencies.

In Coventry South East and Liverpool Broadgreen, Labour has to find new candidates after expelling Dave Nellist and Terry Fields; even now, it seems, the local parties may not be allowed to choose the replacements. Labour could well lose these seats on a split vote, with the expelled *Militant* MPs standing against Labour.

In the other two constituencies involved, *Militant* has played no role. Labour's reduced chance of winning these two Tory-held marginals, Nottingham East and Wallasey, is solely the fault of the leadership.

In Nottingham East, the candidate selected by the CLP for the 1987 general election, Sharon Atkin, was ruled out by the NEC. This time, the CLP has been suspended for a period and the left's front-runner for the parliamentary nomination has been suspended from holding party office.

In Wallasey, with a Tory majority of only 279, the CLP has been denied the right to select freely without any formal reason being given. Frank Field, the right-wing Labour MP for the neighbouring constituency of Birkenhead, made allegations against Wallasey CLP, but an investigation by Labour's Director of Organisation, Joyce Gould, was unable to uphold any of them.

Still, the selection has been delayed to the last minute. The *Guardian* has been told that "there are indications that a candidate will be imposed to exclude Labour's 1987 election candidate, Lol Duffy, the left-wing former leader of the Cammell Laird's strike committee", but the CLP members have still not been told anything official.

In 1987 Lol Duffy, standing against Tory Minister Lynda Chalker, secured the highest swing to Labour in a Tory seat.

Subscribe!



Introductory offer: 10 issues, post free. Send £5 (cheques and postal orders made out to "Socialist Organiser")

Name
Address

Return to S.O. (Subs), PO Box 823,
London SE15 4NA.