

SOCIALIST

ORGANISER

**How to
fight the
Poll Tax
see page 5**

Socialism, yes! Stalinism, no!



(Photo Paul Herrmann, Profile)

The ambulance workers can't stop anyone's profits. What they have done is demand control over the running of their service — and that alarms the Tories scarcely less than the loss of profits.

Ambulance bosses have preferred to stop emergency calls going to ambulance workers, and divert them instead to makeshift army and police crews, rather than have the ambulance workers running an emergency service under their own control.

The bosses would rather see people suffer and die than concede control to the workers.

The ambulance crews are right to maintain emergency cover. They don't want emergencies to be left without an ambulance service — that would hit accident victims, not the government — and they don't want army and police scabs doing the jobs that only the trained ambulance crews can do properly.

What the ambulance workers have done is to say that they will provide emergency services for the public, but not cooperation for their bosses. Their stand has exposed the viciousness of the bosses and the Tories, and won wide support. It's our job now to provide the active support which

Ambulance workers save lives while Tories risk them

can help the ambulance workers win.

A London ambulance worker describes how the action is working.

The only way they can say there is no cover from our side is by saying that the crews aren't on the station.

But they are — all the crews are sitting on the stations waiting for the calls. Members of the public, the police, and the fire service are ringing straight through. They've said to us they've dialled 999 and been told they don't know how long the ambulance is going to be, so they've rung our number direct.

The controllers have put one or two calls through, but they were put through on the quiet.

The controllers knew the type of call it was — suspended breathing, or with

children involved — and they knew it would take too long to get an army motor there, so they came straight through to us, and gave us the job.

The emergency cover has always been there.

There are four crews on this station every late turn; there's four on now — that's eight people — all ready to man the motors. In fact, tonight there's five crews on here — five ambulances that could be used. If they tell you over the phone that they can't get one to you then, in my words, they are delaying an ambulance getting to the public, because they've got them on the stations all over London.

There is a full accident crew — but our management won't use it.

Crews here have dealt with certain jobs that the police rang in direct because they couldn't get an ambulance. There was a suspended breathing and heartstop case, for example. That guy was resuscitated, and, as far as I know, he's in the intensive care unit now and

doing all right.

The general public is supporting us with donations and goodwill. If the crews sitting at the stations are called up by members of the public then, no matter what the circumstances, we'll go out and help.

We've got to.

They've shown us so much support and respect we can't do anything else but go out and help them.

What we all want is for the negotiators to get round a table and sort this thing out one way or another.

But management's last proposal was worse than the offer that had been made before. They keep quoting this 11½% for London, originally 9½% for London, but what they haven't said is that that's our London weighting being moved across into our basic pay.

All they're doing is moving it across and saying we're being offered 11½%. And now they're talking about offering it over 18 months. It's a con job.

More on page 11

As we go to press, Czechoslovakia's Stalinist party seems set to follow Poland's, Hungary's and East Germany's in losing its monopoly of power or having it severely knocked out of shape.

Miners are reported to be on strike. Theatre workers and students are certainly on strike. Hundred of thousands march in Prague every day, demanding free elections, the resignation of the Party leader Milos Jakes, and the release of political prisoners.

The Stalinists' puppet parties have started to rediscover some independence. Prime Minister Ladislav Adamec has promised an official inquiry into the police assault on last Friday's demonstration (17 November) and "dialogue" with the Charter 77 opposition.

In East Germany, mass demonstrations continue. Every day the regime makes more concessions and promises: sacking the old leaders; opening the Berlin Wall; promising a coalition government; promising free elections; legalising the opposition. Yet the mass movement remains combative, unwilling to be demobilised until it has won democracy.

The capitalist media claim that this is the collapse of socialism. They lie. The East European systems were never socialist. They were systems whose bureaucratic ruling classes exploited the workers to gain privileges for themselves and to build up the industry which the bureaucrats' state owned and controlled.

Now, when the terrible political tension to which these societies have so long been sub-

Turn to page 3

2 INTERNATIONAL

A trade union in the 'Red Army'

By Sam Jones

An independent trade union has been formed in the USSR's so-called Red Army, demanding an end to conscription and the abolition of political commissars.

Formed mainly by middle-ranking officers and reservists, the union held its inaugural meeting of 300 in a Moscow hall. The hall was rented by an MP representing the radical Moscow Popular Front.

Named Shield, the union also called for a reduction in the size of the armed forces and opposed the increasing use of force in ethnic unrest in the USSR.

Telman Gdlyn, a Moscow MP, according to the *Guardian* (October 23), told the meeting, to long applause: "However hard it is, and from wherever the order comes, do not shoot at your own people."

Discontent in the armed forces is very widespread, with other complaints including social conditions, such as low pay and bad housing.

Shield says it wants dialogue, not conflict. But its formation is extremely significant. It is being tolerated for now, it seems, but the union is sensible enough to be keeping the names of many of its members 'confidential'. If it grows, it could give the military hierarchy a lot of headaches.

There has been speculation inside and outside the USSR that one of the hard liners' options against Gorbachev would be a military coup; Shield's formation, indeed, is in part in response to this. Organised discontent in the army will certainly make any such attempts much harder.

The Red Army was originally organised by Trotsky to defend the



troops marching out of Afghanistan

new workers' state in the civil war that followed the 1917 revolution. As a result of the war with counter-revolutionary 'whites', the USSR was reduced to near economic ruin, and it was isolated by the defeat of revolutions elsewhere in Europe. A bureaucracy began to develop, fronted by Stalin, in the Red Army no less than elsewhere.

For a while, some people thought that Trotsky, the main opponent of Stalin, might use the Red Army, of which he was leader, to take power. But he did not, believing that to do so would condemn him to the logic of bureaucratic-military rule.

But Trotsky was ousted from the leadership of the Red Army, which soon changed its character. Originally extremely democratic, with rank and file control, already by the end of the civil war the Red Army was being organised along more traditional military lines.

As the bureaucracy consolidated its rule over society, the Red Army was purged of revolutionaries. In fact, so excessive was the purge that by the time war broke out between the USSR and Hitler, the Red Army

lacked competent officers.

After the Second World War, the Red Army was the agency through which Stalin extended his control over Eastern Europe. The various 'people's republics', except Yugoslavia, depended for their survival on 'Red Army' back up.

In Hungary in 1956 and in Czechoslovakia in 1968, the Red Army was used to intervene and bloodily suppress popular uprisings.

The more recent war in Afghanistan has done much to alienate conscripted Soviet youth, and underlies the mood of opposition to military involvement in 'troublespot' republics, like Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Socialists in the USSR would seek to replace the 'Red' Army with a popular militia on the model of the original Red Army after 1917. A thoroughgoing revolution in the USSR will certainly mean the creation of such a force.

Discontent, and especially the formation of unions, political discussion, and public protest, will make a big contribution to bringing that revolution about.

Can the Workers' Party win in Brazil?

By Clive Bradley

The Brazilian presidential elections look set to produce a fight-out between Workers' Party (PT) candidate Luis Inacio 'Lula' da Silva and right-wing populist Fernando Collor de Mello.

All socialists must want Lula to win, but victory would pose huge problems for the PT.

The PT has fought this election as the dominant partner in a 'front' that includes the PC do B, a pro-Albanian party that split many years ago from the mainstream Communists, and a small social-democratic party. No doubt they would have preferred a wider unity, incorporating the PCB (ie, the pro-Moscow party, until recently very discredited for its right-wing policies, now making a bit of a comeback), and the Democratic Labour Party of Leonel Brizola.

According to left-wing critics in the PT, the Lula leadership has been making winning the election more and more of a priority as it has seemed more and more possible to do so. Lula has been trying to make himself appear a credible 'presidential' candidate — that is, woo the 'middle ground', and reassure sections of the Brazilian ruling class.

The decision of the PT council led by Luiza Erundino in Sao Paulo to raise transport prices, rather than fight central government, has been linked by its critics to this 'presiden-

'So the objective is to win the "executive branch", and use it as much as possible to stimulate struggles from below which would move in a socialist direction'

tial' image-building. The PT leaders are trying to lose their rough edges and their socialist reputation.

Certainly, Lula has retreated a long way from the revolutionary tones of six or seven years ago. If he wins — which is still unlikely — he will follow the sad course of so many others who were not prepared to take on capitalism.

But the 'social democratisation' of the PT — its transformation into something like the British Labour Party, placid, afraid of radicalism, and subservient to big business, is a very, very long way off.

The Sixth National Meeting of the PT earlier this year brought together 600 delegates each representing 1000 members. Of this total of some half a million, it is estimated that 60,000 PT members are active. So the National Meeting was a representative body.

One of the documents it adopted was 'Guidelines for the elaboration of a programme for government', in which it spelled out the theory behind the project of a people's democratic government, headed by Lula.

This states plainly that "The full People's Democratic Programme can only be carried out with a socialist revolution". Yet that sentence looks like something added on as an afterthought.

And it is, on the whole, a confused document, combining several approaches rather incoherently. Nevertheless, it is adopted PT policy, and it contains vital commitments.

The strategy outlined by the document is to use the position of presidency to "contest for hegemony (domination) in society", primarily by building mass mobilisations and social strug-

gles from below.

Its authors recognise that the PT's strength has been in rank and file mobilisations, particularly within the ten million strong trade union federation, the CUT. Through these workers' struggles, they have defeated various attempts by the ruling class to impose its answer to the country's terrible problems of debt and inflation.

The document acknowledges that in any serious attempt to implement a programme of social reform — to reduce inequality, reform the system on the land, improve social and political rights for the masses — the PT would meet with resistance from the ruling class.

It states: "our main adversaries are the international creditors, the latifundists, the bankers, the big oligopolies, besides the private groups associated with the civilian and military bureaucracy that control the Brazilian state."

It adds: "Neither the constitutional limitations...nor the non-constitutional... (military tutelage, the political hegemony of the bourgeoisie, the monopoly control of the media) can determine our party programme and our historic objective of building a socialist society."

It notes the experience of the Allende government in Chile, where half-heartedness in confronting the ruling class led, in 1973, to tragic consequences.

But, the document's authors insist, "(it is not) possible to propose a socialist programme which would not be understood and would isolate us."

So the objective is to win the "executive branch" ("realising that the government and power are not the same thing"), and use it as much as possible to stimulate struggles from below which would move in a socialist direction. "The PT does not believe in a stage of 'people's capitalism'."

Elements in this document suggest a 'transitional' approach: the formulation of demands and strategies which point increasingly decisively at the centres of capitalist power, according not to a preconceived schema, but to the logic of the struggle itself.

But the document also suggests a wishfully-thinking Trotskyist amendment writer.

It nods at the problem of military power, but does not confront it. A radical government would face enormous opposition, up to and including Chile-style military intervention (ie. slaughter). The PT would need to rely on the armed self-defence of the workers and the slum-dwellers to resist.

The document speaks of confronting "sectors of the ruling class". But elsewhere in Latin America, this formulation has entailed a search for other sectors of the ruling class with whom to unite. Unfortunately they did not exist.

And despite the rejection of "people's capitalism" and despite the "transitional" flavour, there is an ambiguity in the relationship between the 'People's Democratic Government', the Lula presidency, and socialist revolution. The different elements in the strategy sit together uncomfortably.

In many respects, this is a positive document. It stresses the necessary connection between socialism and democracy (strongly implying criticism of "actually existing socialism"), and by no means ignores the difficulties that would confront a PT government.

But the fact remains that the PT is still a diffuse political movement, and that the general drift of its leadership is to the right. What the PT wants of the presidency, and what Lula wants, might well turn out to be very different.

Whoever wins the second round, big events are in store for South America's biggest country.

US multinational strides into Eastern Europe

WORLD BRIEFS

Last week Western capital made its biggest move yet into Eastern Europe.

The US company General Electric is investing \$150 million to buy a majority stake in the Hungarian lighting equipment manufacturer Tungram. Western capital has already made numerous sallies into Eastern Europe, but this one is different.

Previous deals have mostly been joint ventures. Western companies provide sales networks for Eastern companies which remain basically state-controlled. Such joint ventures are numerous in Yugoslavia and Hungary. Poland has numbers of private small businesses owned by expatriate Poles.

Other involvement by Western capital includes Rupert Murdoch's ownership of the biggest-circulation newspaper in Hungary.

But Tungram is bigger business. It is one of Hungary's biggest enterprises, employing 18,000 workers in 12 factories. And General Electric, so the *Financial Times* reports, "is acquiring Tungram with the aim of eventually integrating its management within its global empire". That means taking it out of the "empire" of the Hungarian state bureaucracy.

Tungram was in fact never fully integrated into Hungary's central planning. It has long traded heavily with the West, and until recently it owned a factory in Ireland. Before GE's takeover it was 49.6% owned by a consortium of western banks, which, however, did not propose to take managerial control in the way that GE will.

The US company is attracted by

Hungary's combination of cheap labour and little trade union organisation with easy access to West European markets.

No choice in India

It looks as if Rajiv Gandhi's Congress Party will lose its majority in India's general election this week.

Congress, which was once a powerful movement leading India's struggle for independence, has gradually decayed into a corrupt political machine, run by a bunch of cronies. In 1977-79, after it had imposed a state of emergency, it lost power for the first time since India's independence. Now it could lose again.

The opposition coalition, the Na-

tional Front, has nothing to offer except denunciations of Rajiv. Its policies, on paper, are almost identical with those of the Congress Party — indeed, its core is made up of breakaway Congress groups.

Indian big business, traditionally pro-Congress, seems not to care much who wins. Both groups will provide corrupt and inefficient government — so the bosses seem to reckon — but both will cooperate.

For the workers and the peasants, too, there is little to choose between the rivals. The opposition's populist denunciations of Rajiv have a nasty shadow of Hindu chauvinism following them: the big right-wing Hindu chauvinist party, the BJP, is backing the National Front. But so little is Congress a barrier to that chauvinism that Muslim voters are reported to be deserting it in droves.

India's two Communist Parties, the nearest thing it has to working class parties, are offering no independent alternative, but instead backing the National Front.

Left offensive in El Salvador

The 'rebel offensive' in El Salvador, according to one of its leaders, aimed to force out the present right-wing government and get a more 'moderate' one with whom to negotiate.

In fact, the immediate effect has been to strengthen the right.

But the El Salvadoran ruling class and its American backers have been shocked out of complacency.

Fighting on the outskirts of the capital San Salvador is the heaviest it has been for 10 years. A state of emergency has been imposed.

Especially since the murder of six

priests by a right-wing death squad, the civil war has been ferocious. Thousands have fled their homes.

Socialists must give full support to the FMLN guerrillas, who have been fighting a series of blood-stained governments backed (financially and militarily) by the United States.

The US has pumped \$3.8 billion into El Salvador, \$980 million of it military aid. It is US-supplied planes that are bombing San Salvador's neighbourhoods.

The 'rebels' clearly have support both in the countryside and the towns. Were it not for US support, the government would already have fallen.

Westminster and Prague

EDITORIAL

This week Parliament is being televised. In a timid and limited way modern technology is being used to bring the doings of Parliament into every home with a TV set.

For the first time the people will be able to see a little of what goes on behind the venerable facade of the Palace of Westminster.

The Establishment is taking a big risk, and they know it. There is still a very large body of Westminster opinion strongly opposed to televising Parliament.

If it goes well for them, then the credibility of Parliament will receive a much-needed boost. But if it goes wrong, then Parliament will be discredited, perhaps not instantly, but over time, in an accelerated erosion of its credibility.

Socialists can only welcome this opening up of Parliament. Every advance, however marginal and small, in democracy will ultimately prove to be to the advantage of socialists.

Right now the general idea of parliamentary democracy is being buoyed up by the tangible belief of tens of millions in Eastern Europe, in the USSR, and in China, that a system of government like Westminster's is better than any other available. And for sure Westminster is better than any of the alternatives offered by Stalinist and other police states.

Yet how much credibility does the British Parliament really deserve as a democratic institution truly controlling the governance of the country? How much, or how little, do we in Britain really have

democracy as defined, for example, by Abraham Lincoln — 'government of the people by the people for the people'?

This is what a Westminster insider has to say about it.

"Parliament exercises little control over ministers in any field. Their accountability is a thin and painless phenomenon. Ministers and backbenchers have an identical interest in denying that this is so. But they enter a conspiracy of deception."

Parliament may sometimes be a nuisance, but to a government with a strong majority it is never a threat. The recent occasions when it has stopped a measure or embarrassed a minister are so rare as to be the stuff of wondrous self-congratulation.

Nor is there any refined or reliable thread running between Parliament and the people's wishes. Mandate and manifesto are important words in the vocabulary of illusion.

Current examples abound. The poll tax has become law without a debate of any kind during the last election. Child Benefit is being cut on the basis of a studiously constructed double entendre in the Tory manifesto.

Upheaval beckons in the National Health Service, but not a trace of it was anticipated in 1987. All these matters have the sketchiest of parliamentary legitimacy...

Party discipline, buttressed by ambition and venality of the mind, ensures that Parliament, far from making government accountable, is its faithful accomplice... Between the Conservative Party of Great Britain and the Communist Party of Poland, anyone seeking discipline these days could make only one choice."



Demonstrators in Prague

The writer, to complete the picture, could add that the Kinnockites in the Parliamentary Labour Party are doing their best to make the Labour Party as "Stalinist" in its discipline as the Tory Party.

Who have we been quoting? Eric Heffer? Tony Benn? Dennis Skinner? Some other leftist?

No, Hugo Young, writing in the *Guardian* on 21 November. Young is probably no further left than the SDP. He is merely an honest observer of Westminster and the realities of how Britain is really governed.

He is concerned, in the article we have been quoting, to pour justified scorn on Mrs Thatcher's claim that she is defending the sovereignty of Parliament against the encroachments of the European Community. That same idea — the defence of parliamentary democracy against the bureaucrats of Brussels — has been the stock in trade of the left-wing opponents of 'Europe' for decades.

The televising of Parliament just may bring the hollow realities of our parliamentary government to the attention of those labour movement activists who continue to believe in the hallowed myths of the British political system. It may spur them to resume the fight for a real accountable democracy — for government of the people, by the people, for the people — started 150 years ago by the Chartists with demands like annual parliaments.

Such democracy would mean, at least, getting rid of the House of Lords and the monarchy; parliamentary elections often enough (yearly) to impose some real control on MPs; electors' right to recall their MPs; proportional representation; freedom of inform-

ation; and election of top State officials. Consider the *economic* side of democracy, too, and it's clear that Westminster is a very shrivelled democracy indeed.

Westminster and similar parliaments are glove puppets controlled by the hidden hands of entrenched bureaucrats representing the interests of the rich. They have a great deal less to offer the risen people in the Stalinist states than those people imagine.

The British labour movement has much to learn from those now thronging the streets of Prague and Berlin and Warsaw. We have much more to learn than you would think from the commentaries of those — in the labour movement and outside it — who smugly interpret the movements for democracy in the Eastern Bloc as votes of confidence in our sclerotic democratic institutions.

The democracy those people strive for is not to be found in Westminster. What we can learn from the East Europeans, the peoples of the Russian Empire, and from the heroic workers and students of China who made their stand in June at Tiananmen Square is this: democracy is too important for us to be satisfied with the wizen-ed travesty presided over at Westminster by Mrs Thatcher.

The British labour movement should join the movement for democracy. We should fight for the renovation and development of British democracy, aiming to accomplish what the pioneers of the labour movement set out to achieve. And we should fight together with the workers in the European Community for a genuinely democratic European Parliament.

Socialism, yes! Stalinism, no!

From page 1

jected finally unwinds, the economic substructure emerging is not socialist but capitalist.

In Poland and Hungary the bureaucrats frankly avow their intention to restore the private-profit economy. In East Germany, the new prime minister, Hans Modrow, is a self-declared admirer of Japan as an economic model.

Many workers in Eastern Europe also look favourably on the market and private profit. For decades they have been told that the bureaucrats' systems were socialism. They see that workers in the West have higher living standards and more democratic rights. No wonder they favour a return to capitalism.

But there's more to the movement than that — and the Western bosses know it. That's why they have been nervously advising East German workers to stop their protests.

Not all the workers in Eastern Europe, by any means, are starry-eyed about the West. The main opposition groups in East Germany define their

aim as a "better socialism".

In Poland Lech Walesa says he doesn't want Solidarnosc's trade union organisation to be too strong now, because it would cause trouble for the reform of the economy. Many Solidarnosc trade unionists don't agree!

A minority, around the Polish Socialist Party (Democratic Revolution), argues explicitly for a democratically planned economy with workers' control as an alternative both to Stalinism and to capitalism. That minority is small as yet, but active, and sure to gain more support as Polish workers learn about the free market in their struggles to defend jobs and living standards against it.

If the present upheavals in Eastern Europe end with the restoration of capitalism across the board, that will be a terrible defeat for the possibilities of the movement.

Socialism is not what has existed in Eastern Europe for 45 years — it is what will emerge there if the workers are able to take advantage of the decay of the rotten bureaucratic order to seize control of the wealth of society for the majority.

Limits of plain talk

PRESS GANG

By Jim Denham

Right-wing journalists tend to like to portray themselves as plain-speaking, no-nonsense types. People like Woodrow Wyatt, Paul Johnson and Bruce Anderson aren't afraid to tell it like it is, even if that means treading on a few toes. Not for these bluff fellows the euphemisms and evasions of the liberals and lefties with their craven concern for so-called 'minority groups' like black people, gays and women.

However, plain speaking has its limits. When the *Independent* accused Mrs Thatcher of "lying to save her own skin" in the aftermath of the Lawson resignation, a shrill chorus of outrage erupted from stage right.

Paul Johnson (in the *Spectator*) explained that "if a senior minister goes into the Prime Minister's room at Number 10 to discuss his personal future, then there is bound to be tension on both sides and it is in precisely such an atmosphere that misunderstandings arise". Therefore, Johnson concludes, "words like 'lying' and expressions like 'saving her own skin' are crude inaccurate and childish. I hope we will have no more of this vulgarity from the *Independent*".

Over at the *Sunday Telegraph* new recruit Geoffrey Wheatcroft upbraided the *Independent* along similar lines. "Is the editor of the *Independent*, Mr Andreas Whittam-Smith's, experience of either public or private life really so limited that he has never known anything to compare with this sorry episode? He should try asking those concerned in a failed marriage or love affair to see just how differently two people — in good faith and by their own lights honestly — can recollect the same events".

Ah! Isn't that rather touching? and doesn't it help explain everything with a nice down-to-earth analogy that simple folk like you and me can relate to.

So, having established that calling Mrs Thatcher a liar is crude, vulgar and a sure sign of never having been in love, the question remains why did Whittam-Smith tell it? Once more the *Sunday Telegraph* comes into its own. Peregrine Worsthorpe explains everything: "German re-unification brings the threat of a federal Europe ever-closer. The same sinister forces that encouraged 'coloured immigration' are now 'trying to take steps' again without consulting the British people — leading inevitably to Britain becoming a part of a federal Europe. Only one person stands in the way of this rush into federalism — the Prime Minister".

So now all is revealed: the *Independent* is fronting a huge conspiracy to undermine Mrs Thatcher and establish German hegemony in a federal Europe. The German influence, of course, explains the crudeness and vulgarity of Mr Whittam-Smith's language... or should it be Herr Whittam-Schmidt?

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Petty gangsters

Last Saturday's central London demonstration by ambulance crews and their supporters was a splendid and inspiring event.

But squalid and depressing are the only words which describe what the supporters of Militant did on this demonstration.

Sellers of *Militant* went around at the beginning of the demo, on the march and at the rally in Trafalgar Square, carrying their usual collection tins — but with the 'Militant' logo completely obliterated by ambulance-worker stickers so that they seemed to be collecting for the ambulance workers!

Every one of the numerous collecting tins had had the Militant logo on the collecting tin completely covered over, and it had been done systematically and completely. If you 'knew', you could see that something had been covered over; if you didn't know you'd assume you were being asked to give money to

the ambulance workers.

Thus, Militant greets the inspiring revival of industrial militancy with the same sort of sharp practices and petty gangsterism for which they became notorious during the great miners' strike of 1984-85.

When everyone else on the left was collecting money for the miners, Militant collected money to turn *Militant* into a daily. Militant never became a daily, but many people must have given money to Militant thinking it was for the miners.

The ambulance workers on this demo are not blind, and some of them will have noticed what Militant was doing. Some of them will have drawn nasty and unwarranted conclusions about the entire left. Some of them will, maybe, decide that we are what the press says we are — weaseling, conniving interlopers trying to use and exploit working people for our own alien ends.

Militant should stop such practices now. If they won't stop it, then the rest of the left should take action to make them.

NEW PROBLEMS NEW STRUGGLES



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

A new pamphlet from Socialist Organiser looks at the issues of new technology, business unionism, the changing composition of the working class, and 1992, draws lessons from the history of the movement, and proposes socialist answers. £1 plus 22p post from P O Box 823, London SE15 4NA.



Ms Wendy Henry

Unfair to Wendy?

GRAFFITI

Al Capone, the Chicago gangster of the 1920s, murdered many times over. But 'they' didn't 'get' him for murder. They got him for tax evasion, for which he was finally jailed and put out of circulation in 1931.

From the monstrous to the merely grotesque, we have the case of Wendy Henry.

Former editor of the *News of the World* and editor of the *People* for the last year, Henry has just been sacked by Robert Maxwell from the *People* for...printing pictures of Prince Charles' six year old son peeing in the park!

When Henry was caught out publishing a faked interview with a Falklands war veteran in the *Sun* her punishment was a short period of suspension. It didn't damage her career. It didn't stop her going on to edit the *NOW* and the *People*.

Journalistic ethics? Ms Henry's career tells us exactly what the ethics of the tabloid press are.

Now she gets Maxwell's Order of the Boot for a petty piece of nastiness against the Royal Family. It's almost unfair!

Lambeth Council is still investigating the business activities of surcharged former leader Ted Knight.

According to the *Observer* (22 October) a secret report, now with Lambeth's current leader, Joan Twelves, alleges 'indications' that Knight retained links with a construction firm while it was getting tenders worth over £450,000 from the council.

Knight resigned as secretary of Intercity Building Contractors Ltd before becoming a Lambeth councillor. But through business colleagues, and apparently addresses shared with other companies of which he had been a director, he is alleged to have maintained a relationship with the firm.

At the height of its business relationship with the council, Intercity was receiving £95,000 a year. The report claims, says the *Observer*, that at no time did Knight declare a pecuniary interest in the company.

Knight says that he did declare that he had been involved in Intercity, but had resigned, and that the

issue is being used by his political opponents. He will be eligible again for office after 1991.

Knight was leader of Lambeth council throughout the period of left-Labour local government radicalism. In 1979, Lambeth was the first of the 'new left' councils to organise opposition to the Tories. It was also the first to set the pattern of retreat and capitulation.

In summer 1979 Lambeth council, under Knight's leadership, first responded to the new Tory government by proposing cuts. A revolt by the local Labour Parties forced the council to rescind the cuts and start mobilising. In November it called a 10,000-strong demonstration.

At budget-making in spring 1980, Knight balanced the books with a 49% rate rise. It would "buy time" to build the fight against cuts, he said. But by April 1981 a backlash against rate rises was spreading on Lambeth council estates, and under that pressure Knight went for 10% cuts.

He had been a leading exponent of the "rate rise" strategy. In 1978-9 he, together with Ken Livingstone and others, was involved with *Socialist Organiser*; they split on this question, some of them launching *Labour Briefing*.

In the battle over rate-capping in 1984-5, Lambeth was the last of the Labour councils to hold out, sticking throughout to the policy of not setting a rate and therefore making an "illegal budget". In the end, the courts found Knight and others guilty of law-breaking anyway, and they were surcharged and banned from office.

Lambeth was the last to capitulate, but the whole strategy, pioneered in practice by Liverpool, created the conditions for last-minute collapse.

Throughout this period, Knight retained friendly relations with the now scatter-bombed Workers' Revolutionary Party of Gerry Healy. For example, in 1982 he helped the WRP pack the founding conference of the Labour Committee on Palestine, which thereafter did nothing and collapsed.

Knight was closely involved with the now defunct *Labour Herald* whose editor, Stephen Miller, had for a long time been a WRP member. It was printed on the WRP press.

The WRP later blew apart in a cloud of revelations about Healy's sexual abuse of young members, and it was revealed that, among other miserable activities, it had been receiving money from Gaddafi's Libya. The WRP had tried to sue SO for libel in the early '80s when we criticised them; they particularly objected to the epithet 'Moonies'.

The occasion of this criticism was the WRP's defense of Knight's rate-rise policy at a conference in 1981.

Reorganising child care

LETTERS

I agree with Liz Millward (SO 420) that kids often get a rough deal, but she has fallen into the trap of blaming the parents. Sure, it's hard on kids to be dragged around supermarkets, but Liz is assuming that the parents want the kiddies there. I'm very sure they don't.

Most parents aren't mad or masochistic. They could finish their shopping in record time were it not for the constant watching out for tiny hands grabbing at items on the shelf, kids crying and wailing, kids dropping and spilling things. People take their kids out shopping with them because they have nowhere else to leave them. That's the problem.

Adults, (usually mothers) and kids are chained together by necessity. Because what Mum does has to be done (shopping etc) the child is dragged along willy nilly. But it's a tragedy for both — not just for the kid.

The effort involved in nipping across the road for a bottle of milk is doubled and quadrupled when a child has to come too. Everything become a major expedition. Watch a mother getting on to a bus — complete with child, shopping, buggy, and all the paraphernalia kids need (nappies etc.) The effort is enormous and exhausting.

Women don't do these things because they enjoy them, but because they have no choice.

It's hard on kids. Definitely. I agree too that divorce can and does harm many, but legislating for dads and mums to spend time with kids is no answer. Who'll enforce such a law? And what benefit is it to the kids if it has to be enforced?

The needs of children often do get swamped by the needs of adults. But is the opposite better? Devoted, possessive parents who try to live out their own thwarted dreams and desires through their kids often do more damage than the more casual parents who try to get on with their own lives.

Child rearing is currently privatis-



"Chained together by necessity". (Photo Andrew Moore)

ed. Unlike production, which is social, reproduction is private, the responsibility of each individual family. It shouldn't be. For kids, it's the luck of the draw. Some end up abused and brutalised, some end up neglected, some do alright, while others have no parents at all. To even things up, child rearing should be a communal responsibility. Kids should have a range of adults and children to know and love.

In a better world, children could spend time with a variety of people, as well as their parents. The parents could follow their own interests, secure in the knowledge that their children were being well looked after, and developing their minds and talents in a stimulating environ-

ment. Most evidence shows that kids do better if they have a variety of people to relate to, not just one mum and one dad, or maybe just one tired, overworked mum.

But our society isn't structured that way. Child care is inadequate and expensive. It's seen as a luxury, not a right or a necessity.

The needs of children and the needs of adults are both important. The answer is not to sacrifice the needs of one set to satisfy the other, or to heap guilt on mothers who are trying to do the best they can in difficult circumstances, but to change the world so that both adults and children can live the lives they want.

Belinda Weaver
Islington

Women are not to blame!

I can quite understand the point of an article which tries to be controversial and provoke discussion, but Liz Millward's 'Children and divorce' (*Women's Eye*, SO 420) is at best wide of the mark, and at worst utterly reactionary.

It is true that we live in an anti-child society, but my own experience of being a mother does not fit the reality which Liz describes.

When most people see a mother lashing out at her wailing child in a supermarket, they do not sympathise with her as the article claims; in fact they utterly condemn her, either publicly, or just under their breath.

And when people see women struggling on the bus with buggy and shopping, they do not leap to her aid. Bitter experience has shown that more often than not people ignore her plight, bus drivers don't wait, other passengers get cross...

But the most disturbing part of the article was its implications for women in relationships they don't really want to stay in.

It is not true that divorce necessarily leads to children having "an inability to form happy and long-standing relationships" in

later life. Divorce certainly can be emotionally disturbing for the children involved, but so can incest, domestic violence, poverty, etc.

To conclude that women ought to make more of an effort to make their relationships last is to put the burden of guilt squarely on the shoulders of the mother. Women do not take a decision to leave the father of their children lightly — they do not overlook their children to suit themselves. Tragically the reality is more like women suffering in unfulfilling relationships for the sake of the children.

An unhappy parent is not as good a parent as a happy one.

Little children are indeed innocent, but moralising to women does nothing to help kids at all. I honestly cannot imagine anything worse than separated parents having by law to spend time with their children, when they really want nothing to do with them. Apart from the obvious implications of allowing the state to intervene in this way, forcing parents to be with their children would not make for a positive relationship.

The article starts from a viewpoint which sees the nuclear family as the norm and anything else as second best.

I do not think that my son suffers

because I no longer have a personal relationship with his father. I thought it was the Tories who always went on about children from so-called "broken homes".

And talking of the Tories, let's put the blame for all this where it really lies — on poverty, homelessness, low pay, long working hours, lack of communal childcare facilities, the capitalist system itself which puts profits before people and oppresses women particularly.

The answer to the problems of children and divorce is not, as Liz suggests, for individual women to put up with things as they are or to make changes to their lives on their own.

The socialist answer is for women to collectively fight back, to make the labour and trade union movement take up their demands for a shorter working week, for flexible working hours, for adequate childcare facilities, etc.

And socialists should certainly not fall into the trap of thinking that a child should be with its father an mother in perfect harmony. That harmony is mostly a lot less than perfect in the big bad world out there.

Julia Coulton
Manchester

How to fight the poll tax

By Jim Kearns and Cate Murphy

On Saturday 18 November 6,000 people marched in Glasgow protesting against the proposed use of warrant sales to collect the poll tax.

Considering the fact that over 30% of people in Glasgow — and one million people in the whole of Scotland — have so far yet to pay a penny of the poll tax, the turnout for the demonstration was, to say the least, disappointing.

As the poll tax in Scotland approaches its ninth month in operation it is time to draw some of the lessons of the anti poll-tax struggle so far, and of the various campaigns.

It was the STUC campaign which was responsible for last Saturday's demo — which was an event typical of their campaign. There was little publicity, no campaign of mobilisation, and lacklustre organisation. Since the inception of the STUC campaign it has been a shadow of a real campaign, tightly controlled by the STUC appointees and forever wary of embarrassing the leadership of the Scottish Labour Party — at Regional Council, Scottish Executive or any other level.

It has been associated with 'Committees of 100', groups of 100 people organised throughout Scotland — churchmen, trade union officials, professionals — who can afford to pay the poll tax, but who refuse to pay.

Besides being a very elitist idea, it was an attempt by the bureaucrats to get themselves seen to be doing something positive, whilst at the same time undermining and excluding any real campaign for mass non-payment and for labour movement action against the poll tax.

Or take the campaign of the Scottish Anti-Poll Tax Federation. The basic strength of the SAPT lies in the hundreds of anti-poll tax unions organised throughout the whole of Scotland who are affiliated to it. The Federation represents the genuine anti-poll tax campaign in Scotland and has been actively excluded by the STUC from doing any joint work with the campaign of the Committees of 100.

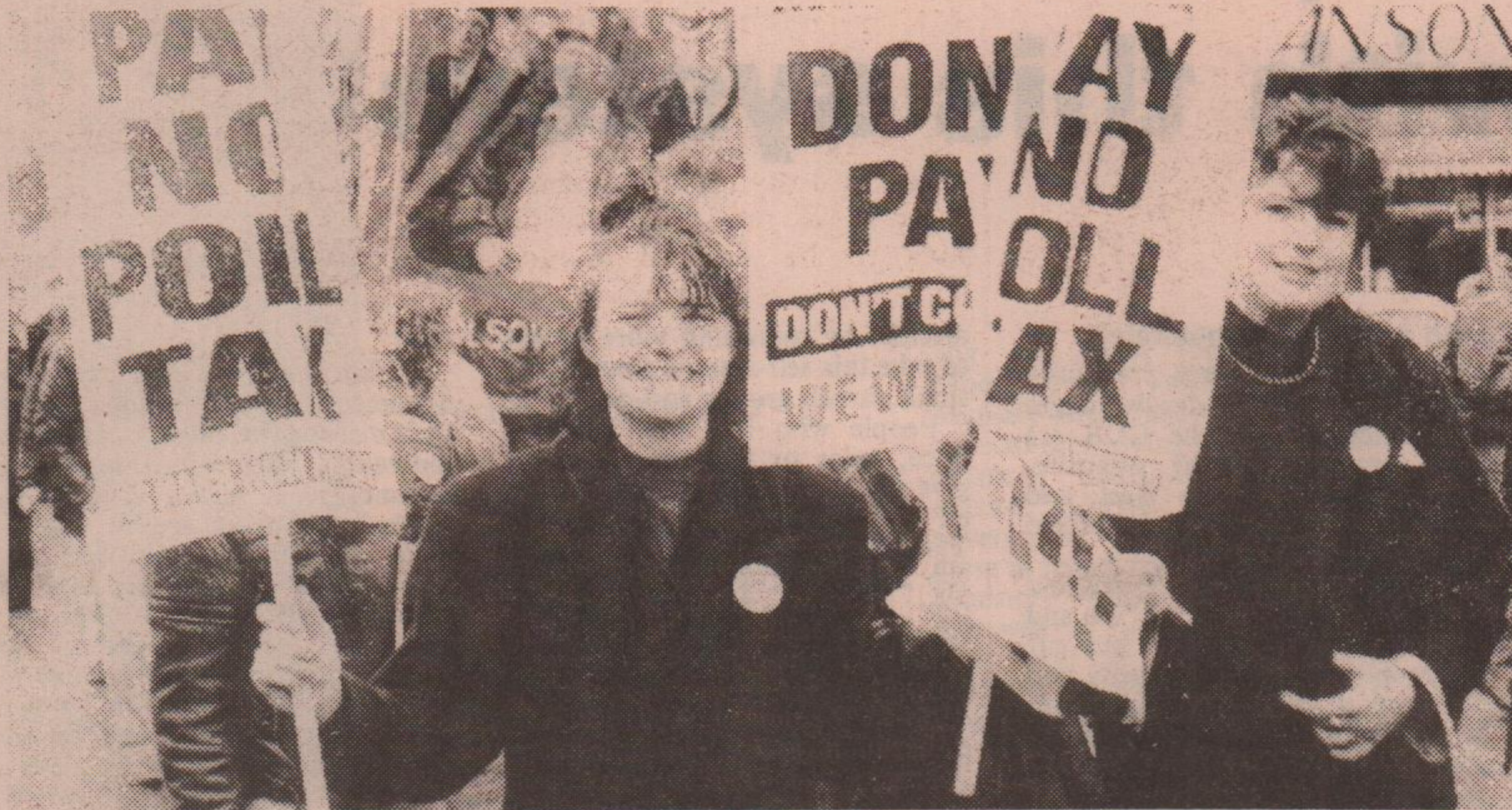
The Federation's basic slogan is 'Don't Pay, Don't Collect', an excellent slogan, though the emphasis has been placed on the 'Don't Pay', heavily overshadowing 'Don't Collect'.

The central force in the Federation is taken by supporters of Militant. It must be said, in all fairness, that these comrades have done an enormous amount of good work both within the Federation and in the mass non-payment campaign.

However, Militant is always Militant, and they are making serious, and characteristic mistakes in the campaign so far, and these mistakes must not be repeated by the newly-formed campaign in England and Wales.

They have over-emphasised propaganda for mass non-payment. Although mass non-payment is absolutely central, it cannot be seen as a be-all-and-end-all for the campaign against the poll tax. The fight within the labour movement is no less important: for example the campaign within unions such as NALGO, CPSA, etc, for industrial action against the poll tax; for the fight within local Labour Parties to commit Labour councils not to implement the poll tax and not to penalise those who refuse to register or pay.

It is very odd, considering Militant's history of decades of immersion in the structures of the official labour movement, but it is nevertheless true that Militant is displaying something like an ultra-left attitude to the official labour



movement in the poll tax campaign.

One inevitable consequence of this ultra-leftism is that it reduces the seemingly 'left' and 'revolutionary' focus on 'Don't Pay, Direct Action' to empty phrasemongering, good, maybe, for recruiting people out of the campaign to the Militant's organisation, but having little consequence in terms of promoting a real movement which refuses to pay, and can go on to beat the Tories.

Such a movement demands the mobilisation of the official labour movement at all levels. Without that, even a powerful estates-based non-payment movement can be contained, worn down, and will finally be dissipated.

Militant's one-sidedness, the 'revolutionary' concentration on 'Direct Action now' is, therefore, not quite what it seems. In real life it translates into the irresponsible politics of phrasemongering combined with Militant sect-building, at the expense of developing a movement which can win. Militant is always...Militant!

Thus too we reach the explanation of another paradox: that Militant should now be presenting itself as ultra-revolutionary, as almost a brand of syndicalists, with their focus on tenants' direct action and one-sided neglect of the official structures of the labour movement, when for decades past Militant has been marked above all by an ultra-

staid and cautious approach to every question, and by its obsession with the structures of the official movement.

The explanation is to be found in the fact that Militant feels that it can safely indulge in 'revolutionary' and 'extreme' posturing, because they will never be called upon to live up to it, so long as the labour movement is not involved enough to make it a serious challenge to the Tories.

Should the labour movement mount a serious challenge to the poll tax, Militant would most likely revert to the role of cautious and timid right-wing commentator, the role it stubbornly played through all the years of mass working class struggle in the '60s and '70s — to the role it played during the miners' strike in '84-'85, when it let the Liverpool Council, which it led, be bought off by the Tories instead of leading the labour movement in Liverpool into confrontation there and then in combination with the striking miners. Militant let the miners fight on in isolation, and next year the Tories came and settled their account with Militant in Liverpool.

Militant is not concerned primarily with an effective fight against the poll tax, but with adopting the best safe posture on which to maximise the recruits to and the income of Militant.

One immediately disruptive con-

sequence of Militant's central concern with itself above all else is a manic sectarian desire to control every campaign they're part of.

The anti-poll tax campaign should be as democratic and open as possible. For Militant to completely control any organisation if profoundly unhealthy. It would be profoundly unhealthy even if Militant itself were an open non-sectarian healthy Marxist organisation, instead of the ingrown, narrow-minded sect it in fact is.

For instance, the LPYS, which Militant controlled for 20 years, or CPSA Broad Left, which Militant controls now, are not organisations renowned for their lively campaigning orientation.

Yet, whatever the faults of the campaigns in Scotland it can still in many ways act as an inspiration to those building the anti-poll tax campaign in the rest of Britain.

Tens of thousands of people are actively involved in anti-poll tax unions throughout the length and breadth of Scotland. At present the regional council are planning their next step and it is certain that warrant sales, the forces sales of people's belongings, will be the central weapon for the recovery of unpaid poll tax.

In many ways the fight in Scotland against the poll tax is just beginning and with the campaign in England and Wales it is still a fight that can be won.

Capitalism's human face

WOMEN'S EYE

By Liz Millward

The UN has just passed a comprehensive resolution on the rights of children. The procedure now is that member countries sign and ratify the document, and by so doing, promise to implement it.

As part of the propaganda surrounding the UN proposals, TV programmes have highlighted children's lack of rights in various countries around the world. One programme I saw focused, with chilling footage and stories, on undernourishment in Peru, homelessness in London and racism in Italy. The programmes seemed to promise that these problems would now be tackled.

I'm not convinced! Idealistic schoolchildren (for whom, I suspect, programmes like the one I saw are made) may be con-

vinced by the UN resolution, and the public relations hype now surrounding it, that the UN is a "good thing". But most thinking adults surely will not believe that anything much will really be done.

Why? Because the real cause of the lack of children's rights is — poverty. For the UN's fine words to have any effect the UN would have to get rid of poverty.

Poverty is the cause of the Peruvian families' diet of "bread and herb tea", which produces in their children a monthly bout of flu.

Poverty is the cause of Peru's endemic TB, and high infant mortality rate.

Poverty is the reason why so many young people sleep on London's streets each night.

Poverty engenders fear of having to share limited homes and work — one of the major causes of racism in countries where immigration from even poorer countries is common.

Poverty — and exploitation — is the cause of child labour.

Poverty is the reason millions of children don't go to school or get anything resembling what we think of as a childhood.

Listening to UN propaganda you would think that poverty is just something which happens to afflict half the world, and that "concerted international action" will solve it. But poverty is not inevitable or necessary.

TB, homelessness, infant mortality, lack of childhood, undernourishment, are all capable of being dealt with — right now.

Poverty is a crime against children. It is a crime beyond all comprehension not that poverty exists, but that the system under which we live depends upon it, encourages it and makes money out of it.

For every penny made by a child labourer, someone else takes another penny home and calls it "job creation" or "providing work", and gets government thanks for it.

People in Peru cannot eat meat because other people will not sell it to them at prices they can afford, or lose profits in order to pay a living wage.

Young people cannot find homes in London because they haven't enough money for private housing,

Vote Janine Booth!

By Mark Osborn

At the Christmas National Union of Students' (NUS) Conference, Janine Booth will be standing in the by-election for a part-time post on the NUS National Executive Committee.

The by-election has been caused by the resignation of Tim Clarke — an 'independent' (ie. right-winger) from Bristol.

Tim Clarke's resignation came after a number of public statements and incidents (in favour of a graduate tax, slugging off NUS) which caused a number of student activists to question whether or not he had been lying about his age and was, in fact, the first 12 year old to be on NUS Exec.

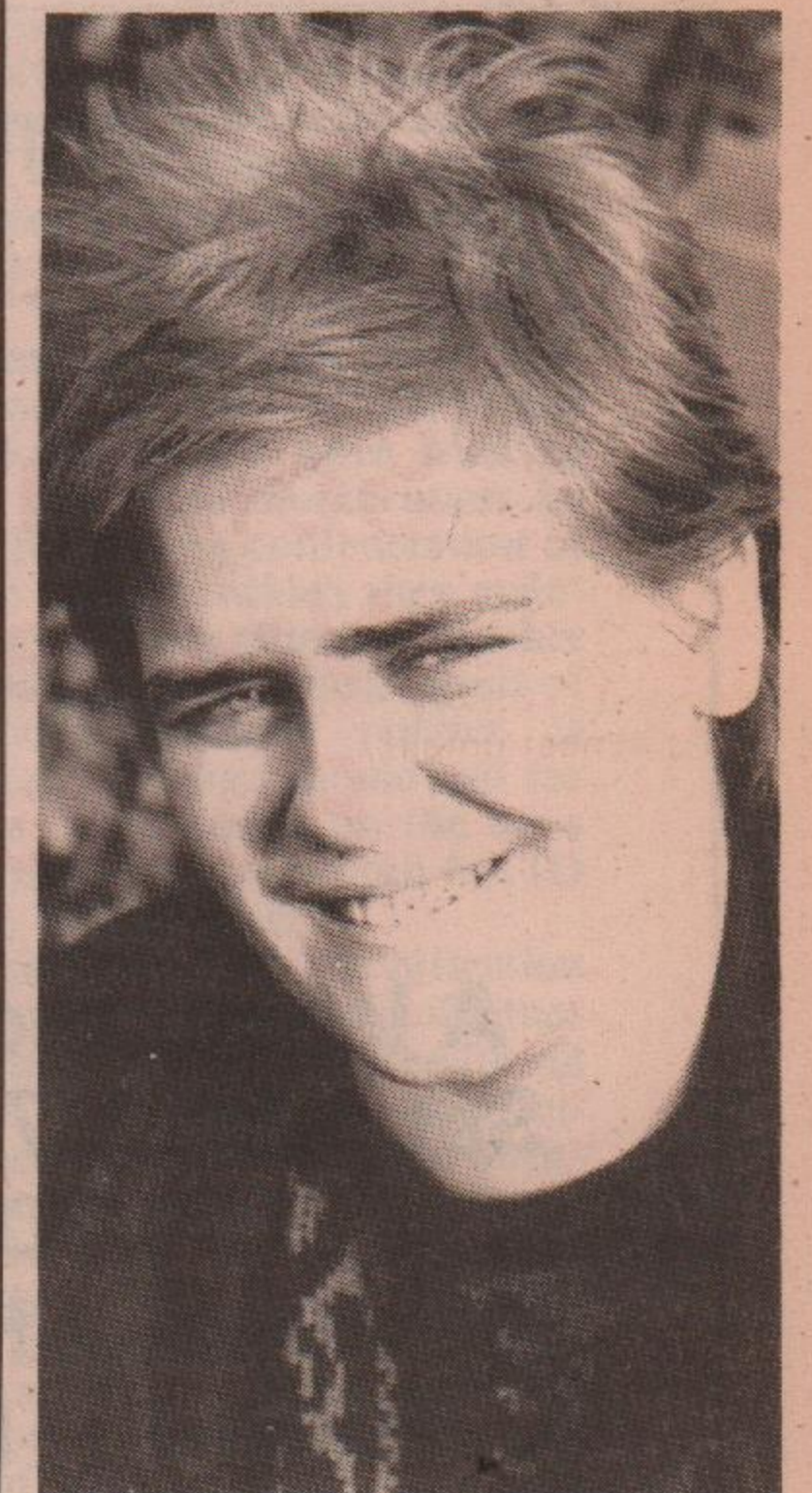
His resignation may make a number of student unionists, unhappy with the National Union, reconsider their policy of voting 'independent'.

Janine Booth, Convenor of Manchester Area NUS, makes no apologies for her affiliation to Left Unity. She believes that Left Unity has a strategy that can beat loans. Moreover, she showed what Left Unity activists could do in practice when she led a 10,000 strong anti-loans demonstration through the streets of Manchester in week two of term.

Janine is also a member of NUS Lesbian and Gay Committee. One hundred lesbian and gay activists signed a statement backing her campaign at last week's aggregate, a dozen NUS Area convenors have already said they will be supporting her.

Her campaign meetings will be happening in your area — soon!

For more details contact 56 Kevan House, Wyndham Road, London SE5.



Janine Booth

and the Tories have stopped public sector building to finance tax cuts to benefit the already rich.

The truth is that capitalism is a crime against the whole of humanity and UN declarations won't stop it for the very simple reason that the UN is an organisation set up to give capitalism a "human face".

However, the UN is right about one thing. "Concerted international action" is needed to stop poverty. The concerted international action of the working class will get rid of capitalism, and with it poverty and the other crimes against children.

'Since we want socialism, we must break with this system'

Wolfgang Templin is one of East Germany's best-known socialist dissidents. At present he is living in West Germany, after being deported by the East German government in 1988. This interview, translated from the West German socialist newspaper *Sozialistische Zeitung*, shows how East German radicals, unlike most radicals in Poland or Hungary, see their aim as a "better socialism"

For decades every opposition movement in the GDR has been beaten down so quickly that it had no chance to develop. Now, all at once, we have a movement so massive as to force changes at the top and gain, for the first time, toleration in practice of the fundamental democratic rights of freedom of opinion and of assembly. There is even talk of the legalisation of the opposition, the New Forum. How is

such a turnabout possible?

Much of what were previously supposed to be the disadvantages and deficiencies of the GDR are now turning into the opposite. Many observers in the West, and even people in the GDR, had fixed images and stereotypes.

The thought that the Party had managed, especially in the '70s and '80s, under Honecker, to buy off the people with social security and increased individual consumption, in a sort of consumer and social contract. The Party had bought acceptance of the idea that political freedoms would continue to be denied.

So many people became convinced that nothing would change in this GDR for a long time. For many people it was an almost crippling certainty, which even drove them out of the country, because they suffered under this petrification.

What nevertheless escaped observation or immediate experience was the processes underneath that level of political manipulation. I mean the attempts at organisation in the independent movement of the '80s, beginning with the circles and groups of the peace movement, then the ecology and human rights groups. Right from the start, with all their political naivete and churchiness, they staked a claim that touched the system more deeply than any worked-out programme: namely, the claim to be taken seriously as adult citizens.

It was that struggle that did it — not any formed opposition, but the

attempt by more and more people to take this self-assertion out of the small church groups and circles.

People who had been arrested once, twice or five times did not give up. They survived being detained on remand. They carried on. They put up with social repression, job discrimination and discrimination in day-to-day life, without becoming embittered. And still they insisted: we need a different way of life in this country.

That was an anticipation of what is now being manifested on a mass scale. It is no accident that all the initiatives in the broad opposition have as initiators people who have been through those experiences in the last ten years and can now come forward.

Alone and in itself, of course, the activity of the small groups would not have been enough. It was also necessary that the driving force and the opportunities of Honecker's consumer society be exhausted. The GDR is stagnating economically.

Neither a continuing rapid rise in living standards nor a further opening of the political safety-valves, was available.

Every attempt to mollify people with more liberal travel regulations failed because people wanted the travel concessions that they were granted given to them as guaranteed rights.

Is there a positive common denominator for the numerous opposition groups now emerging, beyond rejection of the existing system? A common goal or objec-

tive?

I think so. If you read the documents of these groups, follow their discussions, or get to know the individuals, then something like a common set of values emerges.

Obviously there are all sorts of differences, but you also see common directions. They see a lot of value to be preserved in GDR — I deliberately say GDR society, not the SED [ruling party] system — and a lot of potential for change, which requires radical reforms and democratisation on its own basis. The democratisation of GDR society should not necessarily be oriented to western parliamentary-democratic norms and models.

This consciousness can be found in all the groups of the GDR opposition. We want the rule of law, they say, we want political freedoms, we want the opportunity to participate in politics, we challenge the political monopoly of the SED, we want political pluralism. We do not just want to be heard by the Party as citizens in a dialogue, we also want to break up the Party's monopoly of power by actual participation.

Obviously different groups give different weight to these ideas. Certainly a lot of those involved have a strong tendency to favour economic reforms in the direction of bringing in market elements, or even, as in the programme of the Social Democratic Party [newly revived in East Germany], to talk about a social market economy.

But in the thinking of that party this means something different from what any sort of social market economy means here, so probably using this concept is a mistake. They mean an attempt to combine overall social planning, private initiatives, different forms of property and the introduction of market elements in such a way as to establish an ecologically acceptable, socially just and participatory form of economy, which — and this is the most important criterion, mentioned again and again — prevents the growth of uncontrolled economic power and monopoly.

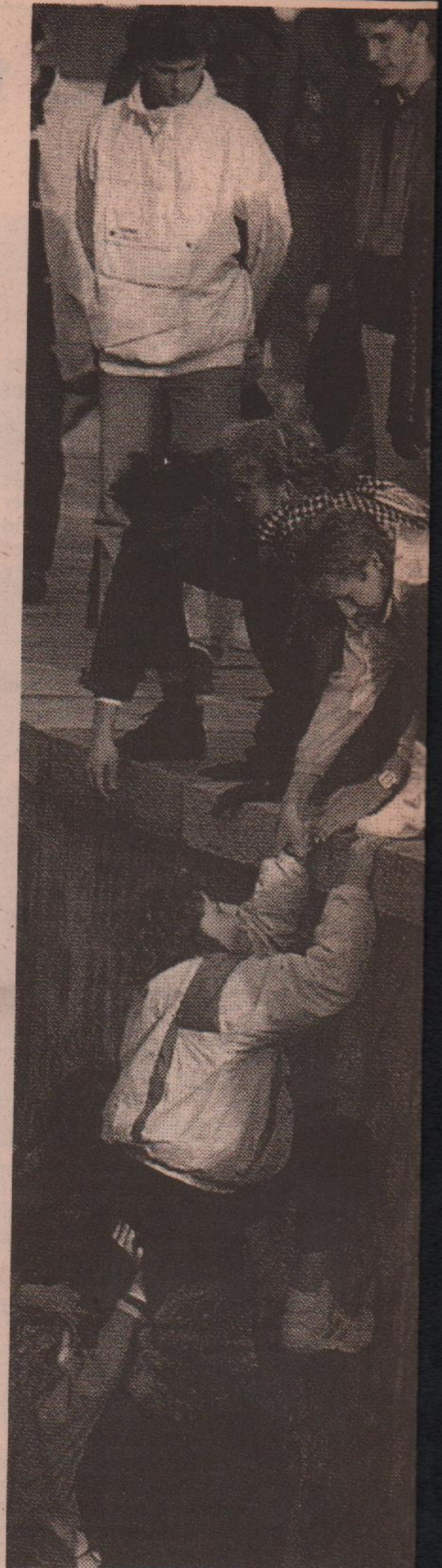
Other groups, for example the 'United Left', are strongly in favour of investigating available concepts and models of council democracy for their usefulness and applicability to the GDR.

There is another common point. In the process of change, which almost everyone sees as involving great conflict, they do not want to be continually patronised, especially from West Germany. They do not want to be always hearing from almost all the different forces how they see the political future of the GDR.

They say: if they want to criticise us and have an opinion, OK, that is their right, but please, not with this arrogance, and this inability to understand our own development, not with this penetrating repetition of their own concepts, when this is our affair. This attitude is very strong there.

The dynamic which has emerged in recent weeks and months has focused first on questions of participation and democracy. In what relation do you see these political demands to the economic problems?

It is very interesting that an economist who is very well respected in West Germany, Doris Cornelsen, emphasised one point again and again in a recent inter-



view with the magazine *Der Spiegel*.

As regards the question of economic reform, there is great potential of creativity and competence available in the GDR, which is suppressed and wasted by the political mismanagement and the rigidity of the system. Just managing through a process of serious political reforms to free that potential, and thus also to increase people's motivation by leaps and bounds, would mean unbelievably great gains for the GDR economy. "Just that?" asked *Der Spiegel* unbelievably. Certainly not, she said, but the GDR is — still, it must be said — in relation to its neighbouring states at an economic level which makes possible a reform process in which the setting-free of popular participation, linked with structural economic reforms and decentralisation, can have an effect which makes possible a rise in productivity and perhaps also the maintenance of the independence of the GDR economy in a way that is not possible in other countries.

Of course there are a series of internal and external economic problems that are very difficult to solve. One is the problem of the GDR's shortage of foreign currency, and behind that stands the question of the possible or necessary convertibility of the GDR mark.

Then there is the question: how far can or should be GDR move into the process of West European integration? Has it got a chance, if it wants to remain politically independent, of not visibly submitting to the logic of capitalism economics? In the West German bourgeoisie are broadcast plainly: if a process of

Conference

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A labour movement event
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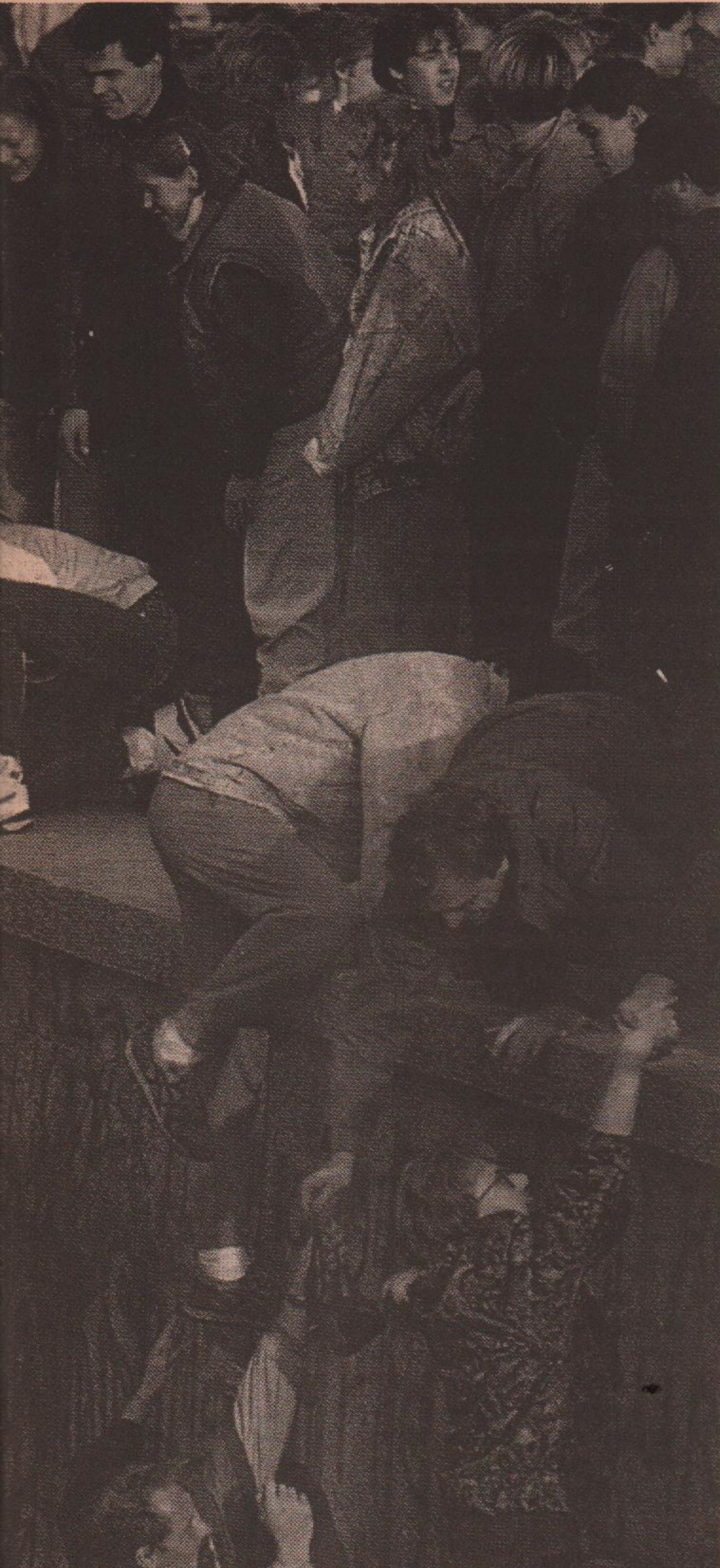
- Creche • Stalls • Food
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- Speakers from the Soviet Union, speaking about free trade unionism
- A speaker from the Polish Socialist Party (RD) in Warsaw, on the fight for women's liberation in Poland and the current attack on Polish women's abortion rights
- Cheung Siu Ming (National Secretary of the Chinese Solidarity Campaign) on the need for democracy in China
- Greg Benton (Chinese Department, Leeds University), on the tradition of dissent in China
- Lei Wei Ping (from Front for a Democratic China-UK) — an eyewitness report from Tiananmen
- Gunther Minnerup on German reunification
- Hillel Ticktin (Soviet Studies Department, Glasgow University) — The Soviet Union in Crisis
- Peter Tatchell on the fight for lesbian and gay rights in Eastern Europe
- Adam Novotny — workers and national conflict in Yugoslavia
- Bill Lomax on Hungarian workers in the '56 uprising
- John O'Mahony — why the British labour movement should back workers in the Eastern Bloc

The political vacuum in East Germany



From back page

The opening of the border has accentuated the economic crisis in East Germany by emphasising the difference in the standard of living between East and West. A black economy is already beginning in which East German workers moonlight in the West and various rare commodities cross into the GDR, while various cheap commodities go the other way. To the extent that (West German) Deutschmarks become a major means of payment in the GDR, there will be massive inflation in the East. Some services or goods will become available only for hard currency. There is also likely to be a massive outflow of savings from the GDR to get hard currency before there is a large devaluation of the East German mark.

On top of this, there are serious labour shortages as a result of emigration to the West. Though about 15,000 of the Stasi (secret police) have been sent down the mines and into the factories to do something useful by replacing those who left, many of them were highly trained workers such as doctors and nurses who cannot easily be replaced. There is a massive crisis in the health service and other sectors such as public transport which were badly affected.

The root cause of both the exodus and the economic collapse go back further into the past. One West German expert calculated that investment of 500,000 million Marks would be needed to bring the GDR economy up to the level of the West. Productivity is 45% below that in the West and, since Honecker came to power in 1971, capital investment has fallen from 16.1% to 9.9%. Whole sectors may have to shut entirely either for ecological reasons or because of their age. In reality, however, nobody knows the accurate figures as it has been admitted that Günter Mittag, who had run the economy since 1962, systematically falsified economic statistics and prevented independent economists from examining them. The information on the GDR in statistical yearbooks becomes thinner and thinner.

Mittag managed, through state takeovers of small firms and mergers, to centralise production in 224 combines, monopolies that were under his direct control. By controlling trade, the currency and travel Mittag was able to exploit the captive market at home with highly priced, low quality goods. At the same time, the GDR became less capable of selling anything abroad. As one leading SED member remarked: "If we export goods worth one Mark, it is only worth 15 Pfennig on the world market".

This bureaucratic mismanagement was at the expense of the mass of the population. It explains why many of them are so keen to get their hands on Western goods.

The net result has been to make the economy now so weak that it offers rich pickings to West German capital — investment opportunities, a market and cheap labour. The immediate reaction to the end of the Berlin Wall was to send the Frankfurt Stock Exchange up 2.5%.

An opening up of the GDR to market forces will be the price of

any aid from the West and Modrow, the reforming Prime Minister has already made concessions to this, saying "a real socialist planned economy needs the market". The West German government is demanding even more in return for aid. The Finance Minister, Waigel, stated: "In no way will we finance the past or a new form of socialist planned economy in East Germany." (So much for letting the people choose!) He also called for the introduction of private ownership, the creation of real markets, and the abolition of price subsidies.

The only way East German workers will be able to stop these massive attacks on their living standards, which will doubtless eventually lead to an attack on their good health and welfare provision, is by organisation in independent unions, which are now just beginning to emerge. They should press for parity with West German workers where their conditions are better, just as West German workers should press for better welfare state provisions of the GDR.

In West Germany there is also considerable discussion about how

'Beyond immediate events the question of reunification is clearly the key to which direction Germany develops in'

low aid for the GDR should be financed. The DGB (equivalent of the TUC) has called for the end of planned tax cuts and of other tax plans that would benefit the rich, most other suggestions involve the increase in general taxation.

The impact of events in the GDR on West Germany have been quite contradictory. While the East German emigrants were generally welcomed at first, the growing pressure on housing and jobs has caused resentment. The mayors of Bremen and Hannover have called for them to go elsewhere. The response to the surge across the border after restrictions were lifted was: "We're glad to see you, but we hope you return home" (most did). There have been some people who left the GDR a few months ago and are returning now that the right to travel has been conceded. Often the refugees are lodged in bad conditions and they face an unemployment rate of over 6%.

Politically the response has also been varied. There has been an upsurge of nationalist feeling, personified by the entire Bundestag singing the National Anthem when free travel was announced. On the other hand, Kohl was whistled at and shouted down when he raised the question of reunification and tried to sing the National Anthem again in West Berlin.

Much of the support for the GDR opposition among the conservatives in the west is hypocritical. As *Die Zeit* put it: "Democracy from below" is applauded by politicians here as long as it takes place in the GDR...Not only Helmut Kohl, but a large part of the political elite,

fear wishes for consultation from below. Even now Kohl goes on again about 'rabble' (in West Berlin)". There is also a real fear that a successful renovation of socialism in the GDR would be attractive at home and should therefore be stopped at all costs.

As the elections next year grow nearer, there will probably be increasing conflicts between the main political parties over their attitudes to events in the GDR. The Greens are the only party who are not formally arguing for reunification, instead saying that events in the GDR may allow the people there to develop a new identity, different both from what exists in West Germany and what existed in the GDR before.

Beyond the immediate events, the question of reunification is clearly the key to which direction Germany develops in. It is not clear how popular the demand is in the GDR, at least on the terms currently on offer. A recent opinion poll among East Germans showed 73% in favour of maintaining the two states. Many who oppose it will be people who see East Germany's identification with socialism as a positive alternative to the market economy of the West. Others may see it as not important or attainable for now, when the GDR has still not become democratic. However, if the peoples of both states want it, their right to self-determination should not be opposed.

However the two German states have different social systems and before reunification could come about two questions would have to be resolved: military alliances and the economy. Gorbachev has said that he has no objection to what is happening in the GDR as long as it remains a member of the Warsaw Pact. Virtually every Western politician has said that West Germany must not leave NATO at any cost. Some people have tried to square this with reunification by calling for a loose confederation of the two states in which they maintain their existing alliances. Neither of the alliances serve the interests of independent socialist politics in Germany. Socialists should call for German reunification on the basis of independence from both NATO and the Warsaw Pact.

In the same way, reunification should not be on the basis of either the Western free market free-for-all or the East's bureaucratic command economy. There would be little to look forward to for most people in the GDR in privatisation, or buy-outs by West German capital.

Our perspective must be for a democratically planned economy with workers' control and management of industry. This alone will enable the economy to develop free of the arbitrary diktats of the bureaucrats and the anarchy of the market.

Reunification, whether on a socialist or capitalist basis, is still some way in the future. The system under which it takes place (if at all) will depend on the degree to which socialist and independent workers' organisations develop in the GDR now. These will not be much time before the economy of the GDR is resolved one way or the other.

There is considerable support for a "renewed socialism", a "third way" between Stalinism and capitalism. The crying need is for the political organisation of these forces before it is too late.

form is introduced in the GDR, it can only mean going back to capitalism and then, to a certain extent, the GDR will fall to West German capital like a ripe fruit into its hands. How do people in the GDR see this?

To politically aware and conscious people in the GDR, these arguments are among the countless stupidities about the GDR that you hear in West Germany.

In recent months we have heard an even cruder description again: the GDR has had it, the system is running away, the system is really on the brink of collapse.

The latest line is this: yes, yes, the GDR oppositionists still talk about capitalism. Either they know no better because they are so politically naive, or they really mean something else, but for the moment they can't say it.

Two models of argument work hand in hand here. The exactly corresponding argument on the side of the SED ideologists is Otto Honecker's, who turned it upside down: the GDR can only preserve its identity as a state if...and then he lists a series of criteria, of what he understands as socialism, but which are criteria not of democratic socialism but of the late Stalinist system.

If you pass that off as socialism, the only possible socialism, it is clear that people will shun like the plague.

Fortunately there are enough people in the GDR who can cut through these arguments. They say: if we want socialism, we must make a serious break with this existing system. If this attitude

spreads more widely, then such arguments on both sides will be reduced to absurdity.

But it is no accident that these arguments mirror each other. There are direct interests working hand in hand here. However much the dominant political forces in West Germany polemicise verbally against the domination of the SED, in practice it is a much more convenient and acceptable evil for them than a social upheaval in the GDR.

The possibility that right-wing forces in West Germany would have to deal with a socially legitimated force in the GDR would mean a challenge for West Germany such as they are not ready to come to terms with.

You hope to go back to the GDR at the end of the year. What are your plans?

I was dumped here nearly two years ago through a series of very unusual and crazy circumstances. The moment of return — to which we now, of course, look forward impatiently — will throw us back into another crazy situation. We're coming on a GDR in upheaval.

Tremendous new experiences have been gained there. In the meantime we have tried to draw out the experiences of your society as critically as possible.

We will now try to set up the first minimal beginnings of independent educational and theoretical work, which are necessary for any further political development in the GDR. We will do it together with friends in Western and Eastern Europe with whom we have been able to develop very intensive contact over the last couple of years.



Racist police in action on the streets of Newham. (Photo Andrew Moore)

Four deaths in custody in one month

In July this year, four black people have died in controversial circumstances, all of them in the custody of the Metropolitan (London) Police.

2 July: Jamie Stewart, 22, was stopped in the early hours of the morning driving in Islington, allegedly because he overtook a police car on a pedestrian crossing. A witness claimed that Jamie was strip-searched in the street.

He was arrested and taken to Holloway Road police station in north London.

Police claim that Jamie became violent when he was placed in a cell and they were forced to restrain him. They add that at this point, Jamie had no visible sign of injuries except a cut tongue. The force of their restraint however, caused the police to send Jamie to Whittington hospital. He was pronounced dead at 1.30 am, before he reached the hospital.

The police claim that Jamie's stomach contained large amounts of cocaine and that he had sustained only minor injuries in his detention.

5th July: 39-year old father of two, Edwin Carr, died at Carter Street police station, south London, after he had been arrested in a police raid at his home in Peckham.

The police say they suspected him of being a drugs dealer. Edwin had a little cannabis on him for his own personal use, and the police took him away to the station to be cautioned.

Just one hour later, Edwin's girlfriend Sharon Wease was told that Edwin was seriously ill and had been taken to Kings College hospital where he was on a life-support machine. According to police Edwin, who had been on crutches for about six months due to a knee injury 'fell ill' during a conversation with a police surgeon.

A Chief Superintendent Humber said that Edwin Carr was been attended to by a doctor and became unwell and later became unconscious. One report gave the cause of death from the (police) post-mortem as pneumonia due to respiratory failure.

Yet the same report, apparently seen by a black community worker, revealed that Edwin had suffered an epileptic fit followed by a heart at-

tack. A week after Edwin Carr was brought to hospital the life-support machine was switched off.

Vincent Graham, 40, died while being chased by police in Islington, north London.

The police put out a press statement claiming that Vincent had fallen on his own knife and stabbed himself to death as he was being pursued. Fantastic as this might seem police implied that he had done this because he knew he was wanted for questioning in connec-

tion with the murder of a business man in May. How did this happen?

The police did not however, supply any evidence that Vincent Graham had been believed a prime suspect. What seemed to lend more mystery to the police version was that they also immediately linked Vincent to two gruesome murders in Soho, stating that his son had been charged with the murders.

In addition, although the police claimed from the start that they had many witnesses to this 'self-

stabbing' one witness had alleged that he saw a large number of police punching and kicking Mr Graham, who shouted at them to get off, before letting out a final death scream.

Vincent Graham's mother herself has said that her son's head was battered and bloody, and that this was not consistent with the police claim that it was a self-inflicted knife wound that caused Vincent's death.

1st August: 55 year old Sullivan Barwani died at Bow Street police station, central London, after he had been arrested and taken there for alleged drunkenness and disorderly behaviour.

The police have released very little information about Sullivan, who, they say, was a vagrant. With no immediate family apparently aware of his death, the details and sequence of events leading to Sullivan's death will remain shrouded in mystery.

A (police) post-mortem attributed cause of death to cerebral haemorrhage, but this goes no further towards explaining how and why Sullivan died.

All four victims were Afro-Caribbean men, the section of black people that is disproportionately represented in the numbers detained in prisons, detention centres and police cells, and who receive the highest proportion of custodial sentences — up to 7 or 8 times more than whites.

Black people make up only about 4-5% of the general population, and yet account for about 17% of the national prison population.

'Black people make up only 4-5% of the population and yet account for 17% of the national prison population'

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Police arrest victim of racist attack

When a nine-months pregnant woman is savagely beaten in her own home and her brother is the victim of an attempted racist murder, we expect the police to act. So what do the police do? They arrest an innocent man and let his attackers go free.

For years the Khan family in Manor Park, Newham were harassed by racist neighbours living opposite and next door. On 3 August at 8pm these neighbours attacked Mrs Khan and her niece with bicycle chains and dustbin lids. Mrs Khan was repeatedly punched and kicked in the stomach — she was nine months pregnant at the time.

Mrs Khan and her niece managed to scramble back into their home but the attackers then smashed the windows with rocks and chanted "Paki bastards, go back to where you came from!"

The Khans rang the police and the attackers responded by cutting the telephone wire. The police did not arrive. When Mrs Khan's brother, Mr Altaf, happened to come by, he was immediately attacked by six of the men wielding iron bars and wooden clubs.

When he staggered into the house, the men broke down the door and one of them grabbed Mr Altaf from behind and then tried to stab him.

Mr Altaf avoided the knife and the racist thug accidentally stabbed one of his fellow attackers instead. Many of the neighbours were watching and did nothing.

At this point the police arrived. When Mr Altaf explained what had happened, they told him 'shut your bloody mouth' and arrested him, leaving the racist attackers free to

go home. Mr Altaf has been charged with Malicious Wounding and the Khan family has been forced to leave their council house and move into bed and breakfast accommodation.

Unfortunately this case is not unique in Newham, which has the highest reported number of racist attacks in the country. In a climate where racist attacks are on the increase, local campaigners demand to know:

* why is Mr Altaf facing a serious charge while his attackers remain free?

* how can the Khan family be driven out of their home while their attackers are left free to stay?

* what is the use of a police publicity campaign against racial harassment when the police let racist thugs go free and treat innocent black people under attack like criminals?

We demand that the charge against Mr Altaf is dropped and that his attackers are brought to justice and are evicted by the council.

You can help the campaign by:

* publicising the case of the Mr Altaf and the Khans.

* getting as many people as possible to sign the petition and sending them to the campaign.

* writing to the Chief Prosecutor Crown Prosecution Service, Solar House, 1-9 Romford Road, London E15, demanding that the charge against Mr Altaf be dropped.

* writing to the Director of Housing, 91 The Grove, London E15 demanding that the council evict the racists who attacked Mr Altaf and the Khans.

'Defend the Altaf/Khan family, PO Box 273, London E7 (555 8151).

WHERE WE STAND

Socialist Organiser stands for workers' liberty East and West. We aim to help organise the left wing in the Labour Party and trade unions to fight to replace capitalism with working class socialism.

We want public ownership of the major enterprises and a planned economy under

workers' control. We want 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, including the struggle of

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We stand: For full equality for women, and social provision to free women from the burden of housework. For a mass working class-based women's movement.

Against racism, and against deportations and all immigration controls.

For equality for lesbians and gays.

For a united and free Ireland, with some federal system to protect the rights of the Protestant minority.

For left unity in action; clarity in debate and discussion.

For a labour movement accessible to the most oppressed, accountable to its rank and file, and militant against capitalism.

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The sick soul of America

CINEMA

Belinda Weaver reviews 'Talk Radio'

Talk Radio' is largely about one man. He's Barry Champlain, a late night radio talk show host in Dallas.

Made by Oliver Stone, who directed 'Wall Street' and 'Salvador', the film is based on the real life story of Allan Berg, a radio host who was murdered by anti-semitic neo-nazis.

Watching, we know that Champlain will die, and this skews the story. Instead of a radio story about a rampant egotist plying his trade, we know instead that we're watching a doomed man dice with death. This gives the film a febrile, hyped-up quality.

All Stone's films have characters living on a knife edge, but 'Talk Radio' goes further and deeper. It had a claustrophobic, panicky feel.

Champlain is not a nice person; there is no attempt to win our sympathy. His ego is well out of control, and so are his emotions. When something doesn't please him, he yells, and if he wants something, he pulls out every manipulative stop to get it.

He's not an ideologue. His responses to his callers come from the heart, not the head, and he's the same with the station bosses, his co-workers and his ex-wife. He's a kneejerk reactor, and a highly competitive one. If they say stop, he says go, and he has to win the contest. He needs constant reassurance that he's on top.

He has arrived at his position by way of his smart mouth; his put downs are famous. Some are clever, but most are just insult; he reviles his listeners as scumbags and Nazis and no-hopers. (Of course many of them are, but he denounces them instead of arguing.)

Champlain stays on top because he's quicker witted than they are. He keeps things moving.

Most of his callers are right wing, anti-semitic, racist. Champlain abuses them, then cuts them off. He



Photo: Brian Hamill. Copyright MCMLXXXIX Touchstone Pictures. All rights reserved.

'New York Stories'

Three famous directors were asked to make short films about New York — a city full of poverty, homelessness, despair, crime, drugs, slums, collapsing public services and gross inequality.

None of them have stepped out of the circles of the well-off top ten per cent or so.

The best of the three films being shown under the joint title 'New York Stories' is Martin Scorsese's 'Life Lessons', about how a successful painter (played by Nick Nolte, pictured above) exploits his assistant/girlfriend (played by Rosanna Arquette).

has one long rave about Jew haters, in which he spells out the reasons behind what they do: "When things go wrong, you all look for someone to blame". That's the limit of his political analysis.

This is a very dark toned movie. Champlain is a very tormented soul, self-destructive, incapable of love or empathy, thrust into a public position he is ill-equipped to handle. His fame goes to his head, and he comes to see himself as invulnerable. His ego can never admit to fear or weakness.

I couldn't decide whether it was a sick-soul-of-America film, implying that freedom of speech will ultimately be punished by death, or a statement that minority groups will always have to live in fear.

It's slight, but amusing and well done. The same could be said for Woody Allen's 'Oedipus Wrecks' — unless you've had enough of sickly-sentimental Jewish mother/Jewish boy comedies from this director.

Francis Coppola's 'Life Without Zoe' is downright disgusting. It's about a smart-arse 13 year old rich girl, living in a luxury hotel and looked after by cheerily servile hotel staff while her separated (but perhaps about to be reconciled) parents jet around the world.

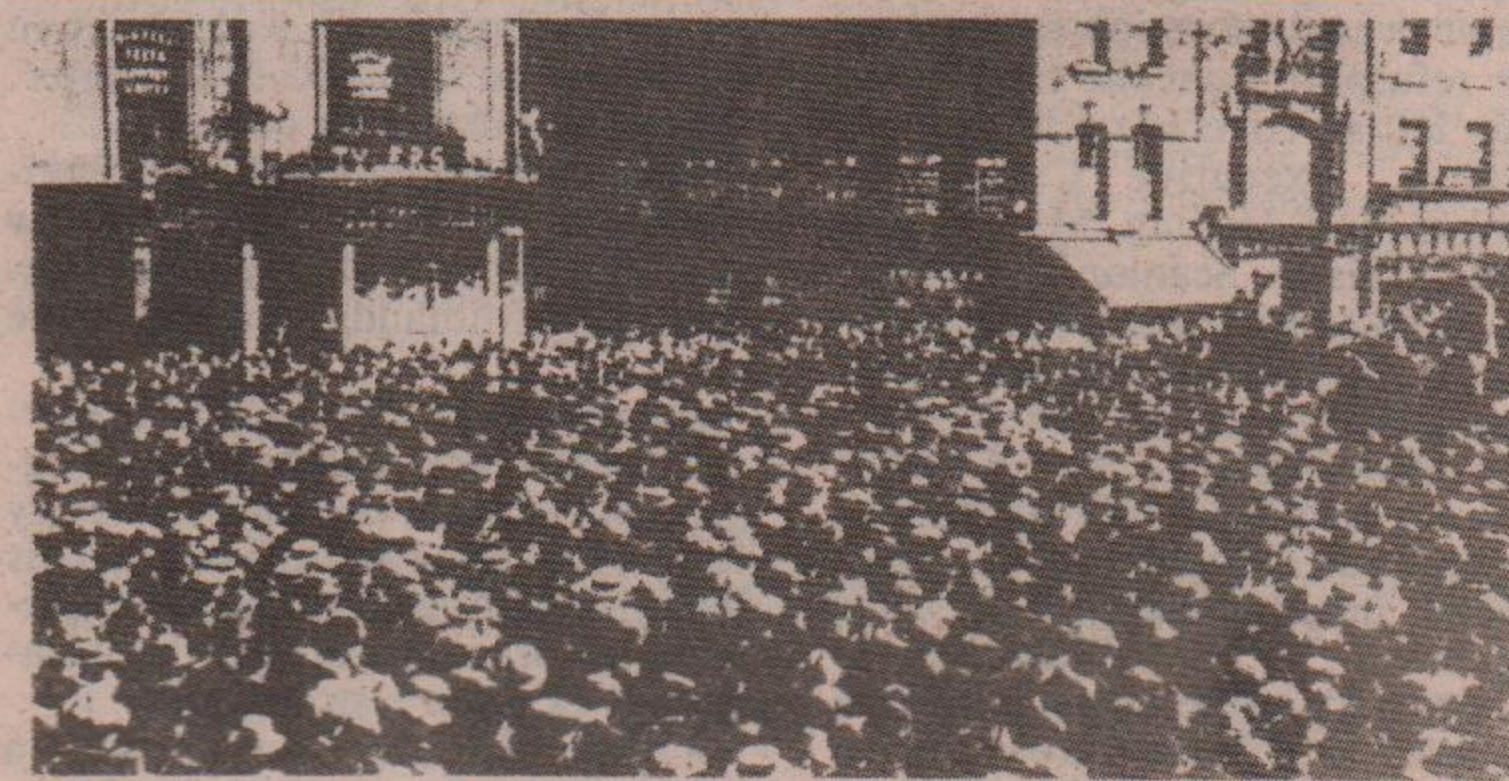
Her only contact with the seamy side of New York is when she gives some candy to a man living in a cardboard box outside her hotel. And Coppola makes the film without a trace of irony or detachment.

I'm still not sure about it all. I think Stone was probably drawn to the material by the character on a knife edge angle, and that it goes no deeper than one long, despairing look at the state of the nation. In one scene, Champlain lambasts his callers: "The whole nation is listening, but you have nothing to say".

What the film has done is confirm my view of "No platform for fascists". Champlain, in allowing these scum on the airwaves, allowed them to parrot their poisonous views, and gave them a hearing

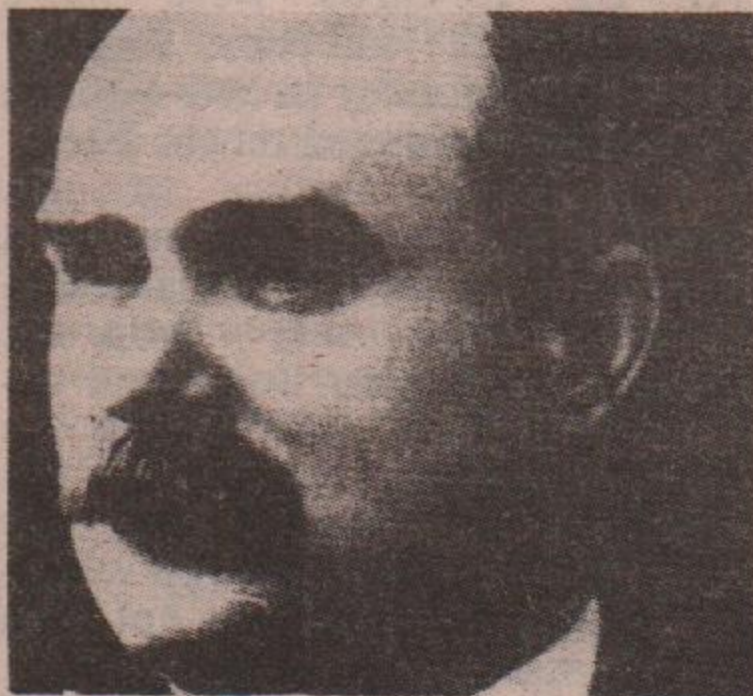
which they should have been denied. Far from being grateful, they murdered him for it.

It's a shame we don't feel sorrier for Champlain. My strongest feeling was relief that it was all over and I could go home. It's not a bad movie, but a hopeless, tense, black one that leaves you feeling grim. The performances are excellent, the atmosphere well done, but the feeling of hopelessness lingers. The tearing down of the Berlin Wall was a good antidote to that.



Connolly addressing mass meeting of strikers

'Be moderate'



James Connolly

'Be Moderate'

Some men, faint-hearted, ever seek
Our programme to retouch,
And will insist, when'er they speak
That we demand too much.
'Tis passing strange, yet I declare
Such statements cause me mirth,
For our demands most modest are,
We only want THE EARTH.

'Be Moderate', the timorous cry
Who dread the tyrant's thunder,
'You ask too much, and people fly

From you aghast, in wonder'
'Tis passing strange, and I declare
Such statements cause me mirth,
For our demands most moderate are,
We only want THE EARTH.

Our masters all — a godly crew
Whose hearts throb for the poor —
Their sympathies assure us, too,
If our demands were fewer.
Most generous souls, but please observe
What they enjoy from birth,
Is all we ever had the nerve
To ask, that is, THE EARTH.

The Labour Fakir, full of guile,
Such doctrine ever preaches,
And, whilst he bleeds the rank and file,
Tame moderation teaches.
Yet, in his despite, we'll see the day
When, with sword in girth,
Labour shall march in war array,
To seize its own, THE EARTH.

For Labour long with groans and tears
To its oppressors knelt,
But, never yet to aught save fears
Did heart of tyrant melt.
We need not kneel; our cause is high,
Of true men there's no dearth,
And our victorious rallying cry
Shall be, WE WANT THE EARTH.

James Connolly

Trapped in memory

Gordon MacMillan reviews 'The Bellarosa Connection', by Saul Bellow. Penguin, £3.50, 102 pages

The Bellarosa Connection, Saul Bellow's new novella and his second paperback original, is more than a story.

It is a lament and an obituary of a novel; it is about endings and it is essentially a fable, an important micro-focus-cum-macro-impression about the Jewish experience in the USA.

A second generation American Jew from New Jersey, who like Bellow is almost eighty, has gained fortune through the work of his memory training Institute, the Mnemosyne in Philadelphia. Here Bellow sets an interesting and intrinsic proposition: "if you have worked in memory, which is life itself, there is no retirement except in death".

With his wife already dead, he is alone in his mansion left to remember; he does, and this is the story. He remembers a distant

relative, unseen for years, Harry Fonstein, and his obese wife Sorella. Harry escaped the Holocaust, with his orthopaedic boot, through Italy, helped by an underground network funded by a low/high life Broadway star, Billy Rose (Bellarosa).

The unnamed narrator recalls how Fonstein tried to thank Rose for saving him, and how Rose refused to acknowledge. Bellow identifies this as the need for American Jewish anonymity. Rose, like the narrator, wants to remain unknown because of the lack of any collective guilt.

The narrator himself, who is trapped guiltily in memory by Fonstein's story, cuts himself off from his European cousin and it is only after thirty years that he tries to make contact once more. It's too late by then, but of course Bellow has to write it the way it is.

This novel is a league better than 'A Theft', also published this year. Bellow continues to relate to the world in a way which is ultimately modern, stylised absolutely concisely, and tailored with language that is immaculate dress.

Bellow remains no waster of words. He doesn't write a thousand pages when he knows that one hundred will do.

Class and war

TV

By Vicki Morris

In the final episode of the latest series of 'Black Adder', our hero failed to dodge an appointment with the Grim Reaper.

He died on a battlefield of the First World War, most likely closing the final chapter in his jaunt through the history books.

This last series, charting Black Adder's experiences in the trenches, has been tragic, as well as comic, in a way that none of the others has been.

Of course I agreed with Rowan Atkinson that World War One was tragic. But he and I come at the subject from rather different directions, and draw different messages from it.

On the comedy side, the programmes had less word-play and absurd caricature of people from ages we hardly know about. As much as ever, we had the usual asinine grim humour poked at upper-class twits, but for once they were twits from a generation we can relate to.

On the tragic side, the programme made a lot of the effect that the stupidities of this class had in the war, fighting for years over a few yards of turf which rapidly became a hellish quagmire, and, sometimes, in the confusion, ordering their troops to fire on each other.

This, however, seems to me to have been the least of their faults. The problem with the 'officer class' was that they caused the war, and made the working class fight it for them, to promote or defend their selfish nationalist and imperialist class interests.

Well you might think I'm being a bit po-faced about all of this. Most of 'Black Adder' has consisted, after all, mainly of farce. It has offered little in the way of biting social comment. But if you saw the last poignant scenes of this final episode, it will have been obvious to you that Black Adder was, for once, probably Making A Point. I claim, therefore, the right to examine what it was, whether he made it well, and if necessary the right to take issue with it.

I think he did certainly make it tear-jerkingly. Black Adder, unusually, was unable to wriggle out of his terminal personal crisis, and took part in the Big Push.

After a slow-motion scene of soldiers emerging out of a muddy trench into hazy blue gunsmoke, we were treated to a final picture of a cornfield with poppies to remind us all that it would soon be Remembrance Sunday.

The creators of 'Black Adder' clearly despair of humankind's warlike nature and wish we would all speak peace to each other. This is all very laudable, but I don't think they put the blame for wars correctly at the feet of the bourgeoisie and the aristocracy from which Black Adder came.

The series, as ever, heaped scorn in equal quantities on the heads of his fellow officers and on the class represented by the pathetic Baldrick.

I wish Baldrick's class had had the chance to shoot his class first, and save their own, and each other's skins.

The old soldiers wheeled out, hung with ribbons and medals to honour the glorious dead who died in no good cause at all, deserve a sight more than a pat on the shoulder from the officer class, assuring them "we're all in it together".



Black workers occupy Stanmore, 1972

The guerrilla line isn't fine

Paul Adams discusses the lessons of the 1972 engineering dispute

The present domination of the AEU by the right-wing might tempt some people to look back on the ten years of Hugh Scanlon's leadership of the engineering union as days of a glory now gone.

In reality, however, the problems faced by the engineers then were very much the same as the ones they face now.

In 1968, the year the left took control of the leadership of the union, tens of thousands of militant engineers expected to be led into battle against their employers in a great national strike. A date was set...but there was no strike. At the last moment there was an agreement between the Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions (the Confed), represents the workers and the Engineering Employers' Federation.

The agreement was a full-blown productivity deal tied up in a three-year package deal: a total disaster. For three years, rank and file militants in engineering fought a guerrilla strategy against the imposition of the productivity elements which had been agreed in principle at national level. When negotiations started for a new national deal in 1971, many were eager for a fight.

The timing was not exactly perfect: during the first three months of 1971 there was a 21% fall in overseas engineering orders and a 6% fall in home orders. It was estimated that the industry in general was working at 15 to 20% below capacity. But that was all less important than the will of many militants to force the bosses to pay up substantial increases now that there was a left-wing leadership.

There was no leadership from Scanlon. Instead there was the pseudo-democratic cover-story: "We are waiting for the rank and file to show the way"! Manchester was an obvious place for the attack on the employers to start. It was a key engineering area pretty solidly dominated by the Communist Party. More important still, it was Scanlon country. The militants

there believed that "our Hughie" would back them to the hilt.

The Confed leaders had broken off their negotiations with the EEF on December 15 1971, after the employers had only offered £1.50 in reply to the unions demand for a "substantial increase", with more for women as a step towards equal pay, a 35-hour week (yes, 17 years ago!), and extra (fourth) week's holiday and other lesser items.

It soon became clear that there would be no call for a strike from the national leaders. Scanlon's call for plant bargaining on the basis of district-organised action covered up their refusal to fight the employers. Other leftists covered up in turn for Scanlon. Executive Committee member and leading Maoist Reg Birch praised Scanlon's strategy and the Maoist paper *The Worker* carried the idiotic headline, 'Our Guerrilla Line Suits Us Fine'.

In Manchester the Confed stewards held their first meeting at the end of February 1972. They decided unanimously to go onto day-work. (The Manchester piecework agreement allowed engineers to go onto day-work [as distinct from piecework] by request and still receive the basic rate of pay. In practice that meant taking the basic rate in exchange for no work at all).

The district braced itself for a fight against lock-outs, as it was clear that employers would shut down factories where the workers insisted on their right to go onto day-work. Lock-outs were to be fought by sitting in.

The Manchester area workers were so eager that the first occupation started a full fortnight before the scheduled beginning of day-work. The workers at Bredbury steel works started their sit-in on March 16. As soon as news of the sit-in got around, other firms' stewards turned up with messages of support and went back to their factories to urge bringing the action forward. In fact, the Stockport District Committee brought its sanctions forward by a week.

Within a week, 5,000 of the 15,000 engineers in Stockport were at least working to rule.

While workers throughout the district were organising sit-ins in response to lock-outs imposed by the bosses, the trickle of settlements

started. The local union leadership refused to make them public, but it soon became clear that some of them were absurdly low. The apparent militancy of the actions was not matched by the level of the claims.

The sit-ins continued to be triggered by lock-outs throughout early April. On 1 April, for instance, there were sit-ins at 11 factories; on 12 April, at 23. On that day Scanlon visited Manchester, but the most important news was that there was a sit-in in Sheffield, the other traditional centre of engineering militancy in England, and a decision in Aberdeen to emulate Manchester. The sit-in movement continued.

But, with no national lead, Sheffield and Aberdeen did not follow suit, nor did the shipbuilding centres, the Midlands, or anywhere else.

By mid-May, the AUEW leadership had clearly decided the struggles should stop. Scanlon obviously felt he had done enough to keep his leftist credentials, while the right-wing got what it wanted: the isolation of Scanlon's stronghold.

On 15 May the Confed called a big stewards' meeting in Manchester. For the first time the right-wing were represented: the GEC-AEI-EE stewards were there courtesy of the company, an army in dark blue donkey jackets with the firm's name stamped on the back.

The central feature of this meeting was the reading out of a circular from the union leadership which in effect said "drop the struggle for shorter hours and accept money-only deals". Even the *Morning Star*, usually a fan magazine for Scanlon and the AUEW leaders, managed to admit: "They [the workers] have not been greatly assisted by the circular."

With the right-wing there and with many of the left whipped into line by the Communist Party — almost all the AUEW officials were CP members — the acceptance of the circular was ensured. Still, a third of the meeting voted against it. Everyone knew now that the signal had been given to wind down the action.

By 25 May there were only 13 firms sitting in and settlements were generally low: £2.50 plus 50p productivity bonus at Mirrlees, £2 plus some minor elements at Ferranti.

Meanwhile, however, the strike wave threatened to spread to London, where there was a sit-in at Stanmore Engineering. So far the Manchester struggle had been isolated as well as internally fragmented. Now, however, the chance was at hand to spread the strike to the vital North and West London districts.

At a big stewards' meeting in London Scanlon praised the courage of the Manchester strikers and recommended their example. When he was attacked for not leading a national action, Scanlon again claimed that in a democratic union it was up to the rank and file to lead. The left backed Scanlon, covering up the truth of the isolation in Manchester and the sell-out on the hours question.

Worst of all, the Stanmore men, when they demanded that they get full backing and that the strike be spread to London were told that they had "jumped the gun". The isolation of Manchester was now complete; it was clear there would only be isolated actions in London.

The result was clear: at a time of unprecedented militancy in the engineering industry, the leadership had refused to call for national action and allowed the most militant area to be battered by a very determined and well-organised section of employers in the Manchester area. Before long the Communist Party suffered defections among its leading lights, the officials in the Manchester area.

The lessons for today are clear. So long as the negotiations were on a factory by factory basis, the superficial look of unity suggested by the mass of similar actions was shot through with divisions that the employers could play on.

And secondly, given the strength of the engineering employers — and despite skill shortages and full order books, like '72 — they are no pushover today; even very militant action like the sit-ins of '72 will not lead to full-scale victory if the action is not properly co-ordinated nationally.

With the EEF saying that they are no longer prepared to accept national negotiations the Confed should be preparing for all-out action to force the employers back to national negotiations and to concede the full claim.

One man's right to veto women's choice

LES HEARN'S SCIENCE COLUMN

Many, if not most, people would agree that it is undemocratic to impose your own view of proper human conduct on others who don't share those views.

Yet this is precisely what Wolfgang Hilger, president of the West German pharmaceuticals giant, Hoechst, is trying to do.

Hoechst's French subsidiary, Roussel-Uclaf, have developed a drug called RU486 which allows women to have an abortion at an early stage in a pregnancy without a surgical operation.

This drug, though needing to be given in a controlled way in a hospital or clinic, would be far cheaper and less traumatic and dangerous for many women.

RU486 works by interfering with the action of the hormone progesterone which "instructs" the cells of the womb to maintain the pregnancy. An embryo is essentially a foreign body inside the womb (and can even be thought of as a sort of parasite!). As it sinks into the lining of the womb, the cells there would tend to reject and try to expel it.

Progesterone, produced by the ovaries and placenta, seems to suppress this tendency by binding to the cells and inhibiting them.

RU486 has a similar shape to progesterone and also binds to the cells of the womb but it binds so tightly that progesterone cannot get a look in. Unlike progesterone, RU486 does not inhibit the cells which then get on with the business of rejecting the newly implanted embryo. The drug is taken by mouth and is followed two days later by a dose of a prostaglandin capable of inducing contractions of the womb. In a few hours, the womb expels the embryo and placenta.

As in a normal menstruation, there can be cramps, nausea and diarrhoea. Rarely, as with some spontaneous miscarriages, there can be severe bleeding, necessitating a blood transfusion.

Several trials of RU486 have taken place in Britain and France, mostly with women who were less than 9 weeks pregnant. The success rate in terms of complete abortions (ie. not requiring surgical follow-up) were 95%.

The advantages of RU486 are manifold. In Britain, it would allow women requiring NHS abortions to have them that much sooner as they would not have to wait for a bed to become available. It would probably not be any safer as abortions in Britain are already about as safe as they can be. In fact, it is more dangerous to have a baby.

On a world scale, though, RU486 could play a major role in reducing the estimated toll of 200,000 deaths of women from illegal or unsafe abortions. Of course, it could also make money for Roussel-Uclaf.

It might seem strange, therefore, for the company to withdraw the drug from sale just one month after launching it in France last year. In explanation, the company cited threats of boycott from anti-abortionists, fear of litigation and pressure from Hoechst. The minister of health instructed Roussel-Uclaf to resume sales, saying that RU486 had become the "moral property of women".

It might also seem strange that the company is being less than speedy in applying for licences in other countries such as Britain but the key is the statement by Hoechst's president that RU486 does not conform to Hoechst's "ethics".

Hilger's opposition to abortion appears likely to deny West German women access to RU486. Elsewhere, Roussel-Uclaf say they want individual governments to invite them to apply for licences. This unusual procedure is said to be because Roussel-Uclaf "does not want to interfere with this debate on abortion".

But, as *New Scientist* said in an editorial recently, any debate on abortion in this country is about whether to allow abortion at all and not over which methods to allow.

Ambulance workers' action escalates

By Stan Crooke

A well-attended mass meeting held in Toxteth ambulance station last Monday (20 November) voted unanimously for a further escalation of action on Merseyside.

The meeting was open to all Merseyside ambulance crews and also other workers involved in the current dispute (members of CoHSE, TGWU, NALGO and GMB).

In line with national union guidelines, and under the umbrella of the TUC Code of Conduct, the meeting agreed that work carried out by Merseyside ambulance crews from midnight on Tuesday should be limited to:

- Accident and emergency calls;
- Maternity admissions;
- Transport of radiotherapy and renal dialysis patients;
- Terminal discharges;
- Cancer patients;
- Children under the age of 14.

The meeting also passed a vote of confidence in the conduct of the dispute by the national NUPE leadership, which has faced criticisms from some quarters for making decisions (such as scrapping various elements of the ambulance crews' claims not directly related to this

year's pay claim) without reference back to the membership.

Ambulance staff anticipate some problems of interpretation of the sanctions. They hope to have a staff-side representative — either the branch secretary or the shop steward — located in the radio control room, who would assist ambulance officers in assessing calls as they were received.

Asked what the likely response from management would be to the latest sanctions, Sefton Heath Authority Ambulance Shop Steward Ray Carrick of NUPE replied: "The branch secretary has had discussion with management to test the water and to see if there are any areas that they are particularly concerned about. We have received informal assurances that they do not anticipate any suspensions from Wednesday, when the new measures come into operation."

"We did not expect that, as the vast bulk of the work of one section of our staff involves dealing with work which will no longer be covered from Wednesday. But management will probably transfer those staff to work which is covered by the union guidelines."

In addition to agreeing to implement new sanctions, Merseyside ambulance crews have also won growing support from the local labour movement and student organisations for their dispute. In the past week ambulance staff have

spoken at a number of Labour Party and trade union meetings in Liverpool, St Helens, Knowsley, as well as addressing last week's student rally in Liverpool.

The next stage is organising stalls in shopping arcades on Saturday mornings and contacting the major factories on Merseyside to obtain invitations to address union meetings. It is clearly vital to tap the massive support which exists for the ambulance crews in their fight for a decent pay rise.

The ambulance crews are determined to carry on with their dispute until they win such a rise. As Ray Carrick put it: "There is no element at all of defeatism. There has not been one suggestion of giving up or accepting management's offers, such as the pre-Xmas bribe from Clarke and Nichol. No-one has even hinted at any acceptance of that. We are determined to keep the dispute going until we win."

By Alison Roche

On Saturday 18 November, at a well-attended demonstration in support of ambulance workers, Socialist Organiser spoke to an ambulance worker.

He told us that in Sheffield over the last two weeks only emergency services and certain essential out-patient services had been operating.

Ambulance workers had not strictly been on strike, he said, as they had been sitting at their station, but had only answered emergency calls.

The response by management however has been to suspend some workers without pay for not working normal hours. "These tricks of management have ranged from individual letters of victimisation, knocking off pay to degrading and demoting some staff."

And on the whole, using pressure to break the morale of the crews. However, there was a lot of solidarity and unity amongst ambulance workers he said.

Although the ambulance workers have been amongst the least militant of the working class, "the government has succeeded in uniting them". They were out until they could get what they want, which would be more than the latest offer of getting a 9% pay rise this year and nothing next year.

"Support from the public and other trade unions has been fantastic. Surprisingly, I believe more than the nurses got." However, the calling in of the army and the police would not damage morale or our fight, he added.

CPSA Broad Left meets

By Trudy Saunders

This year's CPSA Broad Left Conference, held in Liverpool last weekend, was smaller than usual, with only 170 or so attending. This is sad, but hardly surprising.

Over the last year, the Broad Left leadership has consistently failed to mobilise the rank-and-file in an effective fightback against the Tories and the CPSA right wing National Executive. Instead, it has relied on 'exposing' the right wing in the hope of winning next year's national elections.

Conference reflected this sorry state of affairs. In a debate on how to fight agencies (privatisation), Militant supporters (who are in the Broad Left leadership) refused to support a Socialist Caucus (the independent left in the CPSA Broad Left) initiative to build and support a branch based unofficial rank-and-file conference scheduled for February 1990. Instead, the Militant

argued to rely on organising regional workshops and putting pressure on the right wing to call an official conference. This is fine, but only when it is coupled with organising the rank-and-file as well.

The right wing don't want to fight agencies and are unlikely to call an official conference. The vote was 83:83. The Militant chair, instead of getting the movers of the conflicting resolutions together to work out a compromise then cast her vote — against the Branches Against Agencies Conference! Not one Militant speaker had been able to give any serious reason for not supporting it!

In fact their arguments were completely unconvincing. Militant say they want to delay organising any unofficial movement against agencies until after they have exhausted every possible opportunity to pressure the union leadership into action. This may sound reasonable but if you examine the timescale you will see it is a cheating argument.

They intend petitioning the February 1990 CPSA executive meeting to call a

special conference on agencies. But by then there will be only 12 weeks to go until CPSA Conference and it takes roughly that amount of time to call a special conference under CPSA rules. The right wing will be able to argue against a special conference on the grounds that the issue can just as easily be discussed at the main national conference which is happening at exactly the same time (and six months campaigning will have been wasted barking up the wrong tree).

It makes much more sense to focus on getting the December 1989 executive meeting to take some action. This would mean a conference in February. If the right wing refused then an unofficial conference could be called in February or March to help organise those who want to fight against and to prepare to intervene in a national conference to raise the issue.

This is the obvious, rational way to go forward. But a campaign based on such a schedule would have to see the Branches Against Agencies Conference as perfectly timed. Militant would then have no reasonable arguments for refusing to support it.

But Militant have so lost their bearings that they are prepared to advocate a crazy strategy and timetable for the fight against agencies so long as it diverts attention away from a conference they don't control.

The ambulance workers' lesson for Kinnock

The ambulance workers are not proving the easy push-over that the government expected.

But the crux of the matter still lies in the fact that a determined government, prepared to pursue action against trade unionists and not to give a hang about the consequences, can do an awful lot of damage.

People in the Labour Party want to remember, when they're putting forward their yuppie image to attract the man or woman in the street, that the man and woman in the street consists of mineworkers, ambulance

workers, nurses. What comes first for Militant is to preserve their organisation's dominance on the left of the CPSA at all costs even if those costs include side-tracking the fight against agencies.

This year the SWP had truly jumped into bed with Militant. When the election of full-time officers was debated, a SWP supporter, Paul Power, argued to support the Militant's line of 5 yearly elections. His incoherent argument was that elections aren't important so what's the difference between 1 and 5 years! When voting took place, not all SWP supporters agreed.

Some SWPs later disowned Paul's speech but his argument was nothing more than the logical extension of their generally silly arguments about 'electoralism'. They seem to think that the process of standing in elections is the single most corruptible political activity imaginable as if it doesn't matter who leads the unions and Labour Party. Paul's contribution also highlighted the SWP's complete indifference to, and neglect of, the task of transforming the existing trade union and labour movement.

However, despite the silliness, and by clouding the issues, the SWP's contribution did help those who wanted to campaign only for a 5 year election to win the vote.

So all in all the Conference was a victory for the Broad Left leadership around Militant. It was not a victory for those who want to build a serious, open, democratic Broad Left.

WHETTON'S WEEK

A miner's diary

workers, nurses.

It's all right trying to attract the odd floating voter who has for years voted Tory but is a little bit disillusioned — but not if we gain one and lose 100.

There is an important message there for the Labour leadership if they're prepared to look at it.

Paul Whetton is a member of Manton NUM, South Yorkshire

Ford workers will vote next week on strike action over this year's pay claim. The ballot was announced on Monday 20 November.

This follows a series of unofficial walkouts over management's offer. Even traditionally non-militant plants like Southampton and Bridgend have voted with their feet.

However, there are problems with the claim — a 'substantial' pay rise and a

35-hour week. Union leaders should be tied down to a percentage rise and forced to press for a 35-hour week alongside the engineers in the Confed dispute. A recent article in the bosses' *Financial Times* ominously suggested union leaders would settle for a 10% rise, and a commitment to a 37-hour week. This would be a tragedy.

The morale of Ford's workers is high. Their victory would set the tone for the pay rounds of millions of workers. Now is the time to fight.

Drive for 35 round-up

The manual workers' strike at BAe Kingston is solid. Over 250 workers joined the picket of the night shift on Wednesday 15 November. Only 20 or so scabs have crawled in, mainly EETPU members.

However, on Wednesday the police called in the District Support Unit (fully trussed-up riot cops) who proceeded to lay into the picket, arresting five. This was repeated on Thursday morning.

In addition, JSSC secretary Dave Gollop was arrested when addressing the pickets. He had denounced an EETPU official as a scab for refusing to give an undertaking that EETPU members would not touch transferred work.

Although the strike is solid amongst manual workers, they are only about a quarter of the plant's 4,000. White collar unions MSF and Apex voted not to support the action.

The main problem amongst the manuals is the EETPU, but they have been sidelined. They have been kicked off the JSSC and many members have joined other unions.

Though none of the stewards at Kingston had yet had a chance to study in detail the NEI-Parsons agreement, they said that, from what they had heard, they believed it should be rejected.

Send messages of support, and requests for speakers, to: British Aerospace Strike Committee (Kingston), c/o Kingston Labour Party, 162 London Road, Kingston, Surrey.

By an AEU steward

Jordan and Ferry's willingness to talk down our claim can only damage the dispute.

Every time Jordan opens his mouth it makes it more difficult for stewards and activists on the ground to collect the levy. People ask the obvious questions like: "What the **** is going on?"

Other people just get cynical and discuss alternative ways of spending the levy money — such as a giant piss-up, for instance!

But this is no joke. In one major strategic East Midlands plant the staff levy has almost completely dried up and the manual levy has fallen from £5 to £2 per week. In total the levy doesn't even finance the current level of action. A rethink is necessary from the Confed leaders.

The rank and file must control

- Regular local Confed stewards meetings should be held to act as local strategy committees and discuss ways of escalating the dispute such as subsidised solidarity strikes.
- National Confed stewards' conferences should be held on a regular basis to control the overall conduct of the dispute.

Escalate the action

- For a one-day national Confed strike.
- Defend all laid-off workers. Full strike pay for those laid off.
- Send delegations of strikers round every engineering plant. Organise delegations from non-striking plants to the picket lines.
- Prepare for all-out action.

NEI-Parsons in Newcastle have got the first local deal of the campaign — a 37-hour/4½ day week by 1992, with an immediate cut to 38 hours in January next year.

So far the Confed has not released any detailed picture of the settlement so it's difficult to work out its full implications. The margin by which the deal was accepted was very narrow — 55%-45% or 169 votes out of 1,000 — showed that a lot less than the full claim, before the struggle has really got underway and before the action really starts to bite, the Confed leadership have opened up our side to the employers adopting 'salami tactics'.

Clearly, some of the provisions in the Parsons deal, like a 'review of shop stewards structure', hold real dangers.

Nevertheless, the settlement also represents a breach in the employers' defences, particularly as it indicates that Rolls Royce must be prepared to move (NEI-Parsons is a RR subsidiary).

Uniting the media left

By Steven Holt

A one-day conference was held on Saturday 18 November at NALGO House in London to discuss how the Left should respond to current developments in publishing and broadcasting. Over 60 people attended, from left groups in the various unions concerned: NUJ, NGA, BETA, ACTT and Equity.

The morning session focused on new technology. The effects of new technology have caused changes leading to many job losses, enforcement of flexible working, and workers having to do jobs for which they are not trained. An example is television cameramen having

to double as lighting technicians.

New technology has also created jobs, but many of these workers are non-unionised and fall between traditional recruiting areas of the present unions. New health hazards come with the use of VDU screens, too.

It was suggested that inter-union information networks be set up to inform workers, since otherwise information is only available in computer magazines owned by those whose interests are served by playing down health hazards.

Before the afternoon discussion, reports were given by strikers from the Pergamon and Essex Chronicle disputes.

The afternoon session was about how the Left should respond to the formation of an amalgamated media union and what we should work for within such a union. Federated structures already exist in some places, and there have been amalgamation talks between various union bureaucracies.

It was felt that amalgamation was needed urgently, since strikes such as Wapping had been lost through lack of solidarity among media workers in different unions. Even before any amalgamation, the Left must work to forge links at chapel level.

Finally, the conference discussed a Joint Statement of what the Left should fight for in an amalgamated union: collective bargaining, equality, health and safety, and resistance to censorship and monopoly ownership. Emphasis was rightly placed on the need for the union to be democratically accountable to its members and the conference passed an amendment requiring annual elections of officials.

A steering committee for a media Left alliance is being set up and future conferences are planned to exchange information and coordinate the activity of the Left in the media unions.

Support the Pergamon 23!
Saturday 25 November
Assemble:
Acorn House, 314
Grays Inn Road
(tube: Kings X)
12 noon
March to the Mirror
building and rally with
national speakers from
the print unions and
Labour Party

SOCIALIST

ORGANISER

An open letter to Bill Jordan



Dear Bill,

You don't know me. But you should know the kind of work I do, and the conditions under which I work.

Because, like tens of thousands of other engineering workers in

poorly organised, small shops up and down the country, I rely on the national agreement with the Engineering Employers Federation to provide some kind of protection and to set some kind of limits on what my employers can get away with.

'Unity is strength' is an old trade union watchword, but it is still true. And through the national agreement with the employers, the strength of the best organised, most powerful sections of engineering workers helps pull up the general level of all engineering workers.

In turn, the existence of the national agreement and the protection it provides on basic hours, holidays, shift and overtime pay makes it more difficult for the employers to play divide and rule with us. It makes it more difficult for them to undercut the best organised of our brothers and sisters. 'United we stand, divided we fall'.

If the bosses get their way we could be back to the situation that existed in the last century, with a minority of skilled, relatively privileged engineers doing very well thank you very much, and the majority of us facing declining living standards and working conditions.

So that's why I find your reaction and the reaction of the other Confed leaders to the bosses' declaration that national negotiations are now ended so difficult to understand.

Engineering workers need the unity the agreement helps provide and we should be prepared to fight tooth and nail to preserve that unity.

But what have you proposed to do about the employers' decision to stop the agreement?

Absolutely nothing!
The strategy used in the current 35-hour dispute will continue. There will be no attempt to mobilise the full weight of all engineering workers. One of your press spokespersons even went so far as to say: "The strategy remains the same, except instead of trying to win 10 or 12 local battles over hours and thus forcing a national agreement, we will now have to win hundreds and thousands."

This spells disaster.
The levy is starting to fall in some places. It doesn't even finance the small number of strikers already out. In many workplaces like my own there was not enough information put round about the campaign. That situation needs to change if we are going to keep the levy going. But even with the best will in the world, we won't be able to keep the levy up for the years that will be needed to win the hundreds and thousands of local deals the Confed leadership now talks about.

It makes much more sense to mobilise the full weight of all engineering workers in an all-out battle to force the employers back to the national negotiating table and to fight for our full claim.

I don't for one moment believe it would be easy to create the conditions for an all-out national engineering strike, but the leadership of the Confed have got to face up to their responsibilities squarely. And start the work of creating a mood for all-out action.

You should call together a national Confed stewards' conference to re-assess our strategy in the light of the employers breaking-out of the national agreement. And to lay down a plan of action culminating in an all-out national strike. Even if you disagree with such a course of action, how can you deny us, the rank and file, a proper forum in which to work out what to do next?

We are at a crucial turning point. Faced with such determination from the employers we have no other alternative but to prepare the full-scale mobilisation of the entire Confed membership.

Karen Waddington
AEU member
South Yorkshire

The political vacuum in East Germany

By Bruce Robinson

Opening up the borders has only intensified the crisis of the East German state and economy.

The mass movement that brought down the Berlin Wall is still on the streets. If the pace of change slackens, there is no longer any way of preventing people leaving for the West.

The ability to travel has spotlighted the weakness of the GDR's economy in comparison with that of West Germany. The exchange rate for the non-exportable East German mark has gone from the official 1 to 1 exchange rate to 5 to 1 in West Berlin when the wall came down. 20 East German marks now only buy one West German mark and the rate is likely to slide still further.

There is a widespread fear among East Germans of their country being bought out by West German capitalists and becoming a bargain basement with cheap labour and some cheap commodities. At the same time, there is increasing pressure from the West for East Germany to become a free market economy, which would mean the back of the workers.

The depth of the crisis will mean that change will continue at breakneck speed, now that the SED is unable to return to its old methods of rule. Last week Krenz and Modrow brought the other official parties into the cabinet as a minority. These parties, which were closely attached to the SED for years, are now trying to project an independent and oppositional face by calling for free elections.

There is also a widespread revolt of the rank and file within the SED, who have been voting higher ranking officials up to Politburo level out of their posts. It appears that the SED Congress — brought forward to the 15 December — could vote out all of the old guard, possibly including Krenz. It is



The day of the people: the Berlin Wall is opened

unclear where all the replacements with clean pasts would come from.

More and more is coming out about the corruption and political bankruptcy of the SED. It has now been confirmed that armed police were ready to open fire on the first mass demonstration in Leipzig on 8 October. Though Krenz is now claiming credit for preventing this, Kurt Masur, the conductor of the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra, says he and local party leaders restrained them.

The extent of the privileges of the Stalinist elite are now being exposed. The top party leaders lived in a guarded compound in the countryside with free access to Western goods, expensive furniture and servants. Krenz still has a home there but was shown on TV being interviewed in a much more modest flat. The exposure of these privileges has increased the isolation of the SED leadership.

Despite the pressure, many opposition demands have still not been met. The 'leading role' of the SED is still in the constitution and it is unclear when free elections will occur and under what conditions. However as long as the demonstrations continue, it can only be a matter of time before they are announced.

In this situation there is a real danger of a political vacuum to the left of the SED because of the speed at which change is occurring and the difficulty the left still has in organising. The main umbrella opposition group, New Forum, has been legalised and has met SED figures semi-officially. New Forum's programme is broadly democratic. It is unclear whether it would stand as a political organisation in elections or, if it did, what its programme would be. The official Liberal Democratic Party has made overtures to New Forum about a joint

slate.

To the left of New Forum, the United Left is a fairly loose organisation of Marxists, Christians and ecologists. They call for socialist democracy, socialisation of the economy and workers' control. Their focus is on winning support from workers and they are planning to hold their first conference at the end of November. They are still illegal and face obstacles in getting their ideas out to people.

A Social Democratic Party was set up in October. It has quickly developed links with the West German SPD and wishes to join the Socialist International. Like the SPD, they support the idea of a 'social market economy', which, in their view, would mean for the GDR the maintenance of limited nationalisation to safeguard the welfare state and ecological control. Otherwise there would be a gradual extension of the market. The significance of the SDP comes less from these policies, which might be close to those of a refurbished SED, than from the possible attraction of an independent social democratic party for sections of the working class. There have already been reports of groups of workers in some factories joining the SDP.

There is a real urgency to the organisation of the independent socialists around the limited left. Firstly, it is necessary for them to be able to make their ideas available as widely as possible, so that it is clear that an alternative to the SED and the supporters of market economics exists. The left in the West, and particularly in West Germany, should build links with the United Left, and give them material assistance if practical. As well as making general propaganda the left must give answers to the immediate crisis of the economy if they are to appear credible.

Please turn to centre pages

Time to campaign

Eric Heffer MP spoke to Socialist Organiser about the Queen's Speech and its proposals for new anti-strike laws and measures to implement the Health Service White Paper

The Labour Party must oppose these measures as strongly as possible. We must carry the issues to the people and have a proper campaign.

Under the present Labour Party leadership there has been very little campaigning except the type which

has no impact whatsoever. They said they were going to campaign against the Poll Tax. They haven't done that.

Even if you accept the argument that we shouldn't refuse to pay the Poll Tax — and it isn't an argument I accept — they could have campaigned. But they have never done it.

It's vital there should be a campaign on the new industrial relations measures and against the pro-

posals to implement the Health Service White Paper.

I don't think there's going to be any immediate collapse of the Tory government. It would be quite wrong for us to think so. I think we've got to assume that Mrs Thatcher will be there to lead the Tories into the next election. We've got to take full advantage of the internal schisms in the Tories, but the important thing is to get out there and put the alternative case.



Sunday 26 November
Commemorate the
Manchester Martyrs
Parade and rally
Assemble 12.30pm
Longsight Market
Dickenson Road
Manchester