

# SOCIALIST ORGANISER

FOR WORKERS' LIBERTY EAST AND WEST

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## Tories set Kinnock's agenda

# Don't let Thatcher grind us down!



Neil Kinnock is right about one thing. After three election defeats, the Labour Party *does* need to review its policies. But as Kinnock's key-note speech made clear, despite all its denials, what he and the Bryan Goulds want to do is to abandon socialism and go in search of 'respectable yuppie' voters.

Kinnock didn't really say much. But he promised us a mixed economy, affirmed his fetish in the market (except in certain areas) and indicated his determination to keep tough with left-wing dissidents in the Party.

He reminded us of 1959, when Labour was heavily beaten. The

analogy could go on. Talk of the decline of the working class, 'new realities', and so forth is not new.

It is not new to believe that class struggle is old fashioned, or dead. It is not new to want to drag the Labour Party away from its traditional socialistic commitments. Kinnock's would-be intellectual theorising is very, very old hat.

### Answer

And for sure the traditional Labour Left doesn't seem to have much of an answer. It *isn't* adequate just to say 'stick to your guns' — although even the traditional guns have never really been stuck to in an election. But Kinnock's New Model Labour Party won't get us very far.

It's no good *talking* about economic and political power in this country. You have to *challenge* it, and Kinnock has proposed no way to challenge it.

He wants to help the old, the sick, the poor. But he doesn't say *how*. He wants a better health service, better schools, more opportunities for today's youth. Nice ideas. But he doesn't say *how*.

Kinnock's only 'realistic promise' is for more of the same. We *do* need a rethink. And we *do* need to start the election campaign now.

But we need to do that by turning out to the council estates, organising local people against cuts, bad housing, unemployment, racism. We need an active, democratic Labour Party, that provides a real political forum for working class people.

### Visible

We need a national leadership that gives encouragement and support to local initiatives, and which organises *visible, mass*

campaigns. The Labour Party should call a mass demonstration. Neil Kinnock should practise what he preaches.

### Trust

We need a national leadership that gives real backing to trade unionists and communities involved in fighting the Tories. We need a Labour Party that doesn't only talk about 'principles' in the abstract, but stands up for them, and shows people what its principles are.

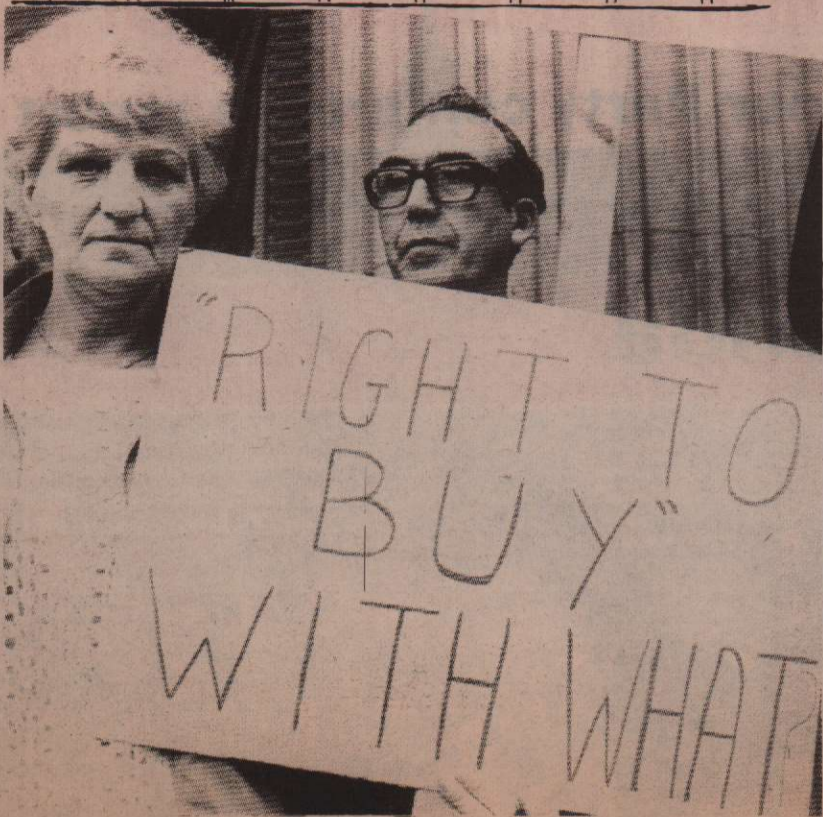
We need a Labour Party that inspires the trust and active participation of working class people: a democratic, campaigning movement.

If what Neil Kinnock has in store for us is five more years of blood-letting, he won't be preparing for a Labour victory in the future. He will be sowing the seeds of disaster.



**Support the miners! See back page**

# GRAFFITI



Protestors in Westminster. Photo:Roof

## Homeless? Give up!

"With a bit of luck, the homeless will just give up". That's the comment from Westminster's Tory council on the implications for the homeless of its plan to sell off half its housing.

The number of people homeless in London is rising fast, and

because the government will not allow councils to borrow money to build new housing, most councils put the homeless into squalid but very expensive bed-and-breakfast hotels. Some primary schools in Paddington now have the big majority of their children

living in bed-and-breakfast.

Westminster is brutally cynical about it; but even those councils that have tried to do something positive for the homeless are at a dead end. Camden's Labour council says that it has reached the point where it is literally impossible for it to meet its obligations under the Homeless Persons Act.

## 53 pounds a day

The flipside of London's rising number of homeless people is its soaring house prices.

House prices in London are rising by an average of £53 a day, according to a recent survey. The average price in Greater London for a three-bedroom semi is now £91,000, and in inner London prices are much higher. The same house costs about three times as much in Lon-

don as in Yorkshire.

No wonder most people can't buy houses in London. Can they rent instead? According to the housing magazine *Roof*, "A foretaste of the wonderful world of free market rents is provided by a two-bedroom flat in Finchley. One of the handful of 'assured tenancies' so far provided... the rent is £150 a week".

## 38 per cent useless

According to a recent report, 38 per cent of all phone boxes in London are out of action at any one time. Across the country, 23 per cent are not working.

No surprises there. But the report also says that only one third of the phone-box breakdowns are due to vandalism or theft. The watchdog body Oftel reports that "Many of the callboxes that could not be used appeared to have nothing wrong with them except for full coin-boxes..."

And 17 per cent of London phone boxes are out of order for more than 21 days. Once vandalised, they

are not repaired quickly.

Oftel boss Bryan Carsberg says "BT's performance can be improved by greater managerial effort".

## Profits

Profits have increased by 46 per cent in the last two and a half years, while basic bottom-grade pay rates in private companies have increased only 3 per cent in real terms.

According to the latest *Labour Research Bargaining Report*, profit margins in manufacturing have now reached their highest levels since the early '70s.

## Rents

The only housing most working-class people can afford in inner London is council housing. But the Tories want to change that, too.

A new law will forbid councils to subsidise their housing revenue accounts from the rates. In most places will not make much difference. Two-thirds of all local authorities in England and Wales transfer little or nothing from the rates to their housing revenue account.

The big exceptions are in inner London — where the councils' costs are higher because land is so much more expensive. Camden, Hackney, Lewisham, Lambeth, Tower Hamlets and Islington all cover over 30% of their housing revenue accounts from the rates. To obey the new Tory law, these councils may have to double rents.

But that's what the Tories want — 'free market' rents.

# Charter 77: ten years on

By Tony Jain

Earlier this year Charter 77 celebrated the tenth anniversary of its foundation. Today, as a result of its size, activity and public relations skill, the group is probably the best known of all the human rights organisations in Eastern Europe.

Three factors stimulated the birth of the group in June 1977.

One was the decision by the Kremlin bureaucracy to sign the Helsinki Accords on Human Rights in 1976. This international treaty in theory committed the Kremlin and its allies across Eastern Europe to respect the basic civil, political, and human rights of their people. The massive persecution, intimidation and discrimination in all East European states against workers, national minorities and anyone else who dares to oppose the regimes shows what a farce the accord is.

Another important factor was the Czech regime. Under Husak, the Communist Party General Secretary who was installed by the Russians after the invasion which overthrew Dubcek in 1968, the regime continues to discriminate in jobs, housing etc., against anyone even vaguely supportive of the ideas of the 'Prague Spring' of 1968.

This was the period when 'liberals' within the ruling party, led by Dubcek, seized control of the party apparatus from more hardline Stalinists like Novotny and attempted to pursue policies which they called 'socialism with a human face'.

Now many of the reforms which proved too much for the Kremlin bureaucrats' stomachs then, are being proposed by Gorbachev himself — a more open press, ballots for top party posts; a choice of candidates in national elections, a greater role for the market in the economy. The problem was that the workers in



Czechoslovakia 1968

Czechoslovakia took advantage of the divisions in the bureaucracy to begin to mobilise themselves.

The regime over-reacted hysterically to Charter 77.

The state-controlled media made hysterical attacks on leading members of the group like Petr Uhl,

The secret police followed up the personal attacks with arrests and physical intimidation of leading Charter activists like Vaclav Havel. Other signatories of the Charter were dismissed from their posts in state institutions like schools and universities.

The regime tried to get ordinary workers to denounce the Charter on TV or in newspapers. Unfortunately for them, this manoeuvre badly misfired. Many workers demanded the right to read the Charter before denouncing it and its proponents.

The net effect of the Husak government's campaign against the Charter was not what they hoped for. Instead there was immense interest in the activities and statements of the group among all Czechs. This perhaps was best illustrated by the fact that thousands of copies of the Charter have been printed and

distributed illegally throughout the country in samizdat form.

Charter 77 membership is drawn from a wide number of individuals with quite different political perspectives, including liberals, ex-Dubcek-style reform 'communists', socialists, humanists, etc.

These quite differing political outlooks have not surprisingly led to tensions within the group over the ten years of its existence. Some more left wing elements like Petr Uhl have urged it to take on a more political orientation and carry out activities more in the style of activists in Poland's Solidarnosc.

Others have insisted that the group carry on its legal opposition thus avoiding head on confrontation with the government. This latest faction has so far won the the arguments on political orientation inside Charter 77.

What have been Charter 77's achievements over ten years?

First they have established an alternative underground network of newspapers, etc., in samizdat form which reaches large sections of the population.

They have also established themselves as a serious grouping, monitoring and publicising to the outside world the human rights violations of the Husak regime.

But perhaps their greatest achievement has been to link up and support other groups and organisations across Eastern Europe defending workers' interests and human rights against tyrannical state repression — groups like Solidarnosc.

Although the demands contained in the Charter are very limited they would nevertheless never be met by the bureaucracy without it giving up its basis of power.

For these and other basic reasons of solidarity with all groups and individuals, we should support Charter 77 and other organisations in the Eastern bloc like it which are suffering state repression.

# Racist coup in Fiji

By Clive Bradley

The islands of Fiji have been declared a republic. Lieutenant-Colonel Sitiveni Rabuka, staging his second military coup in the last five months, has revoked the British-model constitution and threatened the Queen's representative, Governor-General Ganilau, with dismissal if he refuses to support the new regime.

Labour Party leader Timoci Bavadra, the former prime minister deposed in the first coup on 14 May, is being held in army barracks.

Rabuka represents those in the indigenous Melanesian community on the island who oppose 'majority rule'. The island has a slight majority descended from Indian immigrants who were brought to the island as bonded labourers under British colonial rule.

The coup — like its predecessor — is racist. The first coup's motive was to depose the Labour Party-National Federation coalition government, perceived to represent the Indian community. In fact, there was some Melanesian input into the coalition.

Six out of thirteen cabinet ministers — including Bavadra himself — were Melanesian, and nine out of twenty-eight members of Parliament. 9% of Melanesians

voted for the coalition.

The Melanesian Alliance Party had previously ruled the islands since independence in 1970.

In the name of 'seeking compromise', the Governor-General — i.e. the 'Queen's representative' — recognised a diluted form of Rabuka's military government. The elected government was not restored. Instead, Ganilau dissolved Parliament and recognised an advisory council presided over by Rabuka, which promised elections in October after 'reform' of the constitution.

Rabuka got impatient with discussions on the reform, and has preempted any further developments. Political opponents have been rounded up. The right-wing Fijian nationalist (anti-Indian) Taukei movement — whose sectarian actions provided part of the backdrop to the first coup, and who have threatened Bavadra's life — will be given official cover by the new military regime.

Socialists shed no tears for the vestiges of the British Empire, and the legal power of Ganilau, the Governor-General, was scandalous. It is for the people of Fiji to decide their own fate.

Nevertheless, Rabuka's coup is deeply reactionary. In Fiji, the Indian population is even denied legal access to land ownership (although some Indians have prospered as tenants).

Moreover, the Indian community is an old one. Imperial-sponsored immigration (to super-exploit them) ended sixty or more years ago, so most of the Indians are 'indigenous Fijians'.

The non-communal Labour Party — founded by Bavadra, a trade union leader, in 1985 — was a step forward. The labour movement must demand his release and majority rule, while opposing further British involvement.

# Gays are normal!

By Edward Ellis

A Department of Education circular has outlawed homosexuality in school sex education. It says: "There is no place in any school for teaching which advocates homosexual behaviour, represents it as the norm, or encourages homosexual experimentation by pupils".

The Tories' Victorian values look set to triumph again. But they must be resisted. This circular is bad news for school students.

Despite the media hype, no schools have been teaching 'gay sex' or 'advocating homosexuality'. Some local authorities may have been bureaucratic in their 'positive images' policies, but that is no reason to

shove gay sex back into the closet.

Nobody says homosexuality is 'the norm' — but it is *normal*. It is natural, sane behaviour. Two men or two women loving each other can be just as happy or unhappy as two people of the opposite sex.

For very many young people who are coming to terms with their own homosexuality, learning at school that they are not sick, not mad, not evil, and that there are millions of normal people just like them, is absolutely essential.

For them and others, doing something in school to overcome the prejudices of society — which can have violent and even fatal consequences in the shape of 'queer bashing' — is a good thing.

It is the people who want to make young gays and lesbians suffer, now and in the bigoted future they will create, who are sick.

# This isn't the way to win

**OF COURSE** Neil Kinnock and the leaders of the Labour Party want to win the next election. That's their job.

Of course the Labour party should look self-critically at the way it presents itself to the electorate. Of course — however galling it may be — Labour must gauge the effect on working-class opinion of such Thatcherite measures as selling off council houses and shares in public enterprises. Any serious working-class party, however revolutionary, would have to do such things, and shape the form of its message to the electorate accordingly.

**But Neil Kinnock and Bryan Gould and the leaders of the Labour Party are not just doing that.** They are running scared before Thatcher and the brutal 'Thatcher Revolution' of the last nine years.

They have been panicked and rattled to their bones by the defeat in the June election. So they want to go in for 'designer politics' — to ditch much of the Labour Party's identity and design policies they think that more of the electorate will want to hear.

The real lesson on the June defeat has not registered with them — that with four years of vigorous Labour campaigning before 11 June we could

## EDITORIAL

have won. That is not just wishful thinking. Where class-struggle politics were presented, as in Wallasey, they got a better response than the average.

And we need to do more than win elections. Labour needs, once elected, to have policies that work for our people — working-class socialist policies.

Learn the lesson on Labour's modern history. In October 1959 Labour lost its third general election in a row. There was immediate turmoil. The right wing attacked. They wanted to ditch all reference to socialism (Clause 4), change the party's name, and distance it from the unions. They were knocked back.

Three years later Harold Wilson took over. He was the candidate of the left. He had a message and a 'new philosophy' — Britain could be transformed, and many socialist objectives gained, by the 'white heat of the technological revolution'.

The electorate bought it — tentatively in October 1964 and definitely in March 1966, when it gave Labour a sizeable majority.

What happened? Labour in government flopped badly. Wilson did not even renovate British capitalist industry, let alone do anything socialist.

Then Wilson and Callaghan ruled from 1974 to 1979. Labour flopped even worse.

In 1976 Labour started to make cuts in social services, and embarked timidly on some of the 'monetarist' policies which Thatcher was later to make her own.

**It was Labour's failure in government in the '60s and '70s which paved the way for Thatcher.** It was Labour in its moments of triumph and victory between 1964 and 1979 which opened the door to the savage Thatcherite backlash.

Labour won elections — though with decreasing votes after 1966 — but that wasn't enough.

We must start now to fight the next general election. We need now to launch an anti-Tory crusade. We need to attack the increasing centralisation of state power. We need to fight the poll tax and defend local democracy.

We need to indict the plutocratic vandals whose pursuit of wealth Mrs Thatcher serves so faithfully and ruthlessly. We need to join with the unions and campaign to unionise new workforces, especially the growing number of women workers.

That is a programme for the next four years. If we do it, we will rouse an army against Thatcher. But unless we do it under the banner of socialism, we will be helpless even if Labour wins the next election.

**We will be doing what Wilson and Callaghan did in the '60s and '70s — preparing the ground for new, and maybe worse, Thatcherism to step in once Labour has failed.**

Working-class socialist ideas will not dominate Labour conference. Far from it. The panic-mongers and coat-turners will be in the ascendancy. It is all the more urgent therefore that the left stands against the tide.

**The future of working-class politics lies with the left, not with the coat-turners.**



## Fight back!

**Lol Duffy, delegate from Wallasey CLP, sums up Monday's proceedings**

Yesterday, the union block vote was lined up by our so-called leadership to deliver the sort of Labour Party that looks good to the pundits of the media.

Yesterday we saw calls for an active, campaigning Labour Party linked into the day to day struggles of ordinary people defeated, and replaced by 'policy reviews'.

We saw a system of selecting parliamentary candidates brought in which discourages the active involvement of party members — a system which has not even been discussed by CLPs and trade union branches.

We saw the beginning of the dismantling of the LPYS, to be replaced by a tame youth organisation. We also saw a strengthening of the anti-socialist faction on the NEC.

This should not be a signal for people to get downhearted or depressed. It should be a signal to get our act together, to organise back in our constituencies and union branches, to get to a position where the party responds to needs of the the majority of people and not the media conscious whims of the leadership.

If socialist policies are put forward in an honest and open way, people will be drawn towards Labour. What the leadership is doing now has been tried in the past and has failed.

Despite their lack of media support, socialist ideas are the only ones that can change society from one which serves the rich to one which serves the needs of the working class majority.

# Going Kinnock's way

**John Bloxam reports on Labour conference 1987**

**The first day of the 1987 Labour Party conference in Brighton was designed to get rid of the controversial items.**

The top leaders of the Labour Party and trade unions had things their own way.

On party organisation and campaigns, conference massively supported reports and composites which made bland calls for campaigns, but focused on the need to 'modernise' the party and 'review policies'. A

composite from Wallasey and Basingstoke CLPs which argued for class-struggle campaigning was defeated, although it picked up considerable support in the constituencies.

Labour leaders objected to calls in the Wallasey/Basingstoke composite for support to workers and tenants taking action; for Labour MPs to disrupt parliamentary business as part of their tactics in fighting the Tories; and for the NEC to stop attacking party members.

In the afternoon Labour's leaders got parliamentary selection procedures changed, again with a large majority. The unions insisted in retaining some voice, so the 'electoral college' version of 'one member, one

vote' was carried. Unions will still have a block vote at constituency level.

Later in the afternoon conference supported changes in the structure of the Labour Party Young Socialists — reducing the age limit to 23 and abolishing the regional committee structure. Both policies are designed to increase Neil Kinnock's control over the YS.

Kinnock described the new NEC elected on Monday as 'a marvellous NEC'. Jo Maynard and Audrey Wise were kicked off and Eric Heffer did not regain his seat. New whizz-kid Bryan Gould got on. So did Ken Livingstone, with the support of both the 'hard' left and the Labour Coordinating Committee.

## OUT NOW!

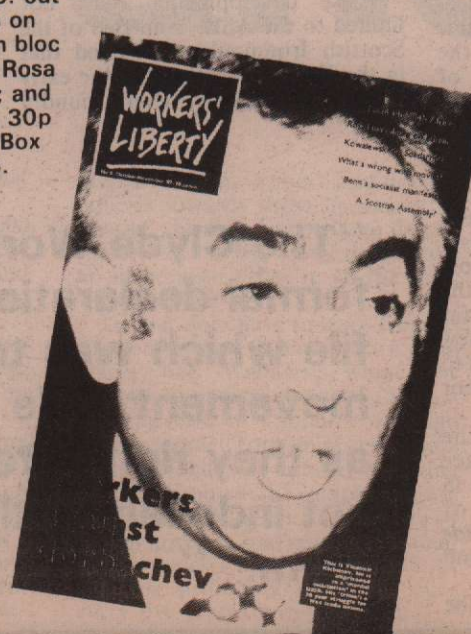
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## PRESS GANG

# Wapping worms

By Jim Denham

**Worms have been turning lately. First there was Steven Seaman, the scab-herd who helped round up EETPU members for Murdoch, ready for the move to Wapping. He walked out on the digger a few weeks ago, bleating about management's 'Ned Kelly' attitude and how they had "reneged on virtually all undertakings made to the workforce."**

Now we have Peter Jenkins (who crossed the picket line to work on the Sunday Times throughout the dispute) declaring in Thursday's Independent, "I had no cause for personal complaint against Mr. Murdoch, but I saw how good newspapers and once independent spirits withered in his presence, even at 3,000 miles removed."

Both Seaman and Jenkins are grown men who presumably knew exactly what they were doing when they rallied to the side of the Digger in his union busting operation against SOGAT and the NGA. That they now recoil from the consequences of their collaboration at Wapping would be funny if it was not so sickening.

If anything, Jenkins' part in the Wapping saga was even more despicable than Seaman's. Jenkins is an experienced political correspondent who claims never to have had any illusions in Murdoch. He stayed on at Wapping in order to demonstrate his opposition to the print unions and then jumped ship to join the Independent once the unions had been defeated.

Now, as Murdoch's empire threatens to extend to the Financial Times Jenkins holds up his hands in horror: perhaps he should take a close look at those hands and tell us if he can honestly say they are clean?

## Hands off!

Murdoch's 'dawn raid' on Pearsons last week, gives him a 15% stake in the group that owns the Financial Times. Inevitably this has started widespread speculation that the Digger has set his sights on the Great Pink 'Un — a prospect that has already provoked howls of outrage from the most unlikely quarters (see above).

In theory there should be no way that the Digger could get his hands on the FT: he already controls about 35% of the national press and surely the Monopolies and Mergers Commission would never allow him to extend his empire still further.

Unfortunately the MMC has never proved to be much of a problem for Murdoch in the past, and Secretary for Trade and Industry Lord Young is unlikely to place any insurmountable obstacles in the path of such a valued supporter of the Thatcher regime.

If necessary Murdoch would almost certainly be prepared to jettison the Times for the more prestigious and profitable FT.

Should we give a damn about all this? I think so. The FT may be the "internal bulletin of the ruling class" but its objectivity makes it an indispensable read for serious trade unionists and socialists. Murdoch's track record demonstrates beyond reasonable doubt that such objectivity melts like snow in summer once he gets his grubby mits on a paper.

# The first shop stewards' movement

On July 22, 1972, the National Industrial Relations Court ordered the imprisonment of five dockers for defying an injunction under Edward Heath's Industrial Relations Act.

It was the age of Gary Glitter and T. Rex. Donny Osmond was number one with 'Puppy Love'.

Leeds had beaten Arsenal in the FA Cup Final. Roberto had won the Derby and Muhammad Ali's comeback continued as he stopped Al 'Blue' Lewis in eleven rounds in Dublin.

It was also the finest hour of the modern shop stewards' movement.

As the dockers were hauled off to Pentonville Jail by the tipstaff, the cadre of working class rank and file leaders who had developed through the long boom went into action. Stewards' committees, union branches and trades councils laid plans for emergency meetings.

Group after group of workers came out not 'spontaneously' but because they were given a lead by their stewards. The links were there, the wheels clicked into place.

## Organisation

With 250,000 workers out on strike and the numbers increasing every day, the TUC called a one-day general strike. The government and judiciary caved in.

In the hot summer of 1972 the British labour movement had what is most lacking in the unions today: a strong stewards' organisation in the workplace, able to mobilise the membership independently of the top official leaders of the trade unions, able to push the union leaders into action by the very strength of that mobilisation and — this is the crucial point — able to mobilise their members, not only on the bread and butter sectional issues of wages and conditions, but on class-wide issues, in this case the use of state laws to fetter the unions.

The stewards' organisations which had developed since the war were the crown jewel of British trade unionism and the hope of socialists. Shop steward organisation had serious weaknesses and limited political horizons. 1972 was the highpoint, never attained again. It is only in the limited sense of a shared set of understandings, an awareness of the necessity for links with other workers, a striving to build those links, that we can talk of a movement.

Today we are faced with the need to reconstruct rank and file organisation within the workplaces and across industry. We need to start with the memory of Pentonville but go far beyond it. We need to build on a new political basis. To do that we need to assess our experience of shop floor organisation in the past.

Engineering was always the heartland of strong workplace organisation. The formal system in the Amalgamated Society of Engineers was for the union *outside* the workplace to lay down rules and custom.

If employers did not accept the

## John McIlroy tells the story of the birth and growth of the shop stewards' movement in the years before the First World War.

conditions the union laid down Society men shouldn't work there. But this system was always supplemented by informal bargaining within the shop. Given the control the craftsmen had over their job a whole range of custom and practice flourished and district committees began to appoint delegates within the workplace.

From the 1880s the development of new technology — the introduction of capstan and turret lathes, machine grinders, the radial arm drill, all capable of being operated by the semi-skilled — undermined the position of the time served craft worker.

With increasing international competition from Germany and the USA in the period to 1914 the employers pressed for drastic changes in the organisation of work. They attempted to weaken the unions, the barrier to putting less skilled workers on the machines at lower rates and introducing piecework.

Disputes over these issues gave stewards a greater bargaining role. Stewards received a further fillip from the 1897 agreement which broke the closed shop, lifted restrictions on overtime and the number of apprentices and brought in payment by results with job prices to be fixed in the shop.

That was where the locus of activity shifted. The District Committee could no longer uphold the craft rules. *In strong workplaces the stewards could.*

The introduction of new tools and the growth of management techniques led to numerous disputes over discipline. The piecework system provided a negotiating role over money for stewards.

So in the years to 1914 the shop stewards' system developed as a means of workplace negotiation and as the guardian of job controls.

These developments were not limited to the ASE. Tom Bell of the Scottish Ironmoulders recalled that in the West of Scotland in the early years of the century, 'Every foundry

had a shop steward. Within three hours of starting a job your card was collected.'

Nor were stewards limited to the skilled unions. As early as 1872 the functions of stewards in the Tyneside and National Labourers' Union were extended from recruitment and collection to negotiation. In the upsurge of the new unionism after 1889 the rules of the Gasworkers', the National Amalgamated Union of Labour specifically provided for stewards.

## Integral

Tom Bell's judgement was true of many unions: 'the shop steward was an integral part of the trade union machinery especially to the engineers prior to the war. Most unions had their delegates on the job or in the shop for the collection of contributions checking up on defaulting members for reporting changes in the condition of work and as a link between the union branch and the work'.

In engineering, stewards had a greater negotiating role. Committees were established. GDH Cole describes stewards — all those years ago — being given an office, access to all departments and full facilities for negotiation with the rate fixers. Not only was workers' organisation at the point of production a tremendous gain. *It was soon asserting its independence from the bureaucratised full-time officials.*

The years before 1914 saw a tremendous struggle in the ASE between a leadership attempting to impose central negotiating and the Districts attempting to maintain local autonomy. This led in 1912 to a Delegate Conference which insisted on the resignation of the Executive. When they refused to go the delegates tunneled their way into the union headquarters and physically turned



The release of the Pentonville Five, 1972

them out.

The militancy of the 'Great Unrest' saw the establishment of rank and file vigilance committees in many unions. Many of the emerging shop stewards were attracted to the socialist organisations, the British Socialist Party and the Socialist Labour Party.

The outbreak of war in 1914 intensified many of these tendencies. A conference of trade union executives agreed with the government 'there shall in no case be a stoppage of work upon munitions and equipment of war or other work required for a satisfactory completion of the war'. This Treasury agreement was given legal force by the passing of the Munitions Act which also provided for prosecution of workers.

With the union leaders now a part of the machinery of state, the rank and file filled the gap. With more full time employment they possessed the

capability to defend themselves independently of their leaders. New issues in the workshops — crucially the dilution of skilled trades by employment of less skilled workers — gave a further boost to the development of stewards on a basis which spread beyond the workshop. The Clyde Workers' Committee gave the first formal declaration of independence of the rank and file which was to be the first plank of the movement. 'We will support the officials just as long as they rightly represent the workers. But we will act independently immediately they misrepresent them. Being composed of delegates from every shop and untrammelled by obsolete rule or law we claim to represent the true feeling of the workers. We can act immediately according to the merits of the case and the desire of the rank and file'.

The constitution of the committee outlined its aims as:

- to obtain increasing control over workshop conditions;
- to regulate the terms upon which the workers shall be employed;
- to organise the workers upon a class basis and to maintain the class struggle until the overthrow of the wages system and the establishment of industrial democracy has been obtained.

250-300 delegates met each weekend. There were delegates from engineering, shipbuilding, the miners, railways and shops. But many represented militant minorities rather than fully fledged workplace organisation. The crunch came over the key issue of dilution. Despite the socialism of the leadership they failed to put forward a class policy which could unite skilled and unskilled

**"The Clyde Workers' Committee gave the first formal declaration of independence of the rank and file which was to be the first plank of the movement. 'We will support the officials just as long as they rightly represent the workers. But we will act independently immediately they misrepresent them.'"**

# WOMEN'S FIGHTBACK

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**INSIDE:**  
The hidden history of black women in America

Women in the civil service  
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How bus cuts hit women  
Defending abortion rights

back page



Women in the miners' strike showed what can be done. Photo: Martin Shakeshaft.

# The way ahead

By Lynn Ferguson

**"Moving Ahead" is the slogan of this year's Labour Party conference, and it is clear what Neil Kinnock and Bryan Gould mean by it.**

In his leader's speech, Neil Kinnock argued that Labour must learn the lessons of its third consecutive election defeat. And so we should.

But what are those lessons? Bryan Gould thinks that wider share ownership, and attempts to appeal to those people who have become fairly affluent under Thatcher (read yuppies) are the order of the day.

Bryan wants the Labour Party to be seen as "really giving people what

Mrs Thatcher has offered only as an illusion". Neil Kinnock wants it to look forwards, rather than backwards, to "old outmoded ideas" (socialism, perhaps?).

Over the past eight years the Tories have been very successful in changing people's expectations. The ideas of individual choice, self-reliance, and dog-eat-dog competition have taken hold.

But Labour's answer should not be to accept those ideas too, attempting to out-Thatcher Thatcher, with a few fine words about the "less fortunate" in society.

It's highly unlikely that a Labour Party which only offers a second-rate Toryism would get itself elected. And even if it did, the millions who have been at the sharp end of Tory policies

could be forgiven for wondering, "What's the point?"

Thatcher's Britain has 100,000 families a year becoming homeless, ending up often in squalid bed and breakfast accommodation with little hope of a real home.

Young people are leaving school to a future of so-called 'training schemes' and low paid jobs in dangerous conditions.

Millions are on the dole, living below the official poverty line. Workers have suffered more and more attacks on their trade union rights and on their living standards.

These people need a real alternative to Thatcher. Many of them voted Labour in 1987 because, inadequate though the campaign was, it did appeal to basic gut feelings of

disgust with the Tories' cold-hearted policies towards those in society — the old, the sick, least able to defend themselves. Sadly, many didn't vote at all because "they're all the same when they get in".

Labour does have to learn from its election defeats. It has to learn from places like Wallasey, where the Labour campaign managed to get a 39% increase in Labour's vote and nearly topple Tory minister Lynda Chalker. That was done by involving the community in the campaign, linking in the fight against the closure of a local hospital, and really campaigning on issues which affect people — not just promising the earth once every five years on the doorstep.

Far from turning its back on ordinary working class people, Labour

Party wards must turn back towards them. We must get "back to basics".

Ward meetings need to be changed from a boring routine of endless committee reportbacks to being active centres of campaigning. We should turn our Labour Party branches outwards to struggles in the local community — tenants' struggles, industrial disputes and so forth and integrate people from those struggles into the Labour Party.

Over the years the Labour Party has become more and more separated from the people whose interests it is supposed to represent. The only way Labour can win the next election is to become more relevant to those people, not less.

The election campaign starts now let's make it a socialist one!

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# The other side of America

The struggles of black women are even more hidden from history than those of women in general. Yet there is a rich history of such struggles. Penny Newell looks at the early experience of black women

## Women and Class

SOME PEOPLE would love us to believe that the model of the white, middle class family which was foisted on working class people in Britain was also successfully carried, through imperialism, to Africa and the United States.

In her book *Women, Race and Class* Angela Davis traces the history of black women in the US. She made a vital contribution to the visibility of black women in class politics. In 1970 the FBI had a warrant for her arrest for murder and kidnap, and posters of her face with its famous Afro hairstyle appeared all over the States. She is now a respected voice and is currently touring Britain to packed meetings.

In her book she challenges the published studies on slavery which saw female slaves either as 'sexually promiscuous' or as 'matriarchs'. Historically, more black women have always worked outside their homes than their white sisters. This pattern was established in the early days of slavery in America and has continued until now. Contrary to popular belief, they were not mainly servants, but more field hands working alongside black male slaves.

They were seen by the slave

owners not just as field hands though, but also as 'breeders', not as mothers and part of a family unit. Their children could be sold at any age because "the young of slaves...stand on the same footing as other animals".

### Beaten

The women were frequently beaten and raped. Sexual abuse was an additional way for slave owners to use their power over women. But because slave owners viewed women as breeders and workers, black men could not be the head of the 'family' with women being housewives and mothers.

When industrialisation started to affect white women's cottage industries, like spinning, and the split started to be made between home and work with women being left at home to be housewives, because of their different history, this did not happen to black women. So the myth of the matriarchal family unit grew up to explain why black men appeared to have a different relationship to black women than white men to white women.

One book is often quoted as being of great influence on the anti-slavery movement — Uncle Tom's Cabin, written by the

female abolitionist Harriet Beecher Stowe. It was published in the 19th century, when popular literature was very keen on perfect mothers in the home at that time so her book gave weight to the misleading view of black women slaves by presenting them as housewives.

The black women in Uncle Tom's Cabin bear no resemblance to reality. Slave women were not passively cooking and washing in the home but were involved politically in the fight for their emancipation as slaves.

### Famous

The most famous black woman slave is probably Harriet Tubman who is still the only woman in the US to have led troops into battle. I wonder how much time she spent in the kitchen in between leading over 300 slaves out of the South on the underground railroad to freedom? The linking up of the anti-slavery movement with women's rights movement in the 1840s is often said to have started with the exclusion of women from the world anti-slavery convention in 1840.

Long before then a leading black abolitionist, Frederick Douglass, had been convinced of

part at all levels. We fight for the implementation of the TUC Charter of Women in the unions.

We fight against the labour movement's reflecting in any way the oppressive ideas about a woman's role, which can undermine women's ability to fight back, and dangerously divide the movement. We ally with all those fighting for rank and file control, democracy and accountability, against those who hold back and sell out our fight. Never again a 'Labour' government that ignores party decisions, serves the bosses and bankers, and beats down workers' living standards and struggles.

4. We aim to co-ordinate and assist those women in the Labour Party, and the trade unions, who are fighting for these aims.

5. We are for direct action, solidarity as women and as workers, and for maximum mobilisation for all actions against the capitalist system that exploits and oppresses us.

## Where we stand

ment, and to involve women who do not relate to these movements.

3. We aim to strengthen the position of women in the labour movement, and fight for it to take our needs as a priority. We will encourage and aid the organisation and consciousness of women as women in the labour movement, and fight for the aims and demands of the women's movement in the unions and labour organisations.

We fight to change the sexist atmosphere in the labour movement, and for positive discrimination and changes in arrangements and practices to enable women to play a full

1. We aim to build a mass campaign of action against the major attacks being mounted on women's rights, such as the right to control our own fertility, the right to health and childcare facilities, the right to work, the right to live in this country with the partner of our choice, the right to maternity leave and job security for mothers, the right to wages, benefits and legal status independent of a man, the right to organise as trade unionists and as women.

These rights and many other, many not yet won or consolidated, must be defended and extended in face of the onslaught against women by this government.

2. Such a mass campaign has to be part of a labour movement response to the Tory attacks. We aim to provide a focus for united action by women already organised in the labour movement and in campaigns and groups of the women's move-



Historically, a bigger proportion of black women than of their white sisters

the arguments to give women the vote, and so women's rights became part of the black liberation struggle. He published an editorial in his newspaper, *Northern Star* on rights for women. "In respect to political rights we hold women to be justly entitled to all we claim for men."

This link between the two campaigns raised the issue of racism and sexism. Racism against black women in the women's movement and sexism against women in the anti-slavery movement. At the first convention on women's rights in Massachusetts, the only black woman there, Sojourner Truth, inspired women and silenced men by her powerful speech.

### 'Weaker sex'

She was not a member of a 'weaker sex'. She showed the audience the muscles in her arms and said, "but ain't I a woman?"

Many anti-slavery campaigners were racist — they campaigned on moral grounds but didn't want slaves to be equal when they were free. But there were revolutionary women involved in the campaigns, who soon discovered the degree of racism in the north when they went to speak at

meetings during the Civil War and were called 'nigger lovers' and attacked. One of these women was Angelina Grimke, who proposed a radical theory in her address.

"To the soldiers of our second revolution. The nation is in a

**The black women in Uncle Tom's Cabin bear no resemblance to reality. Slave women were not passively cooking and washing in the home but were involved in the fight for their emancipation as slaves'.**

death struggle. It must either become one vast slaveocracy of petty tyrants or wholly the land of the free".

When the women's movement split the arguments were that educated white women given the vote could "counterbalance the 400,000 negro men and women and thus the political supremacy of your white race will remain unchallenged."



...s have worked outside their homes

This was a very clear message to the establishment. It was saying, give middle class white women the vote and we will help you to subdue the three main groups in the working class, black people, immigrants and uneducated white people.

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During the 1890s there was imperialist expansion into the Phillipines, Hawai, Cuba and Puerto Rico and when the Civil Rights Act of 1878 was reversed and 'separate but equal' became the South's new system of racial control, segregation and lynching became very, very common.

White women were being taught to be 'mothers of the race'. This was supposed to be

the human race, but as it was only addressing white women, it clearly was about keeping the superiority of the Anglo-Saxon race. Of course this propaganda was aimed at keeping the working class split — black from white. 'A woman's place was in the home' if she was white.

Black working class women were organising together despite the fact that many more of them did paid work outside the home. They formed clubs and naturally one of the struggles they were involved in was against lynching of black men and women. These clubs became powerful political groups for black equality and women's suffrage as well as the rights of working people. One of the founding members, Mary Church Terrall, at the age of 89 marched in a Washington picket line against racism.

### Rape

Rape is the fastest growing violent crime in the US today. Race laws still don't protect working class women. They were originally to protect upper class women and the law has been aimed at black men — their innocence or guilt has been irrelevant.

Between 1930 and 1967, of the 455 executions for rape, 405 were of black men. The predominantly white feminist movement anti-rape activists have rarely acknowledged the racist history of rape against black men.

Many writers, like Susan Brownmiller, and Shula mith Firestone, have reinforced this view of black men in their books. It is strange that before the Civil War in the US there were no reports of white women being raped by slaves, yet afterwards it was the principal excuse for lynching black men. Tens of thousands of black men were lynched after the Civil War and it can only be because black people were a threat and sexuality is a powerful weapon to control people. The fact that black women were lynched makes this clear. The black woman was the 'mythical whore' and the black man the 'mythical rapist'.

This historical perspective on working class black women thoroughly buries too any idea that 'Wages for Housework' has any place in the class struggle. I agree with Angela Davis when she says finally, "Working women should be campaigning for jobs on an equal basis with men."

## Work A woman's place

# Civil servants on slave wages

By Trudy Saunders

**Over 70% of civil servants in the clerical grades are women. As with most jobs which have women workers in the majority, these civil servants work in bad conditions for very low wages. Some even have to draw supplementary benefit!**

Since 1979 the Tories have made repeated attacks on the wages and conditions of these low grade civil servants. The latest Tory onslaught has come in the shape of Limited Period Appointments (LPAs).

LPAs are long term casual workers. They are being brought in to implement Fowler's vicious social security changes — which amongst other things will mean low paid and unemployed women will be worse off financially.

LPAs have no rights as workers. Their job can be ended at any time and for any reason. They have no right of appeal.

For permanent staff in the civil service LPAs are a big threat. Instead of bringing in permanent staff to the already badly under-staffed offices the Government will bring in LPAs. Permanent posts already existing are likely to go. LPAs are cheaper — they have no pension rights for example. The Government will employ them rather than a more 'expensive' permanent worker. They will undermine the strength of our union — the

Civil and Public Services Association (CPSA) — LPAs who get involved in union activity will be more likely to get dismissed.

At CPSA DHSS section conference this year, a motion was passed to fight the LPAs and to prevent them from ever coming in to the Civil Service.

A number of the offices have taken action against LPAs. Some even took all out strike action — and won. The LPAs introduced in these offices have been made permanent.

The Government then issued threats to workers taking action against LPAs. It was at this stage that the CPSA DHSS section Executive Committee had to decide what to do next. This committee is dominated by Militant supporters who have a long history in the CPSA of backing down from confronting the Tory Government.

They have done the same over LPAs. CPSA members are willing to take action against LPAs. The DHSS section Executive Committee should have built on this to extend the campaign and work towards an all-out strike ballot. Instead they gave in and turned their back on CPSA members who want to fight what is perhaps the greatest threat ever to workers in the Civil Service.

The willingness to fight is still there and we should force the Executive to reconsider and build on what has already been achieved. Otherwise, the future looks pretty grim for clerical workers in the civil service.



Birmingham CPSA strikers. Photo: John Harris, IFL.

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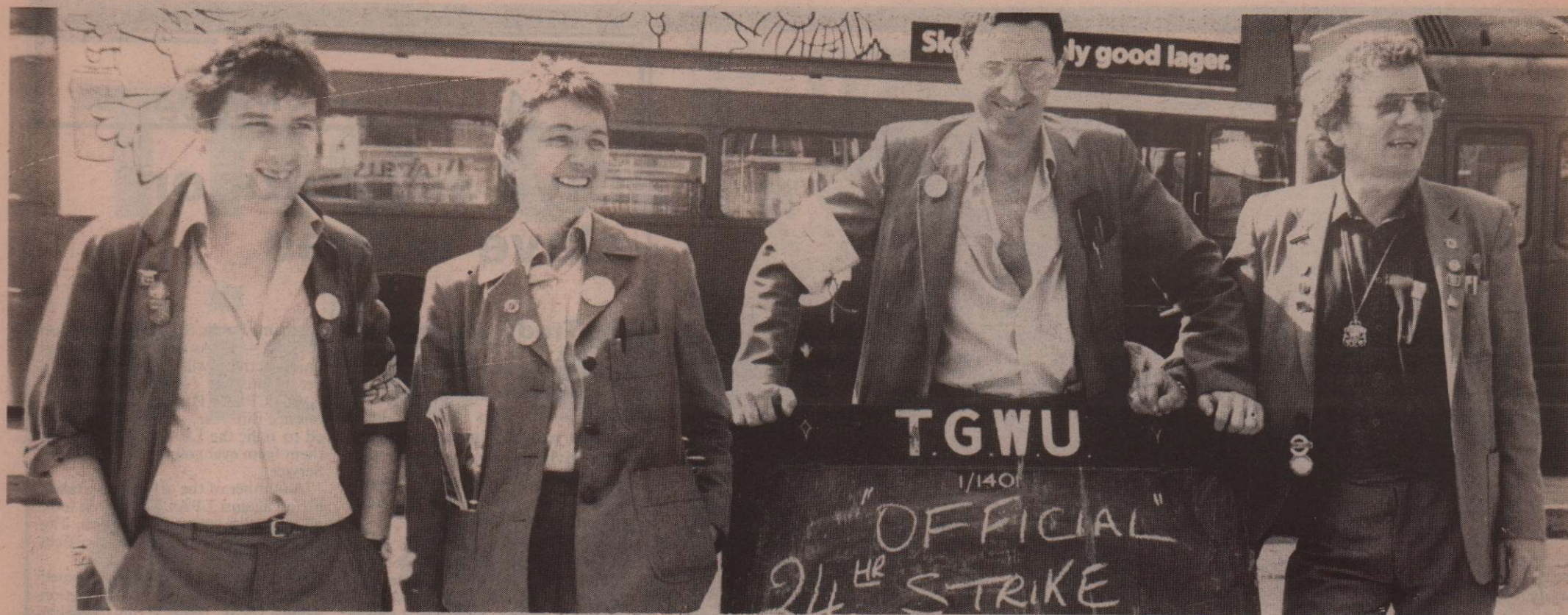
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# Bus cuts: women bear the brunt

London's bus workers have been fighting for the last six months against attacks on their working conditions. The workers at one garage, Norbiton in South London, were told to accept a cut in wages of up to £50 a week and longer hours — up to an additional seven hours per week — or lose their jobs.

As a result of the Norbiton workers refusing to accept these worse conditions or to be bowed by threats of closure of their garage, management were forced to offer more and, indeed, to keep the garage open.

## Privatise

But the attacks on Norbiton are only the start of plans to completely privatise and deregulate London's bus service. What they did at Norbiton showed us what deregulation means for the bus workers: wage cuts, longer hours, job losses and garage closures.

But it will also have a drastic

## By Kate Lyons

effect on bus users and particularly those who rely on a public transport system the most — the old, the unemployed and,

most especially, women.

Only profitable routes will be run. So in the West End, for instance, there will be wall-to-wall buses. In the poorer suburbs, where children need buses to get them to school, old people rely on them for their contact with the

outside world, and the unemployed can't afford the rising fares, a bus will be a rarity.

## Unsafe

Those that do turn up will be dirty and often unsafe because the

cleaning and engineering costs have been cut to the barest minimum for the sake of more profit.

For women, deregulation would be drastic. It means standing at bus stops at night for longer periods of time, open to attack. If you're lucky enough to get on a bus first, there will be only a driver (whose hands are already full coping with two jobs) to help you out and who, if a woman, is just as open to attack as you are.

If you've got your shopping or your kids with you, there will be no help getting on or off the bus and you will be more open to accidents as the driver is under pressure to get away quickly, under stress from the effects of cuts on the job and probably in an extremely bad temper

## Plans

If the government manage to get away with their plans for London Transport, it is women, again, who will bear the brunt of their policies.

## Alton must be stopped!

### By Michele Carlisle

Twenty years on, the 1967 Abortion Act is facing what could be its most dangerous attack. The law, under which three million women have had a safe, legal abortion is coming under threat from Liberal MP David Alton, who announced at the weekend his intention to introduce a Bill which would reduce the upper time limit for abortion from 28 to 18 weeks.

Margaret Thatcher has already spoken up in favour of a Bill to

reduce the time limit, making it likely that the government will give Alton enough parliamentary time for his Bill to be passed.

### Vulnerable

The massive ten week reduction would mean that the most vulnerable women — those seeking late abortions — would suffer. Every year more than 5,000 women have an abortion after 18 weeks, a tiny proportion of the total number, but each a special case as far as the woman herself is concerned.

Many of the women would have initially seen their GP before 12 weeks of pregnancy, but were delayed by unsympathetic doctors and long NHS waiting-lists. Young women with irregular periods and fearful of admitting pregnancy often leave it late in a pregnancy before they seek help and older women can misread the signs, thinking they are going through the menopause and only realising late on that they are pregnant. And sometimes doctors just make mistakes and fail to diagnose pregnancy. No-one wants a late abortion, but for all these reasons and more, women need that choice.

If Alton and the anti-abortionists really wanted to reduce the number of late abortions they would campaign for better facilities, better sex education and free abortion on demand. However, in reality, they are against all abortions, but realise that late abortions are the easiest target, the 15 year old women and the 45 year old women and the women who cannot afford private abortions are seen as the easiest targets. We must be clear; the Bill is attacking all abortions and must be defeated.

A co-ordinating campaign will be set up to defeat the Bill and will organise publicity, events, lobbies, etc. For further details contact: *The National Abortion Campaign, Wesley House, 4 Wild Court, London WC2 5AU. Tel: 01-405 4801.*

## A play from South Africa

The play 'The Long March' which is currently touring the country, was written by South African strikers belonging to the giant metal workers' union MAWU (now NUMSA).

The play tells the story of the bitter struggle of the rubber and tyre workers at BTR's Sarmcol plant in Howick for union recognition. It is, in effect, part of the continuing campaign of the Sarmcol strikers to bring their case for solidarity to Britain.

The strike started in May 1985. BTR is British Tyre and Rubber, a top-ten UK multi-national. It sacked all the strikers within days of the start of their strike.

The play is performed by seven strikers who have never had any previous acting experience. There was no 'script' as such; each episode of the strike was discussed collectively, and the scene was then made up.

It is played in a combination of English and Zulu and punctuated frequently with workers' songs and dances.

The play tells the story of the strike — Sarmcol's boss J. Sampson is taken off-guard by the outbreak of the strike and has to consult BTR's London HQ for 'orders'. Scabs are then hired and protected by the police.

The strikers take their struggle into the community. A 100% boycott of white shops forces the local businessmen to approach Sarmcol's manager for a more conciliatory attitude to the workers. It is in vain.

After being banned from activity in 'white' Howick the strikers take their campaign to neighbouring Pietermaritzburg — eventually organising a successful one-day stayaway. Women are solid behind the strike and turn back debt collectors.

Inkatha supporters moved in to another town where the strikers have a strong base (Mpophomeni). They attacked the community and abducted union activists. Simon Ngabane, a Sarmcol shop steward was tortured and murdered, along with another steward, Phineas Sibiya and the daughter of a striker, Folmerah Maikathi, by right wing vigilantes in December 1986.

After 2½ years the strikers are still pressing their case for reinstatement and recognition. Their legal case is still being heard. Meanwhile the strikers have set up a workers' cooperative, SAWCO, producing t-shirts for COSATU. They have also set up a health-monitoring scheme.

Apart from the political significance of the play, it is also very effectively performed with humorous portrayals of the bosses, scabs and Mrs. Thatcher. It is well worth seeing.

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workers and point a way forward by arguing that the upgrading of the unskilled should be under the control of workplace committees and that all workers should receive the skilled rate. Instead, they argued that they would only accept dilution if all industries and national resources were taken over by the government under a system of joint management with the unions. This was a pie in the sky 'socialism now' approach.

The government realised the need to remove the committee and adopted a stick-and-carrot approach. Half a dozen plants were selected and dilution implemented in each. When the government could point out that it was in and working smoothly they moved to crack the tougher nuts.

Kirkwood, convenor of the Parkhead Forge, was forbidden to move to other sections in the workplace. The members struck. But they had been isolated. Kirkwood and eight other CWC leaders were arrested and deported from Clydeside and opposition to dilution collapsed.

The Clydeside Committee had failed to build bridges to the rest of the industry — and to the unskilled.

The centre of struggle shifted to Sheffield. Here the principle of dilution had been accepted but negotiation over its implementation had stimulated workplace organisation. In Sheffield the majority of District Committee members were stewards, there was greater co-ordination between craft organisations than on the Clyde and closer links with the unskilled.

In October 1916 Hargreaves — a local fitter, supposedly exempt — was conscripted. A mass meeting launched the Sheffield Workers' Committee which gave seven days' notice of strike action if Hargreaves was not released. 12,000 workers struck. A few hours later Hargreaves was released. But the workers refused to return until he was presented to a mass meeting two days later. This success spurred further action.

## Sheffield

The number of stewards in the Sheffield District rose from 60 to 300. The committee was expanded to include the unskilled. The idea was that the District Stewards' Committee should stimulate workshop committees covering all grades and a national committee. A national stewards' meeting was to be held at Easter 1917, but in March a strike broke out when a Rochdale firm sacked 500 engineers for refusing to train women transferred from shell production to commercial work. 200,000 workers struck in Lancashire, Sheffield and Coventry.

The government tried to crush the movement as it had on the Clyde by arresting eight of its leaders. In response one hundred delegates from 34 different districts met for three days and set up a national shop stewards' leadership. After negotiations the arrested men were freed pending trial and the strikes petered out.

**Next week: Part 2 — the impact of the Russian Revolution on the stewards' movement.**



Transport strike 1912

# 1917

YEAR OF REVOLUTION

## The pre-parliament

Sunday 17 September

The figures of the party-political composition of delegates to the Democratic Conference are published. Of the 1,582 delegates, 1,198 declared party affiliations, including: Bolsheviks, 134; Mensheviks, 172; Social Revolutionaries, 532; Bundists, 15; and Cadets, 4.

In Irkutsk agitators who had addressed soldiers' meetings and attacked the Provisional Government are arrested. The Tiflis Soviet demands immediate withdrawal of the death penalty at the front. The praesidium of the Novo-Bayazet Soviet of military deputies calls for a government consisting solely of representatives of socialist parties.

The immediate dissolution of the Ashkhabad provisional revolutionary committee is ordered by the Provisional Government's local commissioner. An extraordinary meeting of the Tashkent Soviet condemns the activities of the Turkestan committee of the Provisional Government, and issues an appeal for calm to prevent providing a pretext for armed intervention.

By 219 votes to 40, with 46 abstentions, a conference of Kiev factory committees opposes as premature the call for a city-wide strike to secure a collective agreement on wages with the association of factory-owners.

Monday 18 September

A meeting of soldiers of the 4th battalion of the 176th Reserve infantry regiment, stationed in Petrograd, calls for transfer of all power to the soviets. An all-Kronstadt meeting of members of the Bolshevik Party resolves to establish a training school for agitators in preparation for elections to the Constituent Assembly.

In the Moscow Soviet of soldiers' deputies, Executive Committee elections the Social Revolutionaries win 26 places, the Bolsheviks 16, the Mensheviks 9, and non-party delegates 9. In the Rogozhsky regional soviet (Moscow) Executive Committee elections the Bolsheviks win 20 of the 25 places.

The provincial congress of soviets of soldiers' deputies being held in Vladimir votes for transfer of all power to the Soviets. The commander of the Moscow military district orders the imposition of martial law in Orel to crush unrest among soldiers. A meeting of 8,500 soldiers in Gomel resolves to refuse to go to the front.

Tuesday 19 September

By 766 votes to 688 with 38 abstentions, the Democratic Conference votes in favour of a coalition government; a majority of delegates from trade unions and workers and soldiers' soviets votes against this; a majority of delegates from peasant soviets and city dumas votes for it. By 813 votes to 183, with 80 abstentions, the conference votes against a coalition involving the Cadets and supporters of the Kornilov mutiny.

A joint meeting of the Central Committee of the Baltic Fleet and the sailors' section of the Helsingfors Soviet opposes the Provisional Government's order to dissolve the Central Committee of the All-Russian War Navy.

In the Moscow Soviet of workers' deputies Executive Committee elections the Bolsheviks win 32 seats, the Mensheviks 1, and the Social Revolutionaries 9. The military section of the Rzhev Soviet of soldiers' deputies calls for transfer of all power to the soviets. On the South-Western front soldiers in the 468th regiment refuse to obey orders.

In new elections for the Lugansk Soviet, Bolsheviks win 82 of the 120 places.

Wednesday 20 September

The workers' section of the Petrograd Soviet resolves to hold fresh elections on 23-24 September for positions on the Soviet Executive Committee. An extended meeting of the Praesidium of the Democratic Conference votes by 829 votes to 166, with 69 abstentions, in

Turn to page 11

# A fraternal snore

Mike Grayson reviews 'Comrades'.

The Tolpuddle Martyrs were six Dorset farmworkers who were deported to Australia in 1834 for forming a trade union branch.

The blanket laws against all trade union organisation, the Combination Acts, had been repealed in 1824, but the ruling class still wanted to keep trade unions down. The mushroom growth of the Grand National Consolidated Trades Union, led by the socialist Robert Owen and pledged to a general strike for an eight-hour day, alarmed them.

The Tolpuddle Martyrs were convicted of taking an illegal oath of solidarity. Mass demonstrations and a petition of 250,000 signatures protested against their sentence, and they were eventually allowed back to Britain in 1836.

They stand as a symbol of the fact that workers have won our rights to organise not by generosity of our rulers, but by class struggle and defiance of capitalist-made law.

So it was with high hopes that I set off to see 'Comrades', the new film about the Tolpuddle Martyrs. Having read a couple of very favourable reviews, I was confidently anticipating an enjoyable evening. I was wrong.

Comrades is a long film — about 2½ hours, but it feels longer. This length is pure self-indulgence on the part of the makers: a large part of the time is spent on very pretty, but ultimately very meaningless shots, which are no doubt intended to evoke an "atmosphere".

Maybe — but after the sixteenth view of sweaty toilers in the fields, my brain tends to switch off. In the first half of the film in particular, the plot clips along with all the speed of a slug with lumbago.

Again and again the audience is shown that rural life in the 1830s was an endless grind of squalor and misery for the labouring classes. Grimy yokels queue for their weekly pittance; an over-the-top vicar preaches at them about the natural order of Rich and Poor; a smarmy landowner reneges on his promise to



The workers are presented as just suffering, with little picture of a fight back

add an extra shilling to the wages.

So heavily are we fed this angle that when six men are finally arrested for trying to organise a union, the event has no impact whatsoever. It's just one more unfair misfortune in the lives of people who seem to suffer nothing else.

The film's second half, with the Martyrs now transported to New South Wales and Tasmania, is a tad more lively. But we see little of how their families and community are faring whilst the Martyrs are in

Australia. We catch a bare glimpse of the campaign being waged in Britain to get the men's sentences revoked.

All rather suddenly, the men are back together in England, appearing at a rally of their supporters. One of them gives a speech which I suspect may have been intended to end the film in a stirring manner. After 2½ hours of this tedium, it doesn't work.

None of the characters reaches beyond the level of stereotype, with the upper classes and their agents coming off worst of all.

And just what is the point of this travelling 'magic lantern' man who keeps cropping up in various guises throughout the film? I can't for the life of me see what is intended by the use of this figure. No doubt it's something awfully clever really.

'Comrades' could and should have been a good film, given its subject matter. That it has been turned into a bore, and an excuse for a lot of (supposedly) impressive visual effects, is more than just a shame — it's a crime.

# Greens go red in the face

**Les Hearn's SCIENCE COLUMN**

The Autumn issue of New Ground is now out, just in time for the Labour Party conference.

There, Labour's policies of nuclear disarmament and of phasing out nuclear power will be under attack in the supposed interest of attracting votes. An article in this issue of New Ground puts a whole new slant on the debate.

The article, by Nick Kollerstrom of the Green Party, is unlikely to win him many friends initially but his arguments deserve to be taken most seriously.

For Kollerstrom, the major obstacle to a permanent nuclear disarmament is the existence of plutonium. Something has to be done with it — it is highly dangerous, even apart from its role in nuclear weapons. One millionth of a gram, if inhaled, can cause lung cancer. Britain's 40 tonnes could kill the world's population ten times over in this way. It is also highly poisonous.

Being radioactive, it is slowly decaying, but this process will make no difference to the present amount in the foreseeable future. With a half life of 24,000 years, "our" 40 tonnes becomes 20 tonnes after 24,000 years,

10 tonnes after 48,000 years and so on!

Even if the plutonium is thoroughly mixed with concrete or glass or something and buried under the seabed, it could still be dug up and extracted in usable amounts any time over the next 100,000 years or more. And all this ignores the greater amounts in the hands of the US and USSR governments.

Kollerstrom's "heresy" is in his solution to the problem. He proposes to annihilate the plutonium by feeding it into the sort of nuclear reactors that produced it in the first place. By changing the mode of operation of these reactors, they can use up a fuel of plutonium faster than they produce new plutonium. The more dangerous Fast Breeder Reactors could use up the plutonium even faster. The "breeder" part of the reactor would first have to be removed, of course.

This is indeed a choice between "a rock and a hard place". We would have to keep the nuclear power industry going for years, even decades. And this would produce even more highly radioactive waste, for which, at present, no safe method of disposal exists. As a sort of consolation, we would be able to get electricity from those former nuclear warheads — "bombs into light", as Kollerstrom puts it.

This proposal will certainly provoke some heated debate. My own opinion is that either we follow

Kollerstrom's logic or we think about shooting the plutonium into the Sun — but in the latter case, we will need totally reliable rockets that are not going to explode in the Earth's atmosphere or get lost on the way to the Sun to reappear in our skies in the future like Haley's comet.

It may well be that the rocket solution is the only suitable one for the present piles of radioactive waste. It is certain that no-one has come up with any convincing answers to date.

New Ground also contains some unfinished business from the election, notably articles from the unsuccessful Labour and Green candidates in York. There it was, you may recall, that Labour lost to the Tories by 147 votes while the Greens took 637. This is particularly annoying since Labour's Hugh Bayley is a prominent socialist environmentalist and would have been a valuable spokesperson in Parliament for many of the causes supported by the Left and by the Greens. He rejects the idea of electoral deals with the Green Party though supporting joint action where possible.

Next comes a page of vituperation from Green Party members, incensed at a flippant dismissal of their policies in the election issue of New Ground. The Editorial Collective, which includes yours truly, are accused of lies, bolstering its self image, standing in the way of a flood of recruits to the Green Party from Labour and of being faithful servants

of "Nuclear Jack" Cunningham, Labour's Environment spokesperson. For a party that prides itself on its "spiritual" approach, the Greens' line in insults matches that of the more traditional labour movement. This is followed by Chartist Mark Douglas' explanation of his move from Labour to the Green Party! SO readers will find his arguments interesting, if unconvincing.

New Ground is available from 26 Underwood Street, London N1 for 60p plus p&p. Send 4 1st class or 6 2nd class stamps for an introductory copy.

**New Ground**  
Journal of Green Socialism

No. 15, Autumn 1987

60p

**Reds and Greens after the flood?**



• Animal rights  
• Rivers • Socialist video  
• Pacific • Local Network • Canada



# SOCIALIST ORGANISER

## Stick by the sacked miners!

WHEATON'S WEEK



**Paul Whetton** (secretary of Bevercotes NUM, Notts) told Labour Party conference about the issues in the coalfields.

I addressed Labour Party conference in 1984, right at the height of the miners' strike. My opening remarks were: "I bring fraternal greetings from the police state of Nottinghamshire."

I have to report that the police have gone back to their units, but victimisation, harassment and intimidation are still blatant in the coalfields of Nottinghamshire and are spreading into other coalfields.

I don't know how many of you were in that Conference that year, when someone came up to Arthur Scargill, tapped him on the shoulder and served him with a writ. Well, I've had a writ served on me. 14 of our comrades have had a writ served on them.

It was an attempt to divide miners — drive them into the UDM. That sort of harassment goes on every day.

If you've got young miners who want to go in to see the manager — they want to do their coal face training, or they want to get married and want a British Coal house — the manager doesn't ask them whether they're black or white. He doesn't ask them whether they're Jew or Gentile, Protestant or Catholic. The question he asks them is "what union are you in?"

If the man says "I'm in the NUM", the answer is: "Sod off, you've no chance". If he says he's in the UDM — "Sit down, son. We'll do everything we can for you".

Most of you know that over 1000 miners were sacked in the miners strike. At the present time there are still 300 miners sacked, and you should get some of those conference expenses out and spend them on the Justice for Mineworkers s.all, because those 300 miners and their wives and kids still need support.

Most of you will have heard about my case — I was sacked 19 months ago for putting an NUM notice on the notice board. It took 12 months to get my industrial tribunal fixed up.

12 months after I was sacked the tribunal decided unanimously that I was unfairly dismissed. It decided by a majority that I had been sacked for trade union activities and that I did not contribute to my own dismissal. It was a total victory.

Yet this week Sir Robert Haslam had the audacity to say "The NUM President is more concerned about dismissed union militants than any other issue, and is now raising the case of two men with highly disruptive records".

I'm one of them he's talking about, and Ted Scott in the Yorkshire coalfield is the other one.

So Haslam's come out with it, in this last week or two, and he's said he will get rid of every good trade unionist he can, not only in the Nottinghamshire coalfield, but in every British coalfield.

There were 24 sacked miners in Notts at the end of the strike. Now there are over 30. I was sacked for pinning a notice up. Mick McGinty was sacked for taking the question of safety up with an underofficial. Geoff Poulter at Bolsover was sacked because he organised a work to rule.

It's a criminal offence *not* to work

**Turn to page 11**

**Socialist Organiser is taking a break next week. No. 330 will be dated 15 October.**



MANUS demonstration, Blackpool, October 10 1985

# March on 8 October

Thousands of students and young people will be marching against the Tories in Blackpool on 8 October

While the blue-rinse brigade are listening to the great works of their

SSiN

By Rachael Jackson  
Stockport Tech

leader, we'll be demonstrating our opposition to their plans for the

education system.

Organised by Manchester Area National Union of Students as part of their 'Defend Yourself — Get Organised' campaign for students and young peoples' rights the demo will be calling for:

\*£35 a week minimum education and training grant.

\*Real jobs, not JTS and YTS.

\*No education cuts, oppose the Education Bill

MANUS Area Convenor, Dave Brennan, told SSiN, "We wanted an event to start the year off with a bang.

"That way people who come on the demo should stay involved in the MANUS campaign when they get back to their colleges. If we're going

to take on the education cuts every college will have to be organised."

Other areas will be represented too, even colleges from as far away as Brighton! Other groups there will include the Labour Party Young Socialists. Steve Mitchell from Stretford LPYS said

"Young people, whether in college or school, or not, want the chance to show the Tories what we think of their plans. After all its us they're trying to force onto slave labour schemes, and its us who won't be able to get into colleges when they get cut."

The march starts at 2 o'clock under Blackpool Tower and there will be speakers and a social.

For more info. contact MANUS on 061-273 5947.

Contact SSiN (Socialist Students in NOLS) at 54a Peckham Rye, London SE15

## A labour movement conference **SOLIDARITY**



with workers in the Eastern Bloc

New sponsors this week:  
Ken Cameron, General Secretary of the Fire Brigades Union.  
Jeremy Corbyn MP.  
Tony Cox MP.  
John McDonnell  
Vidja Anand  
Maureen Colquhoun, (Hackney councillor) TGWU 3/174 branch, Bristol.  
Hugo Radice, Leeds University Economics Department.  
Roger Owen, St. Anthony's College, Oxford.

Saturday November 7th, 11 a.m. to 5.00 p.m.  
Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1

## Defend right to silence!

Metropolitan Police chief Peter Imbert has called for the abolition of the right to remain silent, and the government is likely to follow his advice. Abolish the "privilege against self-incrimination", they say, and you lower the crime rate.

This will mean a further erosion of our crumbling democratic rights, and more power to the police.

The right to remain silent is as basic a democratic freedom as the right to know what you are charged with. Its abolition is usually the prerogative of military dictatorships. It is the indispensable corollary of innocence until proven guilty.

It is very easy to say things under pressure that can be used as incriminating evidence. Even under the existing system, forced 'confessions' result in imprisonment. The latest case where it seems pretty likely that 'confessions' were got for reasons of political expediency rather than justice is Broadwater Farm. Lots of evidence suggests the same for those

imprisoned for the Birmingham pub bombings.

So the right to remain silent can be flouted by the police in practice like most other rights. But it remains a right. If we are innocent until proven otherwise, we have a right to proper legal advice and counselling. We should not be forced to speak until we know the implications of what we are saying.

## Wapping

Printworkers at Rupert Murdoch's Wapping plant have voted by a massive four to one against being represented by the electricians' union, the EEPTU.

Only 140 out of 1000 workers on the Sun, the Times and the News of the World wanted to be members of the EEPTU. 321 want "other union representation".

Although electricians' leader Eric Hammond denied it, the vote represents a defeat for the EEPTU.