

# SOCIALIST

## ORGANISER

### Socialist Forum Revolt in Eastern Europe

Thursday 27 April

7.30

Lucas Arms  
Grays Inn Road  
(tube: Kings X)

- Speakers • Eyewitness from Hungary and Czechoslovakia — fresh from discussions with the opposition
- Polish Socialist Party — PPS (RD)
  - The British representative of the Hungarian opposition group the Young Democrats

# It's class war against the dockers



Sterling



Thatcher

**T**he port employers say that almost any resistance by the dockers to the abolition of the Dock Labour Board will be illegal.

If the dockers strike against the Government who are abolishing the Dock Labour Board, that's illegal because it's 'political'.

The dockers can't even strike legally against the port employers as a body, because the bosses refuse to negotiate as a body.

No: all the dockers can do legally is have dozens of separate strikes against each separate employer's attacks on job security, conditions, and wages. Divide and rule is now law.

The port employers can legally take "industrial action" against the dockers by getting their friends in the Tory Government to scrap the dockers' job protection. The dockers can't legally take industrial action against the bosses.

That's how the Tory anti-union laws work.

These laws, which were used to break the miners' strike, the Wapping print strike, and the P&O seafarers' strike, are now being used to intimidate any group of workers thinking of taking strike action. They are bosses' laws.

And who are these bosses? Union buster Jeffrey Sterling of P&O is the employer with most to gain from the abolition of the Dock Labour Scheme. P&O are a big employer in the registered ports and they own Felixstowe, the biggest unregistered port.

Indeed, P&O have set up their own private army of security guards to look after their interests.

P&O is one of the Tory Party's biggest contributors. Last year they gave over £100,000 to Tory funds! Jeffrey Sterling himself is an advisor to the Department of Transport.

P&O were responsible for the Zeebrugge disaster.

They put profits before safety.



Dockers lobby TGWU executive

Jeffrey Sterling has blood on his hands. While the media witch-hunt train drivers or ferry crewmen they blame for

disasters, Jeffrey Sterling gets off scot-free.

This man, and men like him, are behind the trade union laws.

The laws are a weapon of class war. We must use class war ourselves to beat them.

## 2 POLL TAX, DOCKS

# Now is the time to fight

The Executive Council authorises the General Secretary with plenary powers to take the necessary steps to hold a ballot without delay in the event of a refusal by the port employers to meet or enter into meaningful negotiations, in which case a withdrawal of the TGWU registered dockers will follow immediately".

That's what the resolution passed by the TGWU General Council last Friday, 14th says.

If, as expected, the port employers refuse to negotiate 'national provisions that are no less favourable than the current provisions' then Ron Todd must call a national strike ballot of registered dockers.

As we go to press the strike action is still unclear. Port bosses are insisting they will not negotiate collectively over what replaces the Dock Labour Scheme: each employer will negotiate his own conditions and pay.

It's possible the bosses will make some show of concessions, but then the talks must not be allowed to drag on. A timetable of one week should be set for calling a national docks delegates conference. If no water-tight commitment is given by then a strike ballot should be called by this conference.

The only alternative is to lie down and accept defeat without fight.

The union's negotiating power lies in its ability to organise and coordinate a strike. Preparations must be made now. This means getting commitment from non-registered

dockers not to handle diverted trade and not to cross TGWU picket lines.

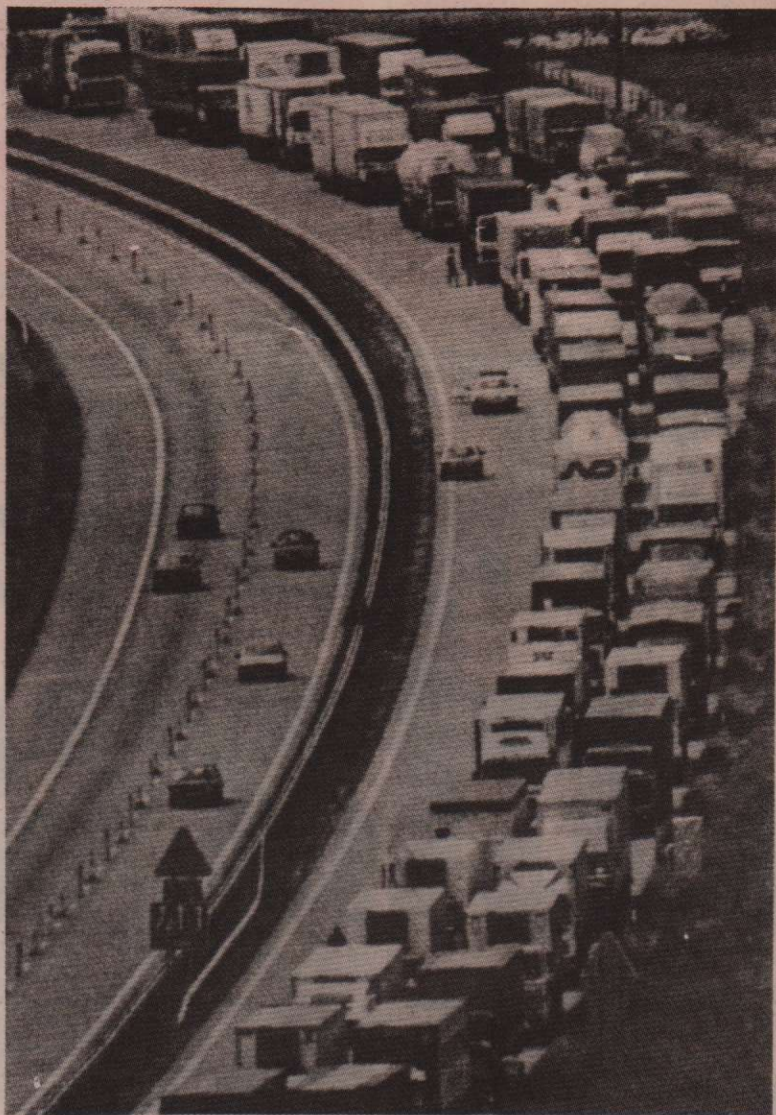
It means getting a commitment from dockers internationally not to handle goods bound for Britain. It means getting a commitment from rail, road and seafaring unions not to move goods from to strike-bound ports.

And the TUC must throw its weight behind the dockers too. If the alliance of government and bosses manages to paralyse the TGWU then the whole movement will be thrown back. The TUC must lead the labour battalions to give solidarity.

Local Labour Parties and Trades Councils should set up support groups for the dockers along the lines of the miners support groups set up in 1984/5. It is urgent. A docks strike will not last anything like 12 months and support is needed from the very beginning.

Local Labour Parties should pass resolutions not only supporting the Dock Labour Scheme but calling for its extension to all ports under the next Labour government.

The attack on the dockers is an attack on us all by a vindictive Tory government. But the Tories are not invincible. The dockers can win — support the dockers!



## New NALGO bulletin

### POLL TAX

By Nik Barstow

Campaign for mass non-payment and non-implementation of the poll tax! That was the view of

60 delegates from 30 branches of the Town Hall union NALGO attending a conference called by the Lambeth branch of the union.

The conference did some good work, agreeing to organise widely for NALGO's annual conference. A composite motion restating the NALGO 1988 conference decision to campaign against the poll tax, to demand the union's leaders implement the policy, and taking up issues of not processing fines and prosecutions was agreed.

A fringe meeting will be called by branches at the union's national conference.

Unfortunately a lot of the debate

and discussion was dominated by the 'new defeatism' of both the SWP and the Militant. The SWP have given up the ghost on mass non-payment, whilst Militant think that non-implementation is now out of the question.

Fortunately most activists wanted to 'stop moaning and start fighting'.

That mood went to a fringe meeting held at the conference that attracted over a third of the delegates for the launch of 'NALGO Action', a planned new rank and file bulletin to link the work of activists in the union who are fighting cuts, privatisation, poll tax and attacks on members' conditions.

## Raising rates to cut poll tax

By Richard Aplin

The Tories and Democrats on Wirral Council recently joined forces to push through a 23.3% rate rise combined with the setting up of an "efficiency panel" (read cuts panel) to cut £15m from the budget.

The Tories, clearly terrified that the poll tax (projected at £405) will provoke mass opposition, are doing everything they can to reduce it to £360.

We are being told to pay an average increase in rates of over £100, combined with the cuts, to save just £45 on poll tax. In fact we are paying next year's poll tax now, with interest.

Unfortunately, in the same week as the budget was passed the Labour group, in opposition to District Labour Party policy, voted 15-8 against any campaign for non-payment. The battle is now on to bring these 15 councillors to account.

No doubt their argument for breaking District Labour Party policy would be the worn-out one of not wanting to be "irresponsible".

Meanwhile the anti-poll tax unions are preparing people to frustrate poll tax registration — forms go out in May — by talking to as many people as possible on the doorstep, and delivering registration-frustration information leaflets to every house in Wallasey.

Through canvassing we are building up a network of between one and ten paid-up anti-poll-tax members per

street, who will be central in organising block meetings over the Summer and providing important support for neighbours facing harassment from registration snoopers.

## New poll tax link up

At the South London Anti-Poll Tax Federation conference last Sunday, 16th, 40 activists met from groups in Lambeth, Lewisham, Greenwich and Southwark.

Kinnock's demand for a legal campaign has infected London Against the Poll Tax (LAPT) which bars local groups who argue for illegal non-payment and non-implementation.

South London Federation made a commitment to support the Tottenham group's moves to create a new all-London Federation that will fight the poll tax.

It is likely that a London federation will be established in May, containing up to 33 local campaigns committed to breaking the law.

The federation has to be democratic, open to all groups opposed to the poll tax, whatever their tactics.

## Workers' Liberty '89

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- Glasnost: is it a revolution?
- Is there a ruling class in Russia?
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## ACTIVISTS' DIARY

**Saturday 22 April**  
Student Left Activist Conference. Octagon Centre, Western Bank, Sheffield, 11.00. Contact Jill, 01 639 7667

**Sunday 23 April**  
Memorial march and meeting for Blair Peach, organised by Blair Peach 10th Anniversary Committee. From Southall Park, Uxbridge Road, 1.00. Contact Anniversary Committee at 01 834 2333

**Tuesday 25 April**  
Manchester SO: 'The Iranian Revolution — Ten Years On': speaker from CARI. Mother Mac's, Back Piccadilly, 7.30

**Thursday 27 April**  
London Socialist Forum: 'Revolt in Eastern Europe'. Lucas Arms, Grays Inn Road, 7.30

**Thursday 27 April**  
Nottingham SO: 'Women's liberation — is socialism the answer?'. ICC, Mansfield Road, 7.30

**Friday 28 April**  
York SO: 'How to beat the poll tax'

**Saturday 29 April**  
CLPs Conference on Party Democracy. AEU, Mount Pleasant, Liverpool, 11.00. Contact Lol Duffy, 11 Egremont Prom, Merseyside L44 8BG

**Saturday 29 April**  
London Alternative Policy Review Conference. LSE, Houghton St, London WC2, 10.30. Contact c/o 96a Stoke Newington High St, London N16

**Monday 1 May**  
Sheffield SO: 'Ten Years of Thatcher'

**Monday 1 May**  
London SO education series: 'Early years of the Communist Party', speaker Tom Rigby. Conway Hall, Red Lion Sq, WC1, 7.00

**Saturday 6 May**  
Yorkshire SO day school: 'Transforming the labour movement'. St John's College, York, 10.30

**Saturday 6 May**  
Morning Star conference: 'Fightback against the Tories'. Conway Hall, London WC1, 11.00. Contact Morning Star, 74 Luke St, London EC2 4PY

**Saturday 6 May**  
Irish Hunger Strike Commemoration. Assemble Broad St/Cumberland St, Birmingham, 12.00. Contact organisers c/o PO Box 540, Birmingham B11 4AU

**Wednesday 10 May**  
'Hands off Guys' march against NHS White Paper. From Guys Hospital (Melior St) to St Thomas's Hospital, 6.30. Contact Richard Excell, Southwark TU Support Unit, 01 582 0996

**Saturday 13 May**  
Lutte Ouvriere fete (three days). Near Paris. Contact Clive, 01 639 7965

**Monday 15 May**  
London SO education series: 'The General Strike': speaker Vicki Morris. Conway Hall, Red Lion Sq, WC1, 7.30

**Saturday 20 May**  
Bristol District Labour Party day school on 'Defeating the Poll Tax'. Filwood Social Centre, 10.30. Contact Pete Crack, 0272 772218

**Wednesday 24 May**  
Bristol SO: 'Dockers against the Tories', speaker John O'Mahony

**Saturday 27 May**  
Newcastle SO: 'Socialist Feminism — is it a contradiction in terms?' Rossetti Studio, near Trent House pub, 7.30

**Saturday 3 June**  
Gorbachev and the European Left conference (two days). ULU, Malet St, London WC1. Contact Gus Fagan, 30 Bridge St, Oxford OX2 0BA

## Campaign Against the Massacres

in Iran, Iraq and Turkey  
Public Meeting

Saturday 22 April  
7.00 pm

Conway Hall, Red Lion Sq  
Speakers include Jeremy Corbyn MP, an Iranian writer, an Iraqi writer



# Jobs for life? Work or full pay!

## EDITORIAL

**H**ow dare the dockers want 'jobs for life'? That's the Tory catchcry as they try to abolish the Dock Labour Scheme.

In fact, the Dock Labour Scheme does not mean jobs for life at all. Over the last 15 years, 47,000 registered dockworkers have lost their jobs!

What the Dock Labour Scheme did do was abolish the system of dockers being hired by the half-day, and gave dockers more job security. Sometimes, dockers get full pay when not working ("welting" as the employers call it.) But this is very rare.

And all this is nothing compared to the 'jobs for life' of judges, or university professors. Or members of the House of Lords!

It's like the old argument. To make the rich work harder, you pay

them more; to make the poor work harder, you pay them less. Judges deserve jobs for life; uncouth dockers don't.

Dockers are not rich. Real dockers are not the workers on £400 a week with a villa in Spain of Neil Kinnock's imagination. An average Tilbury docker, with bonus and overtime, can expect to take home £149. A top grade ship hand might take home £200. But bonuses and overtime are unreliable. So dockers need the scheme.

Is a 'job for life' such a bad idea anyway? At the moment, our jobs and livelihoods are subject not to our needs, but the bosses'. If the bosses are losing money, or want to reorganise, workers lose their jobs.

But why should our lives be subject to the dictates of the market? Why shouldn't we be certain that our jobs are safe? Or that if there's no work, we can be sure of a decent standard of living until there is work?

Or why not share out existing jobs — with no loss in pay — to create work for the unemployed?

From the point of view of the

bosses and their system, the 'right to work' is too expensive to be granted. If they can't afford to employ people, they won't. But it's precisely because we live in a system that works in that way, that we have mass unemployment.

In this system, profits come first, and people second.

We need a system that puts people first. But right now, we can force the bosses to grant our right to work. If the trade union movement is strong, it can impose the principle of work or full pay.

The National Dock Labour Scheme is therefore far short of what trade unions should be fighting for. It should be extended to cover currently unregistered ports. And trade unions should campaign for work or full pay throughout the country.

## Yes, they want casual labour

Britain's port employers say they won't bring back casual labour. But they also praise what's been done in Spain — where, after a recent defeat, dock workers are now hired on a daily basis. This fits into a world-wide pattern of employers union-busting on the docks.

In Italy, workers in Genoa and Livorno are still on indefinite strike over government attempts to scrap 'outdated' employment practices. Elsewhere in Italy, dock workers have been forced to return to work after a bitter dispute.

Industrial unrest is also brewing in the French port of Marseilles, and the Australian government has plans to cut back job protection for Australian dockers.

## Day by day

**Friday 7 April:** Government publish Dock Work Bill to abolish Dock Labour Scheme. 2,800 dockers stage walk-outs in protest.

**Monday 10 April:** TGWU national docks committee meets in London. Call for strike ballot expected. Meeting to continue on Tuesday.

**Tuesday 11 April:** Unanimous support on docks committee for national strike ballot. Todd insists on negotiations with port employers and calls emergency General Council on Friday.

**Wednesday 12 April:** Kinnock backs Todd. 800 dockers at Grimsby and Immingham vote to back Todd.

**Friday 14 April:** Lobby of TGWU General Executive Council. Angry dockers disrupt press conference. General Executive Council votes to back Todd. Meeting with employers arranged for following Tuesday. National docks committee meets in parallel with General Executive Council.

**Saturday 15 April:** Docks delegate conference agrees to wait and see.

**Tuesday 18 April:** Ron Todd meets port employers, but they refuse to negotiate collectively.

## 125,000 dockers strike in India

In India 125,000 dock workers have gone on indefinite strike for higher wages. The Indian government has used large numbers of army and police — 1000 police in the port of Bombay — to try to break the strike.

The dockers want a wage increase of 18%, but the government is offering only 15%.

Dockers' leaders say they are prepared for a "long-drawn strike".

Monday or by phone Monday

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'The emancipation of the working class is also the emancipation of all human beings without distinction of sex or race'

Karl Marx

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Latest date for reports: first post

## Right of Reply

### PRESS GANG

By Jim Denham

**L**about MP Tony Worthington's 'Right of Reply' Bill has returned from the dead.

This Friday MPs will have another chance to give a statutory right of reply to those who claim to be the victims of press "inaccuracy". If Worthington succeeds, papers will have to publish corrections with the same prominence as the original — offending — articles.

At present, when a paper like the *Sun* loses a cast at the Press Council, it tucks the correction away in the corner of an inside page and might even denounce the Press Council decision in its editorial column.

Worthington's Bill sounds like an excellent idea, doesn't it? It has the backing of the Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom and many prominent left-wing MPs are among its most enthusiastic supporters. More surprisingly, quite a few Tories are in favour of it and Mrs Thatcher is said to be "ambivalent" on the matter; the word is that the Bill could well go through.

So why are some of us less than wholeheartedly enthusiastic about the proposal for legally-enforceable redress for the victims of press lies?

For a start, the wording of the Bill is dangerously sloppy — it gives no guidelines on what would actually constitute a "factual inaccuracy". Look through the rest of this paper: you'll find plenty of articles accusing the Tories, various employers and even some union leaders of all sorts of nasty things.

They might well object to a lot of what we say about them, and claim that their motives are entirely honourable and their actions really in the best interests of us all — did we but know it. Who is to judge?

Well, if Tony Worthington gets his way, a group government appointed commissioners — answerable only to the Home Secretary — will judge. Do you really want to give this government that sort of power over the press? Just remember 'Spycatcher', 'Death on the Rock', the new Official Secrets Act — even the ludicrous 'Lorrho affair' — and ask yourself if you'd willingly give Mrs Thatcher and Mr Hurd any additional powers to determine what goes into the newspapers.

Of course, the general standards of the British press are a disgrace. Opinion polls have shown that most people — quite rightly — think something has to be done to curb the excesses of the gutter press.

But Tony Worthington's Bill would not particularly help the many 'little people' who have suffered at the hands of the *Sun*, the *Star* and the *News of the World*. What it would certainly do is give genuine investigative journalists the powers to interfere in the media and make life impossible for left-wing papers.

Socialists, more than most people, have good reason to hate the national press and to relish the prospect of it being brought to heel. It seems that more and more ordinary people share our feeling on this subject.

But giving the state more power — even over the Murdochs and Maxwells of this world — would simply make matters worse.

## 4 LETTERS

### Cops plan more powers

#### GRAFFITI

Secret police plans have been leaked for more aggressive methods in dealing with riots, demonstrations and strikes.

The Association of Chief Police Officers have produced a new manual, which argues for abandoning the use of 'shield lines' — ranks of police protected behind long interlocking shields.

Instead, police would be ordered to charge at the first signs of 'trouble', using truncheons and small, round shields. This would allow them to plough easily into groups of demonstrators or pickets, unimpeded by the old, cumbersome shields.

The proposals have been approved by the Home Secretary, Douglas Hurd, even though such tactics may be, formally, illegal — police are allowed to use 'reasonable force' in arrests, and the proposed changes may contravene this. Some officers have been refusing to undergo riot training because they are worried about their legal position.

Such worries do not seem to have unduly bothered riot police in the past. Almost exactly 10 years ago a teacher, Blair Peach, died at the hands of the riot police during an anti-fascist demonstration. The miners' strike and the print dispute were also hardly examples of police caution about what is 'reasonable force'.

In April, the feminist magazine *Spare Rib* reached its 200th issue. Out of the pages of congratulatory advertisements, one stood out. It was signed by Jimmy Knapp, leader of the National Union of Railwaymen.

A nice gesture, but perhaps women NUR members would rather Jimmy started properly representing his women members.

On his record, though, making a stand on the pay and conditions of any of his members, let alone women, is just too radical for his taste.

Perhaps those in the Social Security department, whose new rules threaten the existence of women's refuges, should read a new Home Office report.

The report, 'Domestic Violence', reckons that though the actual extent of domestic abuse of women is



"Reasonable force?" Photo:

Martin Shakeshaft

unknown, it may affect as many as half a million women in England and Wales every year.

The survey also found that the frequency and intensity of violence increases over time.

The survey proposes harder policing and attempts to improve 'community awareness' of domestic violence. But the real things that women need to escape violent relationships — quick access to housing, decent social security, properly funded women's refuges, and special grants to buy new furniture, bedding and clothing — have been attacked by this government.

In the light of criticisms of the medical facilities on hand at the Sheffield Wednesday ground, scene of last Saturday's 'Hillsborough Disaster', it is shocking to discover that provision at Hillsborough was actually well above the Football Association's official minimum requirements.

All the Football Association demands is that one doctor should be present at matches.

The government has received another blow to its plans to radically restructure the NHS.

The Royal College of General Practitioners has voted to reject the government's White Paper. This follows on from the BMA's decision to fight the government's proposals.

The government has been denouncing the BMA as hard left wreckers since they decided to oppose the White Paper. Now, presumably, the Royal College will be painted as wild-eyed lefties too.

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

## No lesser evil in Afghanistan

#### LETTERS

The picture of Afghanistan conjured up by Duncan Chapple's letter in SO 396 is one of bloodthirsty, barbaric Islamic hordes besieging the cities with the sole aim of butchering every woman and worker.

Even the photo attached to the letter of a blood-smeared Mujahedin fighter added to this colourful image.

These latest predictions of imminent mass slaughter flow directly from the 'Defend the Cities' editorial in SO 390. It stated that "large scale massacres of the townspeople are certain if the Mujahedin conquer the cities."

Where is the evidence of these "certain massacres"? Perhaps the slaughter of urban workers and women is one of the few programmatic points holding together the divided and disparate forces united in the Mujahedin?

No evidence is put forward in either Duncan's letter or the 'Defend the Cities' editorial to substantiate such alarmist and Eurocentric claims.

The *Guardian* on 29 March did carry reports of civilians and Afghan government prisoners being killed off by rebel forces during the siege of Jalalabad. The article went on to report the Mujahedin commanders' concern over these events.

These killings were not carried out by mainstream rebel forces but by radical fundamentalists from Saudi Arabia called the Wahabis. Out of 20,000 Mujahedin besieging Jalalabad, the Wahabi contingent was estimated at between 100-700. The Mujahedin commanders were investigating the claims and may consider throwing the Wahabis out of Afghanistan.

Does this report suggest that the bulk of the Mujahedin are set on a "slaughter of the townspeople"? I don't think so.

Obviously, after such a long, bitter civil war, if the cities do fall there will inevitably be nasty, bloody confrontations.

The 1985 SO pamphlet on Afghanistan makes a more sober assessment than either Duncan



The Mujahedin: not all set on slaughter

Chapple or the 'Defend the Cities' editorial. It stated that if the PDP regime fell, then massacres were a possibility and that it would be a "massacre of PDP supporters". The pamphlet did not raise the idea of a general slaughter of women and workers. While any massacre would be a tragedy, there is an important distinction between the two scenarios.

The "massacre" argument is the only substantial point raised by Duncan to justify a military bloc with the hated Stalinist PDP regime.

Duncan himself points out that "a Marxist approach doesn't consist of taking sides between the Mullahs and the Stalinists...The workers and peasants should not be fighting one another but should turn against their Islamic and Stalinist oppressors." He even sees "the most pressing task for socialists in Central Asia is building a workers party that challenges the Mullahs for the political leadership of the peasantry."

All these are fine points and lead to one conclusion — socialists should support neither side in the civil war.

Duncan is prevented from this by gun-to-head scenarios of "slaughter of the townspeople". The result is a political collapse into standing shoulder to shoulder with a hated, reactionary, anti-working class regime.

The only supplementary argument Duncan uses is to denounce me for "abstentionism".

To refuse to take sides in a political battle such as this, to denounce both sides as equally reactionary, to put forward an independent working class political line is not to abstain. On many occasions in political and/or military conflicts Marxists have refused to back any of the immediate contesting forces, eg. the South Atlantic war, the US elections, etc. To refuse support to either side in conflicts is often not abstentionism but the starting point for independent working class political action.

At the end of the day, socialists must decide their position on the civil war in Afghanistan by asserting what the fundamental issues are behind the conflict.

The Najibullah regime is not hanging on for dear life in order to defend the rights of women or, for that matter, the rights of workers in general. They are fighting to defend the 'right' of a Stalinist clique to be the ruling group in Afghan society.

The Kabul regime remains in power due to the backing of the army and a ready supply of sophisticated Russian weaponry. Their ability to hang on says more about divisions and weaknesses in the Mujahedin than about the strengths of the government.

The conflict is between on the one hand a hated, unpopular

Stalinist clique forced on the people of Afghanistan by an army coup, and on the other hand an opposition influenced heavily by Islamic fundamentalism. In this conflict, for socialists there is no lesser evil.

Socialists and workers have no interest in the victory of either side.

Tony Dale  
Manchester

### What are the Tories hiding?

I was rather surprised to read in *Socialist Organiser* of 6 April 1989 Jim Denham saying that he doesn't give a damn about the Lonrho versus Al-Fayed brothers affair.

I'm sure Tiny Rowland is no paragon of virtue, but this is to miss the point. Why are the Conservatives so eager to prevent publication of the DTI report and belittle the affair? What have they to hide? We have to find out whether Mohamed Fayed made substantial contributions to the Conservative Party and what his links are to Margaret Thatcher and other leading Conservative Party members.

Whilst fraud scandals are no substitute for working class action, we should have the political nous to know when to take advantage of the weaknesses in the Tories' armoury.

Barry Buitekant  
London E5

### Merger on what terms?

Jim Denham's excellent article on the proposed JAEU/EEPTU merger in last week's paper (SO397) missed one important point.

Socialists are generally for trade union unity and for industrial unionism because it strengthens the workers against the bosses. In the abstract we would favour a merger between the AEU and the EEPTU.

However, the problem is that what is being planned by the AEU and EETPU leaders is not just any old sweet merger but an amalgamation in which the democratic rule book and traditions of the AEU will be destroyed and the anti-democratic structures of the EETPU extended.

A merger on the basis of the AEU's existing rule book would be a very different proposition.

Max Gordon  
Brixton

### 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

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workers and oppressed nationalities in the Stalinist states against their own anti-socialist bureaucracies.

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.

We want Labour Party and trade union members who support our basic ideas to become supporters of the paper — to take a bundle of papers to sell each week and pay a small contribution to help meet the paper's deficit. Our policy is democratically controlled by our supporters through Annual General Meetings and an elected National Editorial Board.



Slave wages — and the threat of deportation

## Police raids stepped up

### WOMEN'S EYE

By Lynn Ferguson

**When you shop for clothes, have you any idea of the conditions in which they are produced?**

Large stores such as Top Shop, Wallis and C&A routinely order garments produced in East End sweatshops. Workers — mostly women — regularly work more than 15 hours a day, receive appallingly low wages, and receive no overtime, sickness or holiday pay. As workers they have no rights.

Most of these workers are simply trapped. Many are what the government calls "illegal immigrants" — they are not officially supposed to be here. Some have fallen foul of further tightening-up of the im-

migration laws, some are political refugees, fleeing from terrible repression in their own countries. Generally they can speak little or no English.

Such workers are particularly vulnerable to the grossest forms of exploitation in the sweatshops. But they also run the risk of deportation.

On 28 February this year, immigration officers raided one such sweatshop in Dalston. 38 workers were arrested — most of them are Kurdish refugees, unable to stay in Turkey because of the terrible repression inflicted on their people. Later, their husbands and wives were also arrested.

Six of the workers "agreed" to leave the country — that is, they signed a form agreeing to do so, unaware of exactly what it was they were signing.

A campaign has been set up, to demand an amnesty for all such unauthorised workers, consisting of representatives of the IGWU, the Tailors and Garment Workers

Union, various MPs and community organisations.

In the wake of the deportation of Viraj Mendis, the Home Office seems to have decided to organise more and more raids on places where "unauthorised" workers are employed — generally in the rag trade, cleaning and hotels and catering.

There are many thousands of such workers in Britain. They can be forced to work in terrible conditions for a pittance because they are desperate. Their bosses are happy — not only do they get cheap and compliant labour but as the workers are officially "not here" they avoid paying tax.

It is long overdue that unions begin to pay attention to such workers. Other trade unions should follow suit, and take up the struggle not just against the profiteering bosses, but against the government's discriminatory immigration laws that force thousands of black workers, particularly women, to live in fear.

## No democracy please, we're AEU

**Lol Duffy reports on the CLPs conference due on 29 April**

**On Saturday 29 April Constituency Labour Parties will be meeting to discuss our response to attacks on Party democracy.**

The conference was to be held in the AEU hall, in Liverpool, but Gavin Laird has decided that he is not going to have that sort of meeting on his property. We have been notified today, the 17th April, by telephone that our booking has been cancelled by order of the AEU National Executive Committee because the CLPs conference is 'out of line with AEU policy'.

If that is their criterion for room bookings, they will have some empty rooms in the future.

The cancellation is an attempt to stifle the growing organisation of Constituency Labour Parties in the CLPs conference; but a feeble one. We have already made alternative arrangements. The conference will now be held at Transport House, 2a High Street, Birkenhead. Transport will be available to ferry people from Liverpool to the new venue.

The agenda for the conference includes:

- How the selection and reselection of MPs should take place.
- Speakers who have been at the receiving end of the witch-hunt.
- Speakers from the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy.

The Labour Party leadership has become less and less tolerant of opposing socialist ideas, and is making every attempt to rid the membership of any real say in the party.

The Policy Reviews which were supposed to involve the membership in discussing what sort of policies the Labour Party needs for the future have been a sham.

Regional meetings have been cancelled and the leadership now say that amendments to the Policy Review documents will not be allowed. Not only that, but the National Executive, have said that if conference passes a resolution

which conflicts with the Policy Review document, the Policy Review will take precedence.

The atmosphere that is needed in the Labour Party to push through Kinnock's second rate Tory policies is one which blames socialist policies for all the defeats of past Labour governments and election campaigns.

When anyone questions the leadership's wisdom in any organised way they are threatened with expulsion or suspension.

That is why the CLPs Conference decided to organise a conference around the issue of democracy and the continuing witch-hunt in the party. All CLPs and hundreds of Labour Party members have been circulated with an invitation to send delegates to the conference on Saturday 29th April.

No doubt Gavin Laird needs no prompting to prevent CLPs from organising together to defend socialist ideas in the Labour Party. Our best response will be to make Saturday 29 April an effective and well-attended conference.



Gavin Laird

## Why bosses are in two minds about automation

### NEW TECHNOLOGY

**Bruce Robinson starts an occasional column on new technology with a look at why bosses have mixed feelings about computerised manufacturing**

**Images of workerless factories, Fiat's 'built by robots' and automation spreading relentlessly through manufacturing industry are equally part of socialists' nightmares and Tomorrow's World-type technological fantasies.**

Computers first made their appearance in manufacturing in the late 1950s. They were used for monitoring processes and in metal manufacture to control machine tools.

Instead of having a skilled operator guide the machine, a pro-

gram punched onto paper tape would control the tool. With the advent of chips the 'numerical control machine' had its own internal computer instead of the paper tape. 75 per cent of machine tools produced in Europe are now of this type (known as CNC machines).

They can automate tool changing, work handling, sensing and monitoring. In theory, at least, they can run unattended.

The most recent development is computer-integrated manufacture in which the computers involved in production are linked into other computerised processes such as design, stock control and providing information to management. The process is more flexible as it is possible to redesign products and reprogram the machine tools very quickly. Fewer stocks of components are required as production can be planned better.

There are fewer workers, usually with a much more general role in controlling and supervising production than old-style production workers.

Anything approaching full-scale CIM is still a rarity, even in Japan, not just because of technical problems, but also because of the high cost of the machinery. Attempts to use CIM techniques in Europe and the US have not been very suc-

cessful.

General Motors has been a pioneer in the US, investing \$60 billion in automating all its factories, but it is falling behind Ford in productivity and profits. GM's own factories got only half the productivity increase registered at a plant which GM runs jointly with Toyota in California. The California plant did not use automation but did use Japanese management methods.

As the *Financial Times* put it: "What GM seems to have failed to appreciate is that new technology has to be matched to changes in management and in the way the manufacturing process is organised." The title of a recent *Economist* report is even more blunt: "The new manufacturing: minimal IT [information technology] for maximum profit."

The more far-seeing elements of management seem to be coming increasingly to the conclusion that it's more important to keep workers involved and docile in high technology factories. The machinery itself doesn't solve their problems.

In this model — taken from Japan and increasingly the rule in British 'greenfield' sites — the smaller number of workers have a much more direct role in supervi-

sion and control of production and are expected to make suggestions to improve production levels and quality. They have a wider range of skills and are expected to move flexibly between different functions (eg. being responsible for maintenance).

Cooptation and participation become more important when the responsibilities of the worker often include being able to stop production if anything goes wrong! The potential power of these groups of workers is huge.

Another reason for the continued importance of the skilled worker is the difficulty involved in computerising those parts of the job that require knowledge that comes from direct involvement in production. As a German manager put it: "As long as one is working with metal it is impossible to plan everything and we must acknowledge the limitations of theory. CNC machines relieve the workers only of the physical burden. Skilled workers remain a necessity due to the inevitable imponderables." The skills may change, for example to include programming, but cannot be removed altogether.

The *Economist* report states: "Automation as practised by most Western firms has been the final

doomed episode of Taylorism." — the "scientific management" techniques based on the assembly line, with the work divided up into minute steps and the workers no required to use any initiative. This is echoed on the left by talk of 'post-Fordism' (which if it means anything must mean this) and of 'human-centred' automation, as a means of using workers' skills to meet the requirements of new forms of production.

This doesn't mean that a rosier future for factory workers is waiting just around the corner: very few firms have achieved the degree of automation necessary for CIM and many areas of production are not amenable to it. More common is a use of limited 'islands of automation' in those parts of the process most suited to it.

The reluctance of British bosses to abandon their old methods is perhaps not as short-sighted as it is presented. It probably stems from fear of giving a large degree of control over production to a workforce much better organised and combative (even now) than the Japanese. Where CIM has been implemented, the workers are expected to do a whole range of job and — very explicitly — told that they are responsible for ensuring the company's profitability.

## 6 POLL TAX



### Half the price, one tenth as useful

#### REVIEW

**Jackie McDonough reviews "Socialists and the struggle against the poll tax"**

**If anyone still needs convincing of the Socialist Workers Party's degeneration into a banal propagandist sect, they need look no further than this miserable offering.**

The opening words of the pamphlet are, "The Poll Tax must rank as one of the most vicious Tory attacks on the working class yet". That being so you would expect some sort of strategy to fight the poll tax, wouldn't you? Sadly, you would search in vain.

There are plenty of attacks on the Tories and still more denunciation of the Labour and trade union leaders, to be found in here. There is no shortage of sage words about the "massive potential power" of the working class.

It is even explained that workers are "brought together in factories and offices to create the wealth upon which capitalist society depends". All good stuff, of course. What is not explained is how rank and file activists can go about organising that "massive potential power" to defeat the poll tax.

Instead we are presented with a series of "if only's"... "If Neil Kinnock was to call a massive law-defying campaign"... "If John Daly and Rodney Bickerstaffe were to call for strike action"... "If the Labour and STUC leaders were serious about fighting"... and so on and so on.

Years ago, the SWP used to sneer at us "orthodox Trotskyists" for putting demands on the Labour and trade union leaders — "everyone knows those bastards won't fight, so why waste your breath putting ridiculous demands on them?" Much better, the comrades would argue, to bypass the leaders and concentrate on mobilising the rank and file.

It was a rather one-sided approach that often underestimated the hold that the official leaders exerted over the rank and file. But at least it had the merit of emphasising activity and self-organisation rather than passive "exposure" of the official leaders.

How times have changed! Now, the SWP produces a pamphlet entitled "Socialists and the struggle against the poll tax", that contains not a single proposal for "struggle" of any sort. Instead, it closes with a list of "demands" upon the TUC and Labour Party leaders ("organise a national demonstration", "Labour Councils should break the law", "MPs and councillors should declare they will defy the law", etc etc), with no suggestions for rank and file action beyond moving a resolution at union branches.

The pamphlet singles out one other target for particular attack: "Community Politics". As someone who has spent the last few months criticising the romantic illusions in community-based campaigning that exist in my local (anarchist-dominated) anti-poll tax group, I was very familiar with all the arguments the SWP raise about the limitations of this orientation. I've used them myself.

But the SWP go further and effectively write off the value of any community-based mobilisation at all. Big meetings on housing estates are all very well, we are told, but they "only

involve a minority... sometimes an extremely impressive minority, but a minority nonetheless". And I thought "win the militant minority" was the semi-official slogan of the SWP!

Anyway, "once the meeting is over, individuals are prey to the distortions and demoralising effect of the media. For once you are back in your home there is no collective debate or feeling of strength to counter them".

There is no discussion here of how street committees, regular advice points, telephone trees and even the good old fashioned window-bill can be used to counter such isolation. Even the most starry-eyed anarchist will make the point that anti-poll tax unions exist precisely to counter the isolation individuals feel in their homes.

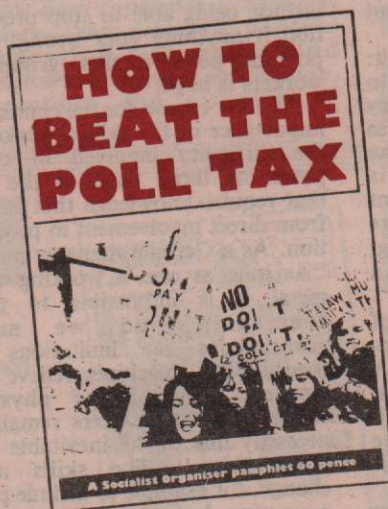
The SWP even sink so low as to distort history in the section on the Glasgow rent strike of 1915. Victory then was not won because of the community organisation, but because of strikes by shipyard and munition workers, we are told.

It is true that strikes in the shipyards and one armaments factory in support of tenants finally secured the victory in 1915. But the SWP appear not to consider the obvious question: if the Glasgow tenants had not taken action in the first place how could the shipyard and factory workers have struck in their support?

This is not merely an abstract historical debating point; in the present fight against the poll tax, linking up community resistance with the organised labour movement is of central importance. The SWP ignore that task (albeit from a diametrically opposite standpoint) as stupidly as do the "community"-besotted anarchists.

The truth is that the SWP really believe that the fight against the poll tax has already been lost. The very last words of the pamphlet are the significant ones: "If the real responsibility for the campaign is pinned squarely where it belongs (ie on the leaders) then it can both give us the chance to mobilise the forces needed to win and enable us to see where the real fault for any defeat lies". (My emphasis.)

It may be worth shelling out 30p for this pamphlet in order to see, at first hand, just how pathetic the SWP has become of late. But if you're interested in fighting the poll tax you'd do a lot better to invest 60p in Socialist Organiser's "How to beat the Poll Tax": it's twice the price and a thousand times more useful.



60p plus 13p postage from SO, PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA



# How the dockers built their

**Bruce Robinson tells the story of 1889, when the dockers first got organised and started to win the safeguards against super-exploitation which the bosses and the Tories are now trying to dismantle.**

**I**t is exactly 100 years since the London dockers first joined a union and went on strike.

Few people expected it. Most unions then were made up of skilled workers who looked down on the unskilled with no "trade". The dockers didn't even have permanent jobs, but were hired casually at the dock gates.

Even when they were taken on it was only for a specific job that might only last a few hours. They were paid fourpence an hour, and on average took home less than the worst paid agricultural labourers. Most of them were among the one-third of the population of the East End who lived permanently at or near subsistence level.

Yet the docks strike was solid and

held out for over ten weeks. In August 1889, The Tea Coopers and General Labourer's Union only organised about 3,000 workers, but the strike erupted when the dock owners refused to discuss its demands for 6d an hour ("The Dockers' Tanner"), 6-8d an hour overtime, and a minimum of 8 hours work if they were taken on.

To begin with the strike was precarious, even though it had spread like wildfire. The union had no funds to feed the strikers and their families.

Other East End workers who had seen the dockers' strike also came out for their own demands, but had to be warned that the union could not support them. The strike was bolstered by the skilled stevedores (who loaded the ships) also joining it.

But throughout the strike, the dockers were dependent on donations to keep themselves and their families from starvation. The union organised the distribution of food tickets. The largest donation was £30,000 collected in Australia.

The strike was led by Ben Tillet, John Burns and Tom Mann. Burns and Mann were both skilled engineering workers and members of the semi-Marxist Social Democratic Federation (which had ironically tended towards the view that trade unionism was a worthless diversion from the struggle for socialism). The SDF had long held

meetings at the dock gates without any apparent success. H.H. Champion, an early proponent of a Labour Party, helped with publicity. Eleanor Marx, daughter of Karl Marx, did clerical work at the strike headquarters.

Generally, the 'New Unionism' depended considerably on socialist activists for assistance and organisation, as they were often the only people at all interested in getting unskilled workers to join unions.

Burns, in his straw hat, became the symbol of the strike. Everyday strike meetings would be held from six am and a march would then be held from the East End into the city, often 20,000 strong. Burns encouraged the dockers to keep strict discipline and the city's initial apprehension gradually changed to sympathy.

The employers tried to bring scabs in from Scotland and the North. Pickets were mounted on the gates and in boats on the river to try to talk to them. The pickets were usually successful, as the union spent over £1,000 for the erstwhile scabs to return to their home areas once they had stopped working.

The strike had begun on 14 August. By mid-September the employers had become increasingly isolated. An agreement was reached after the intervention of the Catholic Cardinal Manning. The union had won almost all of its

# Rebels against Moscow, oppressors against minorities

**Stan Crooke looks at the history behind the anti-Moscow demonstrations in Georgia, and the rights and wrongs of Georgian nationalism**

**G**eorgia was incorporated into the Russian Empire at the start of the 19th century, became independent for four years after 1917, and was conquered by the Bolshevik Red Army in 1921.

Complex national and ethnic conflicts had featured prominently in the history of early twentieth century Georgia. Many merchants and money-lenders were Armenian; British, French and Jews figures prominently in the emerging Georgian capitalism; the Russian government was the biggest landowner in Georgia; and the local administration was in the hands of Russian officials.

When the Bolsheviks seized power in Moscow in November 1917, the Menshevik-dominated Transcaucasian Regional Soviet (covering Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaïdzhân) condemned the revolution and called for a continuation of Russia's war against Germany and Turkey. In May 1918 Georgia was declared an independent sovereign state, and in elections in February 1919, the Mensheviks won 409,766 of the 505,477 votes cast.

The Menshevik government encouraged a wave of Georgian nationalism. The use of Russian was banned in the Georgian Parliament, in the law courts, and in the army and Georgian was declared the sole permitted medium of official business.

Before the year was out, Georgia was involved in a brief war against Armenia, for control of land vacated by the retreating Turkish army. The long-standing hostility between Georgians and Armenians flared up, and a series of outrages were committed against the large Armenian community in Tbilisi. (Tbilisi, at that time, had a bigger Armenian population than any city in Armenia itself.)

The Georgians treated the Ossetes (a people of Iranian descent who lived in the north of the country) with extreme brutality.

The Abkhazian minority was also oppressed. Although Georgia itself had been an oppressed nation under the Tsars, once it had achieved its independence it quickly began to encroach upon the rights of national minorities within its borders.

Georgia's short-lived independence disappeared with the Red Army's invasion in 1921. Stalin, then the Soviet Commissar of Nationalities, gained the approval of the Politbureau for the invasion by claiming that a massive Bolshevik uprising had occurred in Tbilisi and that the Mensheviks had virtually already been overthrown by the Georgian working class.

But the reality of the invasion was described by Makharadze, the chairperson of the Georgian CP: "The arrival of the Red Army and the establishment of Soviet power in Georgia had the outward appearance of a foreign occupation because in the country itself there was nobody who was ready to take

part in a rebellion or a revolution... The Georgian masses had become accustomed to the idea of an independent Georgia."

Lenin and Trotsky were horrified when they learned of the truth of the situation. Lenin wrote to Stalin's crony Ordzhonikidze in Tbilisi, telling him that "the internal and international position of Georgia requires of the Georgian communists not the application of the Russian stereotype, but...an original tactic, based upon greater concessions to the petty bourgeois elements."

Though many of the Georgian Bolsheviks themselves attempted to pursue such an approach, Stalin would have none of it, and instead forced through the creation of a Transcaucasian Socialist Federal Soviet Republic (covering Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaïdzhân) at the close of 1922. Georgian communists opposed to the creation of the Federation were slandered as "national deviationists" by Stalin and his associates.

Lenin initially supported the creation of the federation but quickly changed his mind upon receiving reports of the repressive policies being pursued there by Ordzhonikidze, with the approval of Stalin. He informed the "national deviationists": "I am with you in this matter with all my heart. I am outraged by the arrogance of Ordzhonikidze and the connivance of Stalin and Dzerzhinsky (head of the Soviet secret police)."

But Stalin emerged victorious in the dispute, and soon in the Party as a whole. Lenin suffered a third and ultimately fatal stroke. Trotsky was slow to take up cudgels against Stalin, although in later years he recognised that Stalin's victory in the Georgian affair was "the first victory of the reactionaries in the party" and signalled the beginning of the Stalinist counter-revolution.

In the purges of 1936/7 the entire leadership of the Georgian CP, with the exception of the 70-year old Makharadze, was tortured to death or shot. The sweep of the purges embraced the Georgian population in its entirety, with imprisonment, exile or death for anyone whose loyalty to the regime was subject to the slightest doubt.

At the close of the war, Georgians who had sought asylum in the West were forcibly repatriated to the Soviet Union, where they were either exiled to Siberia or shot immediately. A series of purges were carried out in the Georgian CP. A "nationalist plot" was conveniently unearthed, supposedly directed towards the liquidation of Soviet power in Georgia. This was followed up by a purge of supporters of Beria who, in turn, after the death of Stalin in 1953, purged his opponents. Then, after Beria's fall from power in 1955, it was the turn of Beria's supporters again to be purged.

Economic development was rapid in Georgia in the post-war years, but per capita industrial output grew at well below the average rate for the USSR as a whole. By 1975 the Georgian national income was 75% of the Soviet average, though its position improved a bit in the following years.

The official economy in Georgia plodded along. But the black market flourished. Official vehicles and railway stock were used to transport black market goods produced in a network of underground factories, run by black-market rouble-millionaires who were able

to exert a powerful influence even on the Georgian CP.

A decentralised governmental structure might provide even more scope for black marketeering. This may be one reason for the strength of Georgian separatism; but it is certainly not the only one.

Georgian nationalism has been a political force ever since the Georgian national revival of the late nineteenth century. As a result of the role played by non-Georgians in Georgian development, class antagonisms have interlaced with national antagonisms.

Georgian nationalists have been even more hostile towards Azerbaïdzhânis than towards Russians. At least Russians tended to be white and Christian, whereas the Azerbaïdzhânis were dark skinned, Muslim and economically backward. Armenians, the third major natinality in the Transcaucasus, were likewise despised by Georgian nationalists.

The level of repression under Stalin and his immediate predecessors prevented such national antagonisms coming out into the open. But they clearly continued to exist.

Once Gorbachev slightly loosened the straitjacket of Soviet society, the long dormant Georgian nationalist forces (some pushing for more autonomy, some pushing for outright independence) inevitably re-surfaced and re-entered the earlier traditional relationships of national hostility between the major and minor nationalities inhabiting Georgia in particular and the Transcaucasus in general.

Whilst Georgia can point to a long history of oppression by Tsarist Russia and then the Stalinist Soviet Union, the brief experience of the independent Georgia of 1917-21 underlines the fact that Georgian nationalism in power can be just as oppressive of national minorities.

The validity of the Georgian demand for self-determination should not blind socialists to the fact that an independent Georgia might be no less intolerant of its national minorities than its predecessor of seven decades ago.



# Dockers union

demands. The union grew massively as a result, and had 154,000 members by 1892.

The docks strike was the biggest event in a general upsurge of the unskilled in London. The year before the match girls at the Bryant and May factory (now desirable appie flats!) struck for a fortnight successfully, backed by a fund collected by socialists.

In March 1888 Will Thorne set up the Gasworkers' and General Labourers' Union in close collaboration with Eleanor Marx. On the basis of an agitation for the 8 hour day it enrolled 3,000 members in a fortnight and 20,000 within 6 months. Eventually the employers conceded the 8 hour day without a strike.

Following the dock strike, the 8 hour day movement took off, even forcing reluctant craft unions along its wake. The first May Day demonstration in 1890 consisted of 50-300,000 workers. Engels enthused that he had heard again for the first time since 40 years, the unmistakable voice of the English proletariat".

Although the 'New Unions' membership declined drastically in the next economic depression, they had become established. The Gasworkers Union eventually became the GMBU, while the dockers were one of the core components of the TGWU. They marked a clear break with old craft

unions, which functioned as friendly societies and were therefore unwilling to get involved in strikes.

The craft unions would only become radicalised in the late 1890's under the pressure of technological change and employers' attacks. The 'new unions' pioneered the idea that the unions should be open to all and fight for unifying demands like the 8 hour day.

They were also more politically advanced than the craft unions, which were largely supporters of the Liberal Party. The 'new unions' were to play a major role in fighting for the creation of the Labour Party.

However, the direct link between the Marxists and the new union leaders was broken both by people like Burns moving to the right (he ended up as a minister in the 1906 Liberal Government) and by the idiosyncratic sectarianism of the SDF.

The group around Engels and Eleanor Marx was too weak, though it was involved, for example, in the creation of the Independent Labour Party.

The dock strike marked the beginning of a new period in the British labour movement. The next twenty years saw the creation of the Labour Party and another great industrial upsurge in the years leading up to 1914. The new unions were important for both.



**A Socialist Organiser pamphlet. Available from PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA, for 80p plus 13p postage.**

# Is Militant Marxist? Part 2

Last week we argued that the Militant tendency is a typical sect, self-absorbed, arrogant, disdainful, despite having its home in the Labour Party.

Its sectarian approach — just building itself, increasing the number of Militant supporters, even at the expense of wider struggles, as in Liverpool — is very sharply expressed in the trade unions. Here also Militant has a 'front organisation', the Broad Left Organising Committee (BLOC).

BLOC was set up in 1981. Its first couple of conferences were large and relatively lively. The platforms were heavily dominated by Militant speakers, but many other socialists turned up. It looked promising.

But soon BLOC became nothing more than a signboard for Militant rallies. It ran no campaigning activity. In late 1983 thousands of activists mobilised to support the NGA print union picket lines against Eddie Shah in Warrington. It was a crucial test battle for the Tory anti-union laws. BLOC took no initiative at all.

In 1984 a BLOC conference coincided with the start of the miners' strike. The conference passed a bland resolution of general support for the miners, and then for the whole year of the strike BLOC did nothing beyond issuing one leaflet and calling one lobby of the TUC.

When a Mineworkers' Defence Committee was formed to unite and organise activists, it was Socialist Organiser and Briefing who took the initiative, not BLOC. BLOC played no role at all.

Where is BLOC now? Nobody knows. It has shown no signs of life for some time. From the thousands of activists who were attracted to BLOC when it was launched Militant has created something even more lifeless than the Communist Party's old Liaison Committee for the Defence of Trade Unions.

Before the 1980s, the old trade union Broad Lefts were usually dominated by the Communist Party, which was a very bureaucratic organisation (and is now two very bureaucratic organisations — one trendy and right-wing, the other pro-Moscow). The Broad Lefts were never active, democratic rank and file movements: they were machines for winning elections. Today's extremely right-wing leadership of the electricians' union, the EETPU, dates back to a big scandal in the early 1960s when it was proved that the previous CP leadership had rigged elections to keep control.

By the early 1980s the old Broad Lefts had largely died away and been replaced by new ones, dominated by Militant. Some of these are still more than Militant fronts, and other socialists, like Socialist Organiser, are often involved in them. But it is an uphill struggle to stop Militant stifling even the best of them; and they are just as much electoral machines as the old Broad Lefts.

Militant looks to capturing the apparatus of the trade unions, and devotes lots of energy to winning elections in them. In itself, this is reasonable and necessary; but Militant look no further.

The trade unions are the basic, 'bedrock' organisations of the working class. Partly because their job is to bargain within capitalism, the unions have developed a powerful bureaucracy — a distinct layer of full-time officials who see their role as negotiators as the be-all and end-all. Because big strikes often threaten the position of the bureaucrats, they frequently sell them out.

Socialists need to democratise the trade unions, and fight to replace bureaucrats with a new fighting

## Clive Bradley looks at the record of the Militant tendency in the unions, on the Eastern Bloc, and on the 'parliamentary road to socialism'

leadership. Elections are important — it makes a difference whether a union is led by Eric Hammond or Arthur Scargill.

But the key to transforming the unions is the rank and file itself. A socialist policy tries to develop the confidence and organisation of the rank and file. So while fighting to replace old, right-wing leaders, we have to build a rank and file movement that can, to a degree, act independently of the officials. The lack of such a rank and file movement across the unions was one of the reasons the miners' strike of 1984-5 lost: when the TUC refused to do anything to help the miners, those activists who did want to do something had no means to build solidarity.

The Broad Lefts could have helped build a rank and file movement. They didn't because Militant had no interest in fighting for that. Just like the CP before them, they did not represent a fighting leadership in the unions. The Broad Lefts they dominated were either largely lifeless front organisations, seen as recruiting grounds to the Militant or, where they did have life, were electoral machines.

The jewel in BLOC's crown is the Broad Left in the Civil and Public Servants Association (CPSA). This Broad Left is large and used to be quite active and lively; but now it does very little outside of union elections. A Militant motion to BL conference in 1987 argued: "...the priority must be the re-election of the Broad Left NEC."

That year Militant supporter John Macreadie had his election as General Secretary ruled out by the CPSA President. Macreadie took the CPSA to court — at a cost of £20,000 — violating the principle of trade union independence from the courts. He never consulted the Broad Left — and then had the nerve to ask the BL to pay for it! He lost both court case and re-run.

Militant frequently oppose the extension of union democracy. For example, they are against the annual election of full-time officers like Macreadie, who is now Deputy General Secretary for a five-year period. Militant say five years is short enough...

They see the Broad Left as their property. When a policy was passed by the Broad Left that the Militant leadership disagreed with, committing the BL to fight for action over the sacking of trade unionists at GCHQ. Militant supporters who are Broad Left officers just ignored it. They even refused to put out a Broad Left leaflet explaining the policy. A fine example of commitment to rank and file control and workers' democracy!

Broad Left conferences are like Militant rallies, with guest (Militant) speakers who even intervene in debates on contentious issues.

The BL have controlled the CPSA Executive twice. They did so in 1982-3 — and their record, matched against the class struggle, was not impressive.

The big battle during their period of office was by DHSS workers in Oxford and Birmingham, against job cuts. Militant argued for a return to work from the beginning. They said that workers should keep their powder dry for a bigger struggle later, over pay. They organised

no mass pickets or demonstrations. After four months, the NEC balloted for a return to work. Nothing was won — and no bigger struggle over pay followed.

In 1987-8, Militant were no better. The NEC under their control failed to organise any strike action against YTS, although sporadic strike action was already taking place. They stuck to producing a few glossy leaflets.

They failed to hold a Labour Party affiliation ballot, although it was conference policy to do so, because the Treasury threatened to stop the deduction of union contributions at source. There was no campaign against the Treasury, or even an attempt to find ways round it.

The NEC failed to call out civil servants on the one-day strike over the NHS on 14 March 1988. John Macreadie (who is the CPSA delegate to the TUC) called on the TUC to have a one-day strike instead. The TUC should have had a strike; but Militant's policy was just a posture.

The Broad Left National Committee did not meet for four months after the NEC victory, and never consulted the BL about its actions.

As a result the BL was effectively paralysed as a serious rank and file organisation in the vital period of the 1987 pay claim. This paralysis allowed the right-wing to step in and do their best to sabotage the ballot for all our strike action. The BL lost that ballot and the seeds were sown for the return of the right to power in the union in 1988.

That defeat at the '88 conference was rationalised by Militant as a mere 'lull before the storm'. We'll be back next year they vainly boasted. Tragically the BL's inactivity over the last few months makes that prospect unlikely.

Militant ran the DHSS Section Executive from the early 1980s until 1988, when they lost it to the right-wing. They ratted on BL and Section policy to fight the Fowler Social Security Reviews (1986-7) by refusing to ballot on strike action — for fear of the courts.

They refused to spread limited (but successful) action against Limited Period Appointments (casuals on fixed contracts) brought into the DHSS to implement the Fowler Reviews.

Now the DHSS looks set to lose 15,000 jobs. The new right-wing leadership, which won't fight, was voted in on a backlash against Militant.

BLOC has had little presence in any of the big battles of the past few years. In the 1988 NHS dispute, Militant bureaucratically strangled the shop stewards' structure that health workers were creating. Militant wanted the whole thing co-opted by BLOC. Failing that, they weren't interested in building the rank and file organisations needed to go forward.

In the biggest of all recent battles, the miners' strike, Militant could have played an important role — via Liverpool — and failed. They had little involvement in miners' support groups (usually setting up separate ones with only themselves in them).

They played stupid games with the vital slogan of the general strike. If the labour movement had mobilised its full force alongside the miners, they could have won — and much more could have been achieved. Militant called for a one-day general strike only, hardly enough



to win.

Except for a couple of days. In the middle of LPYS summer camp in 1984, South Wales NUM had its funds sequestered. The LPYS NC called a special meeting, at which they called for an all-out general strike. Everyone was very hyped up.

But a Militant Special Edition that week just called for a one-day strike again. The discrepancy was never explained. But the hyping-up had served its purpose — to browbeat the left in the LPYS.

Militant never understood one of the most important lessons of the miners' strike — the role of women. Women Against Pit Closures — the organisation of women in pit communities — showed how politically powerful an independent movement of working class women could be, fighting as part of the labour movement.

Militant tried to reinterpret WAPC according to their own theories, but never very convincingly. For Militant had always opposed the 'autonomous' organisation of women, or other oppressed groups. Their support for WAPC (and other groups, like Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners), was always at odds with their general policies. They had always argued that such organisations, and Black Sections, were 'divisive' (although for a very brief period, in 1977-8 they had built a 'black section' of the LPYS — the Youth Section of the Jamaican People's National Party — under their own control, of course).

In the 1970s Militant were vehement enemies of 'feminism'. And for years they refused even to discuss lesbian and gay rights at LPYS national conference.

All this calls into question the very idea of socialism Militant have. A test for this is their attitude towards the so-called 'socialist' countries, the USSR, China, Eastern Europe and similar societies.

Following Trotsky, Militant is very hostile to the governments in the USSR and similar societies. But they consider the social system (nationalisation and planning) to be an advance on capitalism. They call them 'degenerated and deformed workers' states. So do many other

would-be Trotskyists. But Militant have a version of this theory that is particularly appreciative of the alleged economic advances in these countries.

The clearest example of what this meant in practice for Militant was the USSR's invasion of Afghanistan at the end of 1979 and beginning of 1980.

Now, in 1989, the USSR has left Afghanistan, and socialists should side, for the time being, with the USSR's former Afghan allies against the Islamic fundamentalists. But for nine years, the USSR carried out a brutal colonial-type war to subdue the peoples of Afghanistan — using napalm, demolition of villages and so on.

### "The Militant tendency is not Marxist, and it is not revolutionary. It is a bureaucratic sect which destroys what it runs"

Militant never supported the invasion itself, but they justified the occupation — in brutal terms. Because the USSR would create a 'deformed workers' state', Militant argued that their occupation of Afghanistan was the motor of historical progress — not ideal, but the best available. Nothing else was possible for what they once called the 'dark masses' of Afghanistan.

This is like the old 'white man's burden' argument of classical colonialism. Imperialism — the USSR — was bringing 'progress'. So it was just tough for the Afghan people.

This was an outrageous stand from a socialist point of view. The Afghans have every right not to be napalmed into progress; and if the Mullahs are now so strong, it's the USSR's fault.



## Militant in South Africa



Militant theorist Ted Grant. Photo: John Harris

It's difficult to think of anything more disgusting than a tiny group of self-styled 'Marxists' supporting the violent physical take over of a union branch against the will of the vast majority of the workers.

But that is what the Militant's South African co-thinkers found themselves doing when they supported the attack by a small group of Stalinists on the Cape Town offices of the black shop workers' union, CCAWUSA.

CCAUSA has been in a state of crisis since June 1987, when a merger conference of unions in the commercial and catering sectors broke down. The underlying issues in the battle between the majority (socialist) and the minority (populist) wings of CCAUSA are political.

The majority of CCAUSA, based in the powerful Johannesburg branch, are clearly on the 'workerist' wing of the black workers movement. They are suspicious of alliances between the trade unions and nationalist political organisations, and they want to develop a socialist programme of action for the working class.

The minority want to ally the workers' movement politically with the nationalist ANC. Those who are socialists in the minority tend to identify socialism with the USSR

police state.

One of the bones of contention between the two groupings was the attempt by the minority to manoeuvre CCAUSA into supporting the ANC's programme, the Freedom Charter.

In this bitter conflict, the South African 'Militant' have sided unequivocally with the minority. This is because Militant's dogmatic parody of Marxism tells them that the ANC nationalists are the mass working class movement.

Their policy is to 'build a mass ANC with socialist politics'. Any political force that disagrees with this perspective is by definition a 'sect'. Defending such people against the Stalinists is wrong and will only endanger the Militant's 'revolutionary' work inside the ANC/UDF.

In order to stay 'in', the Militant are prepared to prove their loyalty to the Stalinists by joining them in attacks on the socialist left.

Such 'loyalty' is not repaid in kind. The South African Communist Party and its supporters have now turned violently against the Militant.

We reprint below the text of a leaflet put out by the Cape Town branch of CCAUSA explaining how they defended workers' democracy against the Stalinists.

"On Monday 2 November a group of thugs came to our offices and threatened our organisers and members with violence if they don't vacate the offices. They claimed that they were instructed by workers to evict us from our office. They succeeded in gaining entry by

threatening us with violence. They claimed that our Branch Executive Committee has been 'suspended'. They also attempted to take control of our bank account, telephones and our post box. Fortunately they did not succeed.

In order to prevent violence, our comrades who were at the office left the building. When CCAUSA members heard what had happened to their office, they immediately summoned a shop steward council meeting where workers and shop stewards representing the majority of organised workplaces discussed this matter. Workers were very angry at this violent take-over of our office and resolved that this situation should not be allowed to continue for long.

The following resolutions were passed:

1. That workers take immediate control of their office.
2. That the BEC remains the same.
3. That the violent take-over of our office be discussed on the shop floor.

Workers agreed that they would all come to the office to take control. On Wednesday 4 November, from 11.30am workers from all over Cape Town started flocking into the union office. By 12.00 noon close to 300 workers were present.

The splinter group, when they saw the number of workers present, attempted to run away, but they were stopped by the workers and asked to explain who gave them a mandate to take over our office.

Workers then took everything belonging to us from the splinter group and ejected them from the office. Our union office is now under control and running normally.

Amandla!  
Forward to a socialist programme of action!  
CCAUSA workers will defend CCAUSA!

When the USSR decided to withdraw last year, Militant's 'analysis' was simply ridiculous. The 'counter-revolution', they said, had been defeated (Militant, 13 May) — which will come as a shock to most Afghans. Militant denounced "the confused 'analyses' of the capitalist media, which portray the Russian withdrawal as a defeat."

The idea that the USSR and similar systems are progressive is common to many socialists. Yet these regimes are totalitarian police states in which the working class has fewer democratic rights than it does in Western Europe.

Militant agree, in general, with making a revolution against these regimes. But if workers' revolution is not on the cards — like in Afghanistan — a totalitarian police state is, in their eyes, at least a big step towards socialism. It tells you something central about Militant's whole idea of socialism.

It tells you even more when you read that Militant sees Stalinism as the only way forward not just for exceptionally underdeveloped Afghanistan, but also for most of the world. "Even the victory of a Marxist Party... would not be sufficient to prevent the deformation of the revolution on Stalinist lines," wrote Militant leader Ted Grant in his major article on the "Colonial Revolution". "Revolutionary victory in backward countries, such as Algeria, under present conditions, while constituting a tremendous victory for the world revolution and the world proletariat... cannot but be on the lines of a totalitarian Stalinist state."

Algeria is far from being one of the world's most backward countries. If Algeria has no better possibilities, then so has most of the world. The only Third World countries for which any better possibilities are even hinted at are India, Sri Lanka and South Africa. And in its time the Militant tendency has also welcomed as a huge step forward the creation of "deformed workers' states" in Europe — in Czechoslovakia and in Portugal.

For Militant, progress means nationalisations — carried out by whom, and under what conditions for the workers, is secondary. Workers' liberty is a desirable but optional, and in most circumstances

impossible, extra. The emancipation of the working class is not for them, as it was for Marx, the task of the workers themselves, but the task of the progressive state bureaucrats.

**S**ocialist Organiser is a revolutionary socialist tendency, not because we think revolution is a nice, romantic idea, but because revolution is necessary to defeat once and for all the capitalist class.

They won't give up power without a fight, if necessary a violent one. Moreover, real socialism — democratic workers' control of society — will have to be created from below. No government in Parliament can introduce socialism from above.

On both these aspects of a revolutionary programme, Militant are a long way from Marxism. Each week in their *Where We Stand* column they argue that peaceful change — without serious ruling class resistance — is possible through an Enabling Act in Parliament. After scenes during the miners' strike or at Wapping, who could believe that?

Militant's call for a government to 'nationalise the monopolies' by passing an 'Enabling Act' in Parliament is a strategy for socialism 'from above', which wouldn't work, and wouldn't achieve socialism.

Revolutionaries don't ignore Parliament. And we do want a Labour government! But we don't pretend that such a government could achieve socialism — although we would fight for a left Labour government to support workers in struggle, who could achieve socialism.

The Militant tendency is not Marxist, and it is not revolutionary. It is a bureaucratic sect that destroys what it runs, and participates only to take control. The front organisations it has set up have all been exactly that — fronts, woefully inadequate to the tasks of the class struggle.

Socialists need a different sort of Marxist tendency — one that builds the broad movement as well as itself, and sees no conflict between its own interests and those of the working class as a whole. That is what Socialist Organiser aims to be.

## Worse than mistakes

### LETTER

**Y**our article on Militant (SO 397) refers to their war of attrition with Liverpool's Black Caucus as if the City Council's mistake was primarily one of tactics.

That the Militant councillors made every tactical mistake in the book is true, but those mistakes merely compounded a far bigger miscalculation and the part which was mentioned indicated an unprincipled attitude to black people in Britain.

Anyone reading 'Militant' especially their youth paper, would get a picture of an organisation committed to black rights. On paper, every week, Militant pledges to fight racism.

Yet they regard all black self-organisation as 'divisive' and argue vehemently against it — which does not stop them hypocritically participating in the NUS Black Caucus when they want votes for one of their candidates.

More ridiculous still, they organised all their black youth in 1977-78 into the British section of the Jamaican PNP — an enterprise which was a separatist black group and implied that all British blacks are foreigners and moreover that all West Indians are Jamaicans!

Militant's record with regard to black organisation is one of sectarian cynicism

and indicates a basic hostility to a large section of the working class. Nowhere is this more blatantly shown than in the Sam Bond affair.

Militant's programme of 'build more houses' patently did not benefit Liverpool's black community. The Liverpool black caucus discovered racist practices in the allocation of new and better quality council housing — but the council did nothing about it, leaving the black community ghettoised in the worst estates.

At the same time, the council dropped a project to build sheltered housing for elderly people in an area with a high black population, which would consequently have benefitted elderly black people more than whites.

The Housing programme, arguably Militant's Liverpool flagship, did nothing to alleviate the problems of the city's indigenous black population. The council cannot argue that it was ignorant of these problems — it deliberately chose to ignore them.

The one promise that the council did keep to the black organisations was of the council 'unit' to tackle racism within the city. Yet even here, Militant were not prepared to countenance any dissent from its own dogmatic views.

Whilst it is possible to have some sympathy with a left council which appeared to be reacting against an appointment from the burgeoning race relations 'industry' the facts are that:

1. Bond was the least qualified candidate by anyone's standards.
2. Both ethnic monitoring and

'positive action' even in their most minimal form are a necessary part of a serious attempt to tackle racism in council services.

3. Militant had stitched up the appointment long before the interviews even started.

Politically Militant were 100% wrong, and a simple reaction against self-appointed black 'community leaders' wanting local government riches for themselves does not let them off the hook.

The Militant may not have been prepared to give the race relations industry a foothold in 'their' council but the evidence shows that they were not tackling racism in a way acceptable to their dogma either.

Neither the housing programme nor the job creation schemes were doing anything for Liverpool's black people. In reality ethnic monitoring schemes, 'positive action' in employment and promotion and all the other systems which should have been administered and initiated by the new unit should have gone hand in hand with the jobs and houses programme.

Militant's politics failed on both counts. What followed was inevitable given Militant's starting point.

A right wing administration refusing to take seriously the very real problems faced by its black constituents, refusing to face up to racism in its own procedures, making sensitive appointments from its own ranks, then attempting to cover up the ensuing furor with outrageous front organisations, denunciations of the trade unions and legitimate community groups ('alien methods') denouncing the black caucus as 'pimps and gangsters', calling the police to evict demonstrators, and towards the end disgusting corruption, is no more than we expect.

Yet this is precisely how Militant behaved in Liverpool. They have a view of the politics of race (and for the matter sex and sexuality) culled from the most backward sections of the working class. This is coupled with a smug sense of their own rightness which blinds them to reality.

They are thus not merely insensitive, or capable of tactical mistakes, but positively anti-Marxist. No amount of anti-deportation campaigns or portraits of angry blacks in their paper will change that.

Liz Millward  
North London

## Militant denounce black workers

Militant boasts a lot about the fact that one of its supporters is now the first black woman on the National Union of Students Executive.

Look at Militant's record, and it becomes clear that this pretence of concern for the special struggles of specially oppressed sections of the working class is pure tokenism.

In 1974 there was a big strike by Asian workers at Imperial Typewriters in Leicester, demanding equal opportunities for training and promotion. The white workers and their notoriously racist union officials op-

posed the strike and scabbed on it.

Militant blamed the strikers for splitting the workforce, and delivered many lectures on the need to win over the white workers. In fact the Asian workers had tried that and failed, partly because of the bureaucratic strangling of their union branch.

In a preview of Militant's scurrilous attacks on the Liverpool Black Caucus, Militant justified their line on the strike by diverting the argument into denunciations of a radical black lawyer who was helping the strikers.

# A story of solidarity and violence

## The missing factor

### CINEMA

Neil Cobbett reviews 'Matewan'

In the 1920's virtual civil war erupted in the West Virginia and Kentucky minefields of the US as the bosses strove to smash down the miners.

In Matewan, a company town in West Virginia, run by the Stone Mountain Coal Company, a strike/lock-out developed to the point where strikers were evicted from their homes and attempts made to "repossess" their belongings.

In the end the Coal Company imported an army of gunnies to run the strikers off the land or kill them.

The strikers organised an ambush in which most of the bosses' gun men were wiped out. In retaliation the bosses' hirelings murdered members of the local community and the minefield was blown up.

In 'Matewan', director John Sayles depicts the events of this strike as seen through the eyes of Danny, a sometime Baptist preacher. Sayles's other films ('Return of the Secaucus 7', 'Lianna', 'Brother from Another Planet') are all of an alternative, if not radical, persuasion, but this film is much more clear cut and, I think, shows real guts and a healthy attitude to union struggles.

Whatever its shortcomings it is the first commercial film in years which shows workers in struggle sympathetically. Conversely it shows how the bosses will use every dirty trick in the book to break strikes (scabs, company guards,



James Earl Jones in John Sayles' *Matewan*

spies, slander against union organisers and armed force etc).

The plot revolves around the arrival of Joe Kenehan, a union organiser and an ex-member of the radical IWW who spent time in stir for opposing World War 1.

The local strikers are hell bent on stopping the company's scab labour by force. Joe, realised that the scabs (poor blacks and Italian immigrants who are in the dark about the strike and lured by the promise of work) should be won to the union if the strike is to be successful.

He tells the strikers that they need solidarity to win ("One big union" was the battlecry of the IWW) and that a union that refuses to organise the most oppressed black and

immigrant workers isn't a union but a club.

The strikers think otherwise and organise for a shoot-out. But the scabs realising what they are doing, throw down their tools in front of the bosses and join the strike: this is a powerful moment and shows the power of ideas of solidarity in uniting workers.

This is a recurrent theme of the film, whether the workers should opt for violence (under provocation) or build up solidarity and focus on mass industrial action, while not shrinking from violent resistance where necessary.

Unfortunately, whatever Sayles's intentions, I don't think the film comes across clearly on this point.

The end of the film had a pistols at dawn romanticism which will leave many confused and feeling that minority violence against the bosses rather than mass action, is the key (although the epilogue makes it clear that this is only the opening round in a war in which the miners came off worst).

However, this is an ambiguity, not a clear 'message'. In fact the union organiser is the first casualty in the shoot-out, and the scene leaves us with a feeling of regret that the others don't listen to him.

In any case, this is a powerful film, whatever the problems involved in trying to portray a strike in terms of a 'workers' western'. See it.

### TV

By Vicki Morris

The series 'The Thatcher Factor' analyses the special complexion the Prime Minister has given to 10 years of Tory government.

The first programme was a general review of the Thatcher decade which concentrated on the characteristics making the PM a hard nut amongst Tory leaders. It included accounts of her tyranny over Cabinets and her campaign to oust the 'Wets'. This picture was tempered by testimonies of personal kindnesses to close colleagues, to what purpose I couldn't fathom.

Hugo Young, who wrote the series, is a *Guardian* parliamentary correspondent who, judging by the narrowness of his arguments, appears not to have stepped outside the House of Commons lobby for the past 20 years.

His recent biography of the Right Honourable Margaret portrays an admirably vigorous enemy of the Establishment and his programme, therefore, was stuffed with the Tory Party faithful bearing witness to Thatcher's revolutionary zeal, and professing unqualified optimism for the future of Britain and Party under her tutelage.

Indeed, it is a large part of Young's project to explain how Thatcher's support endures, and how she has "an instinctive feel for what the ordinary Tory voter out in the Shires is thinking."

But he implied that there is another brand of Tory — represented by the Wets, but Tory nonetheless — whom other political parties need to woo if they are to stand any chance of governing before the century is over.

Only a handful of non-Tories — like *Marxism Today's* Stuart Hall — were interviewed, and they seemed to have been chosen precisely because their political perspectives would add weight to Young's defeatist argument. For that reason, the programme's explanation of Thatcher's endurance was scandalously incomplete.

Most of the opposition to Thatcher has not accepted the framework in which she is trying to recast British politics. Footage chronicled their battles and their defeats, but they were not allowed a single spokesperson to give their version of events. The programme contained two strands — historical footage and opinionated interviews, which were completely unreconciled.

Thatcher has not prevailed simply because her policies appeal to the electorate, but also because the leadership of the labour movement has sold out, or stifled the fights against her, something Young completely omitted to mention.

That was the case in the miners' strike, yet Young allowed Stuart Hall to suggest that it failed because, feeling "deeply patronised" by Scargill's failure to hold a national strike ballot, the Nottinghamshire miners stayed at work.

There was no acknowledgement of the fact that at the height of the strike up to 50% of Notts miners had come out, nor of the historical reasons which originally made Notts miners indifferent to the strike call.

It might be attributed to professional myopia that Young considers Thatcher's endurance to lie in her ability to woo the electorate and squeeze first past the winning post on election day every five years. But it is more likely political dishonesty.

His own chronicle of events acknowledged that the Tories have got a bit more on their side than slick PR consultants. There was footage of police brutality at Orgreave, police occupations of pit villages, and an interview with an ad-man who admitted that during the miners' strike the National Coal Board had employed him to manipulate the media so that the miners' case was never heard.

I would conclude from all of this that it is going to take a bit more on the part of the labour movement than a comparably glossy election campaign to defeat Thatcher, not just at election time, but in the attacks she mounts daily on the working class.

In this tenth year of Thatcher's government I naively hoped that Channel 4 would spend a lot of money on a series of programmes which thoroughly exposed the effects of Thatcherism on society, and gave the opposition more than a walk-on part.

## 'Magic' to beat cancer?

### LES HEARN'S SCIENCE COLUMN



An ingenious variant of 'magic bullet' approach is promising to help not just the twenty cancer patients on whom it is being tested, but many more besides.

A 'magic bullet' is one which would single out its victim from amongst a crowd. Such bullets do not exist but their equivalents in the world of the body's biochemicals do.

They are called antibodies, and they have the ability to 'recognise', stick to and, sometimes, destroy a specific target such as a bacterium or virus.

Antibodies do not normally attack a body's own cells. This is just as well or we would all suffer from auto-immune diseases. In the case of cancers, however, antibodies to attack them and kill them would be a good thing. Such approaches are being explored, but the subject of this article adds a lethal refinement to the antibody.

Conventional treatments for cancer, such as radiation or cytotoxic (cell-killing) drugs, kill the rapidly growing and multiplying cancer cells. Unfortunately, they also kill other rapidly growing and multiplying cells, such as skin, hair, gut and blood cells.

This causes unpleasant side effects such as anaemia, decreased immunity to infections, sickness, bleeding and loss of hair. These effects may be severe enough to cause the treatment to be abandoned.

The new magic bullet approach aims to target the cytotoxic drugs on only the cancer cells. The drugs are attached to an antibody that recognises and sticks to just those cells.

Cancer researchers in London and Texas are using ricin, a highly poisonous protein found in the castor bean, attached to antibodies against cells produced by a cancer of the lymph glands, called B-cell lymphoma.

Ricin's previous claim to fame was that it was used to kill Georgi Markov, a Bulgarian dissident living in London. A Bulgarian agent abandoned the cloak and dagger for a sharpened umbrella. Markov was jabbed with this and a tiny metal ball coated with ricin injected into his leg.

Ricin is so toxic that a single

molecule can kill one cell. It works like this. It is made of two chains — the A-chain which sticks to the outside of a cell, and the B-chain which is thereby able to enter the cell. Once inside, it sabotages the cell's protein-making machinery.

The researchers replaced the A-chain with the more discriminating anti-B cell antibody. Only these, then, would get a dose of ricin. Healthy B cells might die along with cancerous ones but it was thought these would be replaced by the body.

The antibodies are made by monoclonal cell cultures. This relatively new technique allows the production of antibodies against any part of a cell or virus, as well as against a host of other substances.

Tests of the ricin-armed antibodies cured mice with B-cell lymphomas with only minor side effects. Tests on humans are now under way.

Versions to attack other lymph cancers, such as T-cell lymphoma and Hodgkin's disease, will soon be ready. It may also be possible to modify it to attack larger, solid tumours, as in lung cancer.

The latest scare about the 'greenhouse effect' (Whitehall under water, etc.) follows the views that last year carbon dioxide levels in the atmosphere rose by twice as much as usual. For the first time perhaps for millions of years, CO<sub>2</sub> levels have gone above 350 parts per million (from 348.7 to 351.2).

This is just over 0.035% which does not seem very much. After all, 99.965% of the air is not CO<sub>2</sub>. But CO<sub>2</sub> has a disproportionate ability to trap the earth's warmth. Coupled with increasing emissions of other

gases that promote the greenhouse effect, this is a serious warning.

There is broad agreement among climatologists that there has been a significant warming of the earth during the 1980s and that this is at least partly due to increased amounts of 'greenhouse gases'.

The problem is due to the disruption of the balance between the amount of carbon locked up in plants and the amount free in the air as CO<sub>2</sub>. This disruption is due to the increasing burning of fossil fuels and felling of forests, particularly since the Second World War.

CO<sub>2</sub> emissions are said to have gone up 10% between 1981 and 1986 alone. They are 240% higher than in 1950. On average, over one tonne of carbon is turned into CO<sub>2</sub> per head of the world's population each year.

The USA and East Germany lead the league table for CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, both converting over 5 tonnes of carbon per head. They are followed by Czechoslovakia, Canada, Australia, USSR, West Germany and South Africa.

Despite growing concern, only France has succeeded in reducing its CO<sub>2</sub> emissions (due to an increasing reliance on nuclear power!)

Natural events combine with this trend of increasing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from the industrial nations to produce particularly bad years, such as 1988. One such event is the periodic reversal of sea and wind currents in the Pacific Ocean, known as El Nino.

The resulting upset in rainfall patterns causes drought and fires throughout Asia, Australasia and Africa. In 1983 El Nino is thought to have caused the release of 4 billion tonnes of carbon from burning vegetation.

# Time for a drive against AEU right wing

By Pete Radcliff

In a humiliating backdown on 12 April, Bill Jordan and the negotiating committee of the Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering unions withdrew their proposals for a major sell-out of national engineering conditions.

A 300-strong lobby of engineering workers outside the Confed's talks with the bosses on 12 April concluded a series of meetings throughout the country of engineering stewards rejecting the proposals.

Jordan avoided the lobby, but apparently was persuaded by Alex Ferry, the Confed General Secretary, that ignoring it would only add fuel to the protests of engineering workers. So Ferry, Jordan and Todd Sullivan (president of the Confed and a TGWU official) met a delegation from the lobby.

At this meeting Jordan came under strong attack from convenors and delegates from local Confeds throughout the country, demanding to know what mandate he had ditched the eight-point claim and the 35 hour no-strings policy agreed at the Confed's Annual Conference.

Delegate after delegate pointed to the high profits in the engineering industry, and said that now was the time for attack, rather than retreat.

Jordan argued that the sell-out proposals were agreed by all the union leaderships within the Confed. Anyway, successful further attacks by employers

on engineering workers were inevitable. To surrender before the attacks start might get engineering workers something in return.

He chose not to answer the question of his lack of accountability to conference policies, arguing instead that he would abide by any ballots held on the issue.

The withdrawal of the sell-out proposals hours later shows that the Confed leadership are not confident that there is such a mood of despair as could give legitimacy to their business unionism. The members' response seems to have taken the Confed leadership by genuine surprise. Not one union on the negotiating committee had spoken out against Jordan's proposals in advance of the lobby.

Two factors undoubtedly influenced Jordan and his cohorts, and contributed to what can only be regarded as a major blunder by them.

After years of inaction at national level, local Confeds have increasingly become talking shops which officials like Jordan think they can safely ignore.

The absence of a serious organised left within the engineering unions also encouraged Jordan. What exists of an organised left, such as the Engineering Gazette, has been preoccupied with, and generally defeated in, union elections, and has shown very little initiative in any other area of union activity.

Conditions now exist for major changes in both these areas. For the second time in two years proposals for changes in engineering conditions have had to be withdrawn by union national

officials in the face of a wide revolt amongst lay officials and the rank and file membership.

The effect has been to focus engineering workers' interest in the machinations of their national officials and stimulate active opposition to their policies.

Much needs to be done to give coherence to that growing opposition. Years of inactivity at national level have opened wide discrepancies in conditions, pay and the extent of casualisation, and consequently in the confidence of workers within various sectors of the industry. There is growing militancy, but it is concentrated in particular areas and companies.

The demand for 35 hours without strings undoubtedly strikes a chord with these workers whilst national minimum time rates (NMRs) for the industry as a whole are generally less important.

Less well organised areas, on lower wages, higher levels of overtime and the worst conditions are probably more concerned about NMRs, restrictions on overtime and other such conditions.

The indications are that the union bureaucrats will attempt to exploit these divisions to reduce the risk of a dispute.

Theoretically, the initial 8-point claim submitted to the EEF in September 1988 is back on the agenda after the withdrawal of Jordan's proposals, with, in addition to 35 hours without strings, demands for increases in pay, shift premiums and overtime premiums, and limitations on overtime. If campaigned for they could unite engineering workers against a vulnerable employers federa-

tion. But instead of pushing for the full claim, national officials are talking in terms of two options.

Firstly, they are talking of separating off the claim on hours from the pay claim — a strategy that will make it doubly difficult for militant sections to take weaker sections of the unions with them in a ballot, not only isolating those fighting for a reduction in hours, but also deflecting attention away from what can only be expected to be a shoddy compromise on pay.

One thing that has been quietly slipped in the wake of Jordan's defeat is a proposal for a two-year deal on pay. At present the bosses have offered just under 6% for both November 1988 and November 1989. Talks of a two-year deal must be strongly opposed.

If the officials are unable to carry their plan of separating the items of the claim they are likely to go for a rapid conclusion of talks and an immediate ballot.

With the officials clearly not wanting a dispute that would significantly undermine their dominance in the unions they cannot be expected to campaign seriously for industrial action — and considerable campaigning would undoubtedly be necessary to win a ballot.

With eight months already having been wasted in talks between the EEC and the CSEU time is running short. An urgent national conference of engineering stewards is still vital to take on the task of building rank and file campaigning unity which is essential to make a fight on this year's full claim.

# Wanted: a proper left in the AEU

## INSIDE THE UNIONS

By Sleeper

The AEU National Committee is meeting even as the Somnolent One puts pen to paper. General Secretary Laird has described this year's NC as "the most important meeting in the AEU/ASE's 138-year history."

For once, we can agree with him. The issue that will dominate the Eastbourne debates is the proposed amalgamation between the AEU and the EETPU. Fifteen districts (out of a total of 25) have submitted resolutions on the amalgamation, with 14 of them against. It looks as though the NC, even with its right-wing majority, might well throw out the merger plans.

AEU right-wingers are in general gut trade unionists, who value the union's democratic rule book and despise the open scabbing of Eric Hammond.

But even if the NC does reject the merger, that won't be the end of it. Jordan and Laird will almost certainly move to ballot the membership on the issue.

That's where the role of the left within the union (mainly grouped around the 'Engineering Gazette') becomes crucial. So far the national Gazette leadership has signally failed to do anything about the amalgamation. The Gazette's chair, Jimmy Airlie, even argued against submitting resolutions to the NC on the grounds that existing policy (in favour of amalgamations but only on the basis of the existing rule book) was perfectly adequate.

The Gazette group's low profile is not an accident. Jimmy Airlie's entire strategy revolves around not rocking the boat, keeping in with the anti-amalgamation right-wing on the NC and even wooing Gavin Laird (rumoured at one time to be against the merger because he feared that Jordan and Hammond would 'forget' to give him a job).

Worse still, Airlie is increasingly coming to regard the Gazette as his own personal property. The last two national meetings have come close to breaking up in disarray, with Airlie abusing and threatening anyone who dared criticise him. At one recent meeting Airlie more or less demanded that support for his stance over the Ford Dundee deal be made a condition of membership of the Gazette. When a few brave souls at the last meeting wanted a discussion on the "role of the chair" (ie. Airlie's behaviour), he threatened to close the meeting there and then if he wasn't given a vote of confidence: incidentally, when a vote was taken on the "role of the chair", Airlie won with the backing of his Stalinist pals, but the vast majority of those present abstained...

The Gazette can mobilise significant forces when it wants to. When they called a lobby of the Confed talks last week, about 400 engineers turned up. But the amalgamation question is too hot a potato for Airlie — it might jeopardise his wheeling and dealing with the NC majority.

As a result of all this, dissatisfaction is growing within the ranks of the Gazette. Many people are starting to find it difficult to stomach Airlie's bureaucratism and bullying. Some prominent AEU left-wingers are even starting to question the Gazette's effectiveness as an electoral machine.

If, as seems almost certain, Jordan and Laird decide to ballot the membership on amalgamation then the Gazette will have to get off the fence. The only way finally to stop Jordan and Laird in their tracks is to mobilise the rank and file. And if that means antagonising Jimmy Airlie, then that's the price that must be paid.

## IN BRIEF

Workers at **Vosper Thornycroft** have accepted a pay offer of 9½% on average wages.

Workers at the **Iron Trades Insurance Group** have accepted a 10% rise in basic pay.

Department of Employment figures showed **average earnings** rising in February at 9¼% — the highest level for nearly seven years.

**Rail union** leaders have rejected BR's 7% pay offer. Bosses said it was their 'final' offer.

Pay talks covering one million **engineering** workers broke down last week when unions rejected a two year agreement worth 6% each year.

Workers at **Selfridges** have voted for a second one day strike over pay. Bosses have imposed a 6¼% pay offer.

**University** bosses have refused to increase their pay offer to lecturers. Lecturers threw out the 7% offer in a ballot and are refusing to mark exams.

Workers at both **Woolworth's** and the **Co-op** have been offered a 7½ pay rise.

The government has been forced to make changes to **Employment Training** to deal with the low take-up rate. Unemployed people are not convinced they will receive much training at all; but the latest changes will not alter the situation.

# Second tube strike on 20 April

By Ray Ferris

London tube drivers have organised a second one-day unofficial strike for Thursday 20 April.

As we go to press it looks set to be more successful than one two weeks ago which paralysed six lines and brought chaos to London's underground. The action is illegal under Tory trade union laws and union officials are pleading with workers to work normally. But bosses have shied off from using the law.

The strike was called over a claim for a £64 per week (to an hourly rate of £6.43) pay rise without strings. Initially the claim came from one person operated (OPO) train drivers but a decision was taken to include all drivers in the claim.

Official negotiations on OPO pay dragged on and on so the rank and file decided to do things their own way.

After the strike on 6 April tube bosses

agreed to consider the pay review hanging over from when OPO was brought in. But they insisted on talks on four new issues:

- Introducing 'staff status' for train operators, with a set monthly salary. Drivers would stand to lose out on shift allowances.

- Introducing a continental shift system — 5 days on, 2 days off. Workers would be forced to work any five days out of seven, receiving a flat rate for nights or weekends.

- Clawing back Bank Rest Days (B/RD). When the GLC wanted a 38 hour week on the Underground, management insisted on still working 40 hours to fit in with schedules. So workers were given leave on a pro-rata basis — an extra two weeks holiday which management want to take back.

- Changing work patterns on 'prepare and assist to go'. By bringing in other workers to test trains management want train operators driving flat out for 7½ hours.

Tube bosses have offered a minuscule carrot together with a very big stick to bash the workforce with.

Profits and privatisation are the order of the day. Management have also introduced plans for station reorganisation which amount to a slaves' charter. The NUR has balloted for strike action against these plans and expect a large 'yes' vote. Action by

drivers will have given other workers more confidence.

These attacks on conditions affect all tube workers and there is a basis for united action.

And the disgraceful leaders who try to sabotage unofficial action must be brought to account. Now that ASLEF has taken up the £64 claim an official strike must be organised. Negotiations must be open and any deal must be put to a mass meeting.

There have been problems with organising the unofficial strike. Many workers first heard about it in the *Evening Standard*. Picket lines have generally not been organised.

And union officials have been allowed to wash their hands of the action and betray it.

On the positive side, local organising meetings have attracted workers on non-OPO lines which should make Thursday's action more effective.

Workers should use the strike as a launch pad for winning official action and to unite with other tube staff. Picket lines will be needed to bring out drivers on the lines that still have guards.

Tube workers have tremendous power. Around 3 million passengers a day use the system.

They can bring an already heavily congested capital to a grinding halt. Faced with a hard-nosed management they should take the offensive.

# Move against merger

**Norman Goodwin from the 'Stop the Merger' campaign and the Birmingham AEU No.4 branch talked to SO about what needs to be done to stop the AEU/EETPU merger.**

I think the National Committee could well vote against the merger. At the Broad Left caucus, people were reasonably optimistic. For instance, the construction section appears to be against the merger almost to a man.

However, even if the National Committee does vote against the merger, the executive could well go for a ballot, probably very quickly...we may

only have a short time to build for a no vote.

The tragedy is that we don't have an organised, fighting, effective Broad Left.

If we had such a body the 400-plus engineers who went to the lobby of the Confed/EEF talks last week could be mobilised into a powerful campaign against the merger. The present Engineering Gazette's leadership are not giving rank and file engineers the kind of lead they deserve.

That's why we organised the Anti-Merger meeting in Birmingham last November.

Despite our small resources, the response to the lobby today has been heartening. Just think what a well organised, fighting Broad Left could have done.

We need a meeting very quickly, drawing in the Broad Left to organise opposition to the merger after the National Committee. We've got to keep up and build the momentum.

# Crunch in Southwark

Crunch time for Southwark Council workers is fast approaching.

NUPE, who represent a sizeable number of manual workers, have agreed a redundancy package which basically gives management permission to get rid of anybody they like. Up to 400 people may go.

Obviously the council would like a similar deal with NALGO. In fact top council bosses have drawn up such a plan. It includes:

- Unions no longer allowed to vet job descriptions or to sit in on job inter-

views.

- Compulsory redeployments/redundancies.

- Introducing extensive performance pay, increasing number of managers and generally giving them 'the right to manage'.

The Labour councillors have put off making a decision on whether to force through this deal, but it can only be a matter of time.

The NALGO branch leadership is doing little, but this spinelessness has spurred activists to form a group called SNAG (Southwark Nalگو Action Group).

# SOCIALIST

## ORGANISER

### Left Unity Conference Sheffield University Students Union

12.00 — 5.00 Saturday 22 April

- Major theme: How Do We Achieve Unity on the Student Left
- Discussions: Loans, Poll Tax
- Workshops include: Green issues, the Women's Campaign, Art Attack, Jewish Students, Lesbian & Gay Liberation, International campaigns, Further Education, Areas

# They make millions and treat fans like animals



Mourners at Anfield for the 94 fans killed in Sheffield on 15 April

By Eric Heffer MP

### The Hillsborough football tragedy could and should have been avoided.

Pitch invasions and hooliganism — sometimes deliberately set up by fascist elements — have been dealt with by putting fans on the terraces in cages. Clearly that has to stop. There is a Football Supporters Association, made up mainly of working people throughout the country, who have very clear ideas, very sensible ideas. They say the money that has been accumulated by some of the big clubs should be spent on proper decent facilities and

conditions for the spectators.

This has to be the priority — safety and decent conditions.

Football is a working class game which workers enjoy, and the facilities have definitely not kept up with the numbers attending.

It's a question of some people making enormous sums of money out of the game, and the ordinary spectators being treated almost like animals.

As for the police, there have been many, many cases of injustice to Everton and Liverpool fans just because of where they're from.

The government should drop the ID card plan. They won't. Their attitude would be different if it was a polo match, or something of that kind.

Football looks to cash profits rather than the comforts of dedicated supporters.

And yet more and more clubs are abandoning the faithful terrace followers, to erect expensive executive boxes that cater for the wealthy and well-heeled.

Their facilities are a million miles away from the fan who is the life blood of the game.

Travelling supporters on away-day excursions are herded like cattle by a police task force who look on most of them as trash. And treat them as such.

Because it is a working class game, fans get workhouse treatment.

Daily Mirror, 17 April

## Football: let the fans decide!

By Janine Booth

The appalling human tragedy of last Saturday's Hillsborough disaster, in which 94 Liverpool supporters were crushed to death, raises many issues.

Football supporters are routinely herded around and placed in uncomfortable, unsafe cages. Last Saturday, the ten-foot fences, topped with metal spikes, imprisoned hundreds in a death trap.

'Crowd control' at the moment means nothing more than partitioning football fans into convenient blocks, where they can be easily observed and shepherded — it has nothing to do with supporters' com-

fort, safety or enjoyment of the match.

As Rogan Taylor, Secretary of the Football Supporters' Association, said, "the cages are designed to prevent pitch invasions, but nobody ever died from a pitch invasion". How many more people would have died in the tragic fire at Bradford's Valley Parade if supporters had been caged in and unable to escape the inferno?

It is easy to hand out the blame, but some responsibility must lie with the Football Association for their naive allocation of tickets. The FA gave the large end of the ground to Nottingham Forest supporters, despite the fact that Liverpool games attract consistently higher attendances.

On Monday morning's 'The Time, the Place', a government spokesperson claimed that letting people into the already packed terraces was a reasonable act, since "there was no evidence to suggest that non-ticket holders were present".

This was an FA Cup semi-final between two of Britain's most popular and successful teams, where ticket demand was always going to outstrip supply, and he needs evidence before considering that there might be non-ticket holders outside the ground? The real experts — the supporters — could have told you that straight away.

Football is being run by people who know precious little about it, and while this continues, disasters

can not be avoided.

What are the implications for Tory Minister Colin Moynihan's Identity Card scheme? An ID card system would have done nothing to alleviate Saturday's disaster, and may well have made it worse.

The extra people were allowed to rush into the Hillsborough terraces because a crush was developing outside. Think how much worse this crush would have been had gate officials had to check thousands of cards, put them through machines and then check tickets.

There are no magic solutions to the problems facing football crowd management, but to treat supporters with respect, and to allow them a say in the running of the game would certainly help.

## A day's delay is a day lost

In a way I can understand Ron Todd's reluctance to rush forward. It seems to me that Todd wants to make sure that he's got everything legally watertight.

But I would remind Ron Todd and the T&G executive that every day that they hesitate is a day in Maggie Thatcher's pocket.

There is no way, whatever they do, that they're going to come out of this in any way clean in the eyes of the Establishment. They might as well do it today as put it off until tomorrow. They should get solidarity and support now from other unions and really go for it.

Ron Todd may be doing the right thing, but for the wrong reason. He just wants to abide by the law — either that or he's afraid, though I hesitate to say that. But it seems to me they have no option — they've got to go for broke now.

In the pit the lads have been talking about the docks, and they can see that it's a threat by the Establishment against the docks. There is more than a small chance of

miners supporting the docks.

The press and the government are using the phrase 'jobs for life' as if it's something that is not quite right.

But look at the Establishment. The Royal Family — jobs for life. Judges — jobs for life. Certain MPs — jobs for life. Army officers — jobs for life.

Nobody can point the finger at docks and decry jobs for life. Many others have jobs for life and with far less justification than the docks. Working people have the right to job security. If judges have a job for life, why the hell shouldn't the working class?

Anyway, in the 1970s there were over forty thousand dockers. Now their numbers have dwindled to next to nothing. Where have all those so-called 'jobs for life' gone?

As for Kinnock's new glitzy Labour Party, with its new song, and Saatchi and Saatchi approach, I find it sickening.

If it's supposed to make a big impression on people, well, I know the lads at the pit weren't impressed. Politics is too serious to be made a joke of.



WHETTON'S  
WEEK  
A miner's diary

If Kinnock and his friends had put as much effort into attacking Thatcher and capitalism as they have into their new image, then it might have meant something. As it is, Kinnock's relaunch was the non-event of the year.

The leaks on the policy review, which show the Labour leadership planning to sell out any commitment to renationalisation, show that power in the party is becoming concentrated in the hands of an unaccountable few. They're taking the Labour Party in the wrong direction.

The big news at the weekend was the Hillsborough tragedy. What hit me straight away, sadly because Liverpool fans were also involved, were the similarities with the Heysel stadium tragedy.

Now I don't blame the Liverpool fans for that. I think they were scapegoats for the Heysel management, who crammed as many fans in as possible, putting profit before people's safety. And now, a few years later, it's happened again, only now the police seem to be to blame.

Their only concern was to get the crowd problem off their hands and to

cram the fans into the stadium.

Supporters are herded around like cattle. And these grounds are supposed to have been upgraded.

I think the way forward is for the clubs to spend money, to make grounds all seated, to improve access and to open up facilities at the grounds for other activities. They should be places where the whole family can go for a day out.

Finally, I saw Gorbachev's Fvisit on the television. It made me smile that whilst

Thatcher walked all over the miners and called us communists, there she was with her arm round Gorbachev, welcoming him like a long-lost brother.

I wonder what Lenin would think if he could see the General Secretary of the Soviet Communist Party kow-towing to the Prime Minister of Great Britain and shaking the royal hand.

What would Lenin have had to say about the Queen's invitation to visit the Soviet Union? I smell a rat somewhere there.

Paul Whetton is secretary of Manton NUM, South Yorkshire.