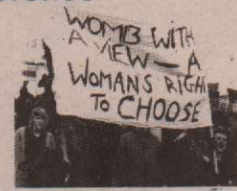


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For socialist renewal!



For workers' liberty!

The Tory enemy
centre pages



Jewish socialist speaks out
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SOCIALIST

ORGANISER

Drive out the Tories!
Fight for a general election!



The Kurds betrayed!

25 million Africans threatened with starvation

Terrible famine

By Mark Osborn

Twenty-five million Africans are threatened with starvation. Six countries are deeply in the grip of the latest famine: Angola, Ethiopia, Liberia, Mozambique, Somalia and Sudan.

In Ethiopia six million face death — a repeat, perhaps, on a larger scale of the one million who died in the catastrophic famine which

struck Ethiopia in 1984-5.

The disgusting fact is mass starvation is avoidable. In the Sudan, where nine million people could die, only 60,000 of the estimated 1.2 million tonnes of food needed to avert the disaster have been delivered.

While Britain was able to spend millions on the Gulf war it recently cancelled £27 million in food aid to starving Africa.

The Western capitalists pile up food mountains and destroy crops to keep up

prices while millions of humans die.

The simple fact of famine is complicated by political problems: the region is racked by wars and corrupt regimes. And the West uses food aid as a political bargaining chip: starvation and social chaos are bartered against political favour and leverage.

In Ethiopia the central government, the despotic regime of Mengistu Haile Mariam has stopped food shipments to starving but



The avoidable tragedy: millions starve in a capitalist world, some parts of which have gigantic food surpluses

rebelling Tigre province. This has lasted for 29 years — and this will not be used as a weapon against the rebels. The first time food has been

"We predict...a witch-hunt in Liverpool"

By Dale Street

A week last Wednesday (27 March), the former Green Party spokesperson David Icke asserted that the Isle of Arran would be hit by an earthquake, that the Mull of Kintyre would be swallowed up by the sea, Ireland would be struck by a hurricane and Las Vegas would be destroyed by an earthquake.

Meeting on the same day, the Labour Party National Executive Committee came up with an equally fantastic set of predictions about the Labour Party in Liverpool:

- Labour's election prospects in the May local elections would be boosted by putting the election campaign under the control of local party full-timers;
- Labour's election prospects would be further boosted by suspending any ward which stepped out of line in the run up to the election;
- The credibility of the controlling Labour Group on the City Council would be improved by expelling seven of its left wing members from the Labour Party.

David Icke is a channel for energy known as the Christ Spirit, which resonates to the same frequency as the colour turquoise. The NEC is a channel to divert all anti-Tory energy into the National Constitutional Committee, which resonates to the same frequency as the colour Tory-blue.

David Icke's predictions were pronounced in the presence of two female kindred spirits fortunate enough to resonate on the same cosmic level as himself. "It works out fine because we know what we are here to do," said the spokesperson for Christ's Spirit.

Earlier visitations to Liverpool by Joyce Gould and Larry Whitty, who resonate on the same political level as himself, in order to take a closer look at the council's budget. "It works out fine because we know what we are here to do," said the spokesperson for the spirit of Astonished Inquisition.

In a parallel development, Neil Kinnock is to despatch to Liverpool two kindred spirits, Joyce Gould and Larry Whitty, who resonate on the same political level as himself, in order to take a closer look at the council's budget. "It works out fine because we know what we are here to do," said the spokesperson for the spirit of Astonished Inquisition.

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Labour Party and the Labour Women's Council.

A further disaster likewise not predicted by David Icke, has just been unleashed by the City Council: the announcement of another 683 job losses, on top of the 384 announced in the budget. David Icke believes that he is the new Messiah. Neil Kinnock believes he is the next Prime Minister.

David Icke's former colleagues in the Green Party wish to disassociate themselves from him. Labour Party rank and file members wish to do likewise with regard to the NEC.

A conference organised by Socialist Movement Trade Union Committee, Haldane Society, Labour Party Socialists, Solidarity Network, and Trade Union News

Unshackle the Unions

Fighting the Tory Anti-Union Laws
Saturday 27 April, 11am-5.30pm
ULU, Malet St, London

The Law • The Struggles • The Strategies
Speakers will include: John Hendy QC • Ronnie McDonald (OILC) • Micky Fenn (sacked Tilbury docker)

If your organisation is prepared to sponsor and/or make a financial contribution to this event please fill in this form and send it to the address below.

We are prepared to sponsor this event on the issue of the Tory anti-union laws, their effects on the trade union, and how they can be opposed.

Name of organisation.....

Address of organisation.....

We enclose a donation of £..... towards the costs.

Please send a form for the registration of delegates at £5 waged, £3 unwaged per delegate.

Send to Carolyn Sikorski, 53a Geere Road, London E5

Lambeth councillors face new ban

Five years ago 28 Lambeth councillors, including council leader Ted Knight, were surcharged £350,000 and each one of them was banned from holding office for five years.

They had failed to set a legal rate in time to satisfy the Audit Commission, which controls these things.

Five years on their punishment has been endured, and they will shortly be eligible once again to be elected as councillors.

That is the way the law works, according to the tabloids: you pay the forfeit for breaking the law and then you come back into society. Well, no, it isn't, exactly. The Auditors have summoned the 28 to appear before them (on 3 April) to face new charges. It is charged that because they did not set a legal rate they owe the council £212,000! The intention seems to be to slap another five year ban on them!

Five years from now they may well face more charges and an additional five year ban...

This is a monstrous abrogation of the civil rights of the 28. And the labour movement — left, right and centre — should protest about it loudly and clearly.

Britain's increase in unemployment in 1990 was greater than any other EC country. On average, unemployment fell by 1% across the EC. In Britain, however, unemployment rose by 14%. The next highest increases were 3% in Denmark and Ireland. In Spain, Italy, Portugal and Germany the totals actually fell. The number of jobless has increased every month for the past year and now more than two million are out of work. It's even worse if you're under 25. In Britain the jobless total rose by 20% whereas in Germany it fell by 24% for this age group.

Rise in number of jobless largest in EC

Life is unfair to Neil Kinnock. And the tabloids — apart from the unreliable *Mirror* — exist to make things as nasty as possible for him. Years and years he has spent building up a quiet, steady, "respectable" pink Tory image. To build this image he has probably done violence to his own better instincts; he has certainly done violence to the interests of the labour movement. And then he goes and spoils it all, by losing his temper!

The tabloids' message is that you can't trust a red-headed ex-socialist Welshman even after he has lost most of his hair and all his socialism. Perhaps it will not work though: there must be a lot of tabloid readers who will be impressed rather than appalled that Kinnock, disagreeably close to 50, went after three young men who made a cheeky comment about his daughter in the street. It's high time you lost your temper with the Tories, Neil!

The lie machine

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Today: THE SELLING OF GRAEME HICK
KINNOCK IN STREET ROW
Sun: KINNOCK SCUFFLES IN STREET
MENAGE OF MIND CULTS!



The bitterness between Jews and Arabs in the Israeli-occupied West Bank was greatly intensified by the recent war, when Israel came under

Scud missile attack and the Palestinian Arabs sympathised with the Iraqis. Clashes between Jewish and Arab civilians have increased,

and so has repression of Arabs by the Israeli army (above)

Why Bush props up Saddam

The Kurds betrayed!

All the rhetoric about "liberation" and freedom used to sell the recent war in Britain and America has evaporated like a pool of blood in the Arabian desert.

For the last week the American and Allied armies — the crusading liberators and protectors of little Kuwait — have stood idly by while the fascistic gangsters of Saddam Hussein slaughtered many thousands of anti-Saddam Shi'as and Kurds.

Numerous reports say that Saddam's stormtroopers have systematically slaughtered the Kurds, including the children, in towns and villages they have taken back from the rebels. Now Saddam Hussein's butchers have broken the Kurdish rising, and the slaughter of the defenceless will escalate terribly.

The Kurds appealed for help to the United Nations and to the American-led armies, who had come halfway across the world to "liberate" Kuwait, and whose political leaders had called on the people within the Iraqi state to rise up and overthrow Saddam Hussein.

The Kurds got no help.

The "freedom loving democratic armies" of Bush, Major and their allies observed strict neutrality. Recently, they shot down an Iraqi aircraft over Baghdad for violating the ceasefire agreement: last week they were careful not to interfere with Saddam Hussein's gunships when they were raining death and destruction down on badly armed Kurds.

To find anything quite so brutally cynical as what we have just witnessed you have to go back to August and September 1944, when Stalin's army stood at ease for two months on the Eastern banks of the River Vistula near Warsaw while the Nazis slaughtered the Polish Home Army which had risen against the Nazis in Warsaw as their "Russian Allies" advanced. 15,000 Poles died. A great many more Kurds died and will die.

All the foolish liberals who backed Bush — and people like Neal Ascherson and Fred Halliday, who are not normally so foolish — are now left to bleat in incomprehension and almost in disbelief at the role played by "the Allies" in the unfolding tragedy of the Kurds. Even sections of the bourgeois press are sickened by the contradiction between the fine rhetoric of the recent war and the brutal realpolitik of today.

They believed the transparent lie that Bush had organised a "benevolent war" to free Kuwait — when it was plain that Kuwait would have been ignored if not for its vast riches in oil.

They believed that Bush and his friends would destroy Saddam Hus-



Kurdish fighters prepare to take on Saddam's military machine

sein, when it was plain that they would — as we said in *SO* — set up another, more biddable, dictator in his place and back Saddam's successor against the Kurds as they backed Saddam Hussein, even when, two years ago, he dropped poison gas on the Kurds.

They believed in the all-round benevolence of the US capitalists and their armies and their allies. Now they are shocked and disabused.

Why have the Americans, who are, after all, in occupation of part of Iraq, behaved like this? Why haven't they done something to help the anti-Saddam forces?

Because they want Iraq to survive in its present form. And because they do not want the oppressed Kurdish nation of 25 million people to achieve statehood.

The Kurds occupy territory divided between Iraq, Iran, Syria, Turkey and the USSR.

If the Iraqi Kurds achieve autonomy or independence, then the other Kurds will want to unite with them. America's allies, Syria and Turkey, have a vital interest in this not happening.

If Iraq breaks up there will be even greater instability in the region. So the US does not want it to break up.

The US wants to keep the Iraqi state organs of repression in being, as the hoop binding Iraq together, while getting rid of Saddam Hussein. So far Saddam Hussein's terrible grip and the powerful base he has in the Ba'ath party, which is deeply entwined with all the organs of the Iraqi state, have allowed him to survive.

No obliging Iraqi general has been able so far to do what the US

wants done — organise a surgical coup that would keep the base of the Iraqi state intact, while cutting out Saddam Hussein and the Ba'ath tyranny he heads.

But Bush isn't fastidious: when the crisis inside Iraq, generated by Saddam's defeat, erupted, threatening the break up of Iraq before Saddam could be removed, Bush and his allies decided to give backhanded support to Saddam — or at any rate not to do anything to help his enemies break up Iraq.

After all, these are the governments which through the 1980s gave military and financial backing to the Cambodian Hitler, Pol Pot, long after he lost control of Cambodia.

"If Iraq breaks up there will be even greater instability in the region. So the US does not want it to break up."

When we said in *Socialist Organiser* that the US would put in another Saddam Hussein after this one was gone we were too simplistic. What the the Americans have done in the last week is "put in" — helped keep in power — the old Saddam Hussein!

If the US and its allies had acted to help the Kurds — and the Kurdish people had every right

to ask for their help — socialists who opposed the war and who oppose the US presence would have been pleased that some good had come out of the war.

But we would have continued to insist that this would not have fundamentally changed the role they play in the region, or changed their basic reason for being there — oil and prestige.

Or changed our basic attitude to them being there.

Certain things have worked out differently than we expected.

The US has only occupied part of Iraq. The US is partially holding back from irrevocably committing itself to the long-term garrisoning role which is the logical — and for them probably necessary — continuation of everything they have done since last August.

They may not be able to continue in that posture indefinitely: and some of the criticism of Bush for letting Saddam butcher the Kurds is part of a campaign to get the US to go the whole hog.

In the light of Saddam's butchery, should not honest socialists — taking our cue from Ascherson and Halliday — now advocate that "the Allies" fully assume the role of a benevolent police, and immediately help the Iraqis and Kurds put down mad dog Saddam Hussein?

But what the last week proves decisively is the naivete of such hopes and dreams! They may — when it suits them — move to destroy Saddam Hussein. And then, if it suits them, they will back another such figure and arm him — as they armed Saddam Hussein — against Kurds and others.

If they do something that lessens the carnage, it will be for their own reasons. We will be pleased: but we

will not forget that they do the other things too, as we saw this last week.

The events in the Iraqi state now show the left two things.

How utterly stupid were those — like the SWP — who took opposition to Bush's war as far as developing illusions in the "anti-imperialism" of Saddam.

And how preposterous were those who backed Bush the Benevolent. The Aschersons and Hallidays are shown to have behaved like the author HG Wells who coined the slogan "The war to end war", to justify the Great War of 1914-18, and then found his idea converted into an official slogan which became the greatest and most cynical lie of that cynical war.

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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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T&G: the right plays dirty

The present election for general secretary of the TGWU is proving to be a dirty business, even by the union's own no-holds-barred traditions.

The two main candidates are the present deputy general secretary Bill Morris and the Welsh regional secretary George Wright. Ron Todd has made little secret

of the fact that he regards Morris as his chosen successor and cannot stand the sight of Wright. Morris has the backing of the union's "Broad Left", which presently has a majority of 22 to 17 over the right on the union's NEC. On paper, Morris ought to walk it.

But Wright (who also stood against Todd in 1984-5) has the support of the majority of the T&G's Regional Secretaries (8 out of 11) and a powerful, if secretive, right wing grouping connected with EETPU research officer, John Spellar. There are also close links with a number of journalists, which may account for the spate of anti-Morris articles that have appeared in papers like the *Mirror* and *Express* recently.

And then, of course, there is the racial element (Bill Morris is black): George Wright has been careful to avoid doing or saying anything that could be construed as pandering to racism, but some of his supporters are not so scrupulous. The semi-official right wing "line" on Morris is that he's a "nice bloke but not up to the job". Meanwhile, unofficial racist leaflets are circulating and someone has thought up the slogan "don't let the coon call the tune".

As with all left vs right battles that have riven the TGWU in recent years, the heat and bitterness seems out of all proportion to the formal policy differences. Both candidates claim to be Kinnock loyalists; both have generally gone along with Labour's "policy reviews"; during the Gulf war Morris (along with the rest of the T&G Broad Left) kept his head down. Even the union's formal policy of advocating unilateral nuclear disarmament is not a major issue these days: Todd, Morris and the Broad Left have deliberately down-played it to avoid embarrassing Kinnock while Wright still occasionally claims to be a member of CND.

Internal organisational matters are the main bones of contention. The union is in a financial and organisational crisis:

membership has declined from over 2 million in 1979 to a present level of 1.2 million; its financial deficit for 1990 was £9 million. The right has continually attacked Ron Todd for not addressing the union's financial problems. But when a package of economy measures was announced in December, the right attacked that as well, making particular play of the decision to cut back on branch secretaries' "allowances".

The other main dispute concerns the union's "Link-Up" campaign, aimed at recruiting women, part-timers and young workers. Bill Morris is closely identified with "Link-Up", which is one reason why most regional secretaries have more or less ignored it and the glossy leaflets pile up, unused, in the regional offices. George Wright makes a point of dismissing "Link-Up" as a "gimmick" and sneering at its lack of success in recruiting members.

But the heart of the battle is really about *what sort of union the TGWU is going to be*: Todd and Morris, for all their faults, have emphasised lay-member democracy and rank and file participation. Wright makes no secret of his desire to return the union to the old Bevin/Deakin tradition, with himself as an "old fashioned union boss". The T&G's rule-book is potentially very bureaucratic, giving enormous power to the general secretary. There is little doubt that Wright would use those powers to the full.

Given the T&G's massive block vote at Labour Party conference, every trade unionist and every Labour Party member has an interest in the outcome of this election. But (unlike Joe Haines in the *Mirror* and Robert Kilroy-Silk in the *Express*) I wouldn't dream of breaking the union's rules by supporting one particular candidate. Just as long as it's not George Wright.



INSIDE THE UNIONS

By Sleeper



Workers march

German worke

By Bruce Robinson

East German workers have now taken to the streets in protest against the virtual collapse of the economy in what was the old Stalinist GDR.

On Monday 18 March about 100,000 people demonstrated in Leipzig against unemployment and factory closures. The demonstration was repeated the following Monday to emulate the regular Monday demonstrations which brought down the Stalinist regime. Others were held in all the major cities of the ex-GDR. 30,000 chemical workers met outside the Leuna works to demand "work and a future".

These demonstrations followed others at the end of February, which involved shipyard workers on the Baltic coast, engineering workers in Thuringen, and public sector workers in Leipzig.

The demonstration on 18 March was organised by the trade unions, supported by the church and civil rights groups, who had played a large part in the opposition to the old regime.

Every time Chancellor Kohl was mentioned by speakers he was booed by demonstrators, many of whom must have supported him in his overwhelming election victory last December. Since then he has not even visited the now Eastern provinces of the unified German state.

There are plans to organise a march on the Parliament in Bonn, and a mass demonstra-

tion will be held on May Day in Berlin. All this marks a major turning point in German politics where there is now a widespread disillusionment with the promises made by the old West German government in the run-up to reunification and the elections.

The cause is not difficult to see. 9.5 million people were employed under the Stalinist regime at the start of 1989: of these, 3 million will soon have lost their jobs! Many more have either moved to, or commute to, jobs in the Western part of the country.

Many firms are likely to close, and another one million jobs will go next July when current subsidies end.

Some estimates indicate that only a fifth of the jobs which existed before unification will remain.

Foreign and West German investment to replace them remains limited. A British banker said that for investment purposes East German was effectively a Third World country.

Last year, national income fell by 20%. Local and regional government is near collapse because of a lack of funds and of skilled administrators, who do not wish to move to the East or live off Eastern salaries. Price subsidies have been removed; rents are due to rise by 3 Marks a square metre.

The Treuhand, a quango given responsibility for privatising or closing much of the old East German firms, has become notorious for its bureaucracy, arbitrariness, unaccountability and active sympathy for the interests of West German big capital.

Only 1000 of the 40,000 firms for which Treuhand is responsible have been successfully privatised, partly because of a reluctance to invest, partly because of inadequate credit, and partly because of the Treuhand's behaviour.

One story indicates the way it is run: an East German member of the Treuhand board had a long argument with the head of the Treuhand, Rohwedder, about what car he should drive, after he refused to give up his East German Wartburg for a BMW or Audi. "But you must make outsiders feel your power," Rohwedder said.

Small capitalists feel they are being excluded to prevent competition, in the interests of Western monopolies. For example, many East German local councils wish to generate their own electricity, which would bring them an income and be more efficient and environmentally friendly. The Treuhand has refused to sign over to them the plant which already exists and intends to hand them over to private Western concerns. The amount of capital local councils can own is being restricted.

The government's handling of the economic side of the unification has been attacked by the President of the Bundesbank (the equivalent of the Bank of England) who said that the introduction of the Deutschmark to the East had been too fast and at too high an exchange rate, with the result that East German firms have been exposed to world competition which they cannot survive. The result, he



Helmut Kohl said, had been "a disaster".

The conservative Christian Democrat government in Bonn is increasingly worried by developments in the East and may have to moderate its commitment to a fast market-driven transition for the Eastern provinces.

In February it increased taxes to pay the costs of unification, blaming this on the Gulf War and aid to the Soviet Union. This merely increased resentment among West Germans that they were lied to about not having to take on a large burden to pay for unification and widened the gulf between the population in West and East.

There have also been some increases in subsidies to the East and there is talk of changing the Treuhand's terms of reference so that it also becomes responsible for reconstructing firms as well as just selling or shutting them.

It is likely that the government will have to make some kind of U-turn under popular



Workers fight back!

pressure, but it faces a large and growing budget deficit which limits the room for manoeuvre.

One possible political way out is to create a "Grosse Koalition" with the opposition Social Democrats to deal with the "national emergency". Kohl would thus seek to spread responsibility for whatever happens afterwards. Although the new leader of the nearest thing to the SPD, Bjorn Engholm, has refused to exclude a coalition in principle, the SPD would drive a hard bargain for its participation. Probably they would demand new elections: since the Christian Democrats would lose, all this manoeuvre may not after all be so attractive for Kohl!

The unions have been able to use the economic crisis to develop their strength in the East. IG Metall, the engineering union, now has 3.5 million members, of which 1 million are in the East. The union has opened offices and sent organisers to factories previously organised by the Stalinist police state "unions", which were deserted by the workers in their millions in 1990.

The public sector workers union, OTV, the rail workers, postal workers and chemical workers have all established strong bases.

While the fight against unemployment is focused on the government, wage agreements are being made for 1991-2. These agreements are largely different for workers in the West and East, reflecting the different economic conditions.

OTV, IG Metall, the miners and construction workers all put in claims of around 10% for their members in the West. It looks as if IGM and OTV have settled for between 6% and 7%. The agreement for government employees will not come into force until five months after the usual date — this is aimed by the government to compensate to some extent for extra public expenditure.

In the East the issue has been more one of how quickly wages can be brought up to the levels of the West and what effect this will have on jobs.

IG Metall has agreed a deal, which is likely to set the pace in negotiations in the East. Wages will be brought up to Western levels in three steps by 1994, starting with an increase this year from the current 42% to 60%.

Changes in hours and working conditions will have to wait even longer. The 35 hour week will only come in in 1998, compared with 1996 elsewhere; paid holidays in 1995 and equal length holidays in 1996.

This agreement binds the unions for a much longer period than the usual one. However, this agreement puts the issue of equalisation at the centre of the agenda for all negotiators.

There is a danger that divisions between the workers on both sides of the old border will increase unless the unions begin to work out a strategy for quickly bringing conditions and wages together and for saving jobs.

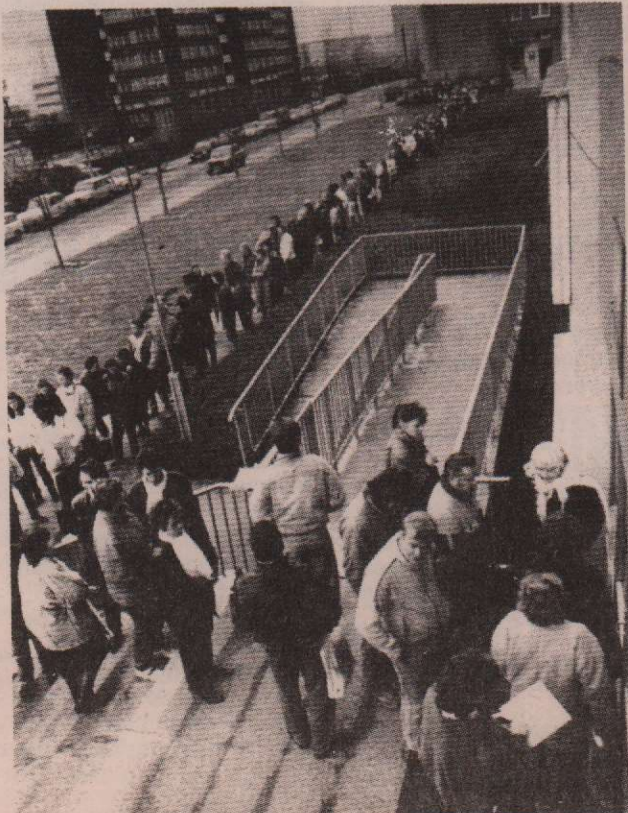
Already there is resentment in the East of the level of wage claims in the West and

feelings in the West that the costs of unification are too high.

The costs of unification should not fall on the working class — East or West — but be financed out of profits, the hidden reserves of the old Stalinist regime, and the military savings from the end of the cold war, the so-called "peace dividend". This would also enable the economic crisis to be linked to opposition to Germany playing a more extensive military role after the Gulf war.

It is unlikely that an economic upswing will solve the problems of the ex-GDR economy within five years as Kohl hopes. The government may be able to fend off the worst elements of the collapse by making a U-turn and pumping subsidies across, but as things stand at present disillusionment with unification in the East is likely to grow.

Certainly the promises of right-wing politicians will never be so easily believed again. The trade unions must translate their anger into an organised fightback.



Chronic unemployment in East Germany

The log jam moves in Northern Ireland

By Alison Roche

After fifteen months of 'talks about talks' with Protestant and Catholic Northern Ireland community leaders, the Northern Ireland Secretary, Peter Brooke, has announced that round table negotiations will begin in late April.

Hope that the announcement would see an end to random violence was shortlived as the murders of the two teenage Catholic girls from Craigavon last Thursday demonstrated.

The senselessness of the killings was so graphic that politicians from all sides and the RUC condemned the action. Part of the motive in responding so quickly and publicly was to try to prevent retribution-killing jeopardising the talks.

The agreement to have these talks has been hailed officially as the biggest breakthrough in 15 years since the British government finally closed the door on the old Parliament building at Stormont outside Belfast, and sent the hopelessly antagonistic Catholic and Protestant elected representatives home. They had failed in a year of public debate and negotiation in the "Constitutional Assembly" to agree on any form of Catholic-Protestant power-sharing.

The talks will comprise three strands. The first strand will be about the internal government of Northern Ireland and will most probably take place in Stormont.

Following this there will be talks on the relationship between the North and the Republic, and the third strand will be about the relationship between Britain and the island of Ireland. These will be held in Dublin.

It is expected that the negotiations will last about ten weeks.

So far, Brooke's proposals about talks have been agreed to by the Irish government, the Labour Party, SDLP, Ian Paisley's DUP, the Ulster Unionists, and the Workers' Party.

Sinn Fein denounced the statement saying that no solution was possible while partition remained.

Brooke claims that nothing will be agreed on any one strand without agreement being reached on the whole.

Some Ulster MPs are looking to the European Parliament as a model. There the Parliament meets monthly and in between a series of all-party committees runs things.

Brooke has also stated that the final outcome of talks will need to be acceptable to the people.

This will prove to be the big problem!

Northern Ireland was set up to give the Protestants an inbuilt majority (it is 2-1). In practice that led, under Six County Home Rule, to 50 years of one party Protestant Unionist rule.

Catholics were discriminated against because they wanted a united Ireland and were



16 year old Katrina Rennie

'disloyal' to Northern Ireland, and because they were competitors for scarce jobs and social services.

The Catholic revolt in 1968 and after, and then the IRA military offensive from 1971, put that system on the defensive: the old Northern Ireland had broken down in chaos and bloodshed.

In March 1972 the British government abolished Northern Ireland Home Rule.

The next four years were spent in attempting to establish some form of institutionalised Catholic-Protestant power-sharing. Nothing less, it was felt even in London, would prevent the state quickly sliding back to Protestant sectarian rule.

For a few months in 1974 there was a Catholic-Protestant Power Sharing Executive, but it didn't have Protestant support. In May 1974 a province-wide Protestant general strike forced it out. Britain then organised elections to send representatives to a constituent assembly. This got them nowhere: for the Protestants it had to be majority — that is, their majority — rule or nothing. A leading Protestant hard-liner who flirted with the idea of power-sharing, William Craig, had his career destroyed.

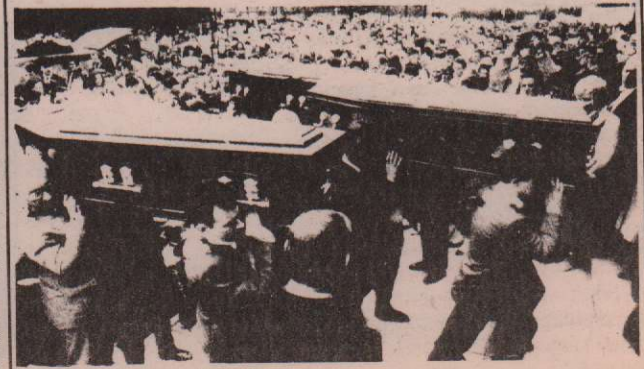
What is new now is the Anglo-Irish Agreement, negotiated and established in November 1985.

This gives Dublin a direct political say in running Northern Ireland, and is aimed at partly satisfying the demands of Catholics for a united Ireland. Fierce Protestant resistance in 1986 failed to affect the Agreement, because Dublin and London were determined to uphold it. The Protestant leaders' willingness to talk now is probably a late result of their failure to break the Anglo-Irish Agreement and the voice which, in consequence, Dublin has had in Northern Ireland affairs for five years.

The question now is whether or not London-Dublin 'power-sharing' can generate some system of Northern Ireland power-sharing broadly acceptable to a majority of Protestants.

The majority of Catholics has long been for it: the Provisional IRA and Sinn Fein have only the support of about 1 in 3 Catholics.

If the talks ultimately fail to produce agreement on such a system, then this 'initiative', like so many others, will be a failure. It is early days yet.



Funeral of the three Catholics

Class voting

GRAFFITI

As the general election draws nearer, talk of the importance of tactical voting resurfaces.

However, according to a study on voting patterns between 1964 and 1987, the premise on which tactical voting is based is wrong.

The main reason why tactical voting hasn't taken off, according to the survey's authors, is because class politics remains so strong.

They say the degree of tactical voting was the same in 1987 as in 1983 despite the strong campaign for tactical voting in 1987.

Contrary to the 'New Times' theorists, they found that in 1964, 42% of voters thought there was bound to be class conflict, while by 1987 this had increased to 51%. They also found that in 1964 35% of working class home owners voted Tory while in 1987 the figure was 37%.

It seemed appropriate that in Easter week the CP tried their own resurrection scam.

Renaming themselves

Democratic Left (they didn't risk letting the members vote on the name just in case) the CP proudly junked the "irrelevant trappings of Bolshevism" and all references to Marxism-Leninism.

Mere coincidence then that a *Marxism Today* reader wrote in this week complaining about the journal's name? After all, when he read *MT* he was afraid others would think he might become aggressive or try to sell them a grubby, Trotskyite paper and use words like "vanguard" and "struggle".

So he suggested dropping the title, *Marxism Today* and replacing it with something like "The Post" or "The New Times".

Good idea, drop the name. But why not "The Mourning Post" or even "Nice & Friendly". Send in any suggestions you have.

Unemployment is expected to reach 50% in East Germany by the end of this year. Tens of thousands of workers have taken to the streets to demonstrate against Kohl's false election promises last year.

But things aren't working out as expected for Germany's Deutsche Bank either.

The incorporation of its East German counterpart, Deutsche Bank-Kreditbank AG, is costing plenty. In the first year the merger resulted in losses of £56 million.

The collapse of the East German economy and the costs involved in modernising its banks will mean that this won't be the last year the Deutsche loses money.



Coup in Chile, September 1973: Chile's popular president Allende (left) goes out — gun in hand — to face general Pinochet's army and death

Erick Honecker, the former East German CP Secretary, was another who didn't fare well out of the East German revolution.

After losing his job, being charged and thrown into prison, he was then allowed to recuperate in a private hospital in Moscow.

Now it appears that Honecker is to be moved again. This time to Chile. At first glance it seemed a strange destination, but then maybe not. After all Chile and Germany don't share extradition treaties.

Another to think highly of Chile was Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre who died last week.

Lefebvre, leader of the reactionary Tridentine movement within the Catholic church, was often thought of as nothing more than an old crank. After all he was still opposed to the French Revolution believing that liberty, fraternity and equality were false.

His opposition to the Vatican Council reforms were more than just wishing for a return to the Latin mass. He was a monarchist, French chauvinist, and anti-semitic. His public appearances were often guarded by jack-booted members of the National Front.

In 1976 he praised the Argentinian Junta only to say later that he should have said Chile.

He will be replaced by the anti-semitic German priest Franz Schmidberger. He will not be missed.

Back in Britain, and research by Bristol University's Department of Social Policy and Social Planning shows that the gap between rich and poor has increased in the past 10 years.

Between 1979 and 1989, the income of the poorest fifth of the population fell by 4.6% while that of the richest fifth grew by 40%.

Even after social security changes designed to benefit the poorest families were introduced in 1989 their annual disposable income of £3,282 was £160 less than in 1979.

The richest fifth's annual disposable income for the same period had gone from £20,138 to £28,124, an increase of 40%.

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The cap'n sells his crown jewels

PRESS GANG



By Jim Denham

Given the fact that almost all Cap'n Bob Maxwell's newspaper ventures seem to end in catastrophic failure, how is it that he's so rich?

The answer to this great mystery lies in Pergamon Press, founded by the Cap'n just after World War 2. Bob was serving in the British army in recently-liberated Berlin when he came across a cache of pre-war German scientific periodicals which he duly translated into English and published with great success.

Scientific titles, the Cap'n realised, are cheap to produce (even the most eminent scientists are always desperate to get their work into print) and have a guaranteed, if small, market. This was the rock upon which the £2 billion Maxwell empire was built.

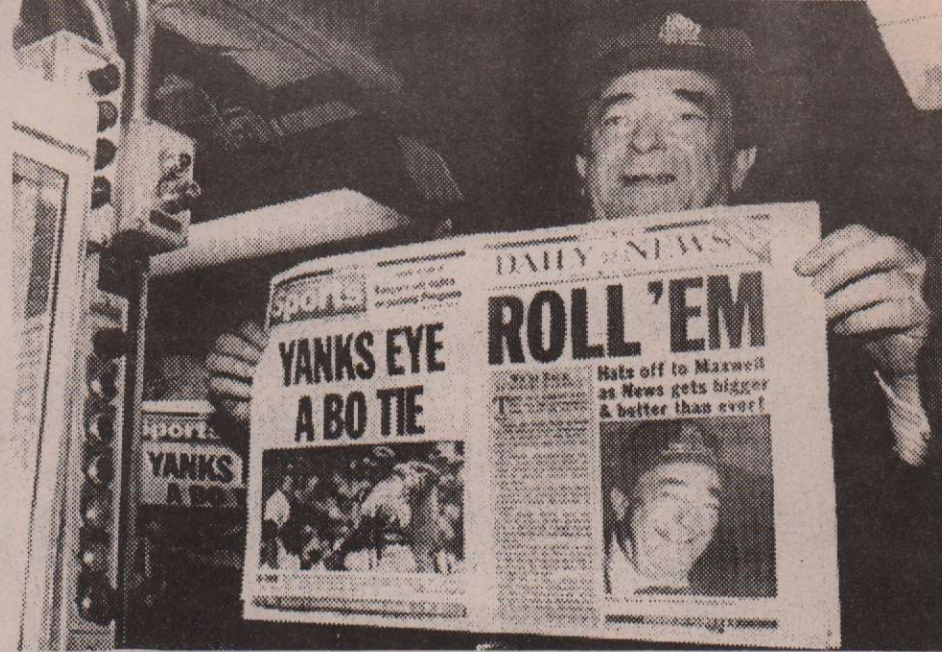
But it hasn't always been plain sailing for the good Cap'n: in 1969 he attempted to merge Pergamon with Leasco Data Processing Corporation, a US group run by Saul Steinberg. The deal foundered when Leasco found out about certain "irregularities" involving a Pergamon subsidiary, International Learning Systems. Steinberg sued for \$22 million damages, and the resulting Department of Trade report severely criticised the Cap'n's business methods.

An extraordinary shareholders' meeting removed him as Chairman of Pergamon in October 1969 and he did not regain the position until 1974. It was a humiliation that still rankles with the Cap'n, and is the main reason for his almost fanatical determination to suppress Tom Bower's unauthorised biography of himself.

Now, Maxwell Communication Corporation is selling Pergamon Press to the Dutch group Elsevier for £440m. This will cut MCC's borrowings for the last financial year to an estimated £700m. But City observers see it as selling the crown jewels to pay off the debts built up by follies like the *European*.

More information is emerging on the Cap'n's sacking of *Mirror* editor Roy Greenslade. It seems that early accounts, emphasising a row over the *Mirror*'s Saturday TV supplement, were wide of the mark.

The key role in the saga was, in fact, played by former Harold Wilson toady turned Maxwell hagiographer, Joe Haines. Despite his shameless grovelling to the Cap'n, Haines was not consulted over the appointment of Greenslade. Hell hath no fury like a



Get your copy of 'The Egomaniac'

toady slighted, and Haines set about an Iago-like campaign to undermine Greenslade, whispering poisonous reports into the Cap'n's ear at every opportunity. Haines' resentment reached apopleptic proportions when Greenslade hired John Diamond, an old chum from the *Sunday Times*, and billed him as "Britain's wittiest columnist". Everyone knows that *Joe Haines* is Britain's wittiest columnist.

"Mr Major is more feminine than the woman he succeeded in Downing Street, Birmingham Labour MP Clare Short has said.

"Launching Labour's plan to set up a new Ministry for Women yesterday, she said it was ironic that Mrs Thatcher, Britain's first woman Prime Minister, had done nothing for women and had an 'unfeminine' personality.

"Mr Major is more feminine Prime Minister than the one he has replaced", said the Ladywood MP.

"Miss Short said he had so far done nothing for women but she thought he was 'feminine' because he cared about others."

From the Birmingham Evening Mail. Similar strange and bizarre local press items welcomed.

Black Sections support PR

Labour Party Black Sections held its eighth annual conference in London last weekend with Bernie Grant MP a main speaker.

The conference debated the way forward for Black Sections, and its relationship to any Labour Party Black Society set up.

It was agreed that Black Sections will continue negotiations on the formation of a Black Socialist Society and work within it while still retaining the principle of black self-organisation.

The number of black councillors has shot up dramatically in the last few years. Yet with this success

RACE AND CLASS



By Dion D'Silva

there have also been problems — with some of these councillors distancing themselves from Black Sections and voting for cuts in local services, race equality committees, etc.

International issues and the rise of racism were considered central campaigning priorities. Black Sections rightly congratulated itself for the leading role it played in the anti-war movement.

The most lively debate was left to last and by a clear majority, Black Sections decided that it would campaign for electoral reform (ie. proportional representation) as a way of securing more black representation.

Bad budget for women

Well done John Major, another "winner for women"!

Not only can the grey man in the grey suit not find a woman in a grey suit to join the Cabinet, this month's budget will hit women harder than men. Here's how:

1. Tampons are now subject to VAT. A 2½% increase in VAT is about 4p on a packet of Tampons. If 10 million women are using tampons, the new tax will raise over £4 million in a year.
2. Women are more likely than men to be pay-

WOMEN'S EYE



By Liz Millward

etc. So these women won't get the full £140 reduction. It is one of the odder quirks of history that Mrs. Thatcher, the first British woman Prime Minister, who lifted Major into the saddle on her own forced retirement, leaves so many women worse off than men when she took office.

My own conclusions? Sisterhood is powerful and women can perform better than men, but you need more — you need socialists with clear policies. The politics that will serve the big majority of women, working class women.

ing a "rebated" Poll Tax, because women are more likely to be on Income Support, Family Credit

NUS Women's Conference

Big steps forward



By Janine Booth

The NUS women's campaign has taken many important steps forward this year, and next week's conference looks set to be the biggest for many years.

It is reaching out to more colleges than ever before. Communications have improved. Participation by women in Further Education colleges has increased dramatically.

The women's campaign has visited more colleges. Developing Area networks has been taken seriously.

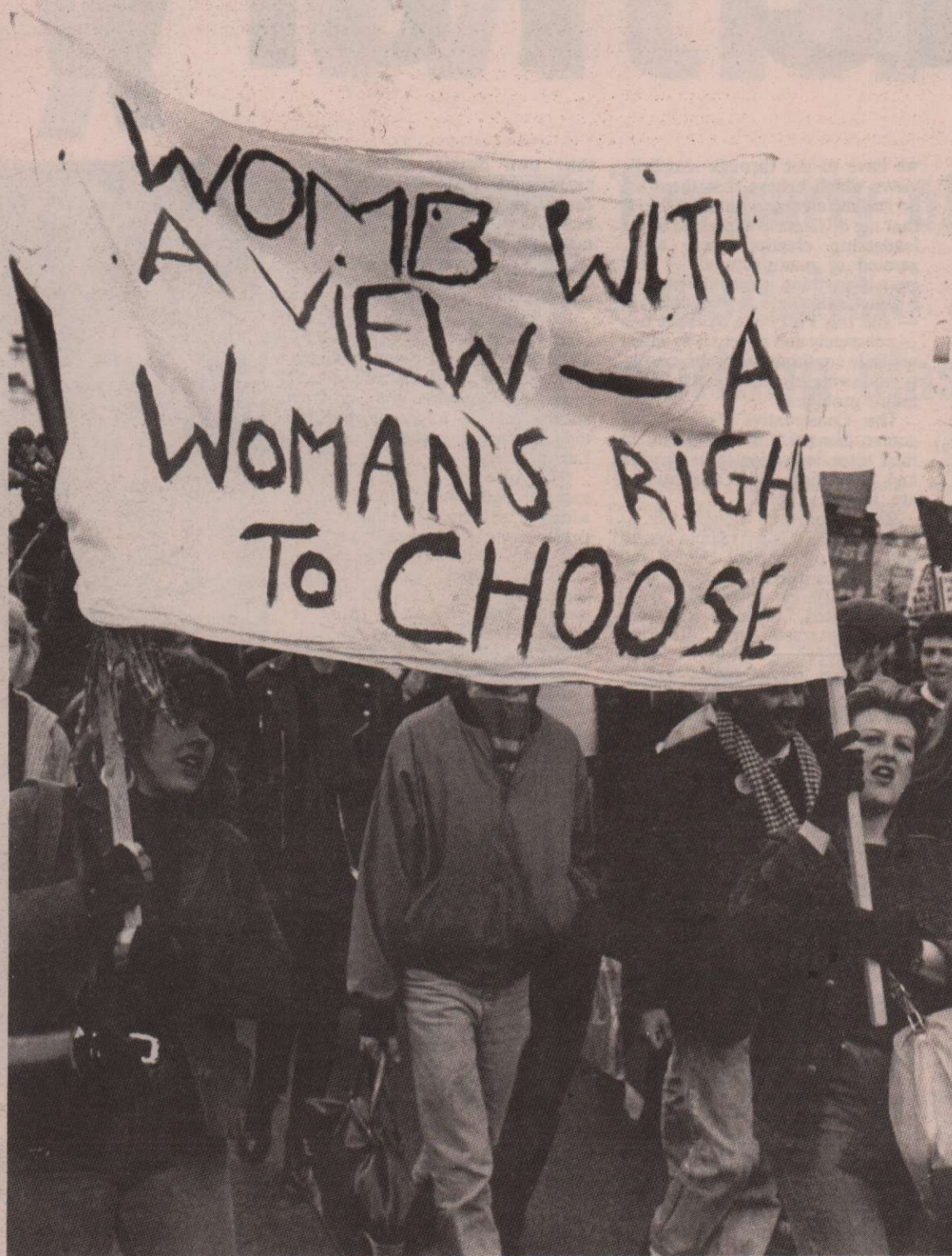
New women's groups and women's officer posts have been set up.

Many issues have been tackled, each with fighting, participatory campaigns. The women's campaign placed itself alongside the wider community in fighting a "Don't Pay! Don't Collect!" campaign against the poll tax.

Solidarity with Irish women has been given a central place in the campaign for a woman's right to choose. Campaigning for childcare is being given a national focus with a petition and national action next term.

Importantly, the women's campaign is leaving behind its old cliquey, guilt-tripping atmosphere, making it a more accessible forum for women students to get involved in.

Next year we need to step up the action. The academic year



The Irish women's campaign for the right to choose has been at the centre of NUS Women's Campaign work this year

should kick off with *action for safety* in every college. Practical advice and services for women students should be coupled with

direct action demanding effective measures from college authorities.

Anti-racism must be

prioritised, taking up issues such as immigration controls, and taking positive action to involve more black and Jewish women. We should also be supporting women overseas students.

The women's campaign should play an active part in the drive to recruit more *sixth form unions* to NUS, and take up the issues facing women in sixth forms.

Whilst society ignores and trivialises *women's health*, the NUS women's campaign has a duty to both provide information and fight cuts and privatisation in the NHS.

Finally, with a *general election* looming, the women's campaign should make women's issues election issues.

The 12 years since the election of Britain's first woman Prime Minister have been a catalogue of attacks on women's rights. Kick out the Tories!

Labour Party proposes 'housing bank'

Tinkering with the system

Liz Millward looks at Labour's new housing policy

The Labour Party is considering setting up a "Housing Bank" if and when it is elected to government. Such a bank would provide investment funds for low rent housing.

It is one of those ideas which sounds nice in theory but in practice would be another bureaucracy which would fail to attract money. Housing for low rents has to be subsidised week by week, year by year. Investors would only see a return on their money if the government and/or local authorities guaranteed those subsidies. It would be quicker, cheaper and less bureaucratic just to give the money to the developer to build the houses, then subsidise the rents.

But the Labour Party is obsessed with Tory ideas about "the market" and private investment. A Housing Bank would be similar to the Tory BES schemes, whereby investors are given tax breaks to invest in housing.

Labour wants to break the "boom and bust" cycle in the property business. This is a laudable aim. At the moment, thousands of building workers are losing their jobs because property and land prices have dropped sharply.

Developers are holding land which is over-valued and homes they can't sell. The only people doing business are the receivers. No one is taking on apprentices or trainees in the construction industry, so that when the next boom comes there will be a serious skills shortage. This will force prices up still further. More and more developers will try to cash in until — bang, back into recession.

Labour cannot just tinker with the system. The Tories have tried — through the BES schemes, increased funding for the Housing Corporation and so on. Developers are only interested in social (or any other sort of) housing in so far as short-term profits are guaranteed.

The "boom and bust" cycle can only be beaten as long as property values rise only gradually and there is a constant building programme of new housing which is not dependent on private finance. (As the Tories discovered when they all but stopped council house building).

The property market will only even out when it is not profit-led. That does not mean that people could not continue to own their own homes and have the choice and security that brings. But a government-financed programme of building and re-habilitation of homes for rent and low cost sale would remove much of the hysteria from the property market.

If the programme were geared to housing need rather than profit, Britain's enormous homelessness problems could be solved within ten years. Valuations for sale by the district valuer would get rid of private profiteering, and the availability of enough decent housing for all would stop values rising wildly.

Of course, if this was Labour's plan for housing they would have to stop pretending to be nicer Tories. Then people might get somewhere decent to live.

What we really say

By Elaine Jones

Janine Booth, a supporter of *Socialist Organiser*, is re-standing for the post of the National Union of Students Women's Officer.

Janine was elected to the post last year as a socialist-feminist who believed an outgoing campaign must be built among women students as part of the struggle for women's liberation.

It is widely recognised that Janine has done a good job.

One of the unfortunate features of the last year in NUS — following the election of a number of *Socialist Organiser* supporters to the NUS National Executive — has been the

amount of silly rumours that have been started about us.

For the record: *Socialist Organiser* women have always fought for an autonomous women's campaign and for an NUS women's officer. We have looked to encourage as many student women to get involved with the campaign and have suggested much of the policy which the NUS women's campaign conference has adopted for the basis of its work.

Socialist Organiser is a weekly paper which carries regular "Women's Eye" and "Out and Proud" columns. The issues are treated *seriously*. Strategies and ideas are *debated* freely and openly. We have had much debate on complex problems which are not tackled by much of the left — for instance

on child abuse and pornography.

There is no heavy editorial "line" and no censorship. One of the things that is different about *Socialist Organiser* is that *discussion* is treated seriously.

The women in *Socialist Organiser* have recently produced the *Women's Fightback* "Case for Socialist Feminism" pamphlet. This pamphlet is a 64-page pamphlet aimed at developing a sophisticated socialist feminism. If you want to find out what we say — read this pamphlet, rather than listen to rumour mongering!

And if you like what we say, take a bundle to sell in your campaigning work. Copies of the pamphlet are £1 plus 32p post, from PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA. (Cheques to *Women's Fightback*).

The Tory en

John McIlroy starts a series on the Conservative Party after Thatcher and the future of British politics

As the focus shifts back from the Gulf War to the struggle on the home front — and particularly the coming general election — it is important that we now take stock, not only of 12 years of Thatcherism, but also of the likely trajectory of the Tory Party as the dust from Thatcher's removal and the Gulf conflict begins to settle.

The journals of the hard left, for example, have tended to emphasise the continuity between Major and Thatcher. Major is portrayed as simply "a new face for Thatcherism" — but not even a more human face. Nothing, at least nothing of any substance, has been changed by the bloodletting of November 1990: in his ideas and policies the new Prime Minister will continue to be "Thatcher's poodle". "They are all the same," we are told, all Tory leaders spring from the same pod and piss in the same pot.

Marxism Today, so hopelessly wrong about Thatcherism from start to finish, seems more sensitive to changing currents with its emphasis on the potential and possibilities for change in Tory philosophy and politics. But we have to be aware of continuities as well as change, the power of economic and social circumstances as well as ideology and politics in forging policy.

It is wrong, for example, to go to the other extreme, as *Militant* sometimes does, editorialising "Thatcherism is dead", and arguing that Thatcher has "shattered the base" of the party and that: "These events could represent the beginnings of the fragmentation of the Tory Party with sections moving, over a period, further towards the right, towards 'strong man' politics of 'Queen, Country and Army'." (7 December 1990)

In the interests of an essential sharper analysis as a guide to action

we have to cut through simplistic views which believe that there are no real differences within the Party, that the differences expressed in the leadership election were exaggerated or manufactured — they were if anything played down.

But we also have to locate change — and this Party is a dynamic one — concretely and reject views which see little continuity and observe only wild swings as the response to any major problems.

The Conservative Party is, of course, the party of capitalism. In their utter dedication to its survival and expansion, all Conservatives are, indeed, clones.

But a moment's thought tells us that capitalism is a dynamic system in a state of constant change and constant conflict. Capitalism consists of different competing, if interpenetrated, factions with different interests and different

"In the interests of an essential sharper analysis... we have to cut through simplistic views which believe that there are no real differences within the party."

strategies for their realisation. Although on several levels they have interests in common, the oil industry is not the agricultural sector, Barclays Bank is not Rolls Royce, British Telecom is not News International, and Burtons is not the shop on the corner.

Taken as a whole, there may be conflicts between capital's interest in accumulation and its interest in political stability and different sectors may balance this differently.

All these conflicts are refracted through the living organisation of the Party. The Conservative Party represents capital, but is not capital. Bound to capital to interest and personnel, representation requires relative autonomy.

Choices have to be made between competing capitalist interests. Some are better articulated or more pressing than others. Politicians develop

their own distinct interests and perceptions of what is best for capitalism, perceptions which being human may be mistaken, even antagonistic to certain capitalist interests. Factions organise around different perceived interests and struggle for political power.

If they get the process of representation wrong, if they fail to adequately articulate the interests of important sections of capital then these capitalists may turn to another party — a Liberal party, or even a Fascist party, or even a Labour party.

Of course, all of this occurs in specific conditions of class struggle within a system of Parliamentary democracy and universal franchise, a system in which the votes of the workers dwarf those of the capitalists, whilst a variety of processes of force and fraud, from the police to the trade union leaders to the education system to capitalism's "natural" generation of incorporation, have been available to deal with this problem. The Conservative Party has had to develop political strategies to confront this constantly throbbing headache.

The growth of the working class and the growth of the working class electorate has meant that the Conservative party could never form a government without the support of key sections of the working class. The problem has been exacerbated by the fact that the working class established their own party with the formal, if fuzzy, intention of legislating capitalism out of existence.

The negotiation of these problems has taken up a major part of the energies of the Party. It has marked it in crucial aspects, in comparison with similar parties in other countries. The danger of a Labour government, given the party's links with the unions and its oscillations rendering it in some ways different from conventional social democratic parties, has given the Conservative Party a voracious appetite for government. Whilst the cat's away, the mice have generally contented themselves with nibbling at the cheese.

The Conservatives have been constantly exercised by the fear one day they might take over the larder. For the Conservatives, the power to form a government has been everything.

Secondly, the problem of representing capitalism and policing the working class, the need to constantly develop its policies to take account of changing economic and political conditions has led the Party to travel light — ideological baggage has been kept to the minimum. Compared, say, with its European counterparts, the Conservative Party has been famous over most of its history for its pragmatism and flexibility, its lack of dogmatism, its minimal attachment to ideas, its willingness to change with the times.

A brief examination of that history may be a useful preliminary to examining the future. It may aid our understanding of the dialectic of continuity and change and how it has expressed itself down the years. A scrutiny of the Conservative Party may help us to situate and to better understand Thatcherism and what may come to take its place.



Major meets the troops

From landed capital to

The Conservative Party, thrown into crisis in 1990, was born of a deeper crisis 150 years ago. The original capitalist class was constituted from the 1600s by a melding of landed and commercial capital in which the big capitalist landowners exercised formal leadership and to which the developing manufacturing capital was political-subordinate.

Differences of interest were dealt with directly and reflected weakly in the loose, informal party organisations of the Whigs and Tories.

The Whigs were called after the Whiggamores, Scottish Presbyterian dissidents, and were initially the "country party" of aggressive capital opposed to absolutism.

Whilst the Tories were the party of the King and Court who got their name (a Tory was an Irish outlaw) from their willingness to use Irish troops to secure the succession of James II.

There was, in reality, little politically between these loose and shifting formations but, by the 1800s, the Tories were more distinctively the party of landed capital, the party which stood in the face of the first trade unionism and Chartism — the movement for universal male suffrage — for the exclusion

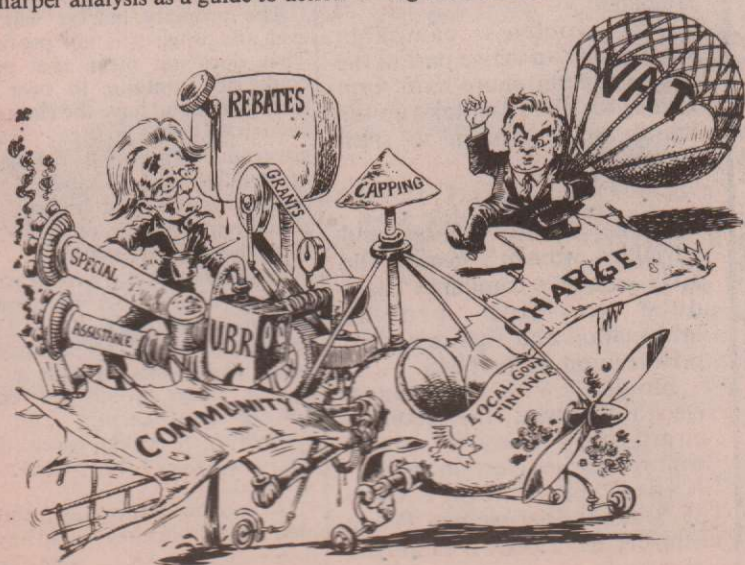
of the working class and most of the manufacturing class from the vote. The Tories, who became more generally known as the Conservatives after their leader, Sir Robert Peel's electoral address to his constituents in Tamworth in 1834 that the policy of the party was to conserve all that was essential and good in existing institutions, were the anti-democratic party.

Even the 1832 Reform Act admitting the industrial capitalists to citizenship and the vote, had been passed by their Whig opponents.

However, Peel, who took office as Prime Minister in 1841, was an innovator and reformer and commenced a series of measures which made concessions both to the manufacturers and the working class. Free trade in industrial goods was introduced and, in 1846, Peel continued his bonfire of tariff protections by repealing the Corn Laws.

These were taxes on the import of cereals which protected the small — and inefficient — agricultural capitalists from foreign competition at the price of making food more expensive, particularly for the working class.

Peel was interested not simply in increasing the living standards of the working class although this was seen as bringing them into the new

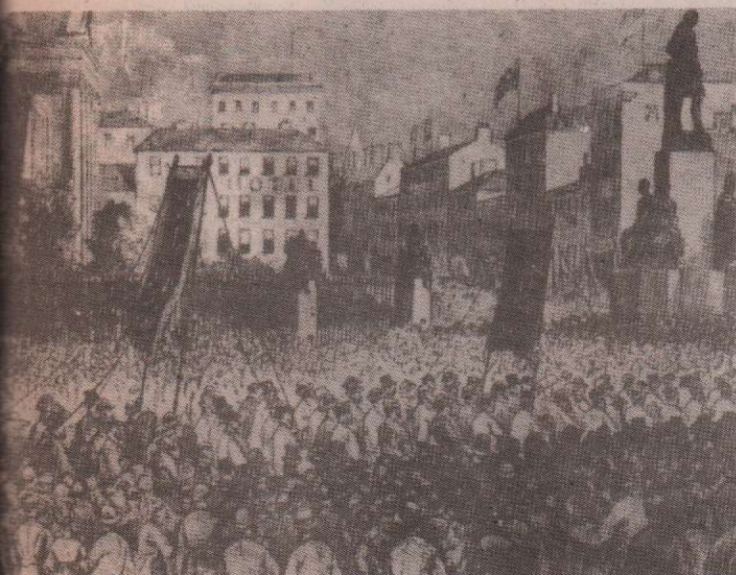


tcherism

enemy within



Industrial capital



Chartist demonstration

system, but in relieving the new capitalists of the consequences in terms of the pressures for increased wages that the tariffs and dear food had produced. Peel was opting for an industrial capitalism which would have the support of the landed aristocracy and an incorporated working class.

Unlike some later Conservative

leaders, Peel was not able to manage successfully the tensions between political change and political stability, between innovation and conservatism.

There was a split in the Tory Party. Peel's supporter, William Gladstone, regrouped with the Whigs and the Radicals to form

what became the Liberal Party, whilst the Tory majority who opposed Peel in support of tradition and the interests of the small landed capitalists, regrouped around Benjamin Disraeli.

However, it is only after 1867, with an increased electorate through the extension of the vote to many urban workers, that we can really talk about the beginnings of the formation of the two major capitalist parties in anything like the sense we know them today.

This was because you didn't need proper parties when only the bosses could vote. It was only in the 1870s and 1880s that these parties became extra-Parliamentary organisations building at local and regional level as, for the first time, there was a necessity to organise what was now a mass vote.

The National Union of Conservative Associations was founded in 1867 and party organisation was given further impetus by the further extension of the franchise in 1884 — to most workers — and 1918 to all males and to women over 30. It is a measure of the backwardness of the UK that it was only in 1928 that women over 21 got the vote and, if we take account of double voting as in university seats, the 1950 election was probably the first fought on a modern universal franchise.

The party of imperialism and the working class

It was Benjamin Disraeli who seriously began the work of "deserting the squires" and moving the Conservatives away from the landed interest they had defended in the 1840s to becoming the party of industrial and commercial capital whilst crucially binding sections of the workers to this project.

After the crisis of the 1840s the party of tariffs and protection gradually became the party of free trade, sharing a new consensus with the Liberals.

The party of reaction and aristocracy which had opposed the entry of the industrial capitalists into citizenship in 1832 now became the party of electoral reform, carefully shepherding sections of the working class deemed responsible and trustworthy because of the small stake they had in the system, into the franchise through the Second Reform Act of 1867.

Disraeli's project of an organic national community required an extension of the franchise, and farsighted Conservatives were keenly aware of the short and long-term costs of opposing what they perceived as ultimately inevitable. Moreover, as the Liberals had dominated the post-1832 electoral system what had the Conservatives to lose by espousing change?

In his 1874-80 government, Disraeli became an apostle of social reform, introducing the Public Health Act, the Artisans Dwelling Act, the Merchant Shipping Act, and the 1875 trade union legislation — although this was the zenith of Tory reformism and henceforth the role would fall to the Liberals.

Disraeli had moved the party from the wilderness of support for

land to "One Nation" Conservatism. The rich man would remain in his castle, the poor man at his gate, but this would only be possible if concessions were made to keep the poor man happy with his pre-ordained station in life. The rich man's responsibility for the poor man was not simply compassionate and part of mutual obligation in an organic national community: it was essential to the rich man's essential interest in staying rich and a duty he owed primarily to himself. (Apologies for the historical sexism.)

A policy of social reform would detach sections of capital from the Liberals and earn the gratitude of working class voters.

Disraeli was particularly attuned to the needs of finance and commercial capital. The new Conservative Party had initially possessed strong "Little Englander" anti-imperialist tendencies and Disraeli himself once saw the colonies as "millstones around our necks".

This approach coloured the stance of Gladstone and the Liberals but by the 1870s Disraeli and his supporters were sloughing off anti-imperialism in the interests of expansion of capitalism.

The new imperialism was also useful in extending the concept of national unity and deflecting the working class from the path of unrest binding it through material benefits and the ideology of patriotism and Empire to a capitalist system beginning to discern the first signs of US and German competition.

It bound the Conservative Party closely to the banks and finance houses and to capital based on foreign investment.



Punch's view of England sinking under the weight of imperial trappings

Israel/Palestine:

Don't slide into pessimism!

AGAINST THE TIDE

By David Rosenberg

In the aftermath of the war it is very easy for those of us who have been active in the anti-war movement to slide into pessimism and despair.

But if we do that, it would be an even bigger victory for the imperialists who have just slaughtered tens of thousands to protect the dictatorships they currently favour against one that crossed their interests, and who are now imposing a Pax Americana which threatens a lebanonisation of the whole Middle East.

We must quickly release ourselves from the debate about what might have been and make a serious assessment of the post-war situation. We must locate where and how the Left can maximise its effectiveness now in relation to the Middle East, and specifically how we should proceed on the Israel/Palestine conflict.

The principles held by the Jewish Socialists Group and the objectives we had been fighting for long before the war remain the same. If anything has changed, it is the urgency with which they must be pursued.

We have long stood on the need for a political solution to the Israel/Palestine conflict that can guarantee a secure and productive future for the people who live there. A solution based on an end to occupation and discrimination, replacing it with self-determination on an equal footing for all Israeli and Palestinian Jews and Arabs — an equality that includes the relations between men and women, between the secular and the religious, and which provides the best conditions for socialist advance.

Within the Left in Britain there is a sterile debate on whether a socialist solution should be on the basis of a unitary state or two states. As far as the JSG is concerned, these goals may be achieved through the creation of one state, two states or five states. It is not for us to decide or seek to impose our solution, but for the Israelis and Palestinians.

Our opinion, though, is that the two states position is the one that holds the best prospects for moving towards the goals of peace and justice in the area, that it is the position most likely to diffuse rather than further inflame nationalist tensions and meet the aspirations of the peoples of Israel and Palestine.

Although they have different starting points, and see it being realised in different ways, for some years now the mainstream PLO and many people in the Israeli peace movement have been converging on this position.

Nothing that has happened either in the build up to, or during, the Gulf War makes us depart from these positions, but neither can we ignore what happened and how it affects medium and long term prospects for change. The Scud attacks on Israeli civilian targets may have undermined the argument that Israeli security will be found through territorial expansion.

Some left papers have suggested that the attacks will make Israelis understand the fears of the Palestinians in the territories.

I suspect the overwhelming effect will be to increase the hawkishness of the ordinary Israeli. The popular support given to Saddam by the occupied Palestinian people, both at a popular level and at a political leadership level — which can be easily explained in terms of the attraction of a leader superficially espousing pan-Arab unity and opposition to Western dominance — is unlikely to further confirm Israeli hawkishness.

If we recognise that Israel is a very stratified society and understand that change must necessarily draw on the resources of both Israeli and Palestinian workers and social movements, it becomes clear that Sad-

dam's hijacking of the Palestinian cause for his ends has done them and the left no favours at all.

It seems that the Israeli right and far right have made gains during the Gulf war. Hidden behind a popular media mirage of Israel's statesmanlike restraint in the face of murderous provocations by Iraq, the Israeli state has stepped up its repression of the Palestinians. It has imposed drastic curfew measures in the territories, and locked up prominent Palestinian activists such as Sari Nusseibeh and Ziad Abu Zayyad. And Yitshak Shamir has appointed a neo-fascist to his inner cabinet from a fringe far right party.

Jewish socialists have long recognised that while Israel relies for military and economic support principally on the government of the USA, it also relies heavily on the Jewish diaspora, the Jewish communities around the world, for political and moral support, and further economic support.

Israeli governments claim to act on behalf of Jewish interests in the world. The reality is that the Israeli state acts in its own interests, and its actions often run counter to the real interests of Jewish people in the diaspora.

The more cracks that can be made in the false diaspora consensus for Shamir's policy, the more Jewish people who believe in peace and justice refuse to let Shamir speak for

them, the stronger will be the position of Israelis and Palestinians working for a just peace.

If socialists here are going to aid this process they will have to re-examine some of their own formulations about Jewish communities and wrong assumptions that treat Jews, Israel and Zionism as interchangeable.

There is a lot of loose talk in the liberal and left press about the alleged strength of the "Jewish lobby" in America as the most important influence on the politics of the Middle East. Jews in America, as in other countries, have very diverse views and are active in a range of political initiatives. There is a very powerful "pro-Israel" lobby. It includes the organised political establishment of American Jews, but also many non-Jewish interests — including fundamentalist Christian anti-semites who only like Jews who are thousands of miles away protecting American capitalist interests.

Despite attempts by the media here in Britain to portray the war in religious terms and to fuel racism, many communities came together in the anti-war movement, including people like ourselves from the Jewish community. Despite the pressures, there were some outstanding examples of solidarity, such as the campaign on behalf of Iraqi and Palestinian detainees, people like Abbas Cheblak, in which Jewish activists were very prominent.

Fascist groups in Britain used the war as a cover for stepping up their terror attacks on both Muslim and Jewish communities targeting mosques and synagogues and individuals in these communities. They also tried to infiltrate and exploit anti-war mobilisations.

A war which saw the White Christian west triumph and humiliate a Third World Muslim country will continue to be exploited to the full by racists and fascists.

It will also be exploited by fundamentalists within minority communities who have their own narrow agenda and whose activities can threaten unity against racism.

Local anti-racists should note that the most infamous anti-semitic publication of the 20th century, which the Nazis treated as their bible, the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* has recently been on display in the bookshops of the Muslim Information Centre in North London, in both its full version and in an edited version, under the title *Zionism and Internal Security*. That is an issue for all anti-racists and anti-fascists to take up.

The best way we can influence Jewish and Palestinian unity and give support to all in Israel and Palestine who oppose imperialist domination and Israeli occupation, and who oppose discrimination and injustice in the Middle East as a whole, is on the basis of anti-racist and anti-imperialist unity across our communities here in Britain.

David Rosenberg is a member of the Jewish Socialist Group.



Those who do not remember the past are doomed to relive it

The Victorians called them "Street Arabs". Homeless, penniless, young destitute children begging on the streets were a common sight in those days. There was no such thing as a welfare state then; children — and, indeed, adults — that capitalism couldn't exploit for their labour were left to fend for themselves, with no social provision but the hated workhouse prisons.

Social democratic parties pledged to abolish destitution. In a time of capitalist boom they did, partly. The NHS, social security benefits, and other welfare services became the norm. But the fundamental cause of poverty and homelessness — capitalism itself — was left unchallenged, its foundations remained unshaken.

Now, deep in yet another recession, capitalism attacks that welfare provision: it is unprofitable, so it has to go. Young, destitute people have returned to the streets; begging is the only "job" they can find.

Homelessness is soaring, exploitation of child labour is growing; more and more people sink into poverty.

No tinkering with the system can ever eradicate poverty. It can only make life slightly more bearable in times when capitalism is relatively "healthy". To eradicate poverty for ever, we must eradicate the system which spawns it; we must destroy capitalism itself.



The US attempted to bomb the Vietnamese back into the stone age. They still lost.

The Decline of the USA

Tony Brown starts a series

The American economy was in serious trouble long before the Gulf crisis.

It is not a downturn or a temporary problem. It is worse than that. For 20 years now the American economy has been gradually losing its former dominant position.

The roots of the decline are not hard to trace, and the social effects are not hard to relate, but the dimension of the problems and their effects on the rest of the world can be difficult to grasp.

If the American empire is in an irrevocable decline what will the likely effects be both within the USA and throughout the world? Is Bush's military adventure in the Gulf designed to restore US superiority, or has American imperialism overstretched itself? Can Japan or a united Germany, or the EEC, replace the US as the new world power? And if not, what will it mean if there is no dominant world imperial power?

In order to attempt to answer these questions it is worth examining how the US went from the world's richest country to the world's largest debtor nation, and from the land of opportunity to one racked by unemployment, homelessness and violence.

Antonio Gramsci, the Italian Marxist, said a crisis was when the old was dying but the new was unable to be born. This is exactly what has been happening for the past 20 years in the world economy.

In that time the rivalry between America, Western Europe and Japan has increased, there have been two worldwide recessions and the dramatic 1987 stockmarket crash. Still there is no successor to the US's former world position and nor is there likely to be one.

America's economic crisis took off with the last years of the Vietnam War. Up till that time the \$US was 'as good as gold', it had been the world's currency since the end of the Second World War.

The restoration of a single all-embracing world market was one of the fundamental objectives of American imperialism during the Second World War. As the undisputed industrial and financial power of the world, American capital had everything to gain from a rebirth of the world economy. A new international financial system was established with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank.

Instead of seeking savage reparations from the defeated countries as had happened after World War I the US pumped loans and aid into reconstructing those countries that would open their economies to international trade and investment, that is, American goods and American capital. The American sponsored free trade and restored world market was set out in the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) in October 1947.

The first signs of the slowdown were evident in the early 1960s. John F Kennedy boosted the economy by spending on the military and the space programme and cutting taxes. By 1965 after several years of sluggish growth the economy was booming again.

The price of defeat in Vietnam

The invasion of Vietnam began and Lyndon Johnson hoped the war would be quick and cheap. Of course it was neither. By 1968 it was so unpopular that it was too risky to pay for it by taxation. Instead the US borrowed from overseas. By now the inflation that Kennedy had inspired had become rampant.

In August 1971 Nixon abandoned the American role as the world's banker which had been established by the Bretton Woods agreement in 1944. This agreement established a fixed price for gold of US\$35 per ounce. In 1948 the US held 75% of the world's gold reserves.

But in order to finance the war the US government had to print more and more dollars, thus devaluing the dollar against gold. Secondly, the outflow of gold from US reserves to other governments to pay its deficit strengthened those governments in relation to the US. By 1965 the US held only 33% of the world's gold reserves.

Between 1968 and 1971 the orderly, regulated post-war framework

broke down.

In April 1973 John Connolly, a former US Secretary of State, said: "The era of American supremacy in international finance that began in World War II is finished. The monetary and trading system that provided the basis of the post war era has collapsed. There is no point in kidding ourselves about it, that it is just shaky, that we will reconstruct it. It's gone."

Most mainstream economists would have us believe that the 1973 recession was caused by the big oil price rise of that year. It is much more convenient to blame the failures of the system on money-hungry Arabs than on the collapse of America's war in Vietnam. But the massive inflation and growing American debts dragged down all of America's trading partners. The trebling of the price of oil certainly added to the recession that had already begun.

1973 was the end of the long post-war boom. It was the first time since the 1930s that all the advanced industrial economies were

simultaneously in recession. Previously, recessions had been localised enough to allow other non-affected economies to keep world trade and growth bubbling along.

America's indebtedness had already meant that more US dollars were circulating throughout the world than ever before. This, combined with technological advances which enabled vast sums to be transferred by a simple telephone call, meant that the ability of national governments to control the flow of these dollars and fix exchange rates was destroyed.

Credit became much easier as enormous sums were redistributed from the US to international banks via the oil-rich Middle East regimes. Much of this money was then lent to other Third World countries to develop manufacturing industry and Eastern European countries to purchase consumer goods in order to ward off working class revolt.

The US economy remained sluggish. In 1975 the ten leading American banks wrote off \$1 billion in bad debts — an unprecedented amount. Bankruptcies were the highest for years. Expansionary policies were adopted to revive the depressed economy, but further tax cuts and increased government spending saw the budget deficit blow out to over \$100 billion.

When Jimmy Carter left the White House in 1981 the annual Budget deficit was 'only' \$58 billion. Carter's last year as President had been dominated by the Iranian hostage crisis, and gave the Reagan right the opportunity to hammer home the point that America was seen as weak and ineffectual.

Socialists and war

Defeatism and Defencism: bury the dead!

By Paul Hampton

Jack Cleary's review of the Communist Party book on the Second World War — About Turn (SO 479) raised a number of important issues for socialists involved in the recent anti-war movement. In particular, by touching on the controversial role of the Trotskyists, who were the only militant workers at the time to oppose the war without lapsing into pacifism or chauvinism, he sets an agenda for a valuable future debate.

The three issues of most importance regarding the attitude of Marxists to wars are:

- (1) the dichotomy between "defeatism" and "defencism" adopted from some of Lenin's writings;
- (2) what became known as the Proletarian Military Policy (PMP) elaborated by Trotsky between 1938 and his death in 1940;
- (3) the application of the Marxist principles, strategy and tactics during WW2 by the British Workers International League (WIL).

This latter issue, regarding the actual activities of Trotskyists during WW2 would require a separate article in itself, especially if the whole international experience, such as the resistance movements in France and Greece, were to be included. However, for the record, anyone trying to give an account of this experience should remember that much of the work done by militants was at its infancy in terms of a rounded, all encompassing approach, and involved many debates and differences which were still unresolved by 1945.

For example, in the WIL a debate occurred between Healy and Grant on the one hand and Haston and Levy on the other over both fundamentals and on concrete questions like the Home Guard.

This brings me to Cleary's main contention — of the link between the PMP and so-called "revolutionary defencism". It is not clear whether this link is meant to be a logical one, ie. that the PMP was in theory a "defencist" policy; or whether it is an empirical claim, that in practice the Trotskyists who subscribed to the PMP were "defencists". However, in both cases we need to know: (a) what the PMP really meant; and (b) what defencism really means.

The modern forms of defeatism/defencism originate with the Bolsheviks, initially in 1904-5 during the Russo-Japanese war — where they were for the defeat of Russia: meaning the victory of Japan; and later in the imperialist World War 1 as clarification for the workers' movement in the struggle to avoid subordination to their "own" governments' warmongering.

"Defencism" in these circumstances was used by the Social Democrats for defence of the fatherland (the nation), but in practice also meant support for their own (bourgeois) governments — just as Kinnock did during the Gulf War. Hence defeatism — but applied for all sides, to all imperialists. There were three different senses in which defeat/defence was used:

- (1) to explain the aims of the wars, and whether workers should support or oppose them politically with their own methods;
- (2) to explain the attitude workers should take to the outcome of military campaigns re: of the victory or defeat of each side;
- (3) to explain the particular tasks of workers in each concrete war situation.

Unfortunately these separate senses, which were expressed more clearly by other revolutionary internationalists (eg. Liebknecht's "the main enemy is at home"), have become hopelessly confused or encrusted with theology in Cleary's words, as to render

Right: French Trotskyists produced a German language newspaper 'Arbeiter und Soldat' ('Worker and Soldier') during the Nazi occupation. They organised a cell in the German Army which was discovered by the SS. All its members paid for this activity with their lives.



Below: Neath by-election 1945: When Trotskyist Jock Haston dared to stand up against the wartime electoral 'truce' he was denounced as a Communist by the Tories and as a fascist by the Communists!



defeatism/defencism pretty meaningless.

What is more, it should be plain to anyone who thinks about the issues that the Marxist position is more subtle and complex than just supporting one side (defence) against the other (defeat), though this is as far as some commentators have got. With the appropriate, out of context quotation, this tradition has, however, replaced an honest assessment of reality by some sections of the left. Hence we get: (1) "the defeat of one's own government is a lesser evil" [defeat by who — which class, and compared to what?]; (2) "Marxists should wish for the defeat of their own governments" [by doing what exactly?]; (3) "the defeat of one's own government facilitate revolution" [perhaps, but in whose interests?]

Lenin at least had the virtue of seeking an independent policy for the working class to pursue in time of war — to carry on the class struggle internationally — even though his formulations are open to misinterpretation. He also had the virtue of abandoning such

"It should be plain to anyone who thinks about the issues that the Marxist position is more subtle and complex than just supporting one side against the other."

terms when they were found to be inadequate — defeatism and defencism disappear from the Marxist arsenal between 1917-24, ie. during the high point of the theory and practice of working class revolution so far.

It should be warning enough for us that "defeatism" became a "principle of Leninism" again only as a weapon to beat the Oppositionists with (Trotsky had criticised the term during the First World War, as had Luxemburg and loads of Old Bolsheviks, many of whom also later fought Stalin).

The point is that the sheath of defencism/defeatism is not an adequate starting point for elaborating Marxist politics towards particular wars. Critics of the PMP are confounded by the policy precisely because it does not fit clearly into either category, but this is merely a sign of theoretical sterility.

The first thing to say here is about World War 2, which was a continuation of the first war, ie. a conflict between the major capitalist powers over markets and colonies, spheres of influence. But it was no mere repetition, but involved new factors which though they did not change the overall character of the conflict, certainly added to the complexity of the situation and affected workers' consciousness. Principally they were the USSR, as a system apparently different from capitalism, and secondly, the rise of Nazism, smashing the German proletariat.

A further point needs to be made about the precedents of the PMP. Both Marx and Engels were positive warmongers in certain situations (eg. US civil war, Franco-Prussian war), and in Lenin's work there are references to trade unionism in the army and

people's militia (eg. "On the Disarmament Slogan", 1916). Furthermore, during the dual power situation in 1917, he even linked the struggle to overthrow the bourgeoisie by the working class to the tasks of "national defence".

Similarly, in the early Communist International and the CPs in the 1920s, we find references to the necessity of military training, election of officers and organisations within the forces. The particular points made by Trotsky on the PMP have a grounding in the classical Marxist tradition.

What was the Proletarian Military Policy? It was not meant as a distinctive policy to distinguish fascist from democratic imperialist countries, nor a fetishising of the power and influence of Hitler or a denial of the imperialist character of the conflict as a whole.

Rather, it was a set of slogans, ideas and tactics given this characterisation, but in the context of the militarisation of the whole world working class. The advanced workers needed a policy in the context of the reality of capitalist militarisation — a situation in which pacifism was totally useless [what should be done about Hitler?], and in which chauvinism was binding the workers to their oppressors at home.

This meant representing the interests of workers in the context of a changing situation — in the army where, with millions in uniform had no choice but to go with their comrades. It meant a fight for democratic rights in the army, for control over training, over officers, over equipment. It meant a fight against the militarism on the home front — in Britain the Emergency Powers Act, the ban on workers' papers, the speed-up in the factories.

It also posed the question of power in terms of real concerns of workers, eg. in Britain/US: if you fear Hitler, then defend yourselves and your organisations by overthrowing the bourgeoisie. None of this meant abandoning lessons about the character of the state army or the nature of the war — but rather Marxists had to relate to actual struggles, actual conditions, actual experiences which thousands of workers were going through, and which they would fight against.

To repeat, this policy supplemented the agreed principles (opposition to imperialist warmongering, workers continue to struggle for their own interests) in order to link these tasks together, not an endorsement of the "allied" war aims. In all of this Trotsky was clear:

- (1) that every war situation should be understood concretely and specifically;
- (2) that for workers, their own interests, struggles, aims and organisations, ie. politics, came first (just as in peace time) and military considerations are secondary;
- (3) the point for Marxists is to elaborate the tasks in response to the war situation, to arm workers with the ideas to make their own emancipation.

So I think the linkage made by Jack Cleary between the PMP and defencism is unhelpful in explaining either idea.

In the case of defeatism/defencism, starting with military speculation, however important this may be in particular wars for the working class (as in the Gulf War), does not supply us with the method to establish the revolutionary policy, especially in the complex conflicts of the twentieth century.

Better that we follow Trotsky's views from 1915, which Lenin implicitly accepted in 1917, which Rosmer suggested in 1936, and which various Marxists — Shachtman, Goldman and Draper (in the US) and Pearce (in Britain) have repeated ever since — defeatism and defencism get us nowhere, let us bury the dead!

Long live independent working class internationalism!

Richard Harris's latest film

Another Irish 'tour de force'

Film

Tony Brown reviews *The Field*

Everything about *The Field* is dominated by Richard Harris as Bull McCabe. At times Harris seems larger than the screen itself. He is very much the focus, the centrepiece of the film, which is ultimately the film's weakness.

It is one of those 'tour de force' roles that Harris plays to the full. Everything revolves around him.

The Bull's whole life view has been dominated by the Irish famine in the middle of the 19th century. His family was dispossessed, all his brothers and sisters sent overseas to avoid the death which encompassed the parish. He remained only because he was the oldest son and was meant to re-inherit the land.

With his father he worked from morning till night to make ends meet. His mother died in the field but he worked on in order to save the crop. He proved that he was ready to inherit.

When we first meet him he is preparing to pass on to his son the three acres of lush green land that he has singlehandedly transformed from barren rock. But it's not his land, he rents it from the widow. His aim is to buy it from her and pass it on, thus righting the wrongs of decades past.

Into this small village, where things seem pre-ordained, comes the 'outsider', the Yank, and order is turned upside down, with tragic consequences.

To the Bull, the Yank represents the return of those who emigrated, those who couldn't survive the famine, and have now come back to buy what they couldn't work to keep.

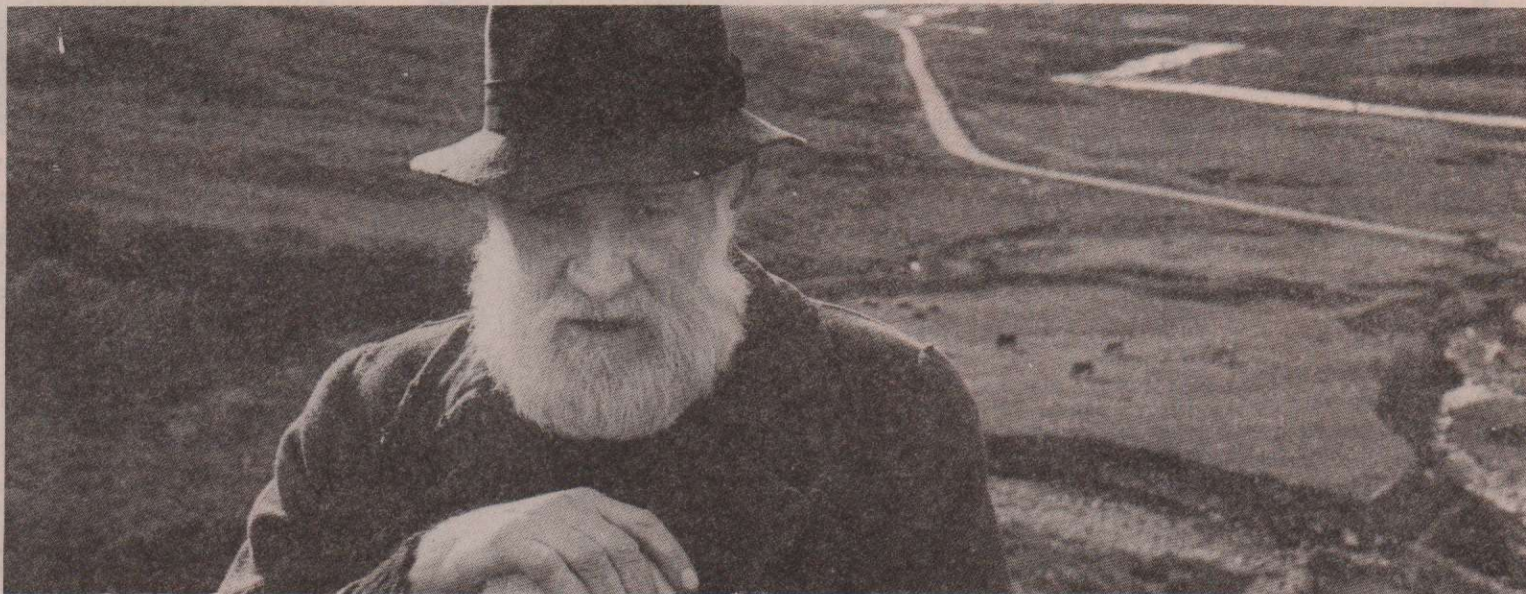
The problem is all the characters represent something from the Bull's memory of his youth. They are not characters in their own right, and in the end become stereotypes. They don't even get their own names.

The priest, although Irish, is still an outsider and represents those priests who turned their back on the poor when they were hungry and homeless.

The widow is the cold landowner with no sympathy or empathy for the locals. The tinker and his daughter are those who stayed but were unable to get back on their feet.

This is a problem for plays turned into movies. The characters on stage are more often symbolic and not realistic as needed on the screen.

But the film also suffers from an 'Irish movie' stereotype. Too much brings to mind *Ryan's Daughter*, or



Richard Harris plays Bull McCabe

My Left Foot. This is not too surprising as it was made by Jim Sharman, who directed *My Left Foot*, and there as Mrs McCabe is Christy Brown's mum, once again portraying the long suffering, silent rock of the family.

The first time we see John Hurt, who by the way gives a remarkable performance, I thought of John

Mills in *Ryan's Daughter*, and as the movie goes on you can't help but be reminded of Barry Fitzgerald in any number of Irish films of the 1940s and 1950s.

The Field does tackle a number of difficult questions, setting them in a small Irish village, as a microcosm of Irish rural life.

Legal ownership of the land

against farmers' rights, religion and power, father and son relationships (we see nothing of the mother/son relationship), and centrally, the land which takes on an almost mystical presence.

Unfortunately, these questions are unbalanced by some rather unbelievable scenes, notably the fight and carrying of the

seaweed, which only serve to prove that the ageing Bull is as strong as two young men. This is even harder to believe when one of them is a strapping Tom Berenger.

But the final scenes really outdo all this. We get a crescendo of tragedy and grief, a reciting of the Lord's Prayer, and a pretty strong sense of dissatisfaction.

The winter of revolutions

Books

Theresa Jones reviews *We The People: The Revolution of '89*, Timothy Garton Ash, Granta Books, £4.99, 1990

Ash begins his book by recounting a meeting he attended in a Silesian coal-mine in 1989. There Lech Walesa introduced his colleague Adam Michnik to the miners. Today Michnik has walked out of the Solidarity parliamentary caucus, is in a political group hostile to Walesa's and writes articles denouncing Walesa as a potential dictator.

Ash has written his account of four episodes of the 1989 revolutions. The four main chapters describe the June elections in Warsaw, the reburial of Imre Nagy in Budapest in June, the opening of the Berlin Wall in November, and two weeks in Prague in November/December just as the CP government was about to resign.

The accounts are journalistic in



Lech Walesa

style and make for easy reading, and at only 140 pages it is digestible in only one sitting.

Even though change is the central theme, Ash is not convinced that the events should be described as a 'revolution'. Rather, he claims, they are a mix of revolution and reform, or 'refolution'. He argues that there was a strong element of change from above led by an enlightened minority in the privileged elite in the still ruling CPs, and that in many areas remnants of the privileged elite still re-

tain undue influence and authority.

His account begins in Poland just before the June elections. The 261 Solidarity candidates are told that the elections aren't democratic but "the key is hope that in four years there will be free, democratic elections." Four years! How tame this idea seems in retrospect.

As the overwhelming election results came into the Solidarity office in Warsaw, they were met with exaltation, incredulity and alarm. Alarm at their new responsibilities. Their timetable was two years of loyal parliamentary opposition before local elections in 1991 and, in 1995, a Presidential election.

In Budapest, police assisted and Ministers spoke at the reburial of Imre Nagy, one of the leaders of the 1956 revolution. Only one year earlier, oppositionists had been violently dispersed as they demonstrated in memory of Nagy's execution.

If nothing else had happened in the second half of 1989, then what occurred in Poland and Hungary would have been regarded as spectacular and historic.

But in Leipzig, in late September, 5000 East Germans demonstrated for elections and reform.

By 2 October, 20,000 were on the Leipzig streets — the biggest demonstration since the failed workers' uprising of June 1953. The following Sunday, there were 70,000 and, two days later, police violently attacked demonstrators at the 40th anniversary "celebrations" of the GDR.

Rather than demoralising the population, the government's violence mobilised opposition. By November 9, 300,000 people were demonstrating. All in a matter of only six weeks.

On 9 November the wall came down.

By now there seemed to be a pattern to follow. In Czechoslovakia the Stalinists refused to negotiate or contemplate anything other than the status quo, that is, its monopoly on power.

On 29 November the CP's Secretary, Karel Urbanek, told Party members that they wouldn't concede to demands to dissolve the

People's Militia. On December 2 they did just that.

In the Federal Assembly, the faceless bureaucrats who for forty years had ruled the country, and preached the leading role of the Party, now voted to delete the Constitution's reference to the Party's leading role. They voted to remove Marxism-Leninism as the basis for education. Not a single dissenting vote. Even at the end not an honest person among them.

But the speed of change took the opposition by surprise as well. Civic Forum had stated that they "did not aspire to any ministerial post". One week later, they told PM Calfa they "might be able to come to an agreement with him".

As in Poland and Hungary, there followed round table talks. In Poland the talks had lasted two months, in Czechoslovakia two days.

On 10 December, precisely to the Forum's deadline, President Husak swore in the new government and then resigned.

In a fortnight, Jan Carnogursky went from being a prisoner of conscience to being one of two first Vice Premiers with partial responsibility for the security apparatus. As had happened in Poland, prisoners became ministers and ministers became prisoners. Soon prisoners would also become Presidents.

The CP's apparatus crumbled. By the end of 1989 the Hungarian SWP had split in two; in January 1990 the Polish PUWP followed suit and within three months East Germany's Socialist Unity Party had lost its leading role, its name and at least half of its members.

Ash's book brings together these historic events in one small accessible volume and refreshes our memory of an inspiring six months.

But, more importantly, he provides an answer to those who see history as one slow gradual process of change. Those who say that groups of people can't change society except perhaps at the fringe. The events in Eastern Europe demonstrate more clearly than ever that change, inspired by popular and mass protest, is dramatic, urgent and essential.

The birth of the great unfree American republic

Television

Jean Lane reviews *The Civil War*, BBC2, Saturday

One of the great events which shaped the world we live in was the American civil war.

It broke out 130 years ago and ended, after almost exactly four years, in the victory of the American capitalists over the aristocratic shareholders and their

southern Confederation of breakaway states.

You could say that this was the bourgeois revolution in North America. Instead of a great slave united state expanding southwards, which is what the southerners wanted, out of the carnage was born the great free labour republic of today. It was ruled by robber baron capitalists.

But, nevertheless, within the system, labour is free and can organise. The black slaves were freed — to live, and their descendants after them, for another 100

years in America's own vile system of 'apartheid'.

Last Saturday, BBC2 began running *The Civil War*, a fine series made for public service television in the USA. The BBC's shortened version of it runs to seven episodes. Mainly using still photographs — movies were 90 years in the future — from the period and excerpts from letters, diaries and speeches, it took you back across the years in an extraordinarily vivid way.

See the rest of it: better, video it.

A story of Australian 'democracy'

Janet Burstall looks at the life and times of John Kerr, former Governor General of Australia

Every Australian Labor Party supporter will have felt a delayed sense of justice with the news last week that John Kerr had died.

While some obituary writers attempted to portray Kerr as a "giant" and a brilliant public figure, he will always be remembered as the man who sacked the Whitlam government.

Kerr came from a working class background, his father being a boilermaker, and lived in Balmain where the first ALP branches had been formed.

In the 1930s he was, briefly, one of a very small number of Trotskyists in Australia. By the 1940s he, like many others, had become so repulsed by Stalinism that he joined in the battle to rid Australia of communism.

During the war he worked in military intelligence to counter "enemy elements" and later went to Washington where he was seconded to the OSS, forerunner of the CIA.

It was the cold war that really brought him to notice. Within the ALP the hard right organised "Industrial Groups" (members were known as Groupers) to fight in the unions against anyone they considered to be a communist.

While the CP's union strength had diminished from the immediate post-war years, when at one point they had a majority on the ACTU executive, many of the largest industrial unions were still in their hands. They were militant and well organised but internally they were run as mini versions of the USSR. No opposition was tolerated and the party line was unquestioned.

The first big union to fall to the groupers was the ironworkers (FIA). In a bitter and sometimes violent election Laurie Short defeated the existing secretary. Short had also been, with Kerr, one of the few early Trotskyists.

When Short went to the FIA building to assume his office the locks had been changed. With police assistance he gained entry, only to find that the offices had been reorganised and the secretary's was now in the corridor.

The groupers' tactics all along had been twofold: to fight within the ranks and to fight in the courts. They had seemingly limitless financial backing.

Because of the centrality of the courts in the industrial relations system, both left and right relied on legal firms that derived almost all their income representing the factions in the courts.

Kerr represented Short and won, and became the chief legal adviser to the groupers. A national referendum was

conducted on outlawing the Communist Party, which was only narrowly defeated. And in 1954 the ALP split.

The groupers had lost out in the decisive national conference and so walked out of the party, forming the Democratic Labor Party (DLP). Many right wingers stayed with the ALP, some for tactical reasons, but others because they were firmly opposed to the groupers' smear and fear tactics.

The split meant that Labor didn't win government again until 1972 even though three times between 1954 and 1969 they won more than 50% of the national vote.

Kerr also left the ALP but didn't join the DLP, instead concentrating on his legal practice and working with the CIA front group the Association for Cultural Freedom.

Why then did Whitlam appoint him Governor-General?

Certainly many warned him against it, both from the left and the right. His pedigree was well known.

The answer isn't clear, perhaps even Whitlam doesn't know. But one thing is clear: Kerr's subsequent actions were entirely in keeping with his character.

By late 1975 Labor was reeling from the effects of the economic recession. Inflation was 16% and unemployment was growing rapidly. Whitlam was forced to reshuffle his Cabinet and appointed as the new Minister for Labor Jim McClelland, a life-long friend of Kerr who had also been one of the small number of pre-war Trotskyists.

The Conservatives under Malcolm Fraser were threatening to block the supply bills in the Senate where Labor was in a minority. It was a very risky tactic as opinion polls showed large majorities against the threat. Pressure was on both Labor and the coalition. Whitlam had decided not to budge and believed the coalition would back down at the last minute before supply ran out at the end of November.

At the same time Whitlam had talked of not renewing the leases on the US's spy bases at Pine Gap in Central Australia. (Pine Gap



John Kerr looking ridiculous in top hat and tails

provided much of the US's satellite coverage of Iraq during the Gulf War.) They fell due on 9 December. It is extremely unlikely he would have made good his threat, but the CIA certainly took it seriously.

Indeed, William Colby, the CIA's Director, later wrote that the Whitlam government posed one of the three threats in his career and said it ranked with the 1973 Middle East war! Such was the CIA's paranoia about a reforming Labor government.

Without any warning, or any discussions with the elected Prime Minister, Kerr called Whitlam to his office on November 11 and sacked his government and made Malcolm Fraser Prime Minister. That afternoon the coalition was defeated in the House and Labor won a vote of confidence. Immediately, the Speaker went to tell Kerr of the decisions, but Kerr refused to even see him.

So in one day an unelected representative of the British Queen sacked an elected Prime Minister and then ignored the decisions of the Parliament.

Spontaneous strikes and demonstrations took place when Kerr's actions became

known. Hundreds of thousands of people took to the streets as Whitlam urged supporters to "maintain the rage".

But even then Bob Hawke, President of the ACTU, was urging workers not to strike but to wait for the December general election. The momentum was lost and as the campaign focus turned back to the economy Labor was annihilated at the polls.

Instead of Fraser, who had masterminded the withholding of supply, Kerr became the figure of hate. Nowhere could he go without being greeted by enormous demonstrations and boycotts. The pressure obviously affected him such that when he presented the Melbourne Cup the next year he was drunk on national television — before millions he slurred his speech. With his penchant for top hats, and his ruddy cheeks, he became a figure of ridicule.

When Fraser later appointed him UNESCO Ambassador he lasted only four months before the uproar forced him to resign.

His last years were spent virtually in internal exile, making few public appearances. His actions warranted such treatment.

Member of the slandering tendency

EYE ON THE LEFT

By Cate Murphy

Who do you think is speaking here? "I really do wish these agents of the police and the state would go away because they are not wanted."

"They are nothing but idiots who want to play into the hands of the media. They are the enemies of this campaign and they've got no place in it."

"Brothers and sisters, don't let these people distract you. That's why they've been sent here today and they've probably been paid to do it as well."

Some old Stalinist hack back 40 years ago in the dark days when they could get away with such blanket denunciations of their left-wing critics, Trotskyists, anarchists, and others?

No, the speaker is a self-proclaimed Trotskyist. He is comrade Tommy Sheridan, Chair of the All Britain Anti-Poll Tax Federation. The diminutive "Tommy" tells you not that he is a friendly popular guy, but that he is a member of *Militant*, which affects this style.

Sheridan was speaking from the platform at the London anti-poll tax rally on March 23; denouncing left-wing hecklers, critical of the Anti-Poll Tax Federation, an out and out *Militant* front organisation.

The quotation is from *Workers' Press*. We have checked that it is broadly accurate.

Sheridan's diatribe is proof that these people are incapable of learning. After last year's anti-poll tax riots in London the leaders of the Anti-Poll Tax Federation thoroughly disgraced themselves when Steve Nally, the Federation Secretary, publicly promised on TV to "name names" of those who had fought the police — that is, turn anti-poll tax activists over to the police and their law courts!

The Tories were attempting to repeat the trick that had worked so successfully during the 1984-85 miners' strike, and focus attention on "violence", making that and not the poll tax the issue. Their press was baying away with this theme, repeating police lies about what happened. So were the leaders of the Labour Party.

Nally, Sheridan and the leaders of *Militant* let themselves get caught up in this hysteria. Not grasping what was going on, they tried to play the role of "good boys and girls" for the Tory media, willing to help nail "violent" "rioters". It was a disgraceful, panic-stricken performance.

What it revealed about *Militant's* leading clique is that they lack some of the most basic and irreplaceable instincts of the serious working class

socialist militant.

The organisers of the anti-poll tax demonstration would have the right and the duty to steward it and try to control, for example, anarchists who tried to act on the belief that a riot is more useful than a vast peaceful demonstration.

But to go from that political (or stewarding) conflict with mistaken comrades to an offer to ferret out their names and make them available to the police, the courts, and their jailers — that is to cross the class line in politics. Worse, the bland TV promises of Nally to turn informer showed that he doesn't know such lines exist.

There may have been a few anarchists looking for a fight on the anti-poll tax demo in March 1990. But two things were outstanding about the riots.

The violence was started by the police in Whitehall and elsewhere. And even the television news reports showed the police driving crazily into crowds and attacking innocent bystanders.

The second outstanding thing was that lots of not very political people were drawn into resisting the police on the street. This too was reported in the serious bourgeois press (the *Daily Telegraph*, for example).

But it passed by the awareness of the *Militant* leaders of the Anti-Poll Tax Federation. They joined the gutter press and Kinnoek, offering narks' services to the coppers who had behaved like Cossacks in the centre of London.

A year later even the police investigation into what happened and why has publicly criticised the police.

As far as we know, *Militant* never repudiated Nally. Now they compound their political infamy with Stalinist-style slander against their critics: the proud would-be coppers' narks of last year now denounce the sort of people they then offered to hand over to the cops as... cops! Yuk!

Militant operates as a closed sect, and runs a weekly paper which on principle (Stalinist principle!) carried few articles or letters by members or non-members who disagree with them. Internally, a high level of conformity is maintained by a quasi-religious atmosphere and by diatribes against even a hint of dissent, of the sort Sheridan spewed out at his critics.

An organisation like that will take on board only such lessons of its own experience as it — that is a tiny group of its leaders — chooses to take account of. The result is that they can commit the political atrocity they committed last year and learn nothing from the experience.

Militant's internal "education" has evidently focused on a hate campaign against "anarchists" and "ultra-lefts", not on how a prominent "Militant" could offer to turn informer.

That is what burst out in Sheridan's yobbo speech from the platform after the demonstration on 23 March.

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Poll tax riot, March 1990 — Nally said he would "name names"

British Timken:

Last chance for strike to save shop steward's job

By an AEU steward

On Thursday 28 March Pat Markey lost his final stage of appeal against his dismissal on medical grounds from his job as a machine setter-operator in the Roller Grinding Shop (RGS) at British Timken, Northampton.

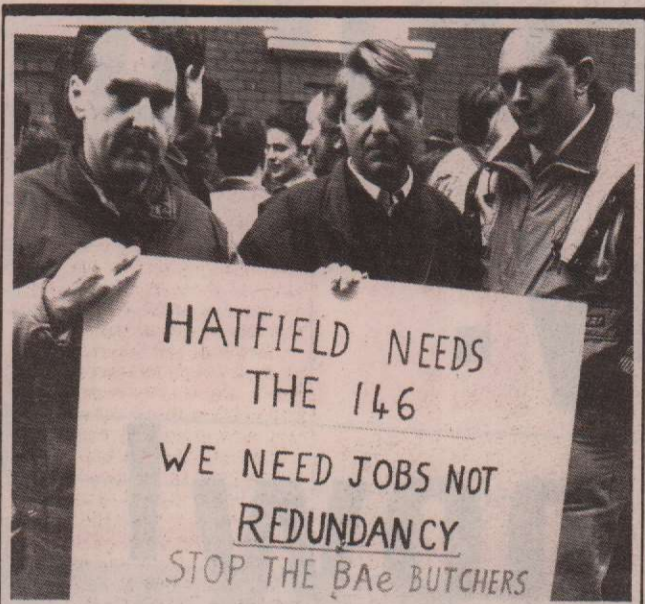
This was no great surprise despite all the arguments being on the union side. For example, how could the company proceed with a dismissal on health grounds before the Health and Safety Executive had submitted their report into the request by Pat Markey to investigate the whole issue of the "coolant" in his department which Pat believed had caused his, and others' dermatitis?

It is, and was always, the case that the only way to fight back against this victimisation is by industrial action. Appeals to the company were never going to get anywhere. In fact, the company have stated that Pat had no previous black marks on his disciplinary or work record.

So why wasn't there an immediate call from the joint shop stewards committee for action?

A majority on the JSSC insisted that the grievance procedure be exhausted before strike action was considered. The same majority seemed paralysed and cowed by the redundancy situation at the factory. (90 redundancies were announced after weeks of speculation a couple of days after Pat's notice of dismissal). Some stewards thought Pat was too militant, and some made their excuses by linking Pat to a *Socialist Organiser* bulletin at the factory.

What these stewards fail to



Protest at BAe jobs massacre

Several thousands British Aerospace workers took to the streets of London last week to protest at 10,900 job losses. They were joined by Rolls Royce workers where 3,000 face the dole.

Speaker after speaker at the rally that followed lambasted the Tories and BAe bosses.

Unfortunately there were no proposals for industrial action to save jobs.

Socialist Organiser supporters gave out copies of a special engineers bulletin arguing the case for an all-out strike across BAe and for cutting the hours not the jobs. Photo: John Harris

understand is that by letting the company get the upper hand, the union as a whole is being attacked. Future redundancies, health and safety issues, and the rest, will be harder to tackle. It is a betrayal of every basic trade union principle not to stand four square with Pat just because some stewards consider Pat too militant.

The JSSC is due to reconvene on Monday 8 April to discuss

ballotting for industrial action in RGS and support from the rest of the factory in terms of a strike levy.

All the stops will have to be pulled out to deliver a majority in favour of a strike. But now as before it remains the only way to get Pat reinstated and to retain a union structure capable of defending union members in the period ahead.

40,000 British Telecom jobs to go

By Maria Exall, BT engineer, NCU Westminster

BT, Britain's largest private sector employer, is to shed 40,000 jobs in their latest reorganisation, "Project Sovereign".

Unlike last year, when £30 million-plus was set aside to ease managers' redundancies, most of the job losses will be amongst engineering and ancillary grades.

In a company that makes £6 million a day profit and is part of a worldwide boom industry providing high technology infrastructure for the economy, why job losses?

The present job losses are a direct result of the privatisation of BT and consequent government policy throughout the '80s. The most recent "duopoly" review — examining present

telecoms provision split between BT and Mercury — confirmed that BT's growth in Britain is to be kept at bay by the encouragement of new firms both on customer service and network provision sides of the business.

In order to bring new "competitors" into the telecom market the Tories have had to restrict BT's ability to compete by means such as the refusal to give licenses for certain telecoms activity to BT. For example, the cable TV company at present digging up your street will be allowed to carry telephone lines on their network but BT will not be allowed to carry any form of entertainment on their network for at least another 10 years.

This restriction has severe consequences for any major investment in a public telecoms network.

Competition — good for whom?

So why are the Tories so keen

to break BT's monopoly and open up the industry to more firms? As one would expect, their propaganda includes promises of cheaper phone calls for all and an industry that meets customers' demands.

This is very far from the truth. Increased competition is in the highly profitably business sector, so the apparent choice offered the ordinary customer is an illusion. Also, the unnecessary duplicating of capital and labour-intensive network installations and maintenance can only add to the costs of the industry as a whole.

The reality is that the expansion of telecommunications has made room for more companies making more profits. There is no direct gain for the customer, but there is a lot of money to be made.

It is significant that BT has a highly unionised workforce. This is not so in most of the burgeoning contractors sector. Mercury and some of the subsidiaries of BT have still to concede union recognition.

Within BT the threat of job losses undermines the assertion of basic trade union rights. The UCW is still fighting the use of casual labour and the contracting out of catering and other ancillary services.

The most recent pay deal negotiated by the NCU conceded a shiftworking agreement that could worsen the conditions of work of a large number of engineering grades.

"No compulsory redundancies"?

BT management have told

CPSA Broad Left in crisis: Where now for the left?

By Mark Serwotka, CPSA Broad Left National Committee

The Civil and Public Services Association (CPSA) is likely to re-elect one of the most vicious right-wing trade union leaderships in Britain.

Not only vicious and right wing, but incompetent too. Our annual pay rise is due in a week but as yet we have had neither an offer from the government, nor a campaign from the union!

When the offer comes it will probably be for 8%, and the union leadership will eagerly grab it.

It will be effectively a pay cut! This, along with failure to fight privatisation, Agencies, victimisation of union activists, staff cuts, sacking of casuals and much more, all add up to a union which is not doing its job.

How can a membership, young and potentially radical, based largely in understaffed benefit offices, dealing every day with the problems of Tory Britain at the sharp end, elect such useless, strike-breaking no-good leaders?

The key to this mystery is to be found in the disarray that the left in the CPSA finds itself in.

Once the CPSA boasted the largest Broad Left in the country. Now it is smaller, and less influential than ever before. Though the official union is unable to protect its members from attack and the situation cries out for an active, radical, left opposition, we have instead a small sectarian uninfluential "Broad" Left.

There are a number of reasons for this. The old Broad Left, which at the beginning of the '80s numbered in excess of 800, split in 1984.

Broad Left '84 (BL84) was formed; this group has drifted to an extraordinarily right-wing position and the once-dominant Communist Party is reduced to a tiny rump.

The Broad Left carried on, still over 500 strong, with most of the activists willing to fight for

a strong union. Though still dominated by *Militant*, it also had other factions, and many independents.

The Broad Left was the body that most members and activists looked to for a strong union. It attracted 20,000 votes in elections. It controlled the union on a number of occasions, at various levels.

How different it all is today! BL84 are now an appendage of the "Moderate" group; their "left" has no influence.

The Broad Left is now only 250 strong. King in the ruins, *Militant* runs the show in a dogmatic and sectarian way. There is little room for dissent. Many members have left. Union activists no longer look to the Broad Left as a credible alternative leadership.

It gained only 7,000 votes in last year's election, and is unable and unwilling to organise any action outside of electioneering.

At last month's Broad Left national committee things reached rock bottom. No pay campaign, or even literature by the Broad Left, no fresh initiatives, no ideas on the many problems facing the membership.

Instead we were treated to a sectarian head bang between the *Militant* and the SWP over *Militant's* decision last November to drop SWP member and current NEC member Carolyn Adams from this year's Broad Left election slate.

After four months the SWP have decided that they are the victims of a sectarian outrage! They have decided to stand in-

dependently in the union's elections, splitting the left vote!

If it wasn't so tragic it would be funny.

For years supporters of the Socialist Caucus have been victims of *Militant's* disgraceful sectarianism. When we appealed to the SWP to unite with us to democratise the Broad Left we were told "elections don't matter, comrades". How ironic then that it is now over an election that the SWP have become so outraged!

With the union in chaos, facing a fourth election victory for the "Moderates", the left is disintegrating. Socialist Caucus supporters, especially those in *Socialist Organiser* urged the SWP not to stand independently in the elections and thus split the left vote. Instead we urged the SWP to join us in a fight for a truly broad left and opposition movement.

CPSA needs an opposition capable of ridding the union of the right wing, and able to organise rank and file activity. Such an organisation can only be built if it is non-sectarian, democratic, and broad-based. The CPSA desperately needs a re-alignment to create a body able to do all of this, one that can unite not just the left of BL84 and the serious independents and Broad Left, but one that draws in big new layers of members and activists who currently refuse to go anywhere near the existing groups.

We need such an organisation, and we need it now!

The offshore 'hook up' agreement: a lousy deal

In last week's *SO* we reported that the national union officials for the offshore oil and gas industry have signed a new 'hook up' agreement with the bosses. This article, from the offshore workers' paper *Blow Out* explains what's wrong with the agreement.

The Offshore Construction Agreement, known as the "hook up" agreement, was for years a one-sided deal that protected the oil companies when they were most vulnerable.

They got industrial peace during the construction of the production platforms in the crucial period prior to "first oil". In return a small minority of the offshore workforce were temporarily granted recognition for their unions. They got representation by their shop stewards, access to grievance

procedures, and a marginally better pay and conditions package.

Once the oil was flowing, this small minority then reverted to the same deal as the rest of the offshore workforce. They got whatever pay and conditions the oil companies allowed their employers to impose on them.

In January last year the unions withdrew from this rotten arrangement under direct pressure from the offshore workers organised around the OILC. This divisive arrangement gone, the way was clear to unite large sections of the workforce behind the struggle for the "Continental Shelf Agreement".

The result was unprecedented strikes and occupations that united well over 10,000 workers on over a hundred separate installations. Workers from every sector of our industry, except exploration drilling, participated.

NALGO Broad Left

Out of the frying pan...

By Dion D'Silva, Wandsworth NALGO

Nearly 120 people turned up to the NALGO Broad Left conference on "No Poll Tax, No Cuts". The numbers were well down on the last, exceptional, conference where the SWP took over the Broad Left from *Militant* supporters.

The first speaker introduced the morning discussion on the cuts by talking of a "rising tide of radicalisation" since the Gulf War. He also proclaimed that the Broad Left was in no shape to challenge the leadership of NALGO. It was then decided that motions would not be taken — probably because they would ask the leadership of the Broad Left to do things.

The afternoon was even more disastrous. A discussion on the

Gulf War turned into a debate between Chris Harman of Socialist Worker and Jeremy Corbyn and a Labour councillor on building a "socialist alternative".

Socialist Organiser supporters argued that we should demand the NALGO leadership co-ordinates and organises national action against the cuts. If they don't, the Broad Left should — our suggestion was to organise a national demonstration against the cuts and in support of public services at the Tory Party conference. Such an idea would have tremendous backing across a whole range of branches and sections of NALGO.

But then again, why would an independent activist be interested if there is no real debate about organising within NALGO, or discussing issues vital to NALGO members specifically. All you are told is to join the SWP. Even a *Militant*-controlled Broad Left made attempts to talk about union issues — but not this one!

Tube workers: vote yes

Tube workers are set to ballot this week for industrial action against 1,800 threatened job losses.

All London Underground Ltd workers are under threat from this cuts package which will hit the jobs of crews, station staff and maintenance workers.

In addition, management are trying to force through the strings defeated by the unofficial strikes in '86: flexible shifts and variable meal breaks.

They have made it clear that there will be no compensation for the loss of rostered earnings.

The London Underground council of the RMT (previously the NUR) have predicted a big 'yes' vote. What is needed is to quickly translate that into effective action.

Go for all-out action! It's the quickest and easiest way to win.

Rebuild the unofficial structures from '89.

SOCIALIST

ORGANISER

NUT Conference:

Yes, boycott these tests!

By Pat Murphy

The NUT's Easter Conference at Scarborough was nothing like as radical as

press reporting suggested, but it was certainly very uncomfortable for the union executive.

The left in the NUT is very strong, and probably one of the

best organised and politicised in the trade union movement. After this week we have much to build on.

Despite the continuing attacks on education made by a Tory Cabinet who send their kids to private schools, our union leadership concentrated again on avoiding, or watering down, any calls to action.

They argued for "the patient process of winning over public opinion", "persuading the government", but, above all, waiting for a general election.

It has to be said there were a number of questions facing teachers. They were successful in persuading delegates there is little prospect of action over salaries yet again, even though the policy passed promised strike action "when and if appropriate".

Socialist Organiser supporter Liam Conway focused on this phrase when he argued for action on salaries: "When and if appropriate means only one thing in the language of the NUT leadership. It means never."

The decision not to act on salaries was not typical of the conference. For example, the union reaffirmed its commitment to strike action to resist redundancies.

The most urgent question for ordinary teachers, however, was the decision to boycott the Standard Assessment Tests (SATs) imposed by the government on primary school children.

The anger against these tests surprised even the left. It is partly a matter of conditions of service. The extra work load is tremendous, and while teachers assess an individual child, over 25 other children are completely without attention.

But it is also a matter of education policy; tests are designed to re-introduce rigid competition and pressure on the youngest of children.

But the NUT leaders won't fight even on this: they ended conference by giving each delegate a leaflet warning them not to take immediate action against tests.

USSR: Striking miners say: elections now!

Prices in Russia went up by an average of 60% on 2 April. This can only stoke up the widespread unrest in the USSR, a spectacular example of which right now is the miners' strike.

In the past the greatest working class struggles have been triggered in Stalinist states by government price rises: Solidarnosc itself was initially a movement against such a decision.

The price rises are a savage, politically determined attack on the working class in the USSR.

Averages tell you very little. The price of meat and bread has increased by 300%. Eggs, tea and cooking oil have gone up by 200%. Millions will suffer greatly as a result. The least well off, there are here, will suffer most of all.

Official statistics show that 40 million people live in poverty. These latest increases will mean that these and others on fixed incomes, like pensioners, will be pushed right into destitution.

In order to beat the rises people have been hoarding. Queues have been even longer than usual as people attempt to get a share of what little is available.

Outside the expensive 'markets', the state food stores only had left pomegranate juice, Turkish tea and cured sturgeon, salmon and red caviar (at exorbitant prices) on Easter Monday.

Gorbachev will be anxiously awaiting the response on the streets to these latest price rises. But his Prime Minister Valentin Pavlov will be pre-occupied with the striking coal miners he is due to meet as we go to press.

New mines are still joining the strike which has been going for more than a month.

In all, 47 mines have stopped in the Ukraine, 11 out of 13 Vorkuta mines are participating, with 6 fully idle. All five mines of the Intaogol concern are out and rallied in the city of Inta last Sunday.

In the Kuzbass 44 out of 75 mines were at a standstill, and eight mines worked without loading coal.

In Sverdlovsk four out of five bauxite mines stopped working and began a one-day strike on 2 April. The Sverdlovsk strike committee are demanding management adopt a programme for social protection of workers, cut managerial personnel and remove the Communist Party committee from the production grounds.

Common to all the striking mine

regions have been political demands. These include demands for Gorbachev's resignation, national Presidential elections in 1991, and early elections to the all union parliament.

They were betrayed by Gorbachev, who made big promises after their last strikes in 1990: now the miners are prepared to take stronger action to ensure their demands are met.

Last Saturday Kuzbass representatives told the Russian Congress that the strike would be prolonged if they refused to debate the plan for free elections for a Russian President.

On Monday Anatoly Moliga from Kuzbass told the Congress that miners are prepared to flood the pits.

"The increasingly desperate rhetoric used by Gorbachev and the CP apparatus is designed to both stiffen the army's resolve...and...to intimidate the opposition and browbeat the striking miners."

In the Donbass, the second biggest coalfield, the miners are threatening to widen the strike by pulling out maintenance teams.

The miners have already made some progress. At the beginning of the strike Gorbachev refused to let any government official even meet the miners. Since then a steady trickle of lower and middle level ministers have met them. Now it's Pavlov's turn.

The cost of the strike is such that Gorbachev can't afford to just let it go on indefinitely.

Addressing a meeting of Army officers over Easter, Gorbachev said that his opponents were trying to "destabilise society, to shake, weaken and even destroy our constitutional structures."

At the same time the Politburo denounced the opposition as "destructive forces" who were using the strike calls to undermine Soviet society.



The increasingly desperate rhetoric used by Gorbachev and the CP apparatus is designed to both stiffen the army's resolve if they are needed, against the miners and others, and, secondly, to intimidate the opposition and browbeat the striking miners.

Last week's mobilisation of 50,000 troops in the capital was one manifestation of this strategy.

Daily the political climate heats up in Russia.

Georgia is now the fourth

republic to vote for independence.

Yeltsin's supporters turn out 500,000 onto Moscow's streets to call for Gorbachev's resignation.

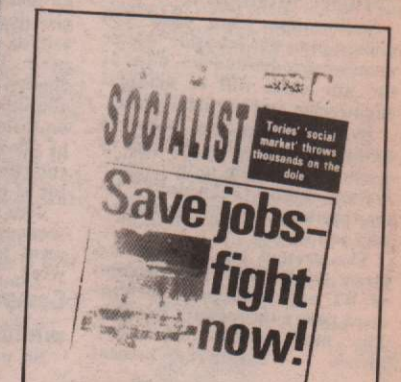
The army is given policing rights in Moscow and puts on a show of strength. Miners threaten to intensify the strikes.

On top of this meat, bread, eggs and tea all skyrocket in price, if you can find any to buy. Gorbachev has just poured petrol on the fires which were already half out of control.

CPSA activist jailed

CPSA activist and branch secretary of Newcastle CITSA branch, Ian Thompson, was jailed for two months last week for non-payment of the poll tax.

Ian is serving his sentence at Durham Prison. CPSA branches and members should send messages of solidarity to Ian at the Prison and also call a CPSA NEC to publicise Ian's case, and ensure he is defended from any possible victimisation.



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