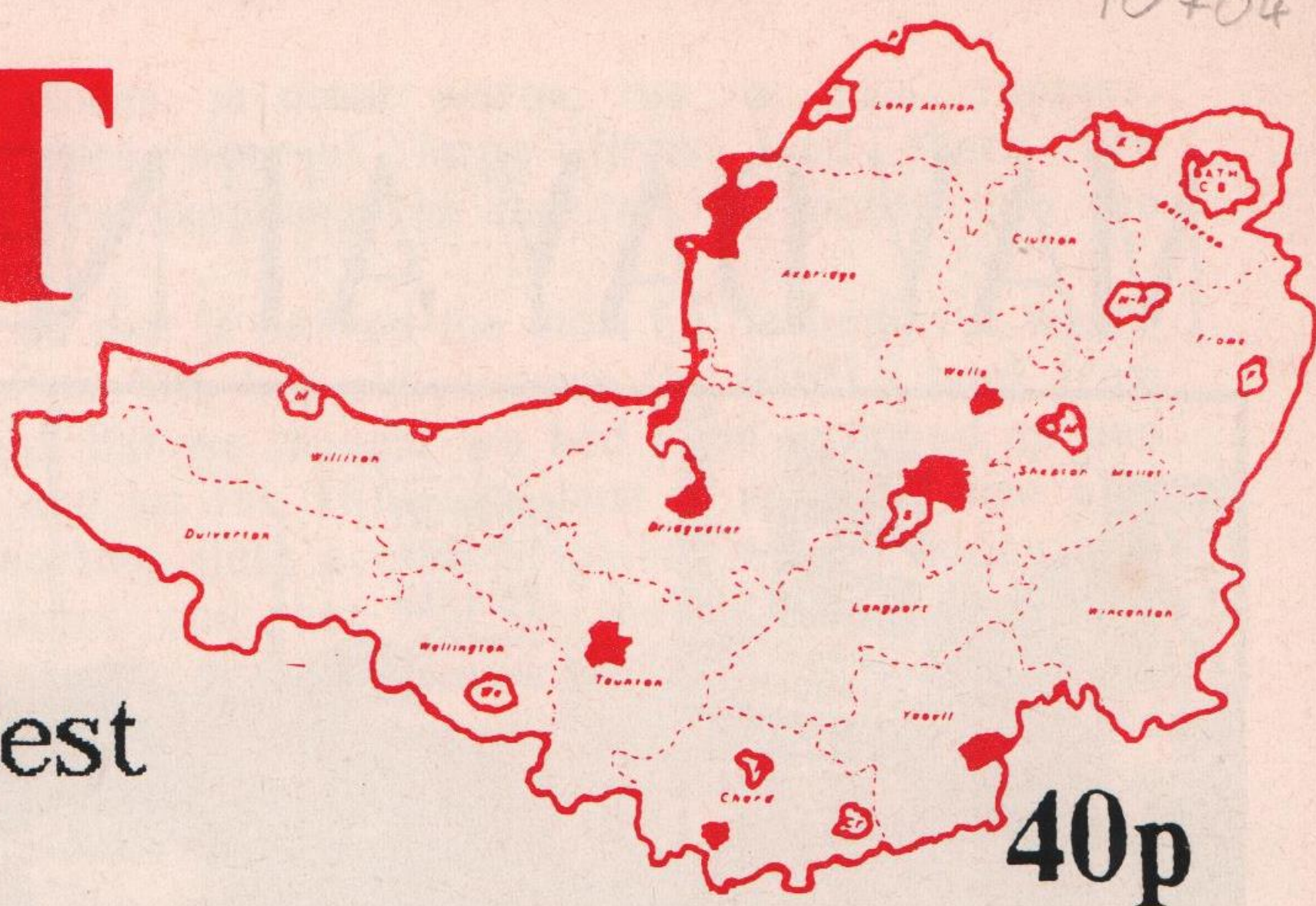
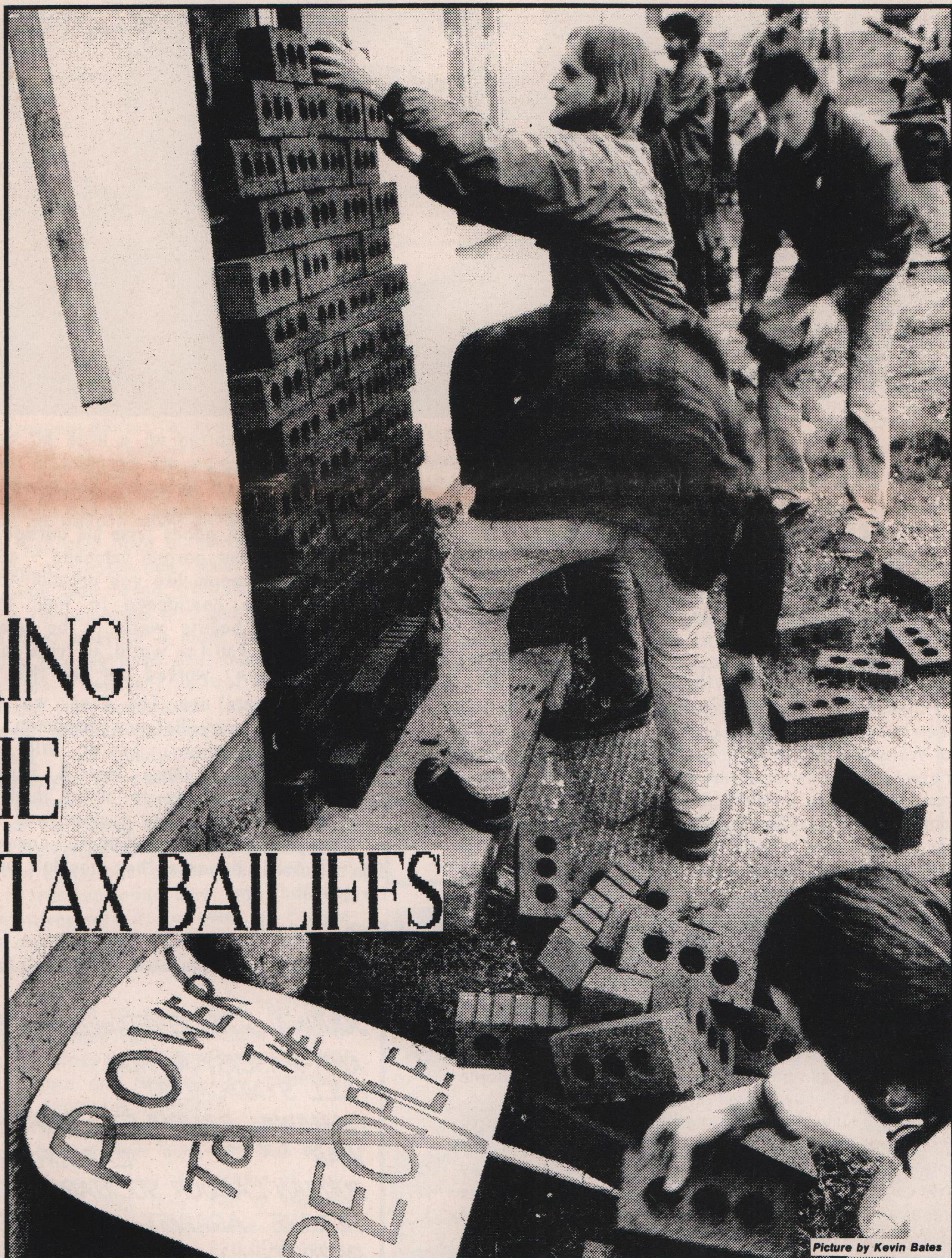


SOMERSET CLARION

A Socialist Journal for the South-West
July 1991



BRICKING
UP THE
POLL TAX BAILIFFS



Picture by Kevin Bates

SOMERSET WORKERS CELEBRATE MAY DAY

MAY DAY AT NEMPNETT THRUBWELL



Protesters gather outside Mr Roche's house

Nempnett bailiff misses the action

Nempnett Thrubwell has never seen anything like it - the massed banners of about 80 chanting protesters, picketing the house of bailiff John Roach. The idea had been to end a May Day ramble, in memory of local socialist Ambrose Holman, by presenting Mr Roach with a distress notice for possession of his goods, in the name of the people.

However, Mr Roach, whose company Roach & Co has been handling possession orders on poll tax non-payers for Wansdyke and Bristol councils, did not appear when the picket leaders knocked at his door. His non-appearance must have been something of an anti-climax for the ramblers, but once the chanting and the shouting had run out of steam, they held the attention of local spectators by letting off fireworks, bricking up the front door, and holding a mock auction of the contents of the garage.

Roach & Co's reaction to all this is summarized below, but what did the organisers, Somerset Community Defence Campaign and the Bridgwater Anti-Poll Tax Union think of the event?

Glen Burrows, a leading member of both groups and a Sedgemoor district councillor until 2nd May (she didn't seek re-election) commented: "I thought it was a very disciplined demonstration, given the anger that people feel, and I was pleased that no damage was done."

"I thought it was a very successful way of giving people confidence about handling bailiffs. The use of bailiffs by councils is meant to frighten people into paying money they can't afford to pay. It really is futile for councils to be spending all this money chasing people who will not be able to pay. In the Bridgwater Anti-Poll Tax Union, we are calling for an amnesty and negotiations with non-payers on an individual basis - this would be more cost-effective for the councils."

Taken from the Chew Valley Gazette, published by Bill Carruthers

The bailiff war hotted up a little bit on May 1st, when a small army of non-payers marched on the home of the head of Roach & Co. at Nempnett Thrubwell near Chew Magna, and surrounded his house, bricked up his front door & held a mock auction of goods from his garage. Tut, tut, Mr Roach, fancy leaving your garage unlocked - none of us would do that, not with people like you around! Actions like this help to give people confidence to fight the bailiffs. In the beginning, the bailiffs were to be used as the pit bull terriers of the Poll Tax world, to frighten people into paying up. It just hasn't worked out like that, now people know what their rights are. The event was organised by the Somerset Community Defence Campaign, and supported by local APTU members, Exeter WRP, Taunton Militant supporters, Bristol Class War & Bristol Direct Action Movement - our thanks to all of them for making it a memorable May Day. The rumour was that some of our more sophisticated revolutionary comrades from Bristol didn't make it because they couldn't pronounce Nempnett Thrubwell!

Glen Burrows

JOURNALS RECEIVED (available for loan)

ANTI-FASCIST ACTION

HULL SYNDICALIST

DAM/IWA PAMPHLET 'FIGHTING THE CLASS WAR'

LABOUR BRIEFING

IRANIAN LABOUR SOLIDARITY CAMPAIGN

LEAGUE AGAINST CRUEL SPORTS ANNUAL REPORT

COUNTER INFORMATION

HACKNEY AGAINST THE CUTS

WESSEX NEWS Bournemouth Labour Party

REFUSE & RESIST (Poll Tax)

NORMAN LAWS: POLITICAL PRISONER

71 year old Norman was jailed for two months on Wednesday 17th May 1991 at South Shields on Tyneside for refusing to pay the Tory government's Poll Tax. The Council that jailed him is a Labour Council, and the Chair of the Bench at the Magistrates Court was a retired full-time union official and Labour Party member. Norman is a life-long socialist and active campaigner and trades council delegate. This letter was written in reply to one written by Councillor Brian Smedley (Sedgemoor DC) on behalf of Bridgwater Anti-Poll Tax Union:

DEAR BRIAN

Thank you for your interesting letter. It's good to know that Labour Councillors somewhere have the responsibility and the guts to oppose this evil, vicious Tory legislation.

My attitude, which I told the court, was to conduct a campaign of civil disobedience against what I called Maggie Thatcher's war against the working class. If she (or her collaborators) want a battle we will provide the opposition, 14 million of us who won't be scared of her minions in Councils and Courts. I always maintained that OAPs should lead the battle. They were better placed to put themselves in the front line because of their relative freedom from liabilities (responsibilities) at home - children grown up and able to fend for themselves etc. Also, if they were harassed by jail threats this would have a greater damaging effect on the authorities. A few more like me, for instance, and the balloon could go up.

I'm pleased to hear you also have a thriving Anti Poll Tax Union locally. So long as people don't think the battle is over. We still have some way to go. Poll Tax is dead, maybe, but we still have to incinerate it - and the Tories along with it. Next we must operate a local Income Tax (the continental countries already have one) based purely on the ability to pay. This is where I retreat somewhat from your proposal of old rate valuations. These worked really in similar manner, in their undemocratic actions against the working class - no 'ability factor' whatever. None of the proposals by any of the parties are any better!

We should not be prepared to settle for half a loaf when we have come so far along the road to demand sensible socialist plans. Actually Paddy Ashdown (God help us) is the only one who officially put forward this idea, but of course he pinched it from someone else, and the silly sods are letting him get away with it. However, all Parties know the ropes on that one, but it is obviously anathema to them all - as good capitalists - Ramshackle MacKinnock included.

But obviously there will be no peace until this large minority (and history shows when such a sizeable body of the population refuses to accept such legislation, it must be removed from the statute and replaced by something agreeable to that body of people) is appeased.

My own plan, and it's free for any of those jokers who are short of a decent policy of their own, lets 90% or so of the workers off the hook completely. An income of, say, £200 and under per head is tax free. For a working couple that means £400 coming into the house tax free (total £10,000 per annum single worker; £20,000 for a working couple - or Personal Allowance £10,000 if you want it expressed that way) That's my idea of socialism for starters. Then a steepening escalation, so that by the time we have £100,000 per head income they fork out £6,

000 per annum. In other words, the fat cats, ruppies, Managing Directors of large firms (and there are hundreds) are supplying the bulk of the money into the Council kitty.

When all that is settled the main battle begins - where we left off in 1945 (we oldies were the REBELS back from the forces). But we thought we had it all wrapped up and sat back and let the TRAITORS bust it up. This time only red hot working class socialist fighters will be acceptable as candidates and then roll on the BRAVE NEW WORLD (that'll scare the pants off Kinnock)

A letter from a lady in Whitby: "I am a 51 year old housewife who is taking the same stand (as me). I am waiting to come and join you in jail." Great stuff! Salt of the earth. She has more guts than all our Council rolled together. Housewife? SHE'S A BLOODY ANGEL!

That's only one of 70 letters received. How can we lose?

NORMAN LAWS
CIVIL PRISONER CKO163
HM PRISON, OLD ELVET

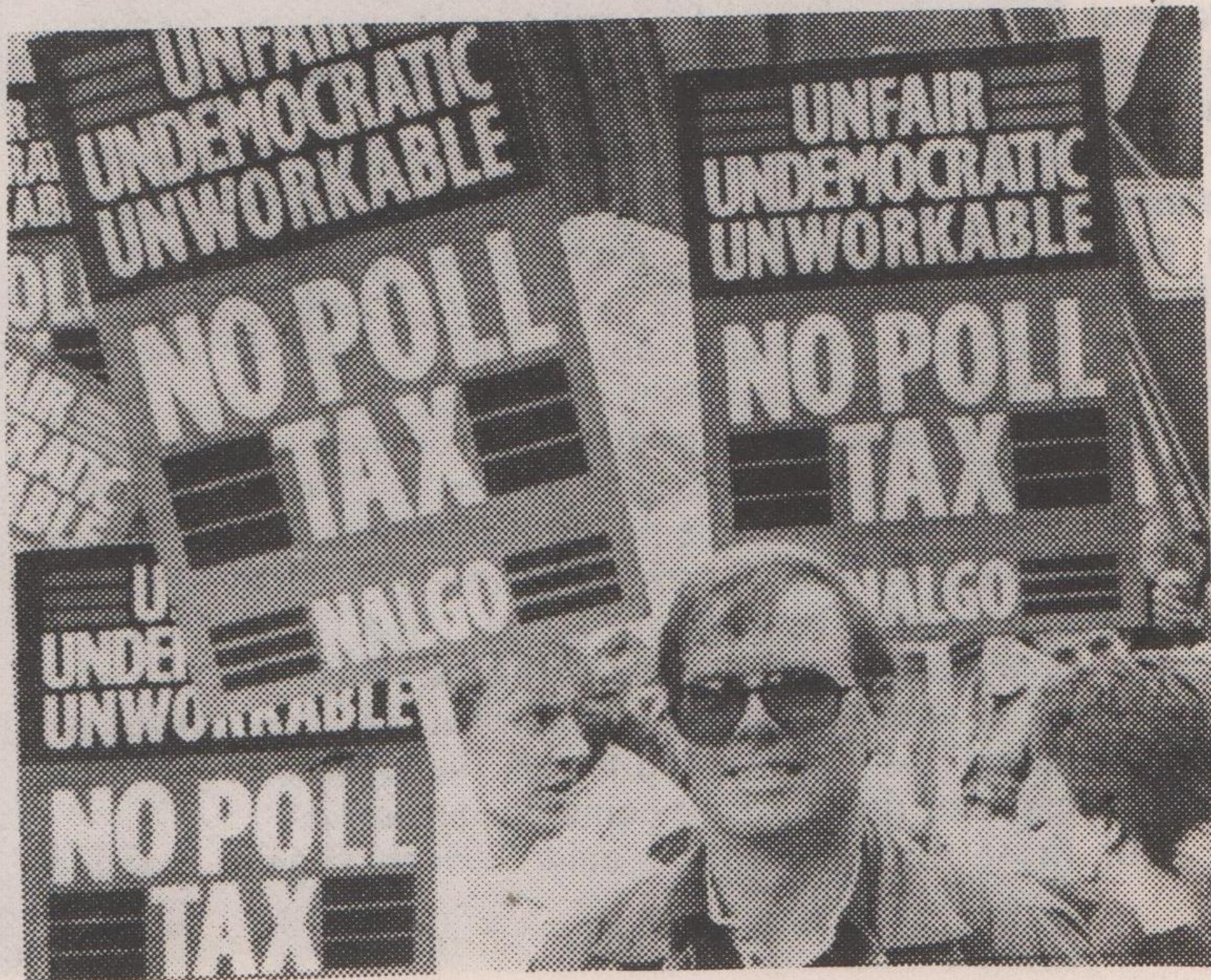
DURHAM DH1 3HU

POLL TAX PRISONERS

25 people arrested at anti-poll tax demonstrations are now serving sentences of up to 4 years. The three longest sentences have been given to 2 black people (3 years) & a traveller (4 years). Prisoners, those still facing trial like the Colchester 13, & all those who will be imprisoned for non-payment deserve our full support. Send them a letter from you /your group/union branch/etc

For information on prison pickets, prisoners' addresses etc contact:

TSDC POLL TAX PRISONER GROUP
c/o ROOM 205
PANTHER HOUSE
38 MOUNT PLEASANT
LONDON WC1X 0AP



TAUNTON ANTI-POLL TAX UNION

BACK TO APRIL 1990

On 1st April 1990 the Poll Tax became operative. What a significant date! And just who has the April Fool turned out to be? Poll Tax protestors marked the first introduction in several memorable ways.

At dusk we lit a huge beacon bonfire high on the Blackdown Hills, near Wellington Monument. Supporters had worked hard all afternoon to build it, & the lighting ceremony was filmed by a TV crew. Later they went to a distant village church tower for a long shot. There were other beacons burning in the South West that night, but our original plan to link them up failed, as we were not given permission to use traditional beacon sites. I guess we were not Establishment enough! The sites are mainly used for royal & state celebrations. Roll on the day that beacons burn to celebrate a peaceful socialist revolution.

Some of us sped back to Taunton to join in a candle-lit, all-night vigil outside the Council offices. In the event it was flood-lit, which dimmed our dozens of candles a little, but enabled the police to keep a 'friendly' eye on us. We had a constant stream of visitors, including the police, some in passing, while others brought us flasks of tea, coffee and sandwiches. A local singer brought his guitar & performed for an hour or two, while flowers were planted in & around the flower beds, reminding me of the December Women's gatherings at Greenham Common.

Our friendly TV crew had earlier filmed a mock-up of us getting into our sleeping bags, so that they could go home to bed. However, there was little sleep for us that night, for just as we were attempting it, a wardrobe-sized box on legs was silhouetted against the floodlighting. It advanced until we could distinguish a bearded young man with the box strapped to his back. Letting it down he casually greeted us, & began to set up house efficiently, as though it was a commonplace procedure. From the box appeared a sleeping bag & a pillow, an ingenious home-made fire &/or grill, wood, matches, food, including a Christmas pudding, a giant candle in a flower pot & a book.

We watched in fascination as he assembled the fire, made from an old chemicals drum retrieved from the dump. Then he calmly announced as he sat on it, that he was going to read to us. He read about gatherings of the unemployed & dispossessed in Trafalgar Square, about attacks & manoeuvres by the police & the rich & powerful. Some of us had been at the Poll Tax demonstration in Trafalgar Square the day before, & the readings were painfully close to experience. The book turned out to be 'News From Nowhere' by William Morris. The reader retreated into his house, having lit his fire & put his pudding on the side grill to heat up for breakfast. Several people went on forays to collect waste wood from skips, which kept the fire burning all night & the next day.

It rained sporadically through the night, but with a bit of trimming the candles kept burning. Alan Debenham produced a plastic car cover & we managed to spread it over 10 sleeping bags. One homeless man stayed with us all night, but he wouldn't get under cover. He sat on a low wall, saying he was used to roughing it.

The next morning we leafletted the council employees as they arrived for work, asking them not to collect the Poll Tax. A couple of officials said they had heard about us on local radio as they drove to work. They actually said we were brave people, but some workers tried to hurry past & some were downright hostile. The media returned for interviews & photographs of bill burning & the cardboard 'house'. During the day we leafletted the public, arguing for non-payment so that the tax could be defeated.

Of those who took part, only 2 were regular political

One year on

activists. The other 10, all under 30, had never protested publicly before. Therefore we had plenty to talk about through the night. Often, when people try to sum up the activity of a group or an individual & can point to no immediate tangible results, they conclude that the activity was a failure. But how can you count all the circles made by a stone when you toss it into the water?

PEGGY WALKER

TAUNTON ANTI POLL TAX UNION

Dear Clarion

I am writing to say that, owing to my mother not being able to pay her Poll Tax, because as a pensioner she just can't afford it, I had a visit from the bailiffs Roach & Co, of Bristol. Owing to urgent work being done at the front of the house, the workmen were in & out of the porch & front door.

The property is ours. Now I was given to understand that Taunton Deane Council said the bailiffs were not to go in to any pensioners, or blind or disabled people, or to harass them. Now I'm telling you the bailiff was in the wrong as he had no right to enter my property as he did. He came into my porchway. He must have seen his opportunity to get in the door while the workmen were in & out of the door.

Now the bailiff didn't identify himself, and if I hadn't asked him who the hell he was I wouldn't have known. All I can say is the next time they come, which will be some time next week, I shall be ready for them. Taunton Deane Council & the bailiffs will be sorry they started this, because quite clearly the bailiffs are operating outside the Taunton deane Council guidelines & the code of practice.

Now everybody who is in the same position as me I urge them to be on their guard, keep all windows & doors locked & curtains pulled so that the bailiffs can't look in their windows.

Yours sincerely,

BARRY DAVIES, SECRETARY
TAUNTON DEANE APTU

Bailiffs have since returned to the Davies' home. Mrs Davies & her husband, who is blind, told them to clear off, and they did! The vehicle they used was a red van, registration H178 BEV - so, watch out! If you see any bailiffs please note registration numbers & let the Clarion & your local APTU know

Bridgwater non-payers have received threatening letters from Madagans, but no visits reported yet. Bridgwater APTU managed to get the bailiffs called off a disabled pensioner who has recently had a stroke. Sedgemoor District Council, like Taunton Deane, has a code of conduct, but will ignore it if we don't insist they enforce it. This ought to be a job for councillors! Councillors Smedley & MacCausland, both Bridgwater APTU members have put a motion to the next Sedgemoor meeting, calling for the use of bailiffs to be discontinued. There will be a lobby of the meeting on June 26th - all welcome - ring 0278 459181 for details.

SOCIALISM OR ANARCHISM?

The animal rights debate

In reply to my letter "Why we should be green socialists" Angie Heritage argues that "...anarchism, not socialism, is the quickest route to human & social liberation". The main point of my letter was to argue that under capitalism the environment will always deteriorate.

I will not reiterate the arguments against the consumerist approach to saving the environment, except to say that it will not get rid of the root cause of many problems, including environmental: a society where production is based on profit rather than need. Despite the above quote, Angie seems to have faith in the consumerist approach when she says "...if people don't use recycled paper now we soon won't have a planet left..". Incidentally I would defend any gains for the oppressed & exploited under capitalism, including the limited greening of capitalists by buying green products. I am a vegan.

SOCIALISM OR ANARCHISM?

Let us assume that Angie agrees that we cannot save the environment under capitalism. The argument then becomes one between 'socialism' or 'anarchism'. The first step in getting rid of socialism is to smash the state that upholds it. Given the present strength & sophistication of the state, this task alone requires strong organisation. History has shown that localised peasant-based movements, which merely wanted rid of state interference rather than to build a new society have failed.

ATOMISED WORLD

What of a post-revolutionary situation? It would seem that Angie's 'anarchism' is an atomised world of small, localised subsistence farms. She says she wants people to take control of their own lives, but in order to do this there needs to be a high level of international organisation of production & an advancement of technology. If the goal is a society free of exploitation (from each according to their ability, to each according to their need) then international means of production, communication & distribution are necessary.

Only through democratic planning of production can the world's resources be used efficiently to meet our needs. The basis of civilisation is interdependence, not subsistence, so, contrary to Angie's bourgeois individualism, we DO need to delegate our lives to each other. Angie is correctly wary of tendencies towards oligarchy, & democracy must be upheld in a post-revolutionary society, but this would not be possible in an atomised world.

TECHNOLOGY USED FOR NEED

Angie assumes that because technology is misused under capitalism it will always be misused. We should realise that technology must be used for need, & it has no limits. If we are to truly control our own lives then we must develop technology to free ourselves from the hazards & toil of nature. A factory can still produce things whether it is worked by people or robots. Angie quotes the fact that western farming methods have destroyed soil as a reason for opposing high technology. Yet she goes on to illustrate the better method of forest farming. This shows that we can understand nature & organise production accordingly. We are a part of nature (we have to eat), but nature is not a sacred thing, it is an accident. We are born into the world like being thrown in at the deep end & forced to sink or swim. Nature makes no conscious effort to support life, only we can do that. Humans have the ability to manipulate &, through this, understand nature, & only we can save the planet. But this doesn't mean a return to subsistence farming. Angie is right in saying "...we can't wait for some fantasy Nirvana to arrive." Instead, we have to MAKE IT HAPPEN!

Angie quotes Bakunin saying that he wanted a society based on "...the free federation of all workers (not just peasants) liberated from the yoke of the state." The only problem with this is that it doesn't go far enough! I would also like to be liberated from the yoke of toil & the hazards of nature.

JOHN KIPLING

Golcar, Huddersfield



THE ROUTE TO RUIN

ENVIRONMENTAL SHORT-TERMISM



Lack of investment in public transport has already caused massive traffic congestion. Now the government plans further moves to put people and freight on the roads.

SHORT-TERMISM - ROUTE TO ENVIRONMENTAL RUIN

The car has become, we all know though are reluctant to admit, an environmental menace. Especially the company car. Why? Because the tax benefits afforded the 3½ million company cars encourage their use in some cases when it would be more convenient, & certainly more environment friendly, for their drivers to travel by rail or coach. Incidentally, those tax benefits amount to a charge on the average family of some £150 a year. Consider then that 1 gallon of petrol pumps 1250 gallons of carbon dioxide, the main global warming gas, into the atmosphere; that UK CO₂ emissions from transport have risen by 33% in the last 10 years & are increasing by 4% annually.

Certainly catalytic converters neutralise poisonous fumes like carbon monoxide & nitrous oxide at the point of traffic, but NOT Co₂, which joins such emissions from industry & other sources in the upper atmosphere. Result - sea levels rise by 2 millimetres a year, & so in consequence do the millions that are affected by floods.

HUMAN ERROR IS INEVITABLE

In the profligate use of energy the USA tops the league, using over 40% for its 6% of the world's population. because fossil fuel sources are finite, since the war nuclear power has been seen by many as the answer, especially in France. Apart from being economically non-viable, this I believe is a dangerous delusion. Chernobyl & other disasters (some covered up for years) demonstrate that nuclear power is the most hazardous source of power ever invented. Over time, for example, human error causing accidents is inevitable. Moreover the twin problems still unresolved are (a) the safe transport & final disposal of nuclear waste & (b) the ultimate decommissioning of nuclear power stations - a process requiring decades of time & millions of pounds. In any case, respected research bodies have found that energy conservation (house insulation & so on) is 7 times more cost-effective than supply options such as nuclear power.

COAL IS NOT THE ANSWER

Coal, which provides a third of our primary energy use, has a dismal environmental record. The UK alone discharges 3.6 million tonnes of sulphur, the main cause of acid rain, into the atmosphere annually, at least half from coal burnt in power stations. Apart from the enormous damage done in Europe, acid rain has harmed some 450 million of our trees, including 29 million oaks. Scrubbing the flue gases to remove sulphur (but not CO₂, unfortunately) could be a partial answer. The fact that the government is dragging its feet on this process I see as revealing its deplorable lack of environmental conscience.

ALTERNATIVE ENERGY PRODUCTION

So what of the alternatives? The more sustainable means of producing energy? Unfortunately their development is shamefully hindered by the present government's obsessive reliance on the free market. Such short-termism is almost certainly leading to long-term disaster. The Labour Party should declare NOW that it will take vigorous & effective steps to develop such resources as wind, wave & solar power. It should also firmly back existing technologies to convert almost all the 85% local authority waste now going into landfill into useful substitutes like peat substitute.

A word, finally, about the Gulf War. Before this appalling carnage of human beings started, a number of us publicly warned that the war could lead to an environmental catastrophe of horrendous proportions. We are left with no joy at being proved right, only a great sadness.

STAN HAYWARD

Founder member Nailsea Environmental Action Group
Chair, Ark in Avon

UNSHACKLE THE UNIONS

Close on 200 trades unionists attended this event, organised by the Socialist Movement Trade Union Committee. Discussions were conducted in a friendly, intelligent and socialist spirit which enabled delegates to take heart at each other's confidence and fighting spirit, in the face of hostile Tories in government, vicious employers determined to use the new Employment Act to their best advantage, and a very poor labour movement leadership.

Opening speakers were Tony Benn, who charted the political background to the 1990 Employment Act; John Hendy QC, a socialist lawyer who gave details of all the Tory anti-union laws; and Jeff Revell, an RMT shop steward on the London Underground, whose members were being balloted for strike action against job cuts. Jeff's address was witty, fiery and very sharp against both LU management and trade union leaders. The 1990 Employment Act was very much fashioned with the recent successful tube strike in mind, so it was educational to hear someone who represents the new rank and file leadership that was thrown up by the dispute.

Jeff said that all RMT members on the Underground had had letters from management asking them all to sign an undertaking 'never to strike again', most of which ended up in the bin or never returned. Jeff also said that one of the worst managers they had to face was Dennis Tunnicliffe, who is a Labour Party member!

At the workshop on Trade Union Democracy, activists from a dozen or more unions talked about how some union structures hinder the fightback against the anti-union laws. The pros and cons of workplace versus postal ballots were discussed, as were the various mergers that are taking place. There was a feeling that it was independent Branch, shop stewards and activists' involvement which enabled unions to fight back effectively.

During the lunch break I sat in on a meeting of activists who were trying to sort out a pretty grim situation in local government. Shop stewards wishing to fight back against Poll Tax cuts were now, unlike four or five years ago, getting no help at all from the Labour Councils. Quite a few good socialist Trade Union Support Units, such as Hackney, face cutbacks or closure because of the ending of Council grants. School staff are being badly hit; a NATFHE member said his members had been told to sign new contracts which only paid them for 30 hours a week and 170 days a year. John Laing from Hackney TU Support Unit said that only 2000 had struck against the Council

cuts, out of a local workforce of 15,000, but they were still trying to build a co-ordinated London Local Government Unions fightback across the whole of London, if possible involving other public sector unions like the transport workers. A NALGO delegate said that 50,000 local government jobs were planned to go this year alone in the London region.

The afternoon workshop looked in detail at the 1990 Act and how it might be fought. There was a strong feeling that it was the spontaneous strike action of ordinary members to defend wages, conditions or their own union officials that was the key. I spoke about the situation at Liverpool Sorting Office where, because of the strength of feeling, the Post Office had not tried to discipline UCW Branch Officials over the sympathetic strike action taken in March against the sacking of two NCU members.

The final session also had some good speakers, but, as usual, there were far too many speakers, each trying to maximise, in a short time, support for their dispute. Outstanding were Ronnie MacDonald from the unofficial oil workers committee OILC; Anna Wagstaffe from Pergamon Press NUJ, still fighting Maxwell; Kim Moody who edits an American trade union newspaper; and finally Mickey Fenn, victimised Tilbury docker and former TGWU steward, who brought us up to date on the Tilbury Dockers Industrial Tribunal, where 152 TGWU dockers are claiming unfair dismissal for trade union activities during the 1989 strike. Finally we heard from Ibdulla, an Iranian oil worker who spoke of a recent strike in Iran where the union had secured victory on most of their demands.

The conference was successful in bringing together a large number of socialists and mainly young activists committed to fighting this vicious Act. The key to fighting it was agreed to be not just a Labour Government repealing it but rank and file action NOW.

DAVE CHAPPLE

Delegate from Bridgwater Trades Union Council
To find out more about the Socialist Movement
Trade Union Committee write to Carolyn
Sikorski, 53a Geere Road, London E15

SOUTH WEST TUC

The Annual General Meeting of the South-West TUC, held in Taunton in April, agreed a motion which severely attacked the national TUC for its attacks on Trades Councils. The TUC, without consultation, recently abolished the Annual Conference of Trades Councils and the County Association of Trades Councils, as well as cutting off funding to local Unemployed Centres. In addition a radical motion from St Austell Trades Council was passed, calling for a guaranteed seat for one Trades Council delegate on the General Council of the TUC. The unity on this motion reflects the disgust that Trades Council members feel for the TUC because of its attacks on the Trades Councils, which provide an invaluable local voice for trades unions. Before the vote was taken, the Executive Committee of the South-West TUC, realising how radical and independent the motion was, asked for remittance. The seconder of the motion was willing to remit, but Brother Tom Smale, the hero of the hour, rose to refuse remission & gave a passionate speech, going back to the 1930s when St Austell Trades Council had given support to the hunger marchers against the advice of the TUC and Labour Party. After this, the motion was carried with only a dozen against, and, for a few moments, the South-West TUC flowered into a brief and useful life.



Part timers on the picket line at Jacob's biscuits

SOMERSET WORKERS' HISTORY

FRANK CHING OF PENSFORD

Gallipoli veteran Frank Ching (aged 92) made the front pages of several national newspapers on ANZAC day in 1990 when he met Maggie Thatcher and complained to the media about the poll tax. Frank now lives in High Wycombe with his third wife, Anne, but he spent about 10 years in Pensford, either side of the First World War. His Chew Valley memories, including his time as a road mender, a miner and a well digger, have been recorded by Rowland Janes.

I was born in 1897 at Hurstborne Tarrant in Hampshire. In 1912, when I left school, a farm labourer only earned 10 shillings a week, so I left home and stayed with my brother in Stoke St Michael. After a while in the quarries at Holcombe working from 6 to 6 for 3 shillings a day, I joined my brother working on the roads, and then came to lodge in Pensford.

We worked the roads from Shepton to Oakhill, Farrington, Temple Cloud, Hallatrow, High Littleton, Pensford - only where it was bad. Above the Traveller's Rest there was a three-cornered piece where we used to park our big wooden hut on wheels, it had two bunk beds and a little range. We'd work from daybreak to about 5 o'clock. In those days there was no tarmac, the roads would come in steam wagons or horse and carts, after the quarry had put the rock through crushers grading it to 2½". You'd have a tined fork about about 12" wide and lay about a 2 or 3" depth of the 2½" stones, blue lias sometimes mixed with brown iron stone, then you'd roll it two or three times dry. Then you'd cover it with sand and spray that with water and brush it backwards and forwards with a stiff brush about 2" wide and make it into a kind of cement slurry then you'd roll that, see. There was three in a gang, my brother was the driver, I was the brush hand and another man, he used to come from Chilcompton, he used to drive the horse and water barrel with the spray. Charlie Price was the road superintendent, he used to stand with his hands behind his back and walk up and down, and if he didn't think it was correct, he'd make you go over it all again. Charlie was a good friend to me. Then I went into the pits at Bromley and went into lodgings with Mrs King at Salters Brook, they were a happy family, and make no mistake about it. They had a gramophone with all the old waltzes, I forget the names of them now, I learned to dance there. After the war I stayed with the Goodings, they were good company too, they used to have a little gig which carried 10 or 11 passengers, the footballers used to hire it. Then I went to lodge with Percy Windmill in that big house next to the Post Office, Degratton House, he was a big pigeon fancier

at the time. That's where I met Eliza Perry's daughter Hilda, they lived in The Nelson, opposite the Rising Sun. Eliza Perry was the only man in Pensford who went to the pit in a bowler hat, he was a lovely gentleman, and his wife, they was as good to me as my parents were. Me and Hilda got married in Pensford Church - I was broke when I got married!

When I started at Bromley I worked on number seam, that was 11". I got someone to make to my guss, and we used to have moleskin trousers. That was a tough job. I only used to weigh about 6 stone don't forget, then, but one of the reasons you went into the pit was you was more or less sure of the money, even it was wet. On the roads if you couldn't go out you didn't get paid. You had to walk from Pensford to Stanton Wick, then sometimes you could catch a lift on the cars on the tramway from Broad Oak to Bromley. I never tried to get a job at Pensford, that was a dangerous pit. They used to have three sets of pumps in that pit, one in reserve and two working, and if those pumps stopped, work had to stop. At Bromley, it was number 2 seam they used to use as an air course, I think, cause it had a good solid top and bottom. When the war broke out, numbers 4 and 5 were shut down, the government gave them a subsidy to produce coal so they opened the "muck vein". They got paid whether it was muck or whether it was coal. They used to send it across to Broad Oak (Pensford Colliery opened in 1913) and mix it with Broad Oak coal.

When the war started, Kerr Thompson, he was the vicar of Pensford, set up a little table by the little shop between the miners' hall & the bridge. After we'd come home from work, most of the boys used to gather round there on the bridge & talk to one another about football, or perhaps a dance they'd been to in Bristol. Kerr Thompson said "Come on you lads, Kitchener wants you in the army." We were taught to hate the Germans & the Kaiser, we didn't know what the war was about, we thought it'd be a glorious holiday. Now I know we fight for big business, not for our country.

When I came back to Pensford after the war I went to Bromley Pit, went to the office, & Durham was there. He says "Who are you?" I says well you ought to know me George, I used to work here. Oh, he says, there's no work for you. As a matter of fact we're standing off men. And as we were talking Sparkes the manager came in, & he says what's this young man doing in the office? And Durham said he used to work here. He says what's his name? I told him, he says who did you work with? Told him. Oh he says, put him on, if he's been in the war he deserves his job.

The rates of pay then was about 5/3d a shift, 1/3d a ton for a hewer, 1/1d a ton for hauling & a runner used to get 2½d a ton. My best week's pay was £5.0.1d, that was when I was on repair work. There was road there a thousand yards long & it had to be cleared & retimbered from one end to the other. George Flower & me took it on contract & were putting up 6 or 7 timbers a night. Management didn't like it. You'll get no

more than 2 sets of timbers a night after this he says, just enough to earn our day money. We never did finish that job!

I left the pits in 1924. My father was a well digger, he used to dig wells & clean out wells, & in 1924 the springs went very low that season & all the wells went dry in the villages along the Test valley, & I went to work with my father. Then I went back in the pits on nights for another few months. In 1926 my father had a contract to dig a well & was taken ill, & that's when I more or less left Pensford to do that job. At that time if there were any houses being built in those Hampshire villages, they all had to have a well, cause there was no water laid on.

I almost lost my life digging a well at Hursley Hill. I'll tell you when it was, it was the year when Blenheim won the Derby! I'd dug this well down about 45' & I was waiting for the bucket to come down. Most of that ground I was in wasn't exactly hard clay, you could dig it with a spade, there wasn't no sign of water in it, but it was damp so I ought to have known better. The bucket went up to the 2 men at the top & I was sort of

bracing myself to have a breather & I thought that's funny, my back's getting bloody wet, & I felt the ground sort of heaving in on me, so I shouted up, get that blinking bucket back a bit quick I said, this lot's going to cave in, & as I came out the whole bottom of the well subsided.

There's an art in digging a well, you don't dig a well in the middle, no, you dig a well in a corkscrew fashion. You take what you think is your limit, perhaps 6-9" depth, & you go round. You don't work outwards. Then every now & then you set 2 plum bobs on 2 nails to find out whether you're staying on line. You had to find the water as well, Jack Perry used to be able to douse, using a hazel branch, you could use other things but hazel was best, he helped me on several jobs.

There were only 6 of us British veterans flew out to the Dardanelles for this year's visit. Maggie Thatcher was photographed on all the front pages with us but she never said much to any of us. Tom King never even said a word. So I never had a chance to say anything about our Poll Tax - we've got to find another £400 each - it's invidious.

Roland Janes Pensford



THIS aerial picture gives an unusual view of Pensford and its famous viaduct that used to carry the railway from Bristol to Frome.

MARXISM & REVOLUTION

The article about Militant in the last issue of the Clarion, written by a member of the Workers' Revolutionary Party shows the amount of animosity there is between the various revolutionary groups. This makes many people think twice about having anything to do with these groups.

Also there seems to be an obsession with a rigid party structure. 'Democratic centralism' has been since proved to lead to undemocratic centralism, elitism, corruption & totalitarianism. Most marxists seem to be inflexible in their interpretations of marxist theory. It is important to remember that Marx died in 1883, & so some issues were never mentioned in his writings.

ANIMAL RIGHTS

This is often branded a trendy, middle-class issue. However, one only has to study the pharmaceutical industry to see a need for animal rights to be included in marxist theory. Nearly all drugs are tested on animals, but the results can be misleading, & dangerous drugs like thalidomide have had disastrous effects on human beings.

Animal experiments are unreliable but very cheap, especially as stolen pets are often used. So the animals suffer, the people suffer, & the drug companies make exceedingly good profits.

ENVIRONMENT

During Marx's lifetime there was some concern about pollution, such as the 1863 Alkali Act, but it has only been in recent years that the scale of destruction of the planet & its lifeforms has been realised. It is easy to point the finger at capitalism & its need for maximum growth, low

costs & high profits. Yet the Baltic Sea has been used as a dustbin by the Soviet Union, & Romania is one of the most polluted countries on earth.

There is a need for environmental policies to be genuinely taken on board by all political parties & factions. Obviously it is easier for revolutionary groups to put the planet before the profit & loss account, due to our ideological background.

RELIGION

Like many revolutionaries I am an atheist, but I know a few marxist christians. The religious hierarchy is just as corrupt & intolerant today as when Marx criticised it. However, in the last 100 or so years, many grass-roots christians have taken a political stance & have participated in civil disobedience & direct action.

In Central America the Catholic church lowerarchy often sides with the oppressed poor against capitalist slavery. In Nicaragua the marxist Sandinista government had 2 Catholic priests in its Cabinet, much to the anger of the Pope.

THE NICARAGUAN EXPERIENCE

Marx has been proved right that revolutions have to happen in developed countries first. The revolution in feudal Russia rapidly turned into a Stalinist nightmare, & US imperialism crushed the budding flower of Nicaraguan freedom.

In 1979 the US puppet Somoza was overthrown by the Sandinistas. Land was given to the peasants, infant mortality dropped & illiteracy was almost eradicated. The



The barricades go up . . . Workers protest against redundancies and government economic policy. General strike, July 1990. Nicaragua.

A reply to Geoff Barr of Exeter WRP

Sandinistas gained 66% of the votes in the 1984 election which was declared free & fair by United Nations observers. The US ignored the UN & mined Nicaraguan harbours, encouraged a trade boycott, & supplied money to the Contra terrorists.

Nicaragua was brought to its knees & the Sandinistas narrowly lost the 1990 election to a US puppet. The bravery of the Nicaraguans must never be forgotten & we must realise the urgent need for revolutions in the developed countries.

PLAN AN OFFENSIVE

Many of Marx's theories are still as relevant today as they were in the last century, but the world has changed. Unfortunately many marxists have not changed with it & argue amongst themselves instead of planning an offensive. The natural anti-establishment mentality of the working-class has only been mobilised during the anti-Poll Tax campaign.

I am in my late 20s & I want to see capitalism smashed before I die. That will not happen if revolutionaries stick to the dogma of the 19th century instead of preparing for the conflicts of the 21st century.

STEPHEN HIPPISEY
GLASTONBURY GREEN PARTY
SUPPORTER OF CLASS WAR FEDERATION

Contributions to THE CLARION represent the writers' views, and not necessarily those of the CLARION or of the SOMERSET COMMUNITY DEFENCE CAMPAIGN. The aim of the Clarion is to be an open discussion journal for the labour movement. Please let us have YOUR views, ideas, and information

All contributions to THE EDITOR, SOMERSET CLARION, 4 GORDON TERRACE, BRIDGWATER, SOMERSET

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CHANGE FROM WITHIN

Each individual has within his or her own capacity the ability to change the destiny of the whole world to a small degree. Clubs, groups, societies, communities, nations are all built up out of individuals who exert their powers each individually, thus bringing about the collective situation in which we find ourselves. The root of all activity is the individual will, & it is by the will of individuals that world-change can be brought about. Therefore, although one may feel powerless against the impersonal forces which seem to be running modern society, one can take comfort in the knowledge that there is a sphere of influence wherein one can exert oneself & make significant changes - namely the sphere of one's own existence.

Although, in the modern world, the concept of individualism is seemingly highly esteemed & although we live in a so-called democracy wherein the voice of the people is supposed to be of paramount importance - we actually find that the reverse is true. Individuals are reduced to a series of digits on a computer screen & big businessmen run the world in an unscrupulous manner - making conditions of living more & more miserable for the common working folk who are supposed to be getting the benefits of living in this advanced 'civilised' society. Technology, which is supposed to have brought us all our comforts, has robbed millions of an honest, independent livelihood & made competent craftsmen, farmers & other independent folk the slaves of an industrial machine. Ruthlessness is the predominant & most highly praised quality of the modern successful man or woman, & those who want to live in peace, benefitting from the natural bounty of the earth - in a natural way - are hounded, badgered, taxed & pestered in every possible manner. What hope is there when people riot & the government

takes no notice? What star of light will guide us when our own trade unions forsake us & sell us down the river time & time again, because of fear & greed, following the lure of materialism?

Each of us has a power over our own destinies & in that way we can affect everything around us. The science of ecology has taught us, if we care to learn, that the whole of nature is an interdependence & that one entity can do nothing that does not affect other entities & indeed the whole system. Although mankind is thoroughly capable & factually appears to be bent on bringing about the destruction of the whole planet, each individual has the power to restore harmony within his or her own ecosystem, & thus bring about an echo in the whole system. In fact, there is no use complaining about the world unless one is prepared to take the onus upon oneself, to change oneself!

People say the causes of world problems are this or that, & they list the symptoms of decay or degradation which are apparent or all, except the most blind, to see, but few address the hidden causes of such degradation or present a viable solution. The cause is simply - greed, the characteristic human misuse of free will, & the solution? Simple - care, love, selflessness! It is up to each of us to try our level best to cultivate this simple solution to all our problems, within our hearts & within our lives. From loving individuals are formed loving communities, loving societies, loving nations & a loving world. Impossible? It starts with the individual.

CLIVE WYNN BRIDGWATER UCW

Clive Wynn lives at Ashcott. He has been active in campaigns against the Poll Tax and the Gulf war. We welcome replies to this article.

LABOUR IN PARLIAMENT: THE 1950s

The Labour Party was more popular during the post-war years of austerity from 1945 to 1950 than before or since. Why then was it defeated in 1951? Why, if 1950 or 1951 seems to mark the peaking of Labour's fortunes, do nearly all Labour circles, from right to left, assume that Labour's record from 1945 to 1951 is well-nigh blameless? It is conceded that the nationalised corporations may now be out of date, but nobody seems keen to find any real skeletons in Labour's cupboards, or any moral blemishes that call for something comparable to *glasnost* in the Soviet Union.

The Communist Party and the *Daily Worker* bent over backwards, as my parliamentary reports and sketches demonstrate, to support Labour's domestic programme in its early years. We recognized that it faced enormous problems and had some solid achievements to its credit. Labour never tried to lay the foundations of a socialist economy or to accomplish a major redistribution of power and wealth, but it carried out a very large part of the programme on which it was elected in 1945. It established a free National Health Service, raised the school leaving age, introduced a land use planning system that recouped developers' profits for the taxpayer, and provided a safety net for the poorest through the social security system. It was committed to full employment. The Communist Party backed the government's nationalisation programme despite major reservations, and Willie Gallacher led the cheering when the Coal Mines Nationalisation Act was passed in 1946. Communists did more than Labour Party members in the first two years to increase industrial productivity in the interests of post-war recovery. We accepted bread rationing and peacetime conscription in 1946.

Labour on the Slippery Slope

Labour never really recovered from the disastrous crises of 1947: the freeze-up that closed industry down in February, and the dollar crisis in August. The dollar crisis led to the first draconian cuts in capital spending. Nye Bevan's housing programme (which seemed likely to reach 300,000 houses a year) was cut to 200,000 for the next three years. Rearmament took precedence over social spending or the modernisation of industry. The government looked for financial salvation to the United States, embraced Marshall Aid, traded nuclear bases in Britain for dollars, and began to rearm. On the eve of the general election of February 1950 Bevan was muttering about resignation because the housing budget had been cut again and preference given to 'defence'. By then Labour had nothing more to offer and was living on its past. Even so, although its majority was cut to five seats, Labour retained such a strong hold on the affections of the people that it got more votes than it had in 1945. The two Communist MPs were defeated and so were the independent left-wing (or in their enemies' eyes 'fellow-travelling') group of former Labour MPs led by Dennis Pritt. When the Korean War broke out five months later the only consistent opposition to the bi-partisan Labour-Tory foreign and defence policies had been eliminated from the House of Commons.

Even before the Korean War broke out in 1950 anti-Soviet hysteria infected the most unlikely people. Bertrand Russell, the Pacifist who was to sit down in Whitehall in protest against atomic weapons a few years later, declared in November 1948 that 'either we must have a war against Russia before she has the atom bomb or we will have to lie down and let them govern us'. After the Soviet Union announced that it had the A-bomb, Field Marshal Montgomery the Commander-in-Chief of the new 'Western Union' told a press conference in Washington in November 1949 that 'if anybody commits an act of aggression against Western Union we would have a real good party and kill a lot of people'. The Labour government to which he was responsible kept silent. 'Monty', I commented in the *Daily Worker*,

thinks killing a lot of people is a 'real good party'. Hitler thought so too. So did the SS men who butchered the Jews. And so do the American Generals who want to wipe out communism with the atom bomb. But you and I are going to be the victims if we are foolish enough to let the 'party' start.

Everything seemed to point to war. The Western powers had just rejected the umpteenth Soviet offer to abolish nuclear weapons and to reduce armed forces by a third, and the US had bludgeoned Western Europe into increasing arms expenditure.

The Labour government's decision in June 1950 to back the American military intervention in Korea and give it the camouflage of the United Nations' flag can only be understood in the context of the all-pervading anti-communism. In 1988 Tony Benn called, in *Fighting Back*, for a vigorous re-examination of the virulent anti-communism that fed us for 40 years with the idea that the Soviet Union was planning to conquer Western Europe and could only be prevented by nuclear weapons. If we ask who purveyed this lie (for which there is not a scrap of evidence), or who betrayed the real interests of this country in the Korean War, the finger points (among others) to Attlee and the Labour ministers. Denis Healey, who was the toughest member of Labour's pro-nuclear and anti-Soviet lobby for many years, now says in his autobiography *The Time of My Life* that 'we were all mistaken' in believing that Stalin was out to 'conquer' Western Europe, and he concedes that their war losses explain 'the universal hatred of war among the Russian people'. In fact 'we' were not all mistaken; those whom he derides as communists or fellow-travellers were right on this fundamental point, however great their mistaken confidence in Stalin's 'socialism'.

Labour Digs its Own Grave

On the other hand the Soviet Union had every reason to feel threatened by the American atom bomb, and American threats can only have intensified the Soviet nuclear programme and the Stalinist repression. By helping to foment irrational fears the Labour government became the accomplice of the US in Korea in a genocidal war that set the pattern for Vietnam and Cambodia.

The US government used the Korean War and the fear of world war it generated to push the Labour government into a gigantic £4.7 billion rearmament programme at the end of 1950, and into accepting the rearmament of Western Germany. In so doing the Labour government dug its own grave. This was not so much because the Korean War was desperately unpopular (with minor exceptions the electorate only got the official version of events) but because the cost of rearmament brought Labour's reforming programme virtually to a halt. One-time left-wing Labour politicians salvaged their careers by taking on the dirty work of waging the Cold and Colonial wars – John Strachey, the one-time guru of the Left Book Club, as Minister for the Colonies and then for War, and Shinwell as Minister for War and then for Defence. Shinwell, who had used George Sinfield our industrial reporter to leak stories favourable to himself when he was Minister of Fuel and Power, gave credence to the charges of 'treason' against his old friends on the *Daily Worker*. Even the £4.7 billion rearmament programme was not big enough for Shinwell, although it was so far beyond the capability of British industry that Churchill's first action on winning the general election in 1951 was to cut it back.

Playing the Parliamentary Game

When I returned to the Press Gallery after Churchill's victory in October 1951 I saw a Labour Opposition hopelessly divided by its commitment to Tory foreign policy, the A-bomb and rearmament. Nye Bevan and Harold Wilson had resigned from the government in March 1951 in protest against Gaitskell's budget, which imposed charges for teeth and spectacles to help pay for rearmament. Bevan alone had the fire and talent to lead an effective Opposition, for he was in a class by himself in the House of Commons. He was loathed by the Tories, for they could never find effective retorts to the wounding phrases that exploded from his lips. But Bevan was hopelessly compromised. He had gone along with NATO, rearmament and the Korean War. A month before he resigned as Minister of Labour he had backed the £4.7 billion rearmament programme, although he also said that the Soviet Union had neither the intention nor the industrial capacity to attack the West. As Minister of Health he had backed the order that introduced the principle of

FROM

'THE GREENING OF A RED' by Malcolm MacEwen



Nye Bevan: "Tories are vermin"

charges in the National Health Service. He launched devastating onslaughts on the Tories to divert attention from his own failures (in housing, for example) while ignoring the friendly critics on his own side.

Attlee tried to keep up the pretence of 'opposition' by playing parliamentary games in which Shinwell was one of the star performers. In 1952 Shinwell put on what I called 'The Punch and Manny Show', offering 'all-night variety, slapstick comedy, superb illusionism, juggling (with statistics), tightrope walking, promise-swallowing, verbal acrobatics and even the occasional punching bout', and kept the House sitting for over 24 hours 'opposing' a Home Guard Bill that he himself had originated as Minister of Defence and to which, at the end of the debate, he pledged support. A debate in July 1952 on the American bombing of the Chinese-Korean dams and power stations on the Yalu River ended (to quote my report) 'in the rout and humiliation of the official Labour opposition'. Mr Attlee and his friends refused to challenge the Yalu bombings, American policy in Korea or the cringing servility of the Tories. Mr Noel-Baker's speech, as Churchill said, was primarily an attack on the left wing of the Labour Party and attempted to justify everything that America had done in Korea.

Why Labour Lost

Attlee's censure motion in the debate of February 1952 on the Tory government's Defence White Paper was a classic example of his use of what I called the 'blank shot' technique – firing off blank ammunition to create a loud noise and the illusion of a tough fight while doing no damage to the Tory government. His amendment expressing 'no confidence' in the Tories' ability to carry out the rearmament programme actually endorsed it. Its practical effect was to force 55 Labour MPs to vote against it.

For a time in 1953 Churchill seemed to have grasped the enormity of the danger to which Britain, with its American nuclear bases, was exposed by the development of the more powerful hydrogen bomb by the US. I was amazed (although pleased) when he made a speech in the House urging the West to take advantage of the death of Stalin in March 1953 to hold a summit – himself, President Eisenhower and Malenkov the new Soviet leader – to explore the possibility of calling a halt to the Cold War. He was frustrated by Eisenhower, by his own Cabinet (which couldn't wait for him to retire) and by a stroke which he concealed from the world. His attack of sanity was short-lived. In February 1955 he announced his government's decision to make the H-bomb, and when, two weeks later, the Commons debated the government's Defence White Paper (which based Britain's strategy on the first use of nuclear weapons), he plumbed the depths in a blood-curdling speech in which he called for a showdown with the Russians in the three years that remained of Western nuclear supremacy.

That debate could have been a triumph for the Labour Party, for Bevan winked out of Churchill the admission that Eisenhower had vetoed his notion of a post-Stalin summit, but Attlee had put down another of his 'blank shot' censure motions, 'censuring' the government's defence policy but supporting its decision to make the H-bomb. Bevan, who got an evasive reply when he challenged Attlee to say whether his amendment committed Labour to first use of nuclear weapons, abstained from voting, along with 57 other Labour MPs. His expulsion from the party was only defeated on the National Executive by one vote, but the damage had been done. Attlee's nuclear policy had split the Labour Party from top to bottom on the eve of the 1955 general election. Ironically, Bevan ended his career as Labour's foreign policy spokesman with his famous (or infamous) refusal to go 'naked into the conference chamber' without the H-bomb.

The Tory Party was a sitting duck in the 1955 election. Churchill was a spent force. Eden, who had succeeded him, was obviously unwell and already obsessed with the Suez Canal, but it came as no surprise to me when the Labour Party lost it. If Churchill was prevented by his own party from seizing the opportunity for detente presented by the changes in the Soviet Union the Labour Party was inhibited from doing so by the anti-Soviet paranoia of its leaders and their love affair with the H-bomb. They offered no real alternative to the Tories, who polled 412,000 fewer votes than they did in 1951, but won because the Labour vote slumped by more than 1.5 million below its all-time high of nearly 14 million in 1951.

The sham battles over Korea and defence policy seemed to me to reflect a basic flaw in Labour's approach to politics. The Labour Party is an electoral machine and it fights its main battles in Parliament, but in my time, from 1945 to 1956, Labour made no serious reappraisal of the parliamentary system. Both in government and in opposition the Labour leaders used their control over parliamentary time to stifle debate and to reduce MPs to mindless lobby-fodder, like the Labour MP who stopped me one night to ask 'What are we voting on?' My reply, 'page three line 13 of The Agriculture Bill leave out "as nearly as may be"', left him none the wiser. When Bevan tried to secure a debate on the explosion of the American H-bomb at Bikini, Harry Crookshank the Tory Leader of the House refused to offer a debate in government time but mischievously pointed out that a debate could be held in Opposition time – knowing that the last thing Attlee wanted was a debate on the nuclear policies that he had introduced. No debate was held.

I have always believed that Parliament should have a central role in any democratic system, but it can never acquire the status and character it needs unless Labour sheds its slavish attachment to the stifling procedures and traditions that (as Tony Benn has recently shown) turn Parliament into a travesty of democracy. In constitutional theory the Commons control the government; in reality the Prime Minister controls both the government and the Commons, and takes major decisions without informing or consulting Parliament. When Attlee's government ran into the inevitable obstruction from the House of Lords, it ran away both from its commitment to abolish the Lords and from any serious attempt to reform the creaking machinery of Parliament. It was left to Tory governments to introduce Life Peers and to improve MPs' pay and conditions. When Labour lost the 1951 election despite having won more votes than the Tories I recalled Herbert Morrison's scornful denunciation of Willie Gallacher's attempt in 1949 to introduce proportional representation into the Parliament Bill. Morrison, like all Labour's leaders before and since, preferred 'strong' government to representative government. The first-past-the-post electoral system, which seemed in the 1940s to give Labour turn-and-turn-about in office without having to win a majority of votes, has given us, as I write, more than ten years of 'strong', minority Thatcherite government.

The Greening of a Red is published by Pluto Press.
Malcolm MacEwen lives at Wootton Courtenay, near Minehead

TRADE UNION SOLIDARITY NETWORK

A SYNDICALIST WAY FORWARD

We regret that we were unable to send any delegates to the Solidarity Network meeting on May 11th in Leicester, but would like to set down our thoughts on this subject. Only our Deptford group is currently affiliated to the Network, despite DAM's consistent record of strike support work. We will be encouraging all groups to affiliate to the Network, and to sell and contribute to the Bulletin. We feel that current problems referred to in the notice of the meeting should not lead to despondency, but rather should focus attention on the strengths of the Network and how they can be used to give it renewed commitment and a clearer direction. We admit that the Network has not been high on our list of priorities. We hope we can use our experiences during that period to strengthen the Network for the future.

CRISIS IN LABOUR MOVEMENT

The starting point for any assessment of where the Network is coming from, and where it must go, has to be an admission of the crisis of the existing labour movement - its inability to defend the interests of the working class, let alone pose an alternative to capitalism. That crisis is both organisational and political, and is not solved by "broad lefts" or entrism, but requires a more radical break with reformist structures. At the national level the trades unions are corporate entities geared to defending their funds, investments (in capitalism), negotiating rights and lobbying power. Membership figures and subs income are key to this, and the strategy of the trades union leadership is to maximise this through check-off, sweetheart deals, union mergers at the expense of membership involvement in order to win single union deals with the bosses etc. All this leads to an interest in not rocking the boat, the anti-union laws merely put the tin lid on it by making militancy a direct threat to the funds, less room to manoeuvre being accepted as necessary for long-term corporate interests. Solidarity has always been a dirty word in some quarters.

CONTROL OF MEANS OF PRODUCTION

The political aspects of the crisis arise from these interests, and the separation of the political and economic spheres, with workers being reduced to passive voters in the former and restricted to negotiating over pay and conditions in the latter. Where workers are organised in the workplace it is only around sectional, sometimes industry-wide, but never class concerns. The trades unions are organised in such a way as to reinforce this, and national bargaining is based on (paper) membership figures backed up by the occasional campaign of "traumatic" strike action of a very limited scope, not on militancy at shopfloor level and taking up workers' own aspirations. The silent majority is always invoked to isolate militancy, an easy task in the vertically-structured trades unions. The most crucial class issue, one which has echoes in every workplace, is the question of the ownership and control of the means of production, and the actual purpose of our work. This issue has the potential to unite workers across industry and in reaffirming our common class interests to re-ignite the flames of solidarity. Such a political response requires an organisational one - building horizontal links between organised workplaces on a local and industrial basis. We think that this, rather than "broad left" electoralism, poses the greatest potential threat to the trades unions.

SYNDICALISM

This is not a new idea, some of you will know it as "syndicalism", more correctly anarcho-syndicalism, and it is

no less relevant for being old and unfashionable. What matters, however, is not the label the Solidarity Network adopts (or not), but what it does. In recognising its origins in the crisis of the reformist labour movement, the Network must face up to its potential to do something about that crisis.

ALTERNATIVE TO REFORMIST TRADE UNIONISM

Simple strike support without posing any kind of political & organisational alternative to reformist trade unionism is merely to shore up our enemies, and to lurch aimlessly from strike to lost strike. Support for strikers is not solidarity if it is restricted by default to collecting money & touring meetings asking for letters of protests & consumer boycotts - that is charity. Solidarity requires active pressure on the bosses in support of both strikers & our own class interests, & the strongest pressure comes from 'secondary action' - solidarity action - by other workers in a position to affect a dispute. In stating the obvious it is not our intention to denigrate solidarity which falls short of this, or merely pay lip-service to an idea. DAM has begun to initiate industrial networks of workers as the nuclei of future anarcho-syndicalist unions, not as political fractions, but in order to actually organise action in & across our workplaces. In all honesty they have hardly got off the drawing board so far, but we think that, just as the Solidarity Network deserves the support of anarcho-syndicalists, so anarcho-syndicalists deserve the support of the Solidarity Network. We are both in different ways responding to the crisis of the labour movement. We should be working together to combine practical activity & support for our fellow workers in dispute with a political & organisational strategy for the liberation of the working class from capitalism.

POLL TAX ACTIVISTS REGROUPING

The legacy of the anti-poll tax movement in some areas has been to draw in & politicise activists who are basically alienated from the existing political groups. Where DAM members have been in a position to influence local groups, libertarian methods of organisation & tactics advocated by anarcho-syndicalists have worked, also demonstrating their flexibility & potential to be applied at work (which is where they were developed). As the focus of the movement shifts away from defeating the Poll Tax to tackling problems such as the destruction of local services & attempts to recover debts by councils, & to class issues more generally, some activists are regrouping on a broader basis. This is a potential base of support for the Solidarity Network, but one which is not dependent on any particular dispute as a focus for activities, & therefore does not have the problems associated with previous workers' support groups. It also shares the experience of having its successes in spite of the reformist labour movement (including the misnamed Militant Tendency). The potential exists for the regeneration & strengthening of the Solidarity Network. This submission deals with principles rather than resources & does not pretend to be comprehensive, but we hope it is informative & useful. Please inform us of all developments.

In solidarity,

DIRECT ACTION MOVEMENT
INTERNATIONAL WORKERS ASSOCIATION

AFTER THE GULF WAR



An old man and his grandson in the new camp at Silopi, Turkey, where conditions for refugees have been improved *Photograph: José Goitia/AP*

During the Gulf war, 150,000 Iraqis died & thousands more were injured. The country has been devastated. Under 10% of Allied bombs hit their military targets. A large proportion of the rest landed on civilian areas. The greatest concentration of bombs ever dropped was dropped on Iraq. Hospitals can hardly function. In the cities there is no clean water. People are desperate. The situation in 'liberated' Kuwait is little better. It is not safe to venture out of doors because of the pollution raining down from burning oil wells. Pro-democracy Kuwaitis & foreign workers, particularly Palestinians, are being rounded up, or killed. The environment is already being contaminated as far away as Kashmir in Northern India.

UN RUBBER STAMP

Was it worth it? Why didn't the US allow the UN to apply sanctions & give time for them to work. The conclusion must be that the US did not want sanctions to work, and the reason for this is that the result would have been the removal of Saddam Hussein. Another result would have been the dismemberment of Iraq. That would not suit the US's books at all. What the US & its allies require is a weakened but intact Iraq, with Saddam, or a clone, in control. They cynically gave a nod to the Kurds & Shia Moslems to rise up against Saddam Hussein (it is reported that they also gave the nod to Saddam to invade Kuwait in the first place) while leaving him with the means with which to smash them, by allowing him to operate helicopter gunships & fixed-wing aircraft. There is to be no Kurdish nation state to challenge NATO member Turkey. Genocide rules OK. It is interesting to reflect that in the UN's

eyes, Hitler's crime was not the killing of 6 million Jews, but invading Poland. That at least is the inference from what is happening in Iraq & Kuwait. What a dictator does to his subjects is an internal matter, it would seem, & of no interest to the UN. It is beginning to look as though the UN is little more than a rubber stamp for American policy. This is reflected in the lack of opposition to US & British support for the Khmer Rouge & the notorious Pol Pot gang which was responsible for massacring a large part of the population of Cambodia. This sort of complete disregard for humanity by the US is what political commentators are beginning to excuse by the weasel word 'Realpolitik'.

BUSH & MAJOR DON'T CARE

So - what of the billions spent on the war? What of the underfunding of the NHS? What of the famine affecting 20 million in Africa? What of Third World debt? What about the people of Iraq, so recently added to the list of people starving world-wide? Who cares? Bush & Major certainly don't. And what about the patriotic, Sun-reading British public who so fervently waved their union jacks & fawned on Stormin' Norman Schwarzkopf? Ask not for whom the bell tolls, it tolls for thee. People are people, be they British or Iraqi, military or civilian, & all are expendable in the eyes of our rulers.

As you contemplate the Poll Tax, increased VAT, life on the dole, the cuts in services, & other horrors visited upon us by the Tories, never forget what was, & is, being done to the people of Iraq, & the support that the US & Britain give to the likes of Saddam Hussein.

BOB CRAIG
WESTON CND



Kurdish Refugees in the Mountains
Hugh Pope

THE KURDS: ABANDONED AFTER THE GULF WAR