

**Australia:
the end of
Labour
Thatcherism**



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on market
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For socialist renewal!



For workers' liberty!

**Making NUS safe
for
Kinnock?**



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**Labour dumps
1987's most
successful
candidate**



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SOCIALIST

ORGANISER _____

Socialists for Labour

Election special

centre page pull-out

VOTE

LABOUR!

And fight:

- For free trade unions
- To restore NHS cuts
- For Poll Tax amnesty
- For a minimum wage

*"Vote Labour in every
constituency", says Tony Benn*



The tide is swinging very rapidly to Labour. The manifesto contains very practical proposals, and we should fight the campaign on the basic questions of jobs and homes and schools and health and pensions and peace.

If we do that, we shall break through.

There is only one choice, between a Tory Government and a Labour Government. Anyone who lives in any constituency should recognise the importance of the size of the popular vote for the authority of an incoming Labour Government. It will in part be judged by the size of the popular vote across the whole country, even in constituencies that are not Labour. The popular vote is the mandate for the Labour Government.

In every constituency, therefore, people should vote Labour.

Kick the Tories out!

"£140 Budget" is a lie

The Sun's headline claim that the Budget handed out £140 a year to millions of low-paid workers is a lie.

A careful analysis by the Financial Times shows that people with incomes before taxes and benefits of less than £5,200 a year gain, on average, only about £50 a year.

And about 30% of them lose out. Workers too low-paid to pay income tax gain nothing. Workers receiving Family Credit or Housing Benefit lose in benefit most of what they gain from income tax cuts. And they are likely to lose from the increases in indirect taxes.

The full benefit of the new 20p income tax rate

goes only to those who would otherwise have paid 25p on a full £2,000 of income - married people on £7,200 a year or more, for example.

The biggest gainers from the Budget, according to the Financial Times, are those on £20,800 to £26,000 a year. They gain about £125 a year.

The Budget does show a shift in policy by the Tories. Their previous tax and benefit changes, between 1987 and 1991, brought losses or only tiny gains to almost every income bracket below £26,000 a year, and sizeable gains (up to £8,000) only to the income brackets above £52,000.

The Tories are trying to bribe their way to an election victory. To do so, they have been willing to scrap all their economic dogmas about balancing the budget, and plan to borrow £28 billion.

City economists interviewed by the Financial Times were mostly scathing: "made a virtue of not kickstarting the economy, but that is just what is needed"; "promised an economic recovery, but done little towards fulfilling his promise"; "prospects remain grim"; "neither bold nor coherent, rather a mishmash".

The Tories are shysters on the run. Let's kick them out!



Striking steel workers fire a home-made rocket at police in Llodio, in the Basque country, in Spain. They are fighting to stop 1800 jobs being cut with the closure of the Acenor steel works. Barricades have also been set up in the town of Torrelavega.

No easy road to the new South Africa

By Anne Mack

As we go to press, South African whites are voting in F W De Klerk's referendum on reform.

A De Klerk victory looks very likely. If he wins by a big margin, it could have dramatic effects.

Firstly, he will be forced to speed up the pace of change. Nelson Mandela could be in the government within the year.

Secondly, defeat by a big margin could split the Conservative Party - one section going with De Klerk, another linking up with the Nazi AWB (Afrikaner Resistance Movement).

The new South Africa would then be ruled over by a bureaucratic and authoritarian Conservative/National Party/ANC/Communist Party coalition. This will spark working-class resistance from below, as militant black workers demand more than such a "historic compromise" will allow. Meanwhile the AWB could launch a racial civil war against the black majority, drawing their stormtroopers from the soup kitchens in the white suburbs and from the drought-ridden countryside.

Those who think that the struggle for workers' power is off the agenda in South Africa are deluding themselves. The alternative is a slide into chaos.

Lau Shan-ching is free!

Lau Shan-ching is probably the first ever Chinese political prisoner with whom the West will have direct contact. He was released after serving a full ten year sentence, and arrived in Hong Kong on December 27, 1991. He is visiting the UK as part of a world tour.

Lau is aged 39, an engineer and a citizen of Hong Kong. He was arrested on Boxing Day

1981 while on a visit to China to bring some money and clothes to relatives of imprisoned pro-democracy dissidents.

Because he insisted that he had not committed any crime, and had resisted repeated attempts by the Chinese authorities to extract a confession from him, he was not released earlier. Lau had numerous debates with prison officials who tried to "educate" him. "I told them they could not

imprison a man because of what he thinks and I insisted that I had the right to have my own way of thinking".

Just days before his release, he was subjected to one last attempt at intimidation in Huai Ji prison - prison officials threatened him with indefinite detention, beyond the period of his ten year sentence, unless he "repented".

Bush's judge backs bosses

Clarence Thomas, Bush's recent controversial appointment to the US Supreme Court has just written the majority decision in a case which effectively prevents union organisers entering an employer's property.

Thomas wrote that employer's property rights were not being adequately protected. Organisers could only enter in the 'rare case' when the union could demonstrate that 'unique obstacles' prevented it from reaching potential members in any other way.

The decision overturns a 1955 decision allowing union access to recruit, distribute literature and organise workers to support other workers.

The 6-3 decision also demonstrates the clear majority that Reagan and Bush appointees have on the Court.



Malik Abdullahi speaks at a meeting in Birmingham. His brother, Yusef Abdullahi, is in jail, with Tony Paris and Steven Miller, for the murder of Lynette White in February 1988.

The "Cardiff Three" say that they are - like the Tottenham Three, the Birmingham Six, and many others - victims of a police frame-up.

Contact: Cardiff Three Campaign, 56 Alice Street, Docks, Cardiff. Photo: Mark Salmon.

Fascist gains in France

According to opinion polls, the fascist National Front could get 15.5% of the vote in France's regional elections, on 22 March.

That score makes it one of the biggest parties in France - only 2.5% behind France's governing Socialist Party, on 18%, and only a bit behind the two mainstream right-wing parties, too (33% between the two of them).

The other gainers, apart

from the National Front, have been the Greens (two rival lists have 14% between them) and various smaller groups. The once-mighty, now demoralised, Communist Party remains lagging at 8%.

But the French left is mobilising on the streets. National Front leader Jean-Marie Le Pen has been met with protests wherever he goes, and a big anti-racist march is planned in Paris for 18 March.

Free Tommy Sheridan!

On Friday 6 March, Glasgow anti-poll-tax campaigner Tommy Sheridan was jailed for six months. The court rejected his appeal against conviction for obstructing a warrant sale of a poll-tax non-payer's furniture.

The same week, four Colchester people - Terry Frost, Christine Hammett, Andrew Hester, and Patrick Tyler - were found guilty of

"riot" and "violent disorder" for their parts in a local anti-poll-tax protest. They will be sentenced on 6 April; four other defendants were cleared, and seven more will go to court in May.

Yet the Tories themselves have effectively admitted that the poll tax is unworkable and unjust.

Free all the poll tax prisoners! Amnesty for non-payers now!

Opinion shifts in Ireland

The dramatic case of a 14 year old girl, raped then banned by the courts from going to England for an abortion, has shaken Ireland's Catholic anti-abortion law.

In a poll taken at the end of February, 66% said that Ireland's constitutional ban on abortion, imposed by a referendum in 1983, should be amended or abolished.

The Supreme Court's eventual decision that the girl

could go to England after all, and indeed that abortion could be legal in Ireland if it were otherwise certain that the woman would die, has alarmed anti-abortion bigots.

At the court hearing, lawyers pointed out that current Irish law might mean that an English woman visiting Ireland who found that she was pregnant and wanted to go back to England for an abortion could be kept in Ireland against her will.

Few women at top

Women are still almost invisible at the top of public and commercial institutions, according to a survey in the latest issue of Labour Research magazine. But they fare better in trade unions than many other organisations.

There are currently just two female union general secretaries - Diana Warwick of the Association of University Teachers and Liz Symons of top civil servants' union the FDA. This constitutes 2.7% of the 73 in the TUC, and compares with 1.4% of local authority chief executives and just 0.5% of managing

directors of large companies. Before the recent appointment of Barbara Mills as director of public prosecutions, there were no women permanent secretaries in the civil service and there are no female House of Lords judges or government cabinet ministers.

Women constitute fewer than 7% of MPs and 4% of all judges. They form 49% of all non-industrial civil servants but less than 7% at the level of under-secretary or above. And while one in three health authority members and senior managers are female, this compares with four-fifths of the total NHS workforce.

The most male-dominated arena is the company boardroom, where recent research reveals that only 0.5% of directors of publicly quoted companies are women. This compares with around 42% of the total private sector workforce.

Who says class politics are dead? The Financial Times commissioned a poll of top business bosses, and 92 per cent said they would vote Tory, 7% Liberal, and just 1% Labour...

Going bust

Bankruptcies nearly hit the 1 million mark last year in the recession-racked USA. According to the American Bankruptcy Institute, 944,000 American individuals and businesses filed for bankruptcy. This was a 21% increase on 1990 and 159% higher than in 1985.

It was the seventh consecutive increase nationally.

Anti-Toryism is not enough

Vote Labour in every constituency!

The great comedian Stan Laurel was dying. The nurse said: "How are you?"

"As you'd expect", he replied, "but I'd rather be skiing". "Ah", she said sympathetically, "so you liked to ski, did you?" "No", Stan Laurel replied, "I've never skied in my life. Stupid business! But I'd rather be skiing".

In fact Laurel borrowed the joke from W C Fields, who - having made jokes all his professional life about how much he hated a certain city - said on his death-bed, "I'd rather be in Philadelphia".

In the spirit of Fields and Laurel, a large part of the left could truthfully reply to the question how they feel about voting Labour on 9 April: I'd rather be skiing, or in Philadelphia! Some might say: I'd rather be dead!

Take *socialist*, the paper of the Socialist Movement. The last conference of the Socialist Movement decided by a democratic majority that it would advocate a vote for Labour in every constituency at the General Election. But the Socialist Movement is not a democratic organisation. Its paper is run by a clique who cannot see why a majority at the conference of the movement which finances and circulates the paper should have authority for gentry such as they.

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The labour movement's fight to rebuild the NHS demands fighting for a Labour Government. Photo: Stefano Cagnoni

Vote Labour? They would rather be in the bourgeois Scottish National Party! They would rather back "independent" socialists like Dave Nellist, Terry Fields, and Tommy Sheridan - who are not, unfortunately, independent of the *Militant* organisation.

Their feeling of revulsion at the Kinnockite Labour Party is understandable. It does them credit. We share it wholeheartedly.

It is their *political thinking* we have difficulty following. Labour is the only possible alternative to the Tories based on the *working-class movement*. That is the only serious argument for socialists voting Labour in this election. It is not, and cannot be, compatible with advocating a *partial* Labour vote.

If you say, "vote Labour sometimes", then the question is begged: why? Sheer catch-penny opportunism - the desire to keep in with the politically conscious workers who will be voting

Labour - is the only possible answer, the answer of *Socialist Worker*, for example. It is not serious politics. It is the same approach, defining politics by public relations, that the Kinnockites pursue.

Socialist tries to get around its difficulties by focusing on that good old standby of all those on the left who want to evade clarity: general anti-Toryism. But, comrades, the basic reason why you gag on the idea of voting Labour everywhere is that the Kinnockites are *politically* very close to the Tories.

Vague anti-Toryism dissolves all real politics. The Tories must be kicked out and replaced by a Labour Government, a government of the labour and trade union movement. It is, in present circumstances, *only* by doing this that the Tory hegemony established over 13 years can be shattered and dispelled; it is only by way of this political victory that the labour movement will begin to get its confidence back and

socialist
Exposes the *real face*
of Tory politics



Who's doing Thatcher's dirty work?

1992 ELECTION SPECIAL

socialist. A new voice for the left

Order your fortnightly copy through your newspaper, or contact: 4-Cynthia Street, London N1 9JF. Tel 071 837 6763

The election poster from *socialist* is anti-Tory, but says nothing about voting Labour. A tortuously-written editorial says - if it says anything clear at all - that we should vote Labour in England and SNP in Scotland. The desire to look for "alternative" ways to vote - SNP, Plaid Cymru, Green, or *Militant* - is widespread on the left, but escapist and irresponsible.

begin to throw off the paralysis which long Tory rule and the seemingly endless succession of Tory victories has laid on the working class.

For that reason - though the regrowth of labour movement confidence and militancy may take a long time: we can not know - a Labour victory would be a working class victory, a victory for the working-class movement, *despite Kinnock's pink-Tory politics* and despite Kinnock's declared intention of keeping most of the Tory anti-union laws on the statute book. With Labour in power, pressure for change will build up, even from the trade union bosses whose backing has allowed Kinnock to smash the Labour Party left over recent years.

Those are the political reasons for voting Labour, the reasons which make sense in terms of the development of the mass labour movement from where it is now to a better condition. The promotion of that development is an irreplaceable core concern of socialists who base themselves on the working class. Otherwise all we have is vague, speculative, limp, gripless, perspectiveless anti-Tory splutterings, combined with giving up on the political struggle as circumstances pose it for us now.

You have the flaccid hope that after the election there will be a Labour Government at Westminster. On the other hand, you may want to vote Tartan-Tory (with a leftist face for the moment) in Scotland, or for the Stalinoid sect *Militant* in Liverpool, Glasgow, or Coventry!

Indeed, the anti-Tory poster published by *socialist* is so vague that it could reasonably be construed as advocating a Liberal-Democratic tactical vote in some constituencies - as is actually proposed by Charter 88, the ex-CP "Democratic Left", and, very surprisingly, the editor of *New Left Review*. Most of the people who put the *socialist* package together will not mean that, but it is typical of the whole "public relations" style that you

can not be sure that there not some of them who may mean it after all.

In so far as there are arguments in the circles around *socialist* for all this rudderless picking and choosing, they are about as well thought out as the conclusions they reach. Proportional representation, they tell you, is coming, and it will change everything - as if you can determine what to do *now* by calculations about a different situation in the future, or, more crazily, determine your tactics for one situation by what *might* be possible or appropriate for another, future, situation.

Voting SNP in Scotland is simply incompatible with fighting for a Labour Government, the goal without which voting Labour anywhere makes little sense. Backing a few independent socialist candidates might not be, all other things being equal. Arguments about the need to back "good socialists" like Dave Nellist, Terry Fields, and Tommy Sheridan might make sense - if they were not members or close associates of *Militant*, which is structured like a Stalinist sect and has for decades had Stalinoid politics (enthusiastically backing the Stalinist empire's "Vietnam 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
Socialist Organiser
PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA
Newsdesk: 071-639 7965

Latest date for reports: Monday

Editor: John O'Mahony
Published by: WL Publications Ltd,
PO Box 823 London SE15 4NA
Printed by Tridant Press,
Edenbridge

Registered as a newspaper at the Post Office
Articles do not necessarily reflect the views of Socialist Organiser and are in a personal capacity unless otherwise stated

LABOUR PARTY



Rank and file must unite

AEEU: All is not lost

As expected, the AEU/EETPU merger ballot resulted in a big majority for the merger (though it's worth noting that only 36 per cent of the AEU's membership and 41 per cent of the EETPU's took part).

Once it had become clear that the AEU's main "left" grouping, the *Engineering Gazette*, had copped out of a fight against the merger, oppositional forces knew that the odds were heavily stacked against them. It was a case of optimism of the will but pessimism of the intellect.

All is not yet lost, however: members of the proposed new union (to be called the Amalgamated Engineering and Electrical Union) must vote on TUC affiliation within a year and then on a new rule-book within three years. Both votes could yet scupper the merger - or at least ensure that the new AEEU is not the irredeemable bastion of business unionism that Messrs Laird, Jordan, Hammond and Gallacher have in mind.

The issue of TUC affiliation will be crucial. In the run-up to the ballot, Gavin Laird paraded his pro-TUC credentials and even accused anti-merger campaigners within the AEU of being "anti-TUC". Meanwhile, Eric Hammond was saying that he would campaign against TUC affiliation for the joint union and his successor Paul Gallacher said he didn't "give a toss" about the TUC (a phrase that was clearly *not* intended to mean that Mr Gallacher was neutral on the question).

The moment the ballot result was announced, Laird changed his tune very abruptly, telling BBC radio that the AEU "may walk out of the TUC front door" if other unions behaved "stupidly" over re-admitting the EETPU/AEU. AEU members who were taken in by Laird's pro-TUC posturing before the ballot might care to ponder upon the implications of this statement.

Of course, the AEEU leaders would prefer to be inside the TUC. The question, however, is on what terms: although little now separates Hammond and Gallacher from the TUC New Realist mainstream in terms of philosophy, there remains the stubborn unphilosophical questions of the single-union deals for which the EETPU was expelled in 1988, and the unpaid affiliation fees for the electricians' three-year absence.

The left within the new union will now have to turn its attention to campaigning for TUC affiliation on the TUC's terms - giving up poached members, renouncing the Orion deal and the Wapping scab operation and paying up TUC affiliation since 1988.

All of which would clearly stick in Paul Gallacher's gullet, but then didn't Brother Laird promise up that the merger would *strengthen* the TUC?

Meanwhile, a special conference of NALGO delegates has voted overwhelmingly in favour of merging with NUPE and COHSE to form one big public sector union. The only seriously contentious issue was that of branch subscriptions: NALGO collects its dues through the branches while NUPE and COHSE collect them nationally. The conference, sensibly, voted to allow branches a choice as to how to collect.

Other "wrecking" motions were withdrawn and most of the NALGO left now seem agreed that the merger makes sense from any industrial point of view. The "opposition" now seems limited to half-hearted bleatings from the SWP and a few sub-syndicalist NALGO chauvinists who think branches should have more or less total autonomy from any national structure. Oh yes - the Tories in NALGO oppose it too.

Some "left-wingers" seem to have forgotten that, sometimes, we can support union mergers.

INSIDE THE UNIONS



By Sleeper

Labour NEC dumps 1987's most successful candidate:

Lol Duffy speaks out against one-faction party

In 1987 Lol Duffy stood as Labour's Parliamentary Candidate in Wallasey. Labour's vote increased by 39%, and Tory Minister Lynda Chalker's majority was reduced from 6,708 to 279. It was Labour's best result in Wallasey since the constituency was formed in 1918.

On 13 February 1992 a seven member panel of Labour's National Executive Committee excluded Lol Duffy from the shortlist for the selection of a Parliamentary candidate in Wallasey.

Lol Duffy spoke to Socialist Organiser.

Interviewer: Why were you excluded from the shortlist of candidates?

Lol Duffy: Labour's leadership try to promote the idea that the majority of people are put off by socialist ideas. They point to our General Election defeats in 1983 and 1987, and say that if only our policies had been more moderate, which is code for more conservative, then we would have won those elections.

They fail to explain how the campaign which we ran in Wallasey in 1987 managed to gain a massive increase in Labour votes. They believe that rather than being an asset to the Labour Party, socialists like myself, are an embarrassment.

Int: What will you do in the General Election campaign?

LD: I'll be working as hard as I ever have to return a Labour Government. 13 years of the Tories has had a devastating effect on the unemployed, the health service, local authority

services and many other areas, and I'm not going to go off and sulk just because the NEC has broken every rule in the book to prevent me being the candidate.

Every socialist, whether a member of the Labour Party or not, has to work to elect a Labour Government as a first step to building up ordinary people's confidence to fight for their rights. Those socialists inside the Labour Party have a special responsibility to stay in and fight to bring MPs and the leadership under democratic control.

Int: What selection process took place in Wallasey?

LD: For the last two years Wallasey Labour Party had been calling for the selection process to be started so that we could have plenty of time to campaign with a candidate in place. The NEC just kept on delaying, even though Wallasey is the number one target seat in the North West and fourth in the country.

Their first excuse was the Frank Field dossier, produced after Frank Field had been deselected by Birkenhead Labour Party. The dossier was full of allegations against members of the Labour Party in Birkenhead CLP, Wallasey CLP, Wirral District Labour Party and the Wirral Labour Group. Joyce Gould came up to Merseyside to interview the officers of Wallasey CLP once and was never seen again.

The next excuse was that the Regional Office was so busy with by-elections that they didn't have time to conduct a selection in Wallasey. It's strange, but seats where Labour had little or no chance of winning were able to select before Wallasey and Birkenhead managed to have 2 selections in that time.

To the credit of Wirral South and Wirral West CLP's they refused to

Only yes-men need apply!

John Evans, told *Tribune*: "From the NEC's point of view, we have to have candidates who best represent the party's policies and can win the seat. I have to say that, on almost every area, Mr Duffy said that, although he would campaign on agreed party policies, he didn't personally agree with them."

Only yes-men, or yes-women, need apply to become candidates for Neil Kinnock's New Model Labour Party. That is what leading National Executive hatchet-man John Evans told *Tribune*

(21 February). "Mr Duffy said that, although he would campaign on agreed party policies, he didn't personally agree with them". Thought-crime! Lol Duffy dares to continue supporting unilateral nuclear disarmament after Neil Kinnock has dumped it! Throw him off the shortlist!

Just as Eastern Europe throws off the old one-party states, Neil Kinnock wants to make Labour a one-faction party. Fortunately he does not have the troops, the police, or the prison camps that the old Stalinist rulers had.

He can not stop Labour activists dissenting - and, after the election, they will be dissenting more and more.

select candidates until Wallasey was given the go ahead - they now have imposed candidates in both CLPs.

It appears that the NEC hoped that an early General Election would be called, so that they could use their emergency powers to impose a candidate on Wallasey, but Major decided to hang on. In December the Labour Party's regional official, Eileen Murfin, agreed a timetable for selection with our EC.

The selection procedure started, and I received over 70% of the nominations, including 5 of the 6 Labour Party Branches and the two women's sections. The actual number of nominations was: Lol Duffy 24, Angela Eagle 5, Mick Groves 1, Mary Honeyball 1 and Carl Wright 3.

The January NEC decided that an emergency situation existed for the

selection of candidates, and that a by-election panel would be set up to shortlist candidates. This made no sense to the Wallasey Labour Party members; our EC and GC could shortlist candidates just as quickly as any by-election panel.

According to the rules, any nominee who receives 25% of the nominations, including one party branch, should be automatically placed on the shortlist. I had the nominations, but they put me off the shortlist.

According to the rules, where there is no sitting Labour MP and 5 or more candidates are nominated then at least 5 should appear on the shortlist. There were only 4 on the imposed shortlist.

According to the rules, if 50% plus one of the ballot forms are returned blank then the selection process

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Vote Labour in every constituency!

From page 3

in Afghanistan for nine years up to 1988, for example). Supporting Nallist, Fields, and Sheridan makes no sense from any point of view other than a desire to promote *Militant*.

But the candidates of *Militant* are, despite everything, the banner-bearers of socialism in their constituencies now? No: the way *Militant* ran last year's Walton by-election - as a noisy comic opera of small parochial reforms and great big general (albeit preposterous) lies, claiming to be the *Real Labour Party* - shows that they cannot be.

To accept *Militant's* candidates as symbolic representatives of socialism, you must have very low expectations of socialism now! And a very strange idea of what socialism is

and must be, both in terms of the general perspectives that socialists offer for developing the working-class movement, and in terms of the ideas socialists must make propaganda for.

Militant's candidacies are a *Militant*-building diversion. They have no other significance for broad left politics or for socialist politics. Support from non-*Militant* socialists - who would "rather be in Philadelphia" than in the General Election the labour movement is now fighting - can enhance only the *Militant*-building core of these candidacies. It will not give them the general socialist significance that they can not, in the circumstances, possess.

Militant is to socialism what a mystic religious cult is to virtue: it claims to be the only

representative of the universal cause, but in fact represents mostly its own oddities.

Socialist Worker, of course, hopes by supporting the *Militant* candidacies to enhance the building of the SWP; but that is their business.

In this election, the class vote, the class-conscious vote, will be a Labour vote! And socialists should not stop at casting a passive vote for Labour on 9 April. Socialists should go out - as *Socialists for Labour* is going out - and organise leftists and trade union militants to join the Labour Party, to vote Labour, and to fight in their workplaces and in their neighbourhoods for a Labour vote.

The left should adopt as its project in this election the organising of a *critical Labour vote*, combined with organising

those it reaches to start campaigning in the organisations of the labour movement, trade unions and Labour Party alike, to compel a Labour Government elected on 9 April to respond to basic working-class demands: removal of the Tory anti-union laws, restoration of the National Health Service, amnesty for poll-tax non-payers, introduction of the promised national minimum wage.

If a Labour Government takes office, then it will be around such campaigns and demands - though maybe over a long period: we can not predict - that the Labour Left will revive, and the trade union left also.

Neither Philadelphia, nor the ski slopes of Switzerland, but a vote for Labour!



Lol Duffy pledges to continue the fight after coming within 279 votes of ousting Tory Minister Lynda Chalker at the 1987 General Election count. Now Labour's leaders say Lol Duffy is too independent-minded to be a Parliamentary candidate.

Why socialists in Wallasey must campaign for Labour

By Gail Cameron

What do you do with a candidate who gets the biggest swing to Labour in any Tory-held seat in the country? Neil Kinnock's answer is: don't let him stand again!

Understandably, some Party activists have responded by saying that they will have nothing to do with the election. "Why should we campaign for a candidate we didn't choose and then get expelled after

we've done it?"

But this reaction is not a serious option for socialists in Wallasey, or those in other parts of the country facing similar problems. The Labour Party leaders have been able to do what they have done in Wallasey not for reasons unique to Wallasey, but because of the general state of the labour movement.

Demoralised by 13 years of the Tories, the Labour Party and the trade unions

are desperate for a Labour government at any cost. Ditching policies and losing Party democracy seem like prices worth paying. The prospect of getting rid of the Tories allows the right wing to hold the Party in a firm grip.

If we abstain, and retire to the sidelines, at the very time that the right wing's arguments will come under test, then we will do nothing to undermine their commanding position, and we may even entrench it.

The right wing would like nothing better than for the left voluntarily to absent ourselves from the Party.

Campaigning for a Labour victory, and a Labour vote in every constituency, does not mean giving in to the right wing, or giving up on Party democracy. On the contrary: to do anything other than campaign for Labour means to surrender the whole political terrain to the right wing.

From page 4

Lol Duffy speaks out

has to start again with the freeze date for entitlement to vote remaining the same. By our reckoning, at least that many blank ballots must have been cast. The NEC has refused to release the voting figures, and refused to allow Wallasey CLP to have any scrutineers at the count - which is also against the rules.

Int: How have the members of Wallasey CLP reacted to this treatment from the NEC?

LD: We held an emergency meeting of the GC and invited all the members to attend. About 100 members turned up, some of whom would not have voted for me to have been selected. At that meeting it was unanimously agreed to call for the ballot to be rerun with all 5 nominated candidates included, for the other candidates to be asked to stand down until I was included on the shortlist, and for members to return their ballot forms blank.

A lot of the members have written to Neil Kinnock and Larry Whitty to protest.

The NEC, surprise, surprise, ignored our letters and our lobbying and we now have Angela Eagle as the imposed candidate for Wallasey. The members are very angry at this treatment, and we are finding it difficult to motivate people to come out and work in the election campaign.

The issue of the imposition and the misuse of the rules won't go away in Wallasey. After the

General Election the NEC has promised to "investigate" Wallasey CLP - they really know how to encourage people don't they? At the same time, Wallasey CLP will be compiling evidence against the NEC for misuse of the rules and bringing the Party into disrepute.

Int: What questions did the NEC by-election panel ask you?

LD: The main issues they were concerned about was my opposition to all anti-trade union laws and my support for unilateral nuclear disarmament. I thought it was interesting when Roy Hattersley asked me how I would reconcile my support for unilateralism with the Party's present policy. This is the same bloke who year after year was interviewed by the press at Labour Party Conference saying that conference decisions to support unilateralism were irrelevant.

There was nothing that contentious, but there didn't need to be because the interview was a formality - they had already made up their minds.

In a television interview John Evans, chair of the Labour Party, said that I had been excluded from the shortlist because I had agreed to campaign on Labour Party policy but I was not "in tune" with that policy. The NEC's next move should be to disaffiliate the TGWU because it is also unilateralist and opposed to all the anti-trade union laws brought in by the Tories.

Stop the purge!

By Cate Murphy

After the National Executive announced its shortlist, the CLP held an all-members meeting - which Labour Party Organisation Director Joyce Gould tried to ban, as "unconstitutional" - and 103 members there voted unanimously to try to force Lol Duffy's name on to the short list.

Members were asked to return their official ballot papers blank as, under the rules, "if 50% plus one of those who voted have returned blank ballot papers, the procedure will recommence..."

Wallasey CLP does not know if it succeeded in this part of its campaign: no-one from the constituency was allowed to attend the count (another breach of the rules), and the Regional Office will not reveal the figures.

Angela Eagle, a CoHSE full-timer and loyal Kinnockite careerist, "won" the official ballot, with, as

far as can be judged from what information the Regional Office has released, about 44 votes from Party members.

An unofficial "democratic" ballot, with all five nominees included, was run in parallel. 168 papers out of 301 were returned, and Lol Duffy won 139 votes to Angela Eagle's 8 - showing clearly who Wallasey Labour Party members really wanted for their candidate.

Meanwhile the National Executive has resolved to launch a new "investigation" into Wallasey after the election. Inevitably there will be expulsions.

Wallasey CLP is asking for Labour Parties and affiliated trade unions to pass motions opposing the National Executive's threatened investigation and condemning its breaches of its own rules.

Messages of support to, and more information from, the Secretary, Wallasey CLP, 39 Orchard Road, Moreton, Wirral L46 8TR.

Aggressive Labor policy pays off:

Keating gives a lesson for Kinnock

LETTER FROM AUSTRALIA

Tony Brown reports from Sydney

Behind the row about Australian prime minister Paul Keating apparently coming out against the monarchy and for a republic, Keating has a calculated plan to wrest back the initiative for the Australian Labor Party (ALP).

Before Keating ousted the previous Labor prime minister, Bob Hawke, in a caucus ballot last December, Labor was trailing the conservative opposition by over 30 points. Labor was generally perceived as tired, discredited, and divided, and tweedledum to the Liberals' tweedledee.

Keating has set out deliberately to differentiate Labor from the opposition, and by so doing to win back support from young and disaffected Labor supporters.

"Keating the Keynesian has no more real answers to the questions of capitalism than Keating the free-marketeer."

His comments on Britain's cynical willingness to deceive Australia during World War 2, and his vaguely republican comments during the Queen's visit, targeted an opposition who still genuflect (or curtsy) before the British monarch and the British Establishment, who still miss getting their MBEs and their knighthoods. It was designed to show them as backward-looking and caught up in increasingly irrelevant ties from centuries past.

Australia's chief trading ties are now with Asia. 70% of Australian exports go to Asia, and 65% of imports come from Asia. Australia is one of the few countries to hold a balance-of-trade surplus with Japan.

More important is Keating's new economic statement, aimed at neutralising the opposition's "Fightback" document, which promises large income tax cuts and

a 15% consumption tax.

Keating promised a big boost in public spending to modernise rail, roads, seaports, and the aviation industry, and to provide a national electricity grid.

There is nothing socialist about Keating's promises - they are aimed primarily at giving business a boost through tax breaks and increased depreciation allowances - but they do represent a switch from Keating's own previous devotion to the free market, and back towards traditional Labor Keynesianism.

Workers earning more than \$20,000 are to receive tax cuts to match those promised in the "Fightback" document, and most families with children are to receive a one-off payment of \$150 in April.

It has taken only two weeks in Parliament for Keating to put the Tories on the defensive. Even the beginnings of an aggressive Labor Party, appealing to its working-class constituency and attacking the toffs of the opposition, have brought a resurgence in Labor's fortunes.

The Tories' poll lead has been cut back; for the first time the polls show a majority of Australians in favour of a republic, and it is possible that Labor may hold on to Bob Hawke's seat of Wills in the April by-election.

Keating has demonstrated that an aggressive and distinctive platform will reap electoral benefits. Labor does not have to be a pale imitation of the Tories.

However, the deep economic problems are still there - a national debt of \$145 billion, 10% unemployment, 30% youth unemployment, and the longest and deepest recession since the 1930s. Keating the Keynesian has no more real answers to these problems of capitalism than Keating the free-marketeer.



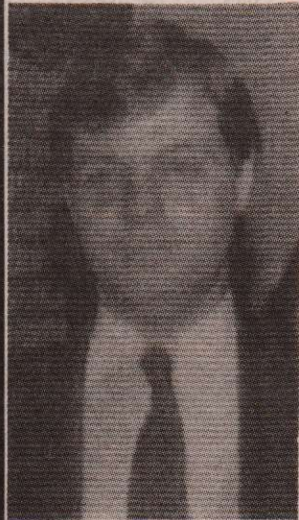
Keating has demonstrated that an aggressive and distinctive platform will reap electoral benefits

Pope Glenda and the Heath

GRAFFITI

It is good that even in the most repressive institutions people's sexuality, although closeted and denied, manages to bubble to the surface in the end. Sex is still a dirty word in both the Roman Catholic church and the Conservative Party, but both have been in the news for their members having a bit of fun with others of the same sex.

The Vatican, never a notable equal opportunities employer, has started insisting that all candidates for the priesthood, and novice monks and nuns, be tested for HIV. Wouldn't it be easier to hand out condoms with the communion wafers?



Tory MP, Alan Amos — unlucky to be caught on Hampstead Heath. If Pope Glenda had her way though...

According to *Outrage*, the policing of Hampstead Heath is pretty liberal, so Tory MP Alan Amos (yes, he did vote for Clause 28 from pillar to post) must have been careless to find his collar felt there last week. Apparently the police don't bother much with what happens after dark or away from the footpaths — only 10 people have been cautioned this year.

But if the police are too free-and-easy, Hampstead has its own Pope in waiting, none other than Labour PPC Glenda Jackson. People should be free to relax and enjoy the Heath, Glenda said last week, without the "embarrassment of discovering people of any sexual orientation engaged in sexual activity".

Readers of *Socialist Organiser* should recall Glenda's activities in the great outdoors in Ken Russell's film *Women in Love*. Pope Glenda? I'm afraid she's already a fallen woman.

Shock waves probably aren't reverberating through the lentil and sandals brigade after the Campaign for Real Ale supremo Roger Protz admitted his personal preference for lager.

The editor of the *Good Beer Guide* never really

liked the stuff himself, and prefers a gassy and tasteless brew. It makes sense, since Protz previously edited no less a paper than *Socialist Worker*, full of gas and changing its flavour to suit taste from month to month, but always lacking a decent head.

In a small cramped room above a pub somewhere in Birmingham (it would be smoke-filled but for the smoking bans) meets the "Summerfield Group", laying claim to being the broad left umbrella group for the left in the Labour Party in the neighbourhood. *Socialist Outlook* is probably the strongest single faction in it.

Ever-anxious to please everybody, *Socialist Outlook* have been sitting firmly on the fence on the question of left candidates standing against official Labour — but they have been willing to state their support for the Dave Nellists of this world away from prying eyes of the Labour left in Birmingham.

So when it was proposed to discuss supporting Labour in every constituency there was much embarrassed fidgeting and looking at shoes. Could it be that *Socialist Outlook* don't want a chance to argue their politics? Could it be that they want to carry on having their cake and eating it, supporting Nellist or supporting official candidates depending who they are talking to?

At the February meeting the discussion comes up, *Socialist Outlook* put up a half-hearted defence of their politics, but win the vote with a lot of people abstaining.

Thank god that's over. Next item on the agenda, Socialists for Labour rally. Well, I suppose we should invite Dave Nellist, a well-known member of SocialistsNot Particularly for Labour.

At this month's meeting somebody, asks about the Socialists for Labour rally. Er, no, afraid it's off. Why? Well, none of the left MPs will share a platform with Nellist.

And then the finale: a speaker gravely warns the meeting that February's decision to support Dave Nellist must be kept secret, since to campaign openly for it would be "suicide".



Dave Nellist: to be supported in secret?

Fleet Street comes on side

PRESS GANG



By Jim Denham

For the newspapers the campaign began months ago. Since the start of the year the editorial offices of the *Mail* and the *Express* have been little more than outposts of Conservative Central Office. Chris Patten and *Mail* editor Sir David English actually liaise to co-ordinate *Mail* headlines with the week's Central Office anti-Labour "theme".

Contacts between Central Office and the *Sun*, *Star*, *Telegraph* and *Times* may be a little less formal but the end result is the same: this is war and a times of war a newspaper's duty (in the immortal words of the *Telegraph's* Max Hastings during the Gulf conflict) a newspaper's duty is to "come on side".

Of the eleven national dailies, six are solidly pro-Tory. Of the remaining five, only one (the *Mirror*) can be relied upon to support Labour. The *Guardian* will agonise between Labour and the SLD. Murdoch's one non-



In these six tabloid front pages, published the day the General Election was announced, you have a graph of the state of British democracy.

Tory paper, *Today*, seems likely to go for the SLD or some sort of tactical voting. On previous form, the *Independent* will pontificate at length before copping out of taking a stand. The *Financial Times* doesn't really count in terms of the propaganda war.

But does it really matter all that much? A recent NOP survey (for the *Independent*) found that only 29 per cent of newspaper readers trust their own paper "a great

deal" or even "a fair amount" when it comes to election coverage. 39 per cent of tabloid readers do not trust their paper "at all". The *Daily Mirror's* rating among its own readers is minus seven; 27 per cent trust it but 34 per cent do not. The *Sun's* rating is far worse, at minus 21. Only 23 per cent of *Sun* readers trust its election coverage, while 44 per cent have no trust. Who says *Sun* readers are all fools?

The same survey

showed that two out of three people do trust the BBC and Independent Television News to report the election accurately — which rather makes a mockery of the recent tabloid campaign against the BBC and ITN on grounds of alleged pro-Labour bias.

It may also explain why the parties' "spin-doctors" (news manipulators to you and me) have been targeting the broadcast media so heavily. The techniques vary from thinly-veiled intimidation (usually in the form of threats over the phone) to blatantly contrived "news events" (usually involving the unveiling of posters and the "launching" of "new" policies).

The Tories seem to be winning this game, especially with regard to the BBC. For some time the BBC TV and radio news has been reporting the blatant Tory propaganda of the *Mail* and *Express* as though it was genuine news material. Now, a Panorama programme on the causes of the recession has been hastily cancelled as a result of heavy lobbying by the Tories. BBC staff are increasingly worried by the corporation's cowardice and self-censorship in the face of a carefully-orchestrated onslaught from the Tories.

Everyone knows that the British press is overwhelmingly biased against Labour. Perhaps now we should be more concerned about what's happening to our "unbiased" TV and radio.

Why Glasgow girls carry knives



WOMEN'S EYE

By Katrina Faccenda

A few months ago there were two well-publicised legal cases running concurrently in Edinburgh and Glasgow. They were both cases involving violence but couldn't have been more different.

The Glasgow case involved the fatal stabbing of a teenage girl by a fellow pupil in the school playground. The Edinburgh case involved the horrifically violent rape and attempted murder of a young woman of a similar age.

The story which won most space on the front pages was the playground murder. When the trials wound up and the sentencing was done, the sentences seemed

as disparate as the coverage given to the cases by the media.

A 15 year old schoolgirl was detained indefinitely for the stabbing of a fellow pupil, and the rapist was given a 16 year sentence which most probably will not be served in full.

But I don't want to go over the familiar ground regarding the hypocritical leniency of the legal system when it comes to crimes against women by men, where often severe jail sentences are seen as a solution to the attitudes which bring men to rape women. What made an impression on me was how the playground killing was generally seen to be so much more shocking than any other crime.

Knife attacks are nothing new to Glasgow, but this case of violence did not fit into the stereotypes of male on female or adult on child violence. This violence involved two young women.

At first glance it may seem difficult to imagine what provokes a teenager to take a knife to school with the purpose of threatening a fellow pupil. Far from being unusual, it is reputedly quite common practice for teenagers to carry weapons.

Recent studies have found that many teenagers now carry weapons in order

to defend themselves. With violent crimes committed by adult men on children soaring above many other crimes, many young people perceive a need for self-defence and the carrying of weapons is not, for them, an aggressive act.

The same research found that a large percentage of the girls and young women taking part were, in the space of their research being carried out, victims of a violent/sexual crime committed by a man, ranging from rape to "flashing".

"Capitalist society judges crimes which do not conform to a stereotypical pattern as all the more serious."

Many of these young women did not report these crimes and this was not only because of the obvious reasons of not being taken seriously but because they did not want to lose any of the freedoms their parents granted them. Determined not to become imprisoned by the violent society we live in,

they look to defending themselves.

When you see young women growing up in a society which seems intent on making them victims, a society where every day we hear more reports of vicious attacks on women, both of a physical and economic nature, the relation between this state of affairs and the nature of capitalist society becomes all the more clear.

But, on the other hand, it's all too easy to create a response which makes a theory of the hostility which many women quite rightly feel towards men, a theory which divides society solely along lines of sex and letting capitalism off the hook.

Capitalist society judges crimes which do not conform to a stereotypical pattern as all the more serious, so you get women who murder their husbands getting more severely punished than men who murder their wives. The socialist society we struggle for will not bring an overnight end to the violence which women are subjected to.

Only socialism will liberate both men and women from sexual stereotypes and when we win, the struggle for the emancipation of the working class I, for one, will feel that the world will be safer for women.

Market madness in Moscow

Boris Kagarlitsky spells out the economic catastrophe facing the workers of the ex-USSR

Even quite recently I would have found it difficult to imagine that I would write an article for Pravda. Two years ago Pravda would not have printed anything by me under any circumstances, and one year ago I would hardly have agreed to an article of mine being published in this paper.

Today, however, so much has changed, so much has become mixed up and confused, that the events of the period of "early perestroika" are already regarded as belonging to history, as "the affairs of days long past, the legends of long-past ancient times".

Society has come up against completely new problems and contradictions, ones which are completely unknown to us. We are learning at first hand the meaning of hyper-inflation, the collapse of production, and economic dependency. In reality we are changing into an ordinary developing capitalist country - but with the difference that in the majority of such countries people have become accustomed to these problems and have learnt to cope - albeit with difficulty - with them, whereas we are completely unadapted to our new situation and, above all, the majority of us were reckoning on something completely different.

The well-known Moscow journalist Anatoly Baranov has written: "You have the impression that the country is governed by professors who have specialised in describing the horrors of capitalism and who

now, after declaring themselves democrats, have set about creating such horrors".

People are showing a miraculous amount of patience in the hope that the promised prosperity of the market is not far off, and that only modest exertions are required in order to reach the sacred goal described in such picturesque terms by liberal writers. Many still see visions of mountains of cheap imported goods spilling over the shelves in shops.

And even those who today criticise the government (and often even call themselves left-wing) not infrequently continue to believe in the market utopias "proving" that in general the course being followed is the correct one, and that all

"There is not a sufficiently large number of sugar-daddies in the world with sufficient capital to revive our economy."

unpleasant aspects result from "various mistakes" or from "incompetence" on the part of this or that leader.

In fact, the situation is much more tragic. The course being followed in pursuit of the creation of a market-capitalist model of the economy which has been chosen not only by the leadership in Russia but also by practically all the states of the former Eastern Bloc - this course cannot, in general, lead these countries to economic growth



FORWARD TO THE MARKET ECONOMY?

and prosperity.

You can spend hours talking about the success of Western Europe, but these countries demanded four centuries in order to form - at a price of scarcely conceivable hardships and upheavals - a system of more or less civilised market relations on a capitalist basis, in order to rear the contemporary industrialist, and in order to guarantee social stability.

The majority of other capitalist countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America, which lagged behind in their development, flounder in a whirlpool of poverty and social cataclysms.

And there is no point in fooling oneself with fancy fairy tales about the "South Korean miracle", brought about by intelligent bureaucrats with the assistance of Western loans and completely traditional "five-year plans". There is not a sufficiently large number of sugar-daddies in the world with sufficient capital to revive our economy.

But the main point is that those who have free capital at their disposal have totally different ideas. Not that they are particularly ill-willed towards us. It is simply that they have completely different tasks and priorities. The recently fashionable discussions about "democratic privatisations" or "privatisation to the benefit of the labour collective" are utterly devoid of content. Factories

which are handed over to the workforce without a system of supply and sale having been established and without reliable sources of capital investments will end up in a lamentable situation.

The best that we can expect if we proceed along the path marked out by the liberals is that of "joining up with the majority", which suffers from hunger, backwardness, civil wars and dependency.

"Production is becoming so uncontrollable that there will be nothing left to privatise."

Sooner or later, the dream of Western prosperity will, of course, become reality. But not for all. Those who promised us abundance will indeed achieve it. For themselves. The hardships of the country will turn out to be hardships for only a part of the country's citizens.

Somebody will still live in Moscow, just as somebody will still live in Paris (but perhaps such people will simply live in Paris, and Moscow). For this to occur, the majority will have to

live in the most backward and poverty-stricken countries of the Third World.

Already today the industrial basis of the country is seriously undermined. Instead of movement towards the market, we have the destruction of the basic economic links between enterprises. Whilst newspapers argue about who to transfer property to, production is becoming so uncontrollable that there will soon be nothing left to privatise.

Any hope of strengthening democracy in such a situation is nonsensical. There cannot be political equality of rights and political freedom in a country of the hungry where one part of the population plunders the other, and where the poor dream of revenge, preparing a bloodbath for the rich.

The rulers of Russia can call themselves democrats as much as they want, but the very logic of their policies is inevitably and unavoidably leading the country to a brutal authoritarian dictatorship.

Boris Kagarlitsky is author of *The Thinking Reed, Dialectics of Change, and Beyond Perestroika*. He was a political prisoner under Brezhnev. (Translated and abridged from Pravda)



Boris Kagarlitsky speaks in Los Angeles

Kinnockite drive for clampdown in preparation for Labour Go

Students fight for union demo

By Jill Mountford
(Organiser, Left Unity)

The National Union of Students' (NUS) "Emergency" Conference in Wolverhampton on 4 March broke up in disorder.

Delegates rushed to the front of the conference hall, chanting "cheating bastards!" at the platform. The NUS leadership fled the platform and set security guards on the delegates, pushing, shoving, and punching.

Former boxing champion Terry Marsh was a delegate at the conference, and commented that these security men were "a breed apart from the rest of us".

What was it all about? The NUS's Kinnockite leaders had just pulled their fourth dirty trick in a row, in a battle which has dominated student politics for months.

The battle is not, unfortunately, about how to remedy student poverty, or how to win adequate facilities for the larger numbers of students being crammed into colleges - or, at least, not directly. It is about NUS organisation.

But the organisational issue is also very political. The so-called "reform debate" has been bubbling since 1986. The Kinnockite NUS leaders are frantic to ram through their changes now because of the General Election.

They want to have student unionism tamed, strapped down, neutralised, and transformed into student-services bureaucracy and a polite parliamentary lobbying agency, in time for the Labour Government. They want to make sure that students' expectations of a better deal from Labour cannot be translated into mass action.

And if the Tories win again, then the NUS leaders expect moves to smash up NUS altogether. They prefer to respond by making NUS "safe" in advance, and then pleading with the Tories to spare them, than by organising mass student action.

The key changes pushed by

the NUS leaders are abolition of Winter Conference and "regionalisation".

NUS has two conferences a year. It needs them because its membership changes so quickly: most students are students only for two or three years. Abolishing Winter Conference would leave NUS with only one conference, heavily dominated by elections.

The Kinnockites see abolition of Winter Conference as central to depriving the NUS left of a national platform, and that is why these mealy-mouthed careerists are acting with the determination and vigour of hard-bitten revolutionaries to get Winter Conference abolished.

"The NUS's Kinnockite leaders had just pulled their fourth dirty trick in a row, in a battle which has dominated student politics for months."

"Regionalisation" means smashing up the Area NUS organisations, which are an important base for left-wing activists, especially from the Further Education colleges, which are the colleges with the greatest numbers of working-class students.

At the "Emergency" Conference, regionalisation was pushed off the agenda, for now, and so was a NUS leadership plan to restructure the union's National Executive to the disadvantage of the left. Abolition of Winter Conference remains on the agenda, thanks to the NUS leaders' dirty tricks.

All constitutional changes

need a two-thirds majority at two successive NUS conferences.

* At NUS Winter Conference 1991 the platform failed to get their two-thirds majority. They called a re-vote to get the two-thirds - in clear breach of NUS constitution, which states that "No matter once decided may be reopened at the same meeting of the Conference".

* They knew that they probably could not get a second two-thirds majority at Spring Conference 1992. So they went for an "Emergency" Conference - which would be smaller, and more dominated by the more middle-class and right-wing University and Polytechnic delegations - even though there was obviously no "emergency".

* According to the NUS constitution, 25 requests from colleges are needed for an Emergency Conference. The NUS leadership cited 39 requests - only 19 of which were validly made.

* Then the NUS leaders still failed to get their two-thirds majority at the Emergency Conference! They are trying to cook up the two-thirds by counting in two extra colleges which did not vote.

The Emergency Conference was less than a third the size of an ordinary NUS conference. Many Further Education colleges and Sixth Forms could not send delegates because of mock A-level exams the same week.

But the left's campaigning since Winter Conference had produced results. There was a strong contingent of angry and determined opponents of the NUS leadership at the conference.

For three hours the agenda was paralysed by points of order, challenges to the chair, and procedural arguments from delegates convinced that this rigged-up conference had no democratic authority.

But eventually a card vote was called on the abolition. While it was being counted, the Conference moved on to the "regionalisation" debate. Policy for regionalisation was carried, but the constitutional change fell short of a two-thirds majority on a show of hands.

Then the card vote on Winter Conference was announced: 416,554 for abolition, 208,330 against, and 7,716 abstentions. It was just 106 votes short of the two-thirds majority. Conference broke in to cheers and dancing. Then the chair, Sam Peters, announced that she would be making a ruling (which would be open to challenge).

It had to be some dirty trick! The Conference dissolved into chaos. Amidst the hubbub, Sam Peters declared that votes from colleges who "clearly intended to vote" should be added to the count. She wanted to add in votes from two colleges who now claimed that their card votes had been stolen, and so get the two-thirds majority.

There were plenty of reasons to challenge Sam



Student activists want a Labour Government - but they also want to organise to demand education facilities from that government.

Peters' ruling - but no challenges were debated, because the Conference collapsed in disorder.

"The NUS leadership want to have student unionism tamed, strapped down, neutralised, and transformed into student-services bureaucracy...in time for the Labour Government."

The NUS leaders will now have to try to get a "Presidential Ruling" approved at Spring Conference to revise the card vote.

They are determined to get that ruling approved. They are determined because they are being pushed by the Labour

Party leadership in Walworth Road, who want the National Union of Students, the largest youth organisation in Britain, well under control before a Labour Government takes office.

In the run-up to the Emergency Conference, a Labour Party HQ official sent the following fax to leading NUS Executive members Stephen Twigg, Sam Peters, and Mary Wimbury.

What to do:

1. Give details of when the special conference is and the amendments deadline.
2. Ask if they will submit an amendment.
3. Ask them if they are going to send a delegation.
4. Ask them how they are going to elect the delegation (remind them that it doesn't have to be by cross-campus ballot).
5. Approach only those that are pro-reform. Colleges that are anti-reform need to be handled with care. For instance, it would be worth persuading the NI colleges that reform is going to benefit them, and so they should be in favour. There is no point on the other hand approaching Essex University!
6. Ask them when they will know who is going, so that you can phone them back and get names plus affiliations.
7. If a pro-reform colleges

SWP help right

At the National Union of Students "Emergency" Conference, the right-wing Labour leadership got a helping hand from an unexpected quarter - the Socialist Workers' Party.

After hours of filibustering by the left, the right wing moved that we go immediately to the vote to ratify abolition of Winter Conference. NUS women's officer Janine Booth tried to thwart them by arguing that we must discuss what we replace Winter Conference with before we abolish it.

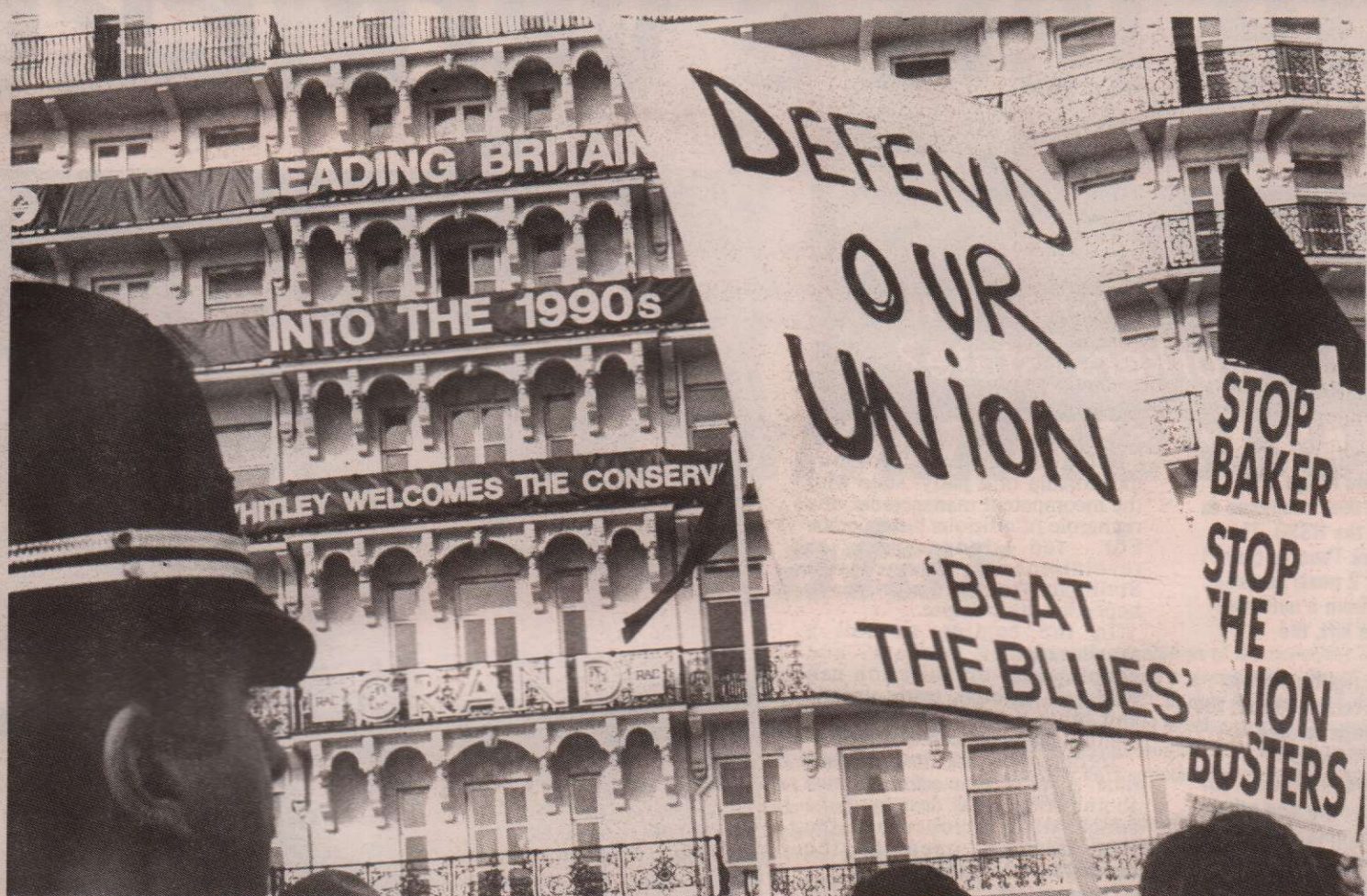
The SWP objected that Janine's proposal was "time-wasting". Suddenly all moderate and well-behaved, the SWP said that the left's filibustering would alienate the middle ground.

Blithely they argued: "So what if we lose Winter Conference! We just have to build a base in the colleges and get motions passed for Winter Conference to be restored". This is irresponsible rubbish. To restore Winter Conference, if it is abolished, we will need two two-thirds majorities at two successive conferences, a year apart. It will be very difficult.

The SWP seem to be blinded by factional hatred for Left Unity - the main left-wing opposition to the NUS leaders' clampdown. In fact, if the Kinnockite NUS leaders get their way, it will be a serious blow to all left-wingers and activists in student unions.

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Democracy



Student unions have had to fight long and hard to defend as much autonomy as they can against Tory attacks. Now the NUS leadership wants to tame NUS itself.

Why campaign will use courts

Alongside its agitation inside the National Union of Students, the Campaign for Democracy in NUS is also pursuing legal action against the NUS leadership.

Why? The abolition of Winter Conference would be a big blow to NUS democracy, and deprive the NUS left of its major national platform. It would be a big, possibly decisive, step in transforming NUS from a campaigning union into a bureaucratic student-services and parliamentary-lobbying agency (a transformation which is already well under way in some University student unions).

The NUS leaders have repeatedly fiddled, flouted and overridden the democratic processes within NUS through which the abolition of Winter Conference could be stopped. Once the abolition is an accomplished fact, to reverse it will be a difficult and slow business. Realistically, in the medium term, it will be impossible.

Despite the general bias of the bourgeois courts, so blatant are the NUS leaders' breaches of their own constitution that there is an excellent chance that a court will stop them going ahead with abolition. And if a court does stop them, then it will be some time before they are able to try again.

Marxists are generally against using the bourgeois courts in the internal affairs of the labour movement. The student movement is not the labour movement - NUS is indirectly state-funded, and much of it is a student-services business rather than a trade-union-type body - but we want to keep the courts out there as much as possible, too. Supporters of Socialist Organiser and the Alliance for Workers' Liberty argue for the main focus on the campaign to be agitation inside the student unions, and against any reliance on the courts.

However, the principle of not using the courts can not be the absolute, always-overriding principle. Other principles have weight, too!

We fight to get disputes settled within the labour movement (or the student movement) rather than by the courts because we value the independence and democracy of the movement. To let that independence be extinguished, and socialists be sidelined, by bureaucratic dirty tricks, without using every means available to resist, is turning the principle into nonsense.

It is no part of Marxist principle to be gallant losers. We are against

"It is no part of Marxist principle to be gallant losers. We are against violence - but we will use violence rather than submit quietly to a military coup. We are against using the courts - but rather use the courts than quietly abandon the struggle."

violence - but we will use violence rather than submit quietly to a military coup. We are against using the courts - but rather use the courts than quietly abandon the struggle.

Yes, often using the courts is often counter-productive. Often, probably usually, when leftists appeal to the courts on issues within the labour movement, the politics of the appeal are opportunist - putting calculated short-term gain (maybe falsely calculated at that) above long-term interests.

Socialist Organiser's editors rejected the advice we had from many on the Labour left to take the

Labour NEC to court when they banned our paper in 1990. We criticised Militant's repeated use of the courts after 1982 to try to stop themselves being purged from the Labour Party, and their recourse to the courts in 1986 to try to get John Macreadie installed as general secretary of the civil service union CPSA.

Why was the use of the courts wrong in those cases, and others like them, and why is the current issue in NUS different? We can tabulate the arguments which condemn use of the courts, and check off the current case against them.

Often the legal action contradicts, detracts, or diverts from political campaigning and mobilisation within the movement, by taking decisions out of the movement - where the democratic channels, though imperfect, have not been exhausted - and in to the courts, or by alienating members who sympathise on the issue but resent the use of the courts.

Or the courts are unlikely to find in our favour. Or, if they do find in our favour, their ruling can do nothing decisive against what we find objectionable, because it can not change an adverse balance of political forces in the movement.

Or, if the court ruling might help us, still, the financial cost of going to court is so huge that money-raising to meet it will inevitably divert from and undermine campaigning within the movement, to a degree which outweighs any likely advantage.

Or, the costs of legal action, in giving the courts and judges an opportunity to mess around and interfere in a movement which had previously kept some robust independence, are so great as to outweigh any short-term gains.

Check off the current case against this list of objections: none of them apply. The democratic processes inside NUS are being pursued to the full, but effectively overridden by an entrenched leadership. The issue is so sharply and narrowly defined that a court ruling in our favour is likely;

it will prevent a difficult-to-reverse shift in the balance of forces in the movement; the financial cost will not be crippling.

The NUS is already so enmeshed with the state that it makes no sense to object to legal action as a major weakening of its independence. The court action can not override or harm NUS democracy, but may well help preserve it. And the legal action plainly is not undermining the direct political campaign in the student unions.

In the run-up to the Emergency Conference, Left Unity and the Campaign for Democracy in NUS were not standing aside from the mobilisation of delegates, and telling students to look to the courts; they were campaigning to such good effect that a conference specially rigged up for the purpose by the NUS leaders failed to repeat the two-thirds majority that they got on the "re-vote" at the Winter Conference.

That is why support for the Campaign for Democracy in NUS, and for its willingness to use the courts, is so strong across a very broad range of student union activists.

The NUS leaders' claim that abolition of Winter Conference got a two-thirds majority at the Emergency Conference suffered a big setback at the NUS Rules Revision Committee meeting on Thursday 12th.

Under the NUS constitution the RRC makes the initial decision on the correct counting of the vote, though it could be challenged at Spring Conference.

The RRC has a three-two majority of hardline supporters of abolition; but, by the time the committee meeting finished at 2am, they were so unsure of their ground that they made no official decision, and instead referred the issue for a "Presidential Ruling".

The left's verdict on the

Was August 1991 a capitalist counter-revolution against a workers' state?

In the new *Workers' Liberty* magazine, a wide range of socialists offer their responses to the collapse of the USSR. This article by Martin Thomas (part 1 this week, part 2 next) surveys the responses from a narrower spectrum of the left, the Trotskyists.

Leon Trotsky, right up to his death in 1940, reckoned that the USSR was a "degenerated workers' state". Some Trotskyists - the *Alliance for Workers' Liberty* and others - believe that events since 1940 have shown that the Stalinist states have been class systems of exploitation parallel, not superior, to capitalism. Most Trotskyists, however, continued to apply the description "degenerated workers' state" to the USSR, and extended it, calling China, Eastern Europe, and so on, "deformed workers' states".

After the attempted Moscow coup of 19-21 August, some of these Trotskyists frankly recognised that their theories must be reassessed, others so twisted their description of events as to try to make it appear that there was an emerging mass socialist movement behind Yeltsin.

As the French socialist weekly *Rouge* put it (12 September), the attempted coup of 19-21 August 1991 in the USSR posed many questions for all those Marxists who still considered the USSR to be a "degenerated workers' state".

"We used to believe that from a sharp crisis of these regimes would arise forces - significant, at least, if not commanding a majority - capable of opposing the road of a self-managed socialist democracy to that of capitalist restoration. In fact such currents are marginal today.

"We used to think that in spite of the confiscation of power by a parasitic bureaucracy, the existence of non-capitalist social relations arising from the revolution of 1917 represented gains in the eyes of the workers, who would mobilise to defend them.

"In fact, it appears not so at all. Primarily, the workers see in their miserable living standards the expression of a productivity gap which has widened again between the rich Western countries and the Eastern bloc.

"That does not exclude vigorous movements tomorrow of resistance to the consequences of privatisation, but as of now the facts are sufficient to render necessary a critical re-examination of the analysis and of their consequences for practical activity."

Rouge's first comment on the coup (5 September) had been: "...No nostalgia! No regrets! We will shed no tears for the

monstrous edifice which combined the ferocious dictatorship of a party-state with the incompetent management of a rigmarole of officious bureaucrats. For too long we, as revolutionaries, opponents of Stalinism from the start, have hoped for this collapse...

"In the coming turmoil a movement of workers' and people's self-organisation can begin to develop, trade unions and other groups can multiply, political pluralism can develop.

"Incontestably, all that will take time. A lot of time... the Stalinist abomination... has destroyed the conquests of October, and the road is now open to the restoration of capitalism."

The strict logic of the "degenerated workers' state" formula should imply some support for the coup, as the only visible attempt to check or halt the drive to capitalism. Yet - as far as I know - only one tiny splinter of the Trotskyist movement drew that conclusion clearly. The "Bolshevik Tendency", a splinter from the Spartacist League, assessed the coup as an attempt by "a section of the rapidly disintegrating Stalinist bureaucracy... to strike against the principal forces of capitalist restoration." (Quoted in *Workers' Vanguard* 27.9.91).

The Spartacist League itself - a small group, but representing the fraction of the "Trotskyist" spectrum most fervent about "defending the workers' states" - remonstrated that the coup programme "comes down to perestroika minus glasnost: the introduction of the market but not so fast, and shut up." (*Workers' Vanguard* 30.8.91).

That assessment - shared by most of the Trotskyist factions - would imply opposition to the coup. But in fact the Spartacist League was distressed at the defeat of the coup.

"August 27 - The working people of the Soviet Union, and indeed the workers of the world, have suffered an unparalleled disaster... Soviet workers are facing a disaster of catastrophic proportions: every gain for which they, their parents and grandparents sacrificed is on the chopping block..."

"As the crowd of yuppies, students and assorted Russian nationalists, including fascists and priests, gathered at the start of the coup outside the Russian parliament, Yeltsin's "White House", a call on Moscow workers to clean out this counterrevolutionary rabble was in order. Yet the coup plotters did not mobilise the workers..." (*Workers' Vanguard* 30.8.91).

All other would-be Trotskyist groups - with two bizarre exceptions, as we shall see - opposed the coup. They then faced a dilemma: didn't support for the anti-coup movement mean support for a counter-revolution which was destroying the "workers' state" and replacing it by capitalism? And why did the "workers' state" have no defenders but a ragged crew of old Brezhnevite bureaucrats - or maybe not even them, since most



Moscow demonstrators topple the statue of Dzerzhinsky

agreed that the coup-makers did not differ fundamentally on economic policy from Gorbachev?

Some groups evaded this question by flatly asserting that the anti-coup movement represented the start of a "political revolution" that would lead not to capitalism but to socialist democracy. Thus the "Lambertist" French weekly *Informations Ouvrières* (21.8.91):

"The chaos of the present situation in the USSR marks the bankruptcy of all those, legatees of the Stalinist bureaucratic system, who have acted in recent years to dismantle social property and to deliver the country to the pillage and colonisation of the system of private property of the means of production. It is the collapse of all the factions of the bureaucracy... Gorbachev... Yanayev and Pavlov... Yeltsin and Shevardnadze..."

"Through the bankruptcy of those who want to re-establish capitalism, the dramatic situation in the USSR expresses the bankruptcy of capitalism itself..." (Editorial).

"All the layers and factions of the bureaucracy have linked their fate to the restoration of capitalism. Between the economic programme of Yeltsin, that of Gorbachev, and that of Yanayev and Pavlov, there is not enough difference to slide a cigarette paper between them..."

"[And yet the coup...] The explanation of this apparent paradox lies in the impossibility in present conditions in the USSR of restoring anything like capitalism... because the capitalism of 1991 is to the capitalism of the early 19th century what the old man in agony is to the robust adolescent. The capitalism of 1830 was the carrier of industrialisation, that of 1991 only generates deindustrialisation... [and because of] the resistance of the workers." (Article by D. Gluckstein).

And after the defeat of the coup (28.8.91):

"The conditions [for developing capitalism] are in fact more difficult today than before the

coup attempt. Through the openings created by the collapse of the bureaucratic apparatus, the masses have begun to surge... A real workers' revolution is just beginning... The defence of social property is merged with the workers' and peasants' fight for survival". (D. Gluckstein).

Although *Informations Ouvrières* welcomed the anti-coup movement so enthusiastically, it did not specifically oppose the coup. Its issue of 21 August, which went to press before the collapse of the coup, expressed no support for resistance to the coup as distinct from resistance to "the bureaucracy" in general. Its nearest thing to a positive slogan was: "Against the dismantling of

"The would-be Trotskyists faced a dilemma. Didn't support for the anti-coup movement mean support for a counter-revolution? And why did the "workers' state" have no defenders but a ragged crew of old Brezhnevite bureaucrats?"

whole industries, against poverty and famine, for the defence of the workers' rights and conquests and of social property: one and the same struggle unites the workers of the world."

The other Trotskyist group which did not come out against the coup was the British *Socialist Action*, which refused to make any comment at all until their irregular magazine appeared in late October or early November. By then, of course, there was no

percentage from any viewpoint in supporting Yanayev and his gang. *Socialist Action* did not enthuse about the coup - "an attempt to put the clock back towards the Brezhnevist past" - but that was basically the same assessment as the Bolshevik Tendency, and *Socialist Action* made it clear that "the Brezhnevist past" was preferable, for them, to a victory of the pro-capitalist democratic movement in the USSR: "If the Russian Revolution were to fall, that is if capitalism were to be restored.. it would open a period of the most extreme international reaction... any sectarianism would be unforgivable... to currents emerging from the old CPSU who want to defend the socialised base of the USSR."

Socialist Action denounced the Filoche minority in the French LCR (*Rouge*) as having "passed out of the political framework of the working class", and Ernest Mandel as confused, but praised the *Morning Star* ("perspective... entirely correct and justified").

The *US Militant* had the same view as *Informations Ouvrières*, but combined with opposition to the coup.

"Soviet workers win great victory by defeating coup," it headlined (6.9.91). "Working people in the Soviet Union won a giant victory when their resistance toppled the August 19 coup."

"Class conflicts that will sharpen as the crisis deepens will end up in the working class organising a political revolution to sweep away the parasitic social layer that now holds the reins of power in the workers' state."

"As they deepen their resistance they will reach out to struggles around the world and be influenced by revolutionaries and communists - from Malcolm X to the leaders of the Cuban revolution."

Other headlines included: "Protest of coup is example of why workers defend nationalised property relations." And "Why US imperialism lost the cold war."

IN PERSPECTIVE

The USSR



The collapse of the Stalinist dictatorship has opened up space for political debate. Yet the dominant mood is anti-socialist.

Sectarian lessons from afar

By Chris Reynolds

Genuine socialists in Russia face hard times. All the traditional phrases and slogans of socialism are discredited by decades of Stalinist abuse; almost everyone looks to free-market economics; the working-class movement is extremely weak.

The least they can ask from us, their more fortunately-placed comrades in the West, is that we try to understand, to help, to criticise constructively. Yet the two biggest socialist newspapers in Britain, *Socialist Worker* and *Militant*, are offering the Russian socialists only peevish and arbitrary denunciations.

Socialist Worker, in September last year, seized on a phrase from the founding statement of Boris Kagarlitsky's new Russian Party of Labour - "civilised forms of market" - to sneer, "That's a good slogan for Neil Kinnock's (or indeed John Major's) election manifesto".

On 21 February *Militant* followed in similar style. An article supposedly reporting on "new left wing parties in Russia" gave half its space to the Party of Labour - the other groups it mentioned were the Stalinist *retreads* and *Militant's* own Moscow grouplet, *Rabochaya Demokratiya* - but claimed that the PL represented nothing outside "the cosy rooms of Moscow State University".

Militant went on to claim:

* The Party of Labour does have support from the Moscow Federation of Trade Unions, which embraces the new independent unions as well as formerly state-controlled unions, but this counts for nothing since the leaders of the Federation are "old union apparatchiks" and "a well-known anarcho-syndicalist"; it "has called for strikes", but, so *Militant* claims, is "scared stiff of strikes".

* The Party of Labour identifies with "the traditions of Kinnock - a few MPs but no democratic debate or control".

* It is "pro-market. Kagarlitsky said in November he opposed 'bad privatisation'. The slogan they use is... 'Market wages for market prices'."

* "Two professors" within the Party of Labour find "their model for workers' democracy" in the USA. "The idea that workers should have democratic control of the state is a million miles from their approach".

Now Boris Kagarlitsky has never claimed to be a Trotskyist or a Leninist. As *Workers' Liberty* pointed out in 1990, when *Socialist Worker* was boosting Kagarlitsky's group as the be-all and end-all of the East European left, "Kagarlitsky is a sort of left social-democrat. 'In my view', he writes, 'Martov and Allende were right, not Lenin'. He seeks a 'middle way' to a new society, between reform and revolution".

Western Marxists can reasonably criticise Kagarlitsky's current advocacy of "left Keynesianism" or "New Deal" economics as his alternative to Yeltsin's free-market programme, though we should do so with some understanding of the difficulties that lead him to try such formulas as a way to get a hearing and escape being marginalised. We can suggest the ideas of workers' control of food distribution (as championed by *Solidarnosc* in Poland in 1980-1) and supervision of prices by committees of workers and housewives (as proposed by Trotsky in the 1930s).

But many of the criticisms from *Militant* and *Socialist Worker* are exaggerated or downright stupid. If the initial group of socialists are mostly university-based, it is good for them to seek alliances with left-moving old union apparatchiks and with influential anarcho-syndicalists in order to find a path to the workers.

The Party of Labour calls for "economic democracy..."

democratic regulation of the economy... self-management and a strong authority of people's representatives". It may be that their democratic demands are not precise or clear enough, but it is plainly slanderous to claim that they oppose the workers having democratic control, or see the USA as a model.

Kagarlitsky favours privatisation of small shops and suchlike, but the transformation of big enterprises into a "social sector" under workers' management. When he opposes "bad privatisation", he is denouncing wildcat rip-off privatisation by the old bureaucrats, but making clear that he does not denounce small private shops and workshops.

"A civilised form of market" sounds feeble and conservative in Britain, but in Russia, where people's lives are dominated by very uncivilised markets, it is not so feeble. "Market wages for market prices" is an answer to Yeltsin's policy of letting prices rip but holding down wages.

For Russian socialists to say "we demand planning instead of the market" would be pointless or counterproductive. Planning by whom? By the old bureaucrats? By the workers? But the workers are not organised, and do not yet want to plan.

Writing to Marx on 23 February 1877, Frederick Engels joyfully cited, as evidence that the Italian workers' movement was turning towards class-struggle socialism and away from anarchist phrases, a declaration that: "We believe that we shall, by this means [agitation for factory laws and general suffrage] achieve the emancipation of the proletariat more promptly and more thoroughly than if we were to stand for years and generations baying at the moon and waiting until Mother Revolution should deign to come and break the workers' chains".

If *Socialist Worker* and *Militant* had been around to comment then, they would have been denouncing the Italian workers, and probably Engels too.

The American group *Socialist Action* offered a more moderate version of the same perspective. It quoted Trotsky:

"The political prognosis has an alternative character: either the bureaucracy, becoming ever more the organ of the world bourgeoisie in the workers' state, will overthrow the new forms of property and plunge the country back into capitalism; or the working class will crush the bureaucracy and open the way to socialism."

And it commented: "The political prognosis Trotsky poses is not for the far off future, but is the stark choice facing the USSR and the Eastern European countries today."

Socialist Action assessed the coup attempt as follows:

"The difference between the opposed bureaucratic layers was whether it was possible to continue the process of capitalist restoration by political/parliamentary means, or whether an iron-fisted dictatorship was necessary to impose the anti-working class measures necessary to achieve the same end."

And its defeat: "The mobilisation of the Soviet people in opposition to the coup was the central reason for its failure... the bourgeois analysts who have focussed on the alleged 'ineptitude' of the plotters as a major cause of their defeat have widely missed the mark." (Theses on the Soviet Union, 29.9.91).

The "Morenist" faction - a sizable force in Latin America, especially - took a similar line. Its Argentine paper, *Solidaridad Socialista*, declared on 23 August that the defeat of the coup was:

"A workers' and popular victory which will have big repercussions around the world favourable to all workers and the oppressed. It shows once more that when the people mobilise they can impose their will."

"Bush, Menem, Yeltsin and

Gorbachev all want the restoration of capitalism, to liquidate the great socialist conquests of the Russian workers, and to convert the USSR into a kind of big Argentina, with an economy ruled by the IMF. Therefore they all also want to preserve the KGB and the oppressive Soviet army.

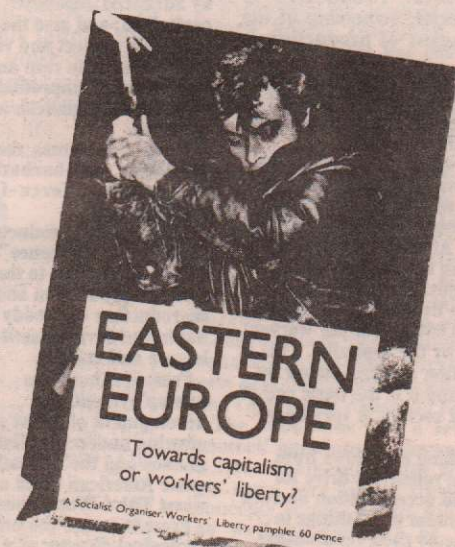
"But the Soviet working class has been strengthened by this great victory. The miners, for example, who have founded their independent union and have already organised three big strikes against Gorbachev, this time went on strike against the putschists."

"It is a great revolution on the march, in which the mobilised people learn day by day. We call on the Soviet workers to destroy the KGB and the oppressive Soviet state and to govern themselves with their own organisations - like the miners union, strike committees - and to support the workers of Europe and all the world to end exploitation and capitalist-imperialist oppression. This is the only way to save the USSR from imperialist colonisation."

The German fortnightly *Sozialistische Zeitung*, in contrast, was as firmly realistic as *Rouge*, or more so; but most of the "workers' statist" took a rather evasive middle way. Opposing the coup, they side-stepped hard questions by side-stepping any clear definition of current events (was it a capitalist counter-revolution?) and instead focusing on future possibilities (the current situation, indeterminate in itself, might turn into capitalist counter-revolution or working-class socialist revolution).

Part 2 will survey those responses; the responses of two "workers' statist" groups, *Militant* (Britain) and *Lutte Ouvriere*, which raised devastating criticisms of the "workers'-statist" thesis without drawing conclusions; and the arguments of those Trotskyists who had already, before 1991, rejected the "workers' state" thesis.

More from Socialist Organiser



60p plus 18p postage from Socialist Organiser, P O Box 823, London SE15

We need £8,000

Our meetings this week

Thursday 19 March, Glasgow: "Socialists, Labour and the Election". AWL meeting, 7.30, Partick Burgh Halls.
Saturday 21-Sunday 22 March, Newcastle: Women's Fightback weekend school. Polytechnic Students' Union.
Wednesday 25 March, London: "A socialist response to Islamic Fundamentalism". Lessons of Algeria and Iran discussed at Socialist Organiser London forum, 7.30, room S75, St Clement's Building, LSE, Houghton St.
Saturday 28 March, Newcastle: Basic Marxism day school, organised by AWL, 11.30, Rossetti Studios.

Anti-racist action

Monday 23 March, London: "Campaigning against fascists". Labour Party Socialists meeting, 7.30, room 119, Lambeth Town Hall.
Tuesday 24 March, Birmingham: ARA meeting, 7.30, TURC, Frederick Street.
Friday 27 March, London: "The rise of French fascism". Organised by CAFE, with speakers including a member of SOS-Racisme, 7.30, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square.
Saturday 28 March, London: "March for Justice" against racist attacks. Assemble 12.30, Plashet Park, E6.
Thursday 2 April, London: Artists Against Racism benefit, 7.00, Hackney Empire.

Other meetings

Thursday 19 March, London: "After Maxwell", meeting called by NUJ-GPMU liaison committee. Speakers include Arthur Scargill, 6.45, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square.
Thursday 19 March, London: Vigil organised by the Chinese Solidarity Campaign, 7.00 to 9.00, outside the Chinese Embassy, Portland Place.
Saturday 28 March, London: "Free media" conference organised by the Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom, 10.00 to 5.00 at 27 Britannia Street, WC1.
Saturday 28 March, London: "The Spanish Civil War". Organised by 'Revolutionary History', 8.00, Calthorpe Arms, Grays Inn Road.

This is the first issue of Socialist Organiser produced on new equipment bought after we raised £10,000 in our recent fund drive. Thanks to all the people who raised money or sent donations for the paper!

A lot of time and effort has been necessary over the last few weeks to rewire and redecorate the offices where Socialist Organiser is produced, to install

the new equipment, and to start ironing out the bugs, so SO has had to miss a few weeks. We are still learning, and still finding and dealing with quirks, snags, and gremlins in the new technology, so bear with us! Before long the new technology will enable us to produce a sharper, better paper, and to do it more efficiently.

The Alliance for Workers' Liberty and Socialist Organiser have launched a new fund target

of £8,000. We aim to reach this target by the time of our Workers' Liberty 92 event (3-5 July).

We are asking for donations and fund-raising from supporters for four reasons.

● We are expanding our organisation and want to pay for a new organiser;

● We need to buy further new technology to streamline production of the paper and other literature.

● We want to be able to finance using the new technology to produce more pamphlets, publishing our ideas in more durable, adaptable form.

● We want to improve our international links.

Can you help the Alliance for Workers' Liberty and Socialist Organiser? We need your help.

Send a donation to AWL, PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA.

Join our 200 Club

The winner of the February '200 Club' draw was Matt Cooper from South London. Every month Socialist Organiser holds a draw for £100. Entry to the 200 Club costs as little as £1 per month. Details from SO sellers or from SO, PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA.

Abuse isn't sexy

LETTERS

Although I agree with a lot of what Liz Millward says in Women's Eye (SO 515) I must take issue with some of the warped logic.

Liz says, "Children cannot understand the complicated signals associated with silky knickers, and I worry they may be unknowingly put at risk". And although she attempts to redeem herself by saying "It is more likely that an abuser will

abuse a child however she is dressed," she is still going down the dangerous road of the idea that rapists/abusers use porn/sexy images of women to abuse. There is no causal link proven that porn = rape and speculation that sexy girls underwear equals more abuse is an ignorant view: it also ignores male sexual abuse.

Liz should have stuck to the argument that expanding the fashion market means more money for M&S and therefore bigger profits.

Just as getting rid of porn won't get rid of rape or the degradation of women, M&S stocking silky knickers won't increase child sexual abuse.

Rebecca Van Homan, Newcastle

Equal ops survey

Would any readers like to take part in a questionnaire survey examining equal opportunities for lesbians and gay men in the workplace and in trade unions?

The survey results will form part of a booklet to be produced by the Labour Research Department, the independent trade union research organisation.

Emphasising best practice where this exists, the booklet will draw on trade unionists'

experiences of negotiating for lesbian and gay equality, and their experiences of how unions are shaping up to placing lesbian and gay rights on the trade union agenda.

The questionnaire will be available in late March. If you would like a copy, write to Ali Brown at LRD, Freepost, 78 Blackfriars Rd, London SE1 8YX (no stamp needed), or phone her at the LRD on 071-928 3649.

Ali Brown, Labour Research Department.

Workers' Liberty '92

Workers' Liberty '92, a weekend of socialist discussion hosted by the Alliance for Workers' Liberty, will be held at Caxton House, North London, from Friday 3rd to Sunday 5th July.

The major themes will be:
 * The fight against racism and fascism;
 * The British class struggle - prospects under a new government;
 * The crisis in Eastern Europe.

There will be many international guests. Initial posters and leaflets will be out next week.

For more details, phone Mark on 071-639 7967



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The left and the election

Hands off Socialist Worker!

By Bill Yates

Urgent appeal to all Labour and trade union organisations! Hands off Socialist Worker! Reject the anarchist takeover!

On the evening of Tuesday 10 March, a gang of balaclava-clad anarchists took over the printshop and editorial offices of Socialist Worker.

They then produced a bogus issue of SW with an editorial entitled "How much will an election change?" which argued that "The election will not fundamentally affected the problems most people face".

A clause was even inserted which implied that there was no real difference between Labour and the Tories.

Then the intruders sent out messages to SW organisers up and down the country, calling on them to set up meetings under the title, "Will the election change anything?" The false circular told organisers to pay particular attention to inviting apathetic and a-political anarchist types who had little or no experience of the labour movement or working-class life.

This takeover is a disgrace. Whilst abstaining from activity inside the Labour Party for the last 25 years - no doubt out of respect for the leadership's right to lead - Socialist Worker has loyally called for a Labour vote in General Elections. Now

Socialist Worker's good reputation risks ruin.

What you can do: Approach your local SWP branch, remind them of their traditional support for the Labour Party, and ask members to help in the Labour election effort - leafletting, folding publicity, stuffing envelopes, giving pensioners and the disabled lifts to the polling booths, even canvassing. Rush protest letters to SW's office, reminding them of Paul Foot's famous remark in 1979, "For the next three weeks I will be a very strong Labour supporter". Send letters of support to Tony Cliff, c/o "The Old Opportunist" rest home, Norfolk.

Militant says "vote Kilfoyle!"

The Liverpool "Broad Left" (i.e. Militant plus a few others) has announced that it will not be standing Lesley Mahmood in Walton in the forthcoming General Election.

In July last year, Mahmood stood in Walton as a "Real Labour" candidate, picking up 2613 votes. Militant and Socialist Worker said it was a great success.

Now Militant is left calling for a vote for Labour in Walton, i.e., for Peter Kilfoyle, who defeated Mahmood last year.

But last July Militant denounced Kilfoyle as "the man who turns his back on the people of Walton", and said, "A vote for Kilfoyle is a vote for Tory policies!"

The politics of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty

We live in a capitalist world. Production is social; ownership of the social means of production is private.

Ownership by a state which serves those who own most of the means of production is also essentially "private"

Those who own the means of production buy the labour power of those who own nothing but their labour-power and set them to work. At work they produce more than the equivalent of their wages. The difference (today in Britain it may be more than £20,000 a year per worker) is taken by the capitalist. This is exploitation of wage-labour by capital, and it is the basic cell of capitalist society, it very heart-beat.

Everything else flows from that. The relentless drive for profit and accumulation decrees the judgment of all things in existence by their relationship of productivity and profitability.

From that come such things as the savage exploitation of Brazilian goldminers, whose life expectancy is now less than 40 years; the working to death - it

is officially admitted by the government! - of its employees by advanced Japanese capitalism; and also the economic neglect and virtual abandonment to ruin and starvation of "unprofitable" areas like Bangladesh and parts of Africa.

From that comes the cultural blight and barbarism of a society force-fed on profitable pap.

From it come products with "built-in obsolescence" and a society orientated to the grossly wasteful production and reproduction of shoddy goods, not to the development of leisure and culture.

From it come mass unemployment, the development of a vast and growing underclass, living in ghettos and the recreation in some American cities of the worst Third World conditions.

From it comes the unfolding ecological disaster of a world crying out for planning and the rational use of resources, but which is, tragically, organised by the its ruling classes around the principles of anarchy and the

barbarous worship of blind and humanly irrational market forces.

From it come wars and genocides; two times this century capitalist gangs possessing worldwide power have fallen on each other in quarrels over the division of the spoils, and wrecked the world economy, killing many tens of millions. From it comes racism, imperialism, and fascism.

The capitalist cult of icy egotism and the "cash nexus" as the decisive social tie produces societies like Britain now where vast numbers of young people are condemned to live in the streets, and societies like that of Brazil, where homeless children are hunted and killed on the streets like rodents.

From the exploitation of wage-labour comes our society in which the rich who with their servants and agents hold state power, fight a relentless class struggle to maintain the people in a condition to accept their own exploitation and abuse, and to prevent real democratic self-control developing with the forms of what they call

democracy. They use tabloid propaganda or - as in the 1984-85 miners' strike - savage and illegal police violence, as they need to. They have used fascist gangs when they need to, and will use them again, if necessary.

Against this system we seek to convince the working class - the wage slaves of the capitalist system - to fight for socialism.

Socialism means the abolition of wage slavery, the taking of the social economy out of private ownership into common cooperative ownership. It means the realisation of the old demands for liberty, equality, and fraternity.

Under socialism the economy will be run and planned deliberately and democratically: market mechanisms will cease to be our master, and will be cut down and re-shaped to serve broadly sketched-out and planned, rational social goals.

We want public ownership of the major enterprises and a planned economy under workers' control.

The working class can win

reforms within capitalism, but we can only win socialism by overthrowing capitalism and by breaking the state power - that is, the monopoly of violence and reserve violence - now held by the capitalist class. We want a democracy much fuller than the present Westminster system - a workers' democracy, with elected representative recallable at any time, and an end to bureaucrats' and managers' privileges.

Socialism can never be built in one country alone. The workers in every country have more in common with workers in other countries than with their own capitalist or Stalinist rulers. We support national liberation struggles and workers' struggles worldwide, including the struggles of workers and oppressed nationalities in the ex-Stalinist states of Eastern Europe and in still-Stalinist China.

What are the alternatives now? We may face new wars as European and Japanese capitalism confronts the US. Fascism is rising. Poverty, inequality and misery are

growing. Face the bitter truth: either we build a new, decent, sane, democratic world or, finally, the capitalists will ruin us all - we will be dragged down by the fascist barbarians or new massive wars. Civilisation will be eclipsed by a new dark age. The choice is socialism or barbarism.

Socialists work in the trade unions and the Labour Party to win the existing labour movement to socialism. We work with presently unorganised workers and youth.

To do that work the Marxists organise themselves in a democratic association, the Alliance for Workers' Liberty.

To join the Alliance for Workers' Liberty, write to
 PO Box 823,
 London SE15 4NA



Sarita Choudhury as Mina, a Uganda Asian living in the USA

Growing up and away

Cinema

Belinda Weaver reviews Mississippi Masala

There are two different stories jostling for attention in Mississippi Masala, and the less interesting gets most of the screen time, but it's still worth seeing. It's not just for immediate consumption (the way Hollywood films increasingly seem to be). It has a number of things to say, so it stays with you, it makes you think.

It's the story of an Indian family, expelled from Uganda in 1972 in Idi Amin's anti-Asian purge. Well-off in Uganda, where the father, Jay, was a lawyer, the family finds life in Mississippi a come-down.

At least the women make an effort. They're practical. The mother, Kinnu, runs a liquor store and her daughter, Mina, works as a cleaner at her mother's motel. But Jay lives totally in the past. Disoriented by the loss of his country and position, he pines for Uganda and spends his days suing the Ugandan government over his lost property. Were it not for his womenfolk and the charity of relatives, Jay would be destitute.

As it is, he's a lost soul, rulerless, in limbo. To make matters worse, he has lost control of his daughter.

Powerless to provide her with the things he wants her to have, like a college education, he can only stand helplessly by as she becomes Americanised, alienated from Indian life and customs.

Things come to a head when Mina falls for a black American, Demetrios. The love story

"The film is about exile, and displacement, and growing up and away from your family, and it's about making your own life out of whatever material you have to hand. It's a comedy and a tragedy. It's full of life."

between these two, and the trouble it causes, is one strand in the tale; Jay's tragedy is another. The two don't really balance; there needs to be more of the Ugandan story than the film delivers. Jay's trip back there at the end is given too little screen time, and the complicated relationship between him and his African childhood friend, Okelo (who believes it is right that the Asians be expelled, and that Africa be for black Africans alone), isn't developed.

But it's good that the film tries to tackle the issue of racism between groups lumped together as black by the white society around them. (Many of the black people in the film are displaced - Indians who have never been to India, Africans who have never been to Africa.) Demetrios is furious that Jay thinks he's better than he is, and he tells him so. Jay has to face the unwelcome truth that he may be as racist as the people who threw him out of Uganda.

The love story is credible, and rather nicely done. Mina is looking for a future, a way out of her claustrophobic life, while Demetrios, who's always been responsible and a goody-goody, gets a charge from going off the rails.

The scenes with Mina's

Indian relatives verge on the slapstick, but they're genuinely comic, and help to stop the film from being messagey and over-serious.

But the most touching moments belong to Jay. When he goes back to Uganda at last, he seems to wake up, to become himself again, even though he realises the past is over and done with, that it's time to start living in the present. As he watches people dancing in Kampala, a black child first touches, then embraces him, and we see Jay happy for the first time.

The film is about exile, and displacement, and growing up and away from your family, and it's about making your own life out of whatever material you have to hand. It's a comedy and a tragedy. It's full of life.

Soft porn de luxe

Television

By Mick Ackersley

I'm not necessarily against pornography. It depends. But soft porn on television is another matter.

And soft porn is about the only half-w interesting thing in Channel Four's opulent, expensive, and vastly over-heralded soapy series, the

otherwise very stodgy Camomile Lawn (Thursdays).

The appearances of the beautiful "Calypso", frequently stripped, once down to her pubic hair, astride various males, provided the highlights of the second episode (12 March). Or is that just me? The programme's hard-sell advertising experts, too, focused their saturation-level publicity on the series' smut quotient.

Yuk! The series is directed by Peter Hall, who should find something better to do.

Uncle Albert rides again

LES HEARN'S

SCIENCE COLUMN

I've been reading a children's book but one with a difference. In fact, I know of only one other like it - the previous one by the same author, Russell Stannard, formerly Professor of Physics at the Open University.

Both books, Black Holes and Uncle Albert and the Time and Space of Uncle Albert, deal with physics at its most strange, when Einstein's Theories of Special and General Relativity apply.

In both books, exciting investigations are carried out by a teenage girl, Gedanken. These take her throughout the universe, at speeds up to that of light, and even, in the present book, into a black hole. Practical difficulties are overcome by having the investigations take place in the almost tangible thought bubbles generated by the exceptional brain of Gedanken's Uncle Albert, a violin-playing physicist who doesn't wear socks. The similarity with Albert Einstein is striking. He was fond of doing thought experiments ("Gedankenexperimenten") when developing his theories.

It starts with a trip to the fairground. Gedanken goes on all the rides and her comments on feeling heavier and lighter as the Big Dipper goes up and down start Albert thinking. He points out that acceleration can mimic the effects of gravity. To see exactly what the effects of gravity are, Albert proposes a thought bubble journey to the Moon (where there is no complicating atmosphere) in the "most powerful rocket never built", complete with its talking on board computer, Dick.

Once on the Moon, she carries out Uncle Albert's experiment, dropping a piece of paper and a bunch of keys at the same time. To her surprise, they land simultaneously. Gravity pulls them at the same rate, despite their different sizes, shapes and masses. On Earth, this fact would have been hidden by the presence of air resistance. How did gravity "know" to pull different masses with the appropriate force?

This problem is tackled in a roundabout way, by sending Gedanken to the Imaginary Universes Laboratory. Here, she observes the inhabitants of a two-dimensional world, a beetle in a white coat leading a team of researchers. They are investigating the behaviour of parallel straight lines in their flat world. They set off in straight lines but some of them end up wandering into each other. Their space is curved! This is because there is a great big rock causing a sag in the surface of their space. Thus Stannard introduces the concept of the curvature of three-dimensional space caused by the presence of large masses, such as planets or stars.

Eventually, this leads to the idea of black holes, collapsed stars so massive that space has curved in on itself around them. Any light beams inside just keep going round but not escaping. Objects with mass are dragged into the centre with greater and greater force, as Gedanken discovers. Contrary to Uncle's advice, she takes the rocket inside the hole and notices too late that it is accelerating faster and faster.

Even on full power, the "most powerful rocket that has never been built" cannot resist the pull. Tidal forces pull the rocket apart and Gedanken feels herself stretched and squashed unbearably. Luckily, Albert gets his thought bubble under control and Gedanken returns to Earth.

The book ends with a set of test-yourself questions and answers and is a remarkably successful attempt to get some very bizarre (though true) concepts across. Adults will enjoy it as well as children of, say, 10 upwards. Wait until the paperback comes out, though.

* Black Holes and Uncle Albert, Russell Stannard, Faber & Faber. Also, The Space and Time of Uncle Albert, paperback £2.99.

Economy in deep trouble

The end of the Tory "miracle"

THE POLITICAL ECONOMY

By Peter Kenway

Some economists are warning that the UK faces not merely a repeat of the 1980-style recession, but a repeat of the 1930s style slump. What is happening? Why? And are the remedies currently being put about likely to save the situation?

1990 and 1991 were years of recession. Unemployment rose from 1.6 million in March of 1990 to 2.5 million in November 1991. Industrial production went from an index of 109.8 in the first quarter of 1990 to 106.8 in October 1991, investment goods output from index 121.7 to index 110.7.

This experience is only comparable with the two major post-war recessions, in 1974-75 (following the quadrupling of oil prices) and in 1980-81 (following the Thatcher-Howe "experiment" with monetarism). These deep recessions lasted for eighteen months and, in each case, unemployment rose by over one million.

The UK was certainly not alone in suffering a recession in 1990: other countries to do so included the US, Canada and Australia. In late 1991 those three countries, and France, Germany and Italy too, showed industrial production still lower than in late 1990.

Yet in the severity of its current recession to date, the UK is alone.

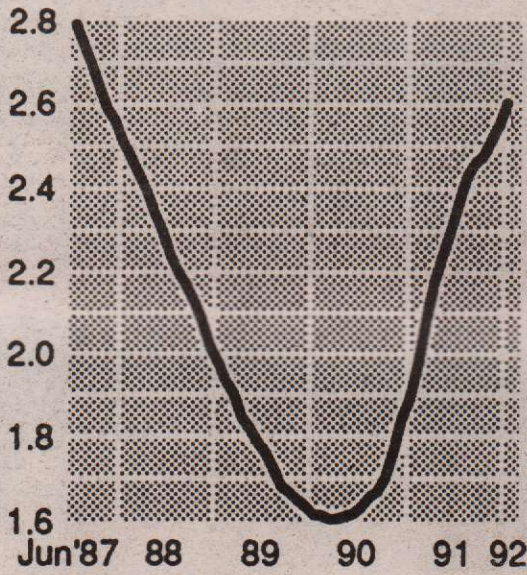
How can we account for this severity? The difficulties can be traced to two sources: firstly, to the excesses of the latter part of Mr Lawson's tenure as Chancellor of the Exchequer, and secondly, to the weak underlying condition of the British economy compared with other major capitalist economies.

The period 1984 to 1989 was indeed one of unprecedented boom in the UK. The Tories were not slow to boast of this. Thus in his 1988 Budget speech, Lawson asserted that the "country is now experiencing a miracle comparable in significance to that previously enjoyed by West Germany and still enjoyed by Japan". But this was no miracle, just a consumer-led boom, financed by a riot of borrowing, which rapidly led to a substantial deficit on the UK's balance of payments.

The major long-standing weakness of the UK economy is that, all other things being equal, imports into the UK grow faster than exports from it. There has been no adequate explanation for this phenomenon but its implication is that the sustainable rate of growth for the UK

UK unemployment

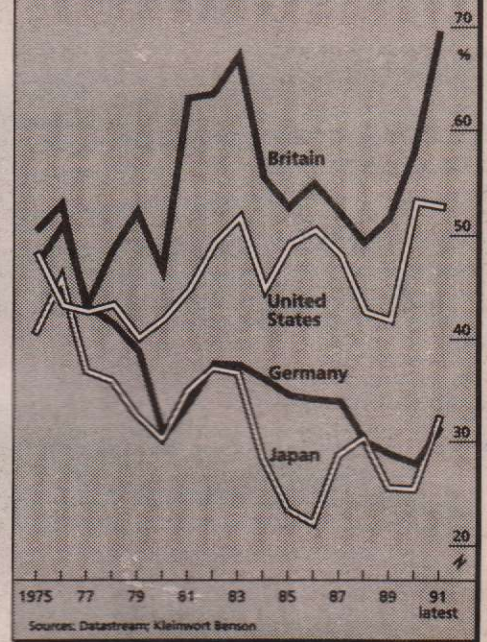
million - seasonally adjusted



Source: Datastream

Dividend pay-outs

Dividends as % of earnings



Sources: Datastream; Kleinwort Benson

Unemployment is soaring (see left graph) — to 2.5 million on the fiddled official figures, and maybe 3.6 million on the basis of calculation used before 1979. Right graph: British companies are now paying out 70% of their profits in dividends, to keep rich shareholders happy.

economy over the long-term is markedly below that of its major trading partners including particularly Germany and the US.

It is certainly possible—for a time—for the UK to manage higher rates of growth (and falling unemployment) if the economy starts off with a balance of payments surplus. The surplus in the early 1980s was particularly high, firstly, as a result of the 1980-81 recession and, secondly, as a result of North Sea oil. It was this which allowed the space for the boom of the late 1980s. But the boom sucked in imports at an unprecedented rate leading to a balance of payments deficit. In order to attract sufficient capital into the country to finance the deficit, interest rates had to be raised repeatedly to their current high levels.

Economists debate whether the deficit is sustainable; none believe that there is any scope for it to get worse.

The pessimistic view is that the deficit needs to be reduced if not removed altogether. It can be reduced through a recession. A rough calculation suggests that removal of the deficit would require a fall of over 5% in GDP compared with what it would otherwise be. This would be associated with a rise of some 1.3 million in the number of unemployed.

The evidence suggests that the pessimistic view is the right one. In that

case, the severity of the UK recession can be understood as being the necessary adjustment to correct the financial deficits built up in the past five years. Some of this adjustment has now taken place. Even so, with the rest of the world in recession, the scale of the recession required in the UK is directly comparable with that of 1980 and 1981.

To follow the boom with a bust on this scale shows that all claims about "miracles" were so much hot air.

This national (Keynesian) perspective affords some insight into the likely efficacy of the calls currently being made to ease the recession. The principal call, from the Labour front bench, Tory backbenchers and much of industry, is for a reduction in interest rates.

It is true that the rise in interest rates has been the means by which this recession has been engineered but—as I have argued — the need for a severe recession lies much deeper. The Government may be able to arrange matters so as to effect a period of mild relief from the recession in time for an election. The best that could be hoped for, however, is a slowing of the rise in unemployment and a return to low levels of growth. (This indeed was the pattern of the early 1980s). The reason for this is that a reduction in interest rates sufficient to stimulate a marked recovery will lead inexorably to a rise in consumer spending and inevitably rising imports too. This will increase the deficit and will in turn increase the pressure for a rise in interest rates sufficient to finance the larger deficit.

Fundamental questions will have to be faced after the election. Both national and class perspectives point in similar direction.

The national perspective would recognise that personal consumption must somehow be held in check if the next boom is not to run rapidly into the sands of a balance of payments deficit. The class perspective would recognise that a precondition for a boom is the restoration of profitability—with restrictions and cutbacks in wages. Either way, it is likely that future measures will be directed at reducing private wage and salary income as a proportion of total national income.

It is possible that the foregoing

argument underestimates the economic dangers which face the major capitalist economies. The danger lies in the weakness of important parts of the international banking system, particularly in the US, Japan and the UK.

Bank credit is the life-blood of capitalism and the danger is that in the present situation a reduction in bank credit can feed back on itself. US and UK banks are already suffering heavy losses and their principal customers are heavily in debt. Banks are therefore very reluctant to lend while many of their customers are at the moment very reluctant to borrow. The expansion of credit has virtually come to a halt.

This, however, undermines the value of assets purchased on borrowed money, and their price thus tends to fall. This leads to the banks incurring losses which further undermines both their willingness and ability to extend new credit. There is a clear danger that the whole process will feed on itself; a downward spiral is possible.

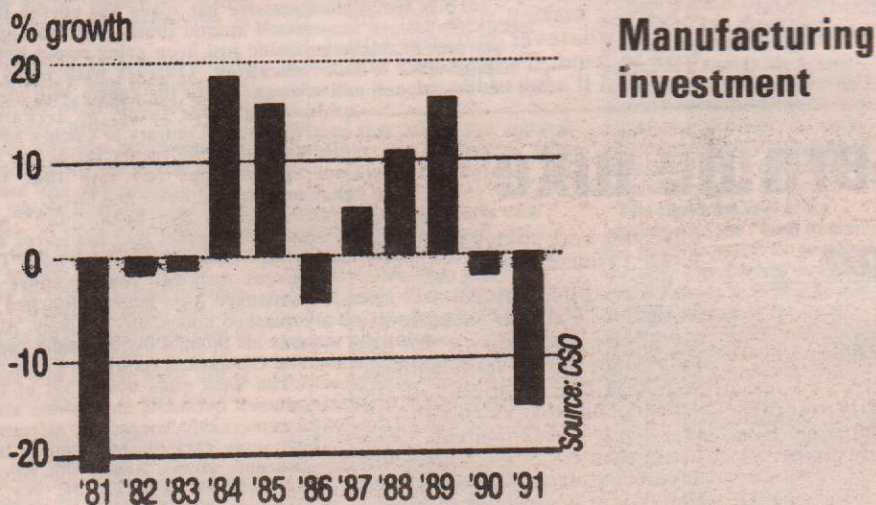
We have not reached the point of a credit collapse yet. However, the US is certainly undergoing a "credit crunch" and its banking system is in a grievous state.

Japanese banks have in the last year been weakened by the near 40% fall in the Tokyo stockmarket and by the fall in Japanese property prices.

This is usually a spectre invoked by Marxists: of a spiralling financial crisis, undermining capitalism worldwide and leading not merely to a sharp recession and slow growth but rather to a general slump. It is therefore of some note that those currently pointing to these dangers are monetarist economists of an almost invariably right-wing persuasion. Should we believe them?

My view is that these competing macro-economic orthodoxies of Monetarism and Keynesianism are each adequate as perspectives from which to identify future trends, emergent problems and flaws in economic remedies proposed by others (ie. economists of the opposite persuasion). Where they are not to be believed is in the remedies (other than for short-term fixes) which they themselves advance for solving the problems.

On that basis, when Monetarists warn of a slump, take them seriously.



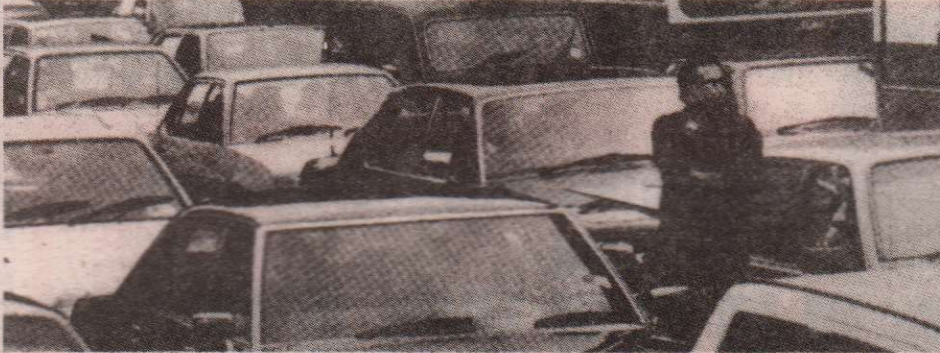
Manufacturing investment has slumped in the backlash from the "Lawson boom"

Tube unions must ballot for strike action now!

By a Central Line guard

There is a very dangerous illusion around that the Company Plan is going to be thrown out lock, stock and barrel by an incoming Labour Government.

This may be a popular bedtime story among union bureaucrats desperate to prevent strikes before the election, but that's no reason for the workers to believe it. The logic of it is to sit back and wait; but the bosses are not sitting back and waiting.



An all-out strike could paralyse London's transport system and bring management to their knees

They have told the depot foremen to reapply for their own jobs under the new title of "team leader". This, needless to say, is part of the Company Plan — a part which they have imposed with no trade union agreement. There will not be enough of the new jobs, and those displaced will be on flat-rate, not rostered pay, and could lose up to one third of their wages. Those who do get the new jobs will be classed as management grade, and will not get union representa-

tion. Management are using salami tactics, taking small groups of workers one at a time and trying to impose changes on them.

The issue here is not about defending depot foremen, or even about defending the rolling stock department. It is about stopping the Company Plan.

For now management appear to be stalling in anticipation of the election result. The RMT, TSSA and ASLEF leaderships seem to be

prepared to go along with this. They could be making a fatal mistake. We need to ballot for action now across the whole of the Underground.

The union and Labour Party leaders have shown their spinelessness. While we should put demands on them, the only thing we should put our faith in is our own activity. We now need a massive campaign of publicity, mass meetings, and joint union activity.

NUCPS: vote to fight on pay!

By a NUCPS conference delegate

Up to 1000 delegates will attend the NUCPS one-day special pay conference at Alexandra Palace this Thursday, 18th.

The NUCPS is the only civil service union to have called such a conference, and it is essential that delegates vote

down the National Executive's disgraceful pay paper — a recipe for inactivity and surrender if the Tories are re-elected.

Instead Conference should back the Broad Left strategy, based on a demand for £30 per week increase and a minimum wage of £190 per week.

The Broad Left motion neither pretends that the Tories can be defeated without industrial action, nor that the membership is in a mood for immediate all-out action. It

calls for a campaign of industrial action to build up the members' confidence, leading to an all-out ballot.

Whatever the outcome of the conference, activists across the unions must step up their efforts to stop a serious pay fight. None of the union leaderships have any strategy other than praying for a Labour victory, while doing nothing to mobilise the members' votes for Labour. Our slogan has to be, "Vote Labour, but fight for pay whatever the election result!"

BT: fight for every job!

By a Central London BT engineer

BT have been forced to reveal the scale of the job cuts they are planning for the coming financial year.

They were trying to keep the details hidden until after

the election, but they were made public through a leak from BT HQ.

The threat of compulsory redundancies — so far avoided for NCU members — is real and imminent, given the scale of the job cuts planned (between 10 and 12%) and the already large numbers of "surplus" staff. Managers are being given targets for each business sector in each zone, and their budgets are cut accordingly.

36,000 staff have already gone over the last two years, through voluntary redundancy and early retirement.

The NCU leadership has confirmed its total opposition to compulsory redundancies, though there are rumours that talks on these have taken

place between BT and the NCU.

The NCU has previously cooperated with management's plans for the industry, but never before have those plans run so counter to members' interests. It is time to plan for the inevitable announcement of compulsory redundancies.

Broad Left policy of a strike ballot on the issue of the first redundancy notice must be followed, and we need to campaign to make any action effective. No doubt management have been planning all along.

We need to change the mood in the workplace from fatalistic acceptance to positive action and fighting for every job.

BP: setback in fight against derecognition

Trade unionists at BP's Baglan Bay refinery have suffered a severe setback

A mass meeting voted to ballot for strike action against the bosses' attempt to derecognise the AEU and IGWU, but the ballot produced a three-to-one majority against a strike.

The bosses had threatened workers that the plant would close if there were a strike. According to stewards, they took individuals aside and attempted to intimidate them on a one-to-one basis.

Meanwhile the EETPU has

been preparing to step in and replace the AEU and IGWU with a single-union deal.

According to AEU convenor Keith Holmes, writing in the latest Trade Union News, "Management's move to derecognise was encouraged by the EETPU. As long as last July they began talking to management about a single union deal which would include loss of bargaining rights."

BP's drive for derecognition and personal contracts is now set to spread to Hull and Grangemouth.

"New union" runs into trouble

By a NALGO special conference delegate

A successful merger between NALGO, NUPE and CoHSE appears to be less certain, following a special one-day NALGO conference on 4 March.

Throughout the New Union discussions, which have been under way since 1988, there has been a considerable input from NALGO conferences, which have amended jointly-produced reports while NUPE and CoHSE conferences had only the choice of a yes or no vote. On 4 March, the jointly produced report, *Towards a New Union*, had 84 amendments submitted to it.

NALGO's conference has one delegate per 500 members, producing a conference of about 1800. The NEC proposal that the New Union have one delegate per 1000 members was carried only narrowly, 263,625 to 259,818, against an amendment for one per 700.

The right of individuals, groups, branches, and regions to organise within the union and to communicate with each other, will now be established in the rule book, against the wishes of NALGO's NEC, who said it was sufficient to have it

accept it. The issue may then be used in NALGO, by people both on the left and on the right, against the merger.

But to blow this issue up into a massive point of principle is to lose all sense of perspective. The important thing is that branches have enough resources to conduct their affairs democratically.

There are, of course, many issues that will have to be addressed in the New Union. One is the political fund and Labour Party affiliation. The Alliance for Workers' Liberty wants to see one political fund, and the whole union affiliated to Labour; the current proposal is for two funds, with only one affiliated. When the New Union is formed, we will campaign for change.

GEC strike defeated

The strike against redundancies by 400 workers at GEC-Alstom in Openshaw, Manchester, ended on 19 February.

A two-to-one majority to return to work without an agreement was carried after seven weeks on strike, following what striker Riek Hesketh described as "a pincer movement from both the employers and the national union officials". Strikers received letters threatening mass sacking just as AEU and MSF officials were saying that the strike was unwinnable.

Next week's *Socialist Organiser* will include a full report on the strike.

Vauxhall Luton throws out strings

National union officials at Vauxhall were busy last week trying to get the workforce to accept the bosses' new 5.5% pay offer.

A mass meeting at the Ellesmere Port plant finally accepted the deal, but at the Luton plant, where ominous strings were attached, the mass meeting voted to defy the national officials' recommendations and reject the offer.

Significantly, the workers at Luton and the Vauxhall parts warehouse were offered an extra 5% in return for accepting the "strings", which include teamwork, full functional flexibility and mobility of labour, part-time and temporary labour, and, to cap it all, pendulum arbitration. They still rejected the offer.

10,000 jobs to go at BBC

A secret report from BBC bosses which proposes to sack half the Corporation's workforce has been exposed by the media union BECTU.

10,000 jobs are set to go. Joint union president Tony Lennon warned, "If these cuts go through, BBC will become another Channel 4 — not a programme maker, but a programme publisher".

BECTU are planning to ballot for a one-day strike later this month. What better time could there be to take the Beeb off the airwaves?

Support this recognition strike!

Print workers at Sprint Screen Print in Gateshead have been in dispute for union recognition since 3 February.

Workers at Sprint Screen earn less than £120 for a 38 hour week. They print sportswear for Nike.

They began their campaign for recognition in October 1991, and, after failed negotiations with management, they voted unanimously for strike action. The response of the bosses was immediately to advertise the strikers' jobs. They have attempted to bring in scab labour to maintain production.

The response from the local trade union movement has been solid, with support coming from other GPMU members and trade union branches across the city.

As one striker told us, "We are maintaining a 12 hour picket with support from other GPMU members. Many transport companies and the Post Office are refusing to cross the picket line. We can see that a lot of the work is not getting out".

It remains an official GPMU dispute, with the strikers "determined to win, no matter how long it takes".

Messages and donations to: Sprint Screen Strike Fund, 186 Hallow Drive, Throckley, Newcastle upon Tyne NE15 9PW.

The Industrial Front

Shipyard workers at Vosper Thornycroft, Southampton, are to ballot for strike action to stop 200 compulsory redundancies.

Professor David Metcalf, of the London School of Economics, has produced a study of pay strikes in the 1980s which concludes that the "average" strike of some 11 days did not materially benefit the strikers, as they lost more than they gained financially.

So why go on strike? The professor doesn't seem to have a clear idea, but old Engels had the answer: "You do not discuss the cost of battle with those you would make war upon". The trade unions, you see, can function as schools of class war.

This year's TUC Women's Conference at last rejected the absurd policy of some unions sending male delegates.

UCW Executive member Ernie Dudley complained that the decision to bar him was preven-

ting his further evolution towards feminism. "I have been coming here for four years. I might still be a bit of a chauvinist, but I am less of a chauvinist than I was".

Norman Willis, forever concerned with unity, implored delegates after the 140-to-120 vote to recognise that the conference was "not losing sons but gaining daughters".

At last the RMT is to hold an inquiry into ballot rigging in one of its constituent parts, the old NUS (seafarers' union).

A widow of a former official has admitted to helping him fill in 2000 stolen ballot papers. The inquiry will be obliged to question Sam McCluskie, former treasurer of the Labour Party, who has already been exposed by SO and others for accepting huge payoffs from Cunard in return for not defending or organising poorly-paid Third World crews.

Royal Mail management have announced that they are to end the established practice of promotion on the basis of seniority. They want to introduce promotion on "merit". 20 branches plan to ballot on industrial action to stop them.

SOCIALIST

Cormorant Alpha tragedy

The price of oil

ORGANISER

Eleven men died last weekend when the helicopter ferrying them just 200 yards from rig to accommodation vessel

plunged into the icy 30-foot waves of the North Sea. The central question surrounding the Cormorant Alpha disaster is, as the offshore

workers' union OILC point out: "What were the circumstances which led to a decision to fly in the atrocious weather conditions on Saturday night?"

Shell say that the flight went ahead because weather conditions were within established safety standards. If that is so, then why are the safety standards so low?

And why does work continue on the rigs when conditions are so bad that accommodation vessels have to be disconnected from the rigs for fear of the damage that could be done to the installations? This can only be because the oil companies and contractors value drilling equipment higher than human life.

Surely if the accommodation vessels have to be moved for safety reasons then the job should stop as well.

But that's not how the oil bosses think: "All they are interested in is keeping the oil flowing", remarked one long-standing offshore worker and OILC activist. "When you go offshore you lose all your civil and democratic rights. They treat you like animals. If you ask questions about safety you are told, 'Shut up - you're not paid to think'. Safety reps go in fear of victimisation if they try to be effective," he added.

New magazine presents widest ranging discussion ever

Renewing

socialism

By Mark Sandell
(Workers' Liberty
business manager)

What is the left's verdict on Stalinism, on the system which passed for "actually existing socialism" for many decades until it collapsed so miserably in Eastern Europe and the USSR between 1989 and 1991?

The new issue of *Workers' Liberty* presents the richest and most wide-ranging debate yet published on this question, so central for the future of socialism.

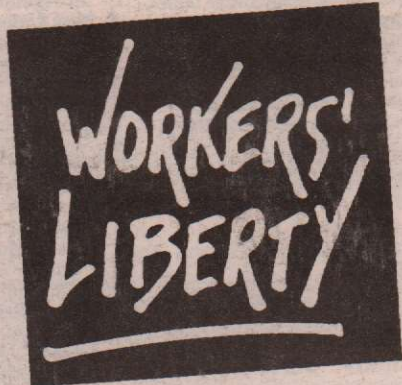
The contributors cover the whole spectrum of the left. Neal Ascherson and Ernesto Laclau, at one extreme, argue that the collapse of the USSR means the collapse of the Marxist idea of revolution and socialism; Terry Eagleton and other contributors declare, on the contrary, that "socialists in the West can not be disillusioned about events in the East unless they had illusions in the first place..."

No contributor still maintains that the old USSR was socialist, though some - Tony Benn, Tony Chater, Jim Kemmy, Paul Sweezy - regret the loss of its "public values and public services". A couple - Greg Benton and Robin Blackburn - see elements of socialism, or at least of a "working-class state", surviving in China.

Many veterans of the debates of the 1940s contribute, including Michel Pablo, architect of the "deformed workers' states" theory, Al Glotzer, for many years Max Shachtman's right-hand man, and Cornelius Castoriadis, a pioneer "state capitalist".

An editorial outlines the views of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty, clearly and sharply, and the magazine also carries reviews, and a "forum" feature.

It is essential reading for every socialist! £1.50 plus 34p post from AWL, PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA.



Stalinism, the left, and beyond



A symposium
Neville Alexander
Neal Ascherson
Tony Benn
Greg Benton
Robin Blackburn
Cornelius Castoriadis
Tony Chater
Ken Coates
Vladimir Derer
Terry Eagleton
Michael Farrell
Al Glotzer
Fred Halliday
Boris Kagarlitsky
Jim Kemmy
Ernesto Laclau
Ronnie MacDonald
Livio Maitan
Ralph Milliband
Alec Nove
Michel Pablo (Raptis)
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"The OILC had 103 members on board Cormorant Alpha before the tragedy. Some have died in it. We owe it to our members and to their grieving families to seek and get answers to the vital question: why did the flight take place?"

**Ronnie McDonald -
Chair, Offshore Industry
Liaison Committee (the
offshore workers' union)**

The Cormorant Alpha tragedy is just the latest in a long line of disasters that have hit the workers of the North Sea in the quarter of a century since the oil industry commenced operations.

The most infamous tragedy is surely the Piper Alpha explosion in which 167 people died. Major incidents occur regularly offshore. For instance, in 1989 at least 50 incidents occurred offshore, leading to major safety scares resulting in evacuations and shutdowns.

The only answer to this terrible situation is strong trade union organisation geared to defending the health and safety as well as the pay of the offshore workforce. That is why the OILC - which organised the strikes for union recognition after Piper Alpha - exists and fights.

For further information about the OILC contact 52 Guild St, Aberdeen, or phone 0224 210118.

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