

SOCIALIST

ORGANISER

It will be socialism or barbarism!

Inside this week

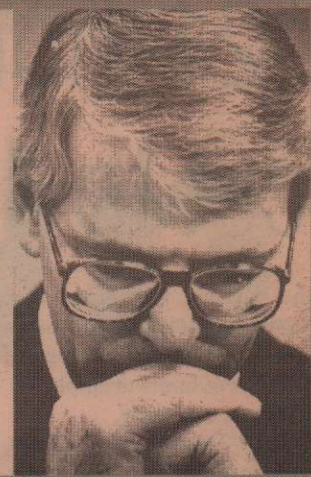


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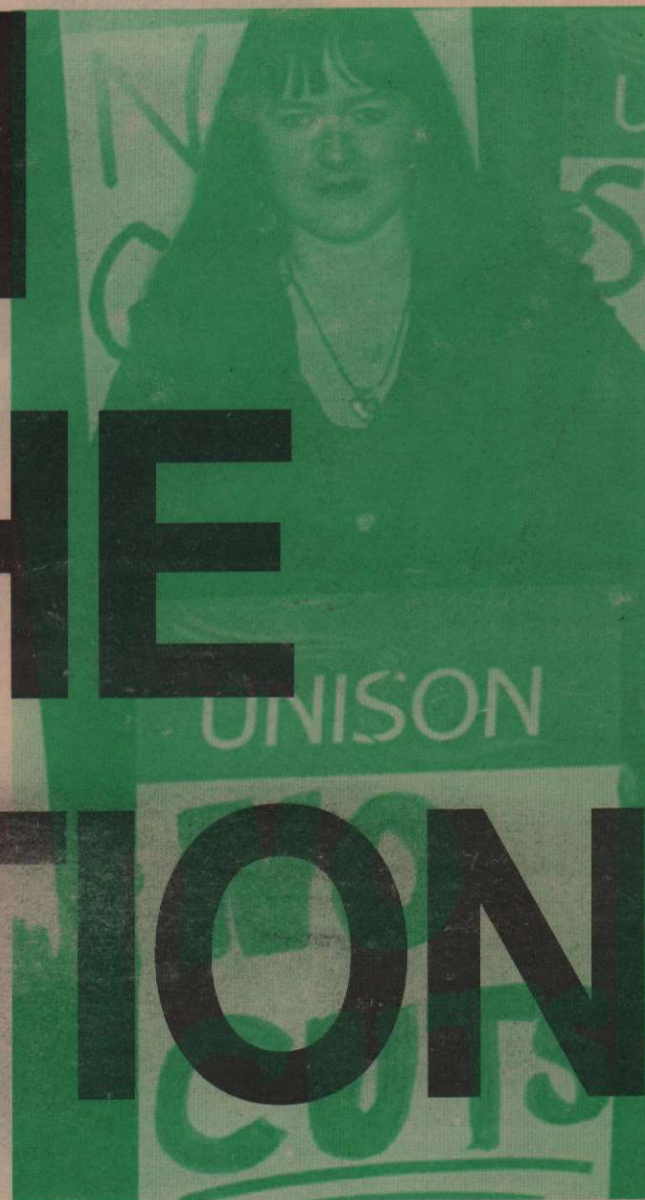
Down with the death penalty!

centre pages



Parents Teachers Students

WE CAN BEAT THE EDUCATION CUTS



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French victory shows the way

French students have won another victory by action on the streets.

On 10 February, after huge demonstrations all across the country, prime minister Edouard Balladur suspended a government decree which would have made the diplomas from "University Institutes of Technology" no longer a qualification to go on into full university education.

As we go to press, protests continue.

Continued on page 2

March against the cuts

25 March, London

"21-hour rule" cut to 16

As we go to press, the Government is about to make a statement about reducing the number of hours unemployed students can study.

The "21 hour rule" allows people to study up to 21 hours a week part-time but still claim benefits as "available for work" and "actively seeking work". The government looks set to reduce these hours to 16.

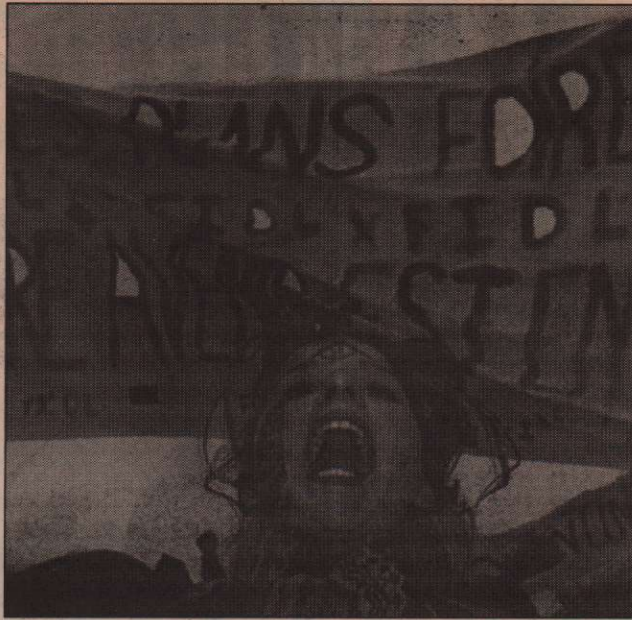
The Job Seeker's Allowance White Paper states "that the Government intends to continue with the broad approach and will be introducing appropriate arrangements within the Job Seeker's Allowance" for "people who first priority is to

find a job".

The rules are supposed to allow people to undertake study where that study will "increase their employability", but there are no guidelines as to what study qualifies.

Cutting the number of hours of study allowed from 21 to 16 will make many people ineligible to claim benefits or force them out of education.

The Welfare State Network aims to create an active campaigning body which works together with others to defeat these vindictive threats and to link this battle with all the other attacks on the Welfare State — education, health, pensions and other.



French students show the way

From front page

ANOTHER demonstration is planned for 16 February. Students at six universities are on strike: Montpellier, Grenoble, Besancon, Perpignan, Pau, and Rennes.

The students, with the support of the trade unions in higher education, are fighting against

government cuts in education budgets and against the official "Laurent report".

This "Laurent report" proposes to remedy French universities' high drop-out rate by pushing students into new "Regional University Institutes", to be financed by local authorities and businesses, for short job-training courses.

It also proposes an increase

in university fees, a redirection of student financial support towards individual scholarships to be awarded by the universities themselves, and — to square the circle — staffing university administrations, libraries, etc. with students working part-time while they study.

A demonstration planned for 8 April should draw together the student movement with other mobilisations, notably against homelessness. Homeless campaigners in Paris have been occupying a large building in central Paris — 7 rue du Dragon — for over a month now, despite police attempts to disperse them. The building has become not only a home for sixty homeless families, but also a centre for campaigns and demonstrations.

In France as in Britain, the "Welfare State" — the element of social provision, of "the political economy of the working class", won over decades of labour-movement struggle — is under attack. In France as in Britain, people feel angry and resentful about this. In France as in Britain, the fight back is difficult because of repeated defeats: Balladur's right-wing coalition has a huge majority in the French Parliament, and trade-union membership has been reduced to between five and ten per cent of the workforce.

But in France — as not yet in Britain — students and sections of workers have moved from anger to mass action. They have shown that mass action can win. It can win in Britain, too.

French "Welfare State" protests on 8 April

ON SATURDAY 8 April, the day of the Welfare State Network conference in Britain, workers will be demonstrating in cities all across France — "For rights and equality, against exclusion and insecurity".

The spur for this day of action has come from recent protests over homelessness and education cuts. The call has come from one of France's major trade union federations, the CGT, together with sections of other union federations, the anti-racist movement SOS-Racisme, and other groups.

"The right to a job, to housing, to social security, to health, to a decent income, to citizenship, to education, to training, to justice, to culture, to leisure... There are more and more people, French and foreigners, in our country, who see their human rights and social gains threatened, or are already deprived of them..."

"We call for a national day of demonstrations all across France".

Welfare State Network working conference

• Job Seekers Allowance •

Incapacity Benefit • 21 hour rule

Saturday 18 February 12-5 pm

University of London Union, Malet Street, London

Speakers: Alan Simpson MP, Richard

Exell (TUC), Low Pay Unit, unemployed

worker's groups, Sarah Wellings (NUS)

and lots lots more.

Act on Clause Four! Attack inequality

THE POLITICAL ECONOMY

By Martin Thomas

ECONOMIC inequality has grown faster in Britain than in any other big advanced capitalist country. The gap between rich and poor is wider than at any time since World War Two. And the poorest ten per cent of under-25s are now worse off, in real terms, than their counterparts of any period since those who were born in 1920 and grew up in the '30s.

Those are some of the findings of the new Rowntree Foundation Inquiry into Income and Wealth.

The well-off are fifty per cent better off than they were in 1979; the poor are worse off.

Class inequality has sharpened racial inequality. Before mass unemployment, jobless rates for Afro-Caribbean, Pakistani, or Bangladeshi people were similar to those for white people. Now they are much higher. Over 40 per cent of West Indians, and 50 per cent of Pakistanis and Bangladeshis, fall into the

poorest one-fifth of the population, the section who are getting poorer.

A chart from the Rowntree report shows inequality rising faster in the UK, between 1977 and 1990, than in all other countries bar one. The exception is New Zealand — where policies of pushing the free market and trashing the Welfare State were carried through, not by Tories, but by a Labour government.

Australia, where another Labour government has also pursued semi-Thatcherite policies, ranks almost as high for increased inequality.

New Zealand and Australia are warnings for us. For Labour's leaders to denounce the Tories is not enough. If at the same time they denounce Labour's own Clause Four commitment, "to secure for the workers the full fruits of their industry and the most equitable distribution thereof", and they tack and trim even on a minimum wage, then we can not trust them to reverse Tory inequality.

We need to get the Tories out — and get Labour committed to policies for economic equality.

National Assembly Against Racism

A wasted opportunity

By Cathy Nugent

AROUND 300 people attended the National Assembly Against Racism on Saturday 4 February. Ostensibly this event was organised by a very broad coalition including Christian churches and other religious organisations, the Commission for Racial Equality, the Anti-Nazi League, Liberty, Morning Star etc etc.

The key organisers, however, were people from Anti-Racist Alliance which split last year, notably Socialist Action and Ken Livingstone MP.

The conference was held in York Hall in Bethnal Green, East London in the middle of an area blighted by a rising tide of racist attacks. A large number of local community organisations and people attended, and that was both heartening and impressive. However, everything else about the conference was truly dire.

The conference was crudely stage-managed to allow very little discussion from the floor. There were three plenary sessions, each with as many as a dozen speakers from the top table. Out of six and a half hours of conference time only 45 minutes was "allowed" for ordinary peo-

ple to have their say. They were told repeatedly to "keep it brief," whereas invited speakers were allowed to ramble on for 20 minutes or more.

This kind of conference is a speciality of the Stalinoid Socialist Action organisation.

The conference was also a popular front — a carefully constructed popular front, but one nonetheless. The organisers had been particularly concerned to include not only religious organisations but also black business organisations — specifically the Asian Chamber of Commerce.

There is something fundamentally misconceived about this. Whilst many small business people do suffer racial attacks and are not exactly Richard Bransons and Anita Roddicks, they still exploit their workers (including members of their own family) and do not share the outlook of the black youth facing unemployment and police brutality.

In any case, very little distinction was made between small and larger businesses/business people. Black entrepreneurship was simply seen as a good thing.

But "getting on in business" is not an option that all or even a large minority of black and Asian people can take. It is a mistake

to make the promotion of business opportunity a prominent part of an anti-racist programme.

The "anti-racist charter for the new millennium", which was media-launched at the conference — but not voted on — was politically very poor indeed. It was in keeping with the carefully constructed popular front approach.

Several demands were objectionable:

- "Ban the BNP". State sponsored bans of the fascists are always counter-productive. The state will use any banning legislation against the left and anti-racists. Our policy should be to physically defend ourselves against the organisation of the fascists — their meetings, demonstrations, rallies and paper sales.

- "Immigration and asylum rights free of racism". It is one thing to campaign against the worst excesses of immigration law: detention of refugees and immigrants without legal rights, the splitting up of families, the brutal and degrading treatment of immigrants and asylum seekers such as that meted out to Joy Gardner. It is another to call, backhandedly but unmistakably, for "non-racist" immigration controls. Immigration controls are for the exclusion of other nationalities, and are by

definition racist.

The left should confront the arguments about immigration control and explain that the causes of unemployment, bad housing and education are capitalism and government spending cuts — not immigration.

- The charter makes a big deal of "multi-culturalism" in, for example, education. But it does not mention cut that have undermined this, for instance, cuts in Section 11 funding. Without such funding bilingual children will not get the support they need in the classroom.

In fact the charter does its best not to criticise the government at all. Perhaps Socialist Action are keeping the option open of drawing in "right-on" Tories (as the Anti-Racist Alliance did: its sponsors included Tory MP Richard Shepherd).

Last weekend right wingers in the Tory party began another round of tirades against immigration as part of their anti-Europe campaign. Such sentiments are cannot fail stoke up racism and xenophobia.

It is disgraceful that a conference like this does not take a clear fighting stand against this government. What a wasted opportunity!

Labour can force an early general election

Bring down the Tories!

"THEY WOULD be right to bring such a government down", declared the big-business magazine, *The Economist* (4 February).

"Many of Mr Major's colleagues believe he is preparing to fight the next election on a Little Englander platform — firmly anti-European, rabidly nationalistic..." *The Economist* called on pro-European Tories to rebel against this flag-waving, and to bring the government down.

The *Financial Times*, the other main voice of big business, is hardly less scathing. Columnist Joe Rogaly denounces the Tories as "like small-time parish councillors. They wrap themselves in the flimsy comfort of the Union Jack." They may last only "a matter of months" (*FT*, 14 February).

If things are so bad with the Tories themselves, then it seems obvious that Labour's leaders should also be campaigning to bring down the government and get an early General Election. They should be; but they are not.

Labour's leaders have limited themselves to dime-a-dozen point-scoring about how divided the Tories are. In so far as they say anything about the basic issues over Europe, they tag along behind the "pro-European" Tories, adding only support for the toothless "Social Chapter" of the Maastricht Treaty.

Instead they should campaign for real cross-Europe democracy — starting with full powers over European Union affairs for the elected European Parliament — and for social "levelling-up" across Europe (German pensions, French or Italian nursery provision, Danish unemployment benefits, and so on, for all).

THE TORIES' raging row over Europe goes back many years. It helped to bring down Margaret Thatcher in November 1990. It became hotter after John Major signed the Maastricht Treaty, on moves towards a single Euro-money, in December 1991. It was eased after the European Monetary System — a loose linkage between the currencies of the different European Union states — collapsed in late 1992, making the prospect of a single Euro-money more remote.

The row is being stoked up again

now by arguments and jockeying over Britain's approach towards the next big conference of European Union governments, in 1996. It gets added immediacy from the fact that nine Tory MPs, suspended from the Tory whip because they rebelled on a vote on the European Union budget, now potentially hold the balance of power in Parliament.

The underlying difference is between two capitalist orientations for Britain: as part of an integrated European economy (which implies more-or-less European standards of social provision, workers' rights, and so on), or as an offshore site for financial dealing and low-cost production (cheap labour, low social overheads) by US, Japanese, and other multinationals.

Most big industrialists and financiers favour the European option. A few, like Lord Hanson, are Europhobes: many of these are people who do little or no business in Europe, as are the large proportion of small business people who are Europhobes.

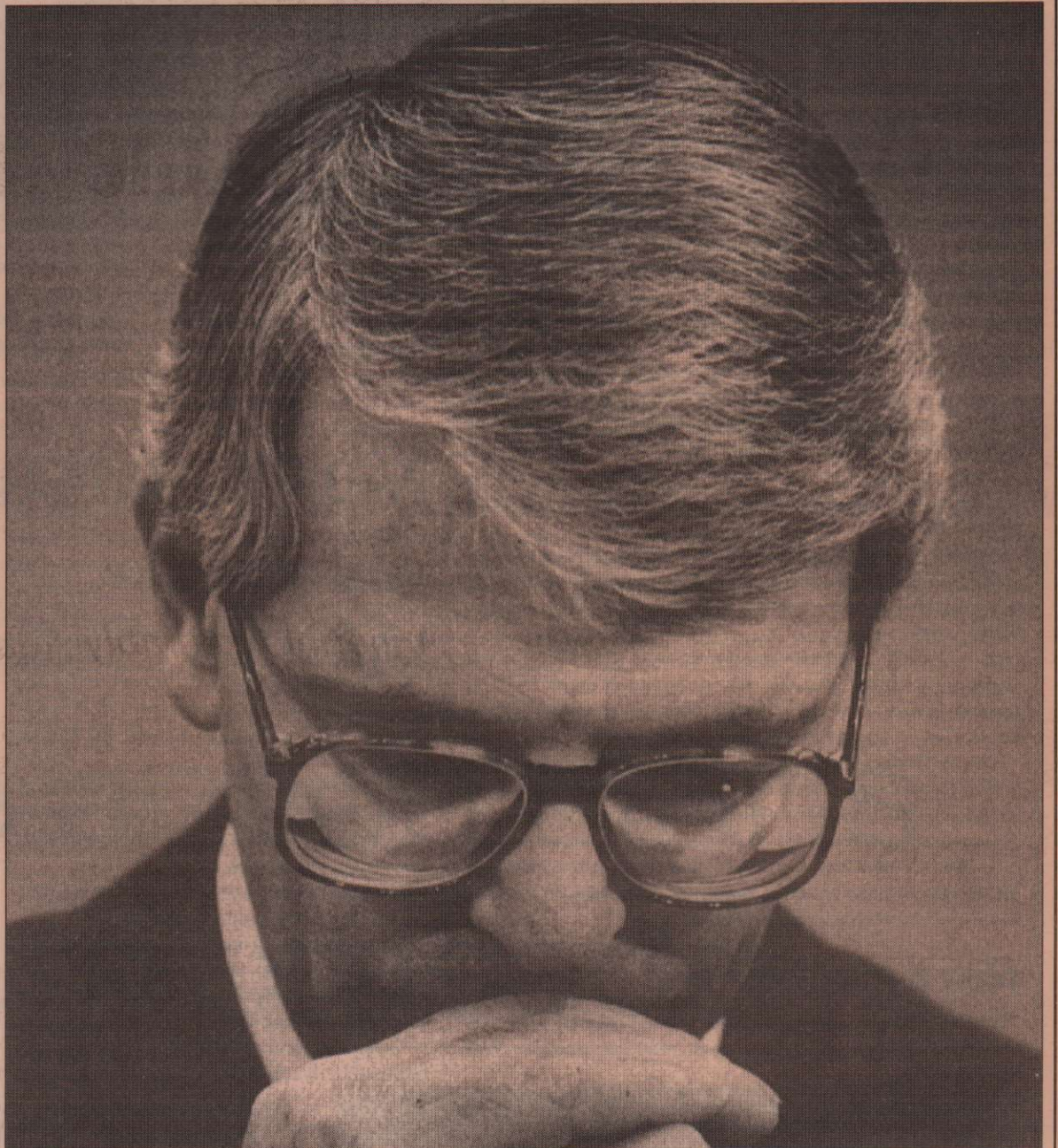
In the Tory party, however, the "Europhobe" faction is much larger and more heavyweight — with leaders like Thatcher and Tebbit — than it is in the wealthy classes generally. It seems that Major has swung towards them in a desperate search to conciliate his rebels and to find some popular rallying-cry for the next general election.

WITH THE Tory government more fragile than ever, Labour front-bencher Mo Mowlam has promised *not to bring it down*.

Her promise came when the *Times* leaked London-Dublin discussion documents about setting up a joint authority covering both North and South of Ireland. The Tories' usual allies, Northern Ireland's Official Unionists, were enraged.

There is a grain of sense in what Mowlam said. Northern Ireland is unviable as a political unit: it encloses not a single population, but two distinct communities. The large Catholic minority feels itself "Irish", and had the Northern Ireland unit imposed on it by force. A solution to the stalemate requires a wider framework — in our view, a federal united Ireland, allowing local autonomy to the Protestant minority.

A framework to "harmonise" Northern and southern Ireland policies on agriculture, trade, education



Major's last hope: a Little England anti-Europe election

and health could help towards that solution.

So Mo Mowlam could reasonably have given some guarded welcome to the leaked proposals, and opposed the Unionist outcry. That is one thing. *To promise not to bring the Tories down is another.*

Even if we agree with some particular Tory policy, we can never trust them! We do not trust them even to carry out the policies we agree with. If they do anything positive, they will do it for their own reasons, in their own way, and as part of their own vicious, destructive general policy. Labour should vote against the Tories in *all* votes of confidence, *whatever*

the immediate issue.

And what is true generally is doubly true on Ireland. Northern Ireland has suffered from many decades of brutal, short-sighted British government policies, Labour and Tory. Labour needs to break from its tradition of going along with the Tories on Ireland, not continue it.

Mowlam said that she would support the Tories in order to save the "peace process." If the Northern Ireland ceasefire survived the fall of Albert Reynolds's government in Dublin — and it did — then it would probably survive the fall of the Tories. (And does Mowlam think the Irish Labour Party was wrong to bring

down Reynolds?)

In any case, we cannot and should not trust the Tories to make peace anywhere, let alone in Ireland. Peace will not be won by bits and pieces of half-positive Tory policy, but only by a comprehensive and consistent programme for democracy, and a battle to unite the Irish working class round that programme.

That should be Labour's alternative. And now, of all times, Labour should be campaigning hard to force a general election and return a Labour government which implements alternative policies on all fronts — Ireland, Europe, jobs, the Welfare State, civil rights... Labour must fight!


WE SAY

No Fortress Europe! No Little England!

THE EUROPEAN Parliament has uncovered a secret agreement between European Union governments to get rejected refugees expelled more quickly. As European Union countries abolish border checks between themselves — France, Germany, Spain and others are due to scrap theirs next month — they are fencing off “Fortress Europe” more tightly from the Third World and Eastern Europe.

A Tory minister, Charles Wardle, has resigned because he reckons the British government is not being firm enough about keeping border checks on people coming into Britain from other European Union countries.

And Labour front-bencher Jack Straw responded to Wardle's resignation by insisting that the border checks remain. “Whatever its sympathy”, he scaremongered, “this country cannot sustain a large influx of economic migrants, for example from Eastern Europe”.

Racism is not improved by being extended into a general fear of and hostility to people from poorer countries, including light-skinned Eastern Europe. And Britain's, and Europe's, immigration controls are racist.

Look at the queues at airports or at the Home Office immigration department in Croydon, where black and Asian people wait for hours and are questioned aggressively and insultingly. Consider Britain's horrific jail camps for asylum-seekers, like Campsfield Detention Centre near Oxford, filled with people who have committed no “crime” but to be dark-skinned refugees. Think of the way the British government deliberately sets up administrative delays in countries like Bangladesh, so that even people fully qualified to enter Britain under the restrictive immigration laws have to wait years to get visas.

All this is justified by scare-stories like Straw's, about the threat of a vast flood of migrants from poorer countries.

Yet Britain has only a tiny surplus of immigration over emigration — a few thousand a year — and before 1981 it long had a net outflow of people. Only 16 per cent of the 243,000 people per year migrating into Britain between 1988 and 1992 were from African Commonwealth countries, the Indian sub-continent, or the West Indies. Immigration could be doubled, tripled, or quadrupled, and still remain tiny compared to population.

Relatively wealthy Britain — and even Germany, with its more liberal asylum laws — have incomparably smaller numbers of migrants and refugees, in proportion to population, let alone resources, than poor Third World countries.

And — crucially — unemployment, homelessness, school overcrowding, long hospital waiting lists, and other such evils, in Britain as in the countries from which economic migrants flee, are not caused by immigration. They are caused by capitalism.

There are plenty of jobs undone; plenty of houses and flats empty; plenty of building workers unemployed; plenty of teachers unemployed or pushed into other jobs; plenty of empty beds in private hospitals.

Reconstructing the economy on the basis of need, not profit, would make Britain — and Europe — able to offer decent lives to millions of people now desperate for refuge, and able to gain from the economic and cultural contribution of those people.

Not just Blair's

TO READ THE press coverage of Labour Youth Conference, you would think that Labour's young members are all, with a few exceptions, Blair bambinos.

Young Labour Conference voted to scrap Clause Four, against any commitment to a definite level for minimum wage and against a living grant for students.

But the truth is more complex. Such results could only be delivered by a carefully constructed conference, with many left wing delegates arbitrarily ruled out and a block voting system that gave Labour Student Clubs and hand picked union delegations overriding power.

The 1995 Young Labour Conference was the first to be held since the foundation of Labour's new youth organisations — Young Labour Groups. Given the delegation entitlements — one delegate per CLP, and several delegates from each Young Labour Group or Student Labour Club, plus union delegations, it should have been huge. In fact there were only 300 or so delegates. Why?

- The details of the conference registration went out at very short notice. Many trade unions and CLPs heard too little, too late, about the conference.

- Setting up Young Labour Groups is laborious, requiring a say-so from regional offices rather than just from local Labour Parties. The Labour Party National Youth Office and many regional organisers are ultra-cautious, haunted by the spectre of left wing youth.

Despite everything, there was a left-wing at the Young Labour Conference. Left candidates won over 35% of the votes for the youth representative on Labour's National Executive. Two Socialist Campaign Group Youth fringe meetings attracted 70 and 150 people.

The conference gave left-wing youth the chance to make contacts and we understand that there are plans afoot to build those links into a national Socialist Campaign Group Youth Network.

DEFEND CLAUSE FOUR

Cracks on the right as grass roots rally to Clause Four

By Tom Rigby

DESPITE THE best efforts of the media and the Labour Party establishment, the mood in the constituencies remains firmly in support of Clause Four.

“The biggest meeting in Birmingham for over a decade” was how many local activists described the 500 strong pro-Clause Four rally there, addressed by Arthur Scargill last Friday, 9 February.

In Bradford recently over 200 people heard Arthur Scargill, Halifax MP Alice Mahon, and York MP Hugh Bayley debate

Clause Four. An indicative vote at the end of the meeting saw just two votes in favour of dropping the Clause.

It is not just the left that is rallying to Clause Four.

A recent Fabian Society debate in London featuring Jack Straw, Mo Mowlam, Alan Simpson and Diane Abbott saw the self-styled “modernisers” in difficulty. Apart from a small group of be-suited ex-student careerists, most of the audience were very receptive to the idea of adding to rather than demolishing Clause Four.

Diane Abbott dealt an incisive blow against Straw when

she accused him of having a student politicians' contempt for the labour movements' traditions of struggle, and Alan Simpson brought the house down with his routine about the “underpants of power” which Tony Blair seeks to win from John Major.

The Fabian debate also saw veteran right-winger Austin Mitchell MP denounce the undemocratic nature of the “consultation process”. He said that the special conference should be allowed separate votes on retaining Clause Four and on amending Labour's National Executive statement.

Mitchell's sentiments have even been echoed by backers of abolition such as Rosina Macrae who is a sponsor of the New Clause Four campaign and a member of the Scottish Labour Party executive: “I regard myself very much as a moderniser but I'm very concerned by the leaderships' handling of this. There has been no debate and the leaders of the party are trying to blackmail the membership into supporting them.”

Despite Blair's roadshow and video the defenders of Clause Four are standing firm while cracks are starting to appear in Blair's camp.

Defend Labour Party democracy

MOVE THIS motion in your ward, GC or trade union and send it to the Labour Party National Executive Committee (NEC).

“We regret that the NEC is seeking to confine the voting at Special Conference on 29 April solely to the

wording proposed by the NEC to replace the present Clause Four. This is contrary to the procedure adopted by the 1981 Special Conference.

Many CLPs and affiliated organisations want the opportunity to vote,

not only on the new Statement of Aims and Values, but also on Labour's long-term commitments, as set out in the existing Clause Four.

The last two Party Conferences have voted to retain Clause Four.

We call upon the Conference Arrangements Committee and the NEC to allow the Special Conference to vote on the two texts. This would be a way of uniting the Party in the run up to the next election.”

Manoeuvres in Scotland

Dale Street reports from Scotland

WITH LESS than a month to go to the 1995 conference of the Scottish Labour Party the bureaucrats are wheeling and dealing to try to prevent the conference from reaffirming support for Clause Four.

Over two dozen pro-Clause Four resolutions were submitted before Christmas. Now 14 amendments have been sent in, seeking to water-down such resolutions.

There should be no confusion about the purpose of these particular amendments.

The organisations submitting them did not feel strongly enough about Clause Four to submit resolutions on the issue. Yet now they have submitted amendments to try to ensure that a composite resolution on Clause Four is either impossible to achieve or as weakly worded as possible.

We also have a statement from the Scottish Executive of the Labour Party on Clause Four to consider. If conference backs the statement, then the Scottish Executive and Blair's coterie will claim that this will take precedence over any pro-Clause Four resolution passed by the conference.

The Scottish Executive will not decide on the text of its statement until the evening of 9 March. Given that conference begins on 10

March, conference delegates cannot be given a mandate on how to vote on the statement. So much for the Executive's commitment to democracy!

On the trade union front there is mixed news. RMT and very probably the TGWU will back Clause Four. However, UNISON is backing a re-write. The UCW-NCU London headquarters are trying to put pressure on the Scottish region to back a re-write. However, this could backfire. People in Scotland don't like being told what to do by people in London!

The GMB will probably abstain on the grounds that it is still in the process of consulting its members. However a more likely reason is that GMB leader John Edmonds wants to back Blair's new Clause Four but also wants to squeeze as many concessions as possible out of him first. He therefore does not want to show his hand at a conference in March.

The Scottish campaign in defence of Clause Four (Campaign for Socialism) is continuing to attract growing support amongst the rank and file and is well organised for the Scottish conference.

Labour Party members in Scotland, as in the rest of the country, have been incensed by Blair's machinations in seeking to foist a new Clause Four on the Party. If democracy is allowed to prevail, then Scottish conference will re-affirm support for Clause Four.

Scargill challenges Blair

TRADE unionists in the North East opposed to Tony Blair's attempt to rewrite Labour's constitution are to bring their campaign into the Labour leader's own constituency with a meeting to be addressed by Arthur Scargill.

The miners' leader will speak on the future of Labour's Clause 4 at a meeting on Tuesday 14 February in Mainsforth, deep into Mr Blair's Sedgefield constituency.

The local Trades Council which has organised the meeting, has also invited Blair, or one of his supporters, to speak in favour of the proposed change.

Brian Gibson from Spennymoor and Newton Aycliffe Trades Council explains:

“The issue of Clause Four raises the question of how a future Labour government intends to plan the economy. Tony Blair has called for a wide debate, and the Trades Council is organising one in the heart of his constituency.”

Demand a debate in your ward!

MANY so called “modernisers” have given up arguing the intellectual case for abolition of Clause Four. Admitting defeat, they are now focusing on appeals for loyalty to Tony Blair and demanding a postal ballot of all members on the issue.

It is important for the left to respond properly to this clamour

for a ballot. Two points should be made.

Firstly, individual members should be encouraged to attend their ward meetings and trade union branches so as to participate collectively in the party's normal decision making process.

That way they would get an opportunity to hear all sides of the argu-

ment and raise any questions they have.

Secondly, if the right succeed in pushing through a ballot in your CLP you should demand that a proper and balanced ballot paper.

That means not just saying yes or no to the NEC statement due out next month. Constituencies should also ask their members.

- Do you wish to retain Clause Four as presently written as the basis of our Party objects?

- Do you wish to add anything to Clause Four?

- Do you wish to support the NEC statement as an addition to Clause Four?

- Are there any parts of the NEC statement that you wish to oppose?

New campaign calls protest for 25 March

Save our schools!

By Liam Conway, Central Notts NUT, and Jill Mountford, Secretary, Welfare State Network

25 MARCH 1995, the date set for a national demonstration in defence of education, could mark the beginning of the end for the Tory government.

Exaggeration? Heard it all before? Maybe. But it's not often that head-teachers, teachers, parents and governors mainly from (what used to be) the Tory shires meet to plan direct action against Tory education policy.

Yet that's exactly what happened last Saturday (11 February) in Rugby, when a new organisation, Fight Against Cuts in Education (FACE), was set up to resist the latest round of education cuts.

These cuts threaten the jobs of 10,000 teachers nationally as well as many other workers in schools, at a time when pupil numbers are set to rise by more than 100,000.

This spontaneous revolt of "decent people" threatened to break the law with illegal school budgets and/or mass governor resignations to reverse the cuts. One brave man who suggested that the cuts were not just the fault of the Tories but also of profligate Labour councils was howled down, as speaker after speaker



Teachers are set for a showdown with the government. Photo: Phil Maxwell

unleashed a stream of invective against the Tories.

The Tory call for efficiency savings and an end to waste were treated with disdain and contempt. Several speakers read out details of Tory waste amounting to hundreds of millions from National Curriculum documents that were never read, let alone used, to the Parents' Charter, £3 million of Tory propaganda.

Anyway, what's efficient about larger classes? What's efficient about putting teachers on the dole or denying work to the thousands of

enthusiastic young teachers who will be seeking work for the first time in September?

Sue Lister, a Chair of Governors and parent from Oxford, said it was time "to get angry and organised... with no books on shelves in libraries, school buildings that are literally falling down and class rooms packed with children, the education system is failing the vast majority of working-class children."

The FACE meeting came at a very opportune time. Teachers in Newcastle have already struck over

the cuts. Teachers in Oxford are set to strike as we go to press. Teachers in Leicestershire and Northants are balloting for action, whilst teachers in Notts and many other places will be seeking national support for action in the very near future.

The response of the Labour and trade union leadership to this revolt has been muted. Doug McAvoy of the National Union of Teachers has already rejected national industrial action as a response to the cuts or to the derisory 2.7% pay award which the government will not fund. In

Notts, the Labour chair of education has already condemned the prospect of the NUT striking over cuts.

All this is pretty standard "don't rock the boat, wait for the election" stuff. But if the mood of the FACE meeting is anything to go by, McAvoy and the rest may be forced to come off the fence quite quickly. And the 25 March demonstration could be massive.

Despite McAvoy there is also now serious talk in the teachers' union of making 30 March, the date set for a day of campaigning around Section 11 cuts, a more general day of action against the cuts as a whole. Left activists in the NUT will have to take the lead in building the national demonstration and promoting strikes on 30 March in areas facing cuts.

Local FACE groups could help link the struggle in the unions to the fight of parents and governors for a decent state education service. Welfare State Network committees in every area will be helping to set them up.

From Saturday's meeting a national FACE steering committee was set up. It will meet to discuss further action on Saturday 18 February in Birmingham.

For further details of FACE, contact: Seamus Crowe, St Francis School, Rye Piece Ringway, Bedworth, Nuneaton, CV12 8JN, or telephone: 0203-315279.

Newcastle action starts the anti-cuts crusade

A TREMENDOUS one-day strike and demonstration in Newcastle on 1 February marked the start of a nationwide battle over this year's local government cuts — in education and in other services — on a scale not seen since 1985.

Kenny Bell, Assistant Secretary of Newcastle UNISON, talked to Angela Johnstone about the day of action and the next steps in the battle.

"FROM 5.30AM on 1 February we organised picket lines, using minibuses and mobile phones to bus people to where they were needed.

"The picketing was so effective that it surpassed my wildest dreams. Hundreds of workers from other unions did not cross the picket lines.

"Once they realised we were on to a winner, national and regional UNISON gave us tremendous support."

Behind this success stood years of solid work. "We have worked

closely with community groups for five or six years, especially tenants' groups.

"We also had a major recruitment drive in the union for Labour Party membership two years ago. We have another recruitment campaign at the moment, organised with the District Labour Party, and we have quarterly meetings with UNISON Labour councillors.

"We have had a considerable effect on the policies of the council Labour group on specific issues, for example school meals. In the current cuts campaign, I don't think the council would have considered setting a budget above the limit set by the government if it were not for the work we have put in over the years."

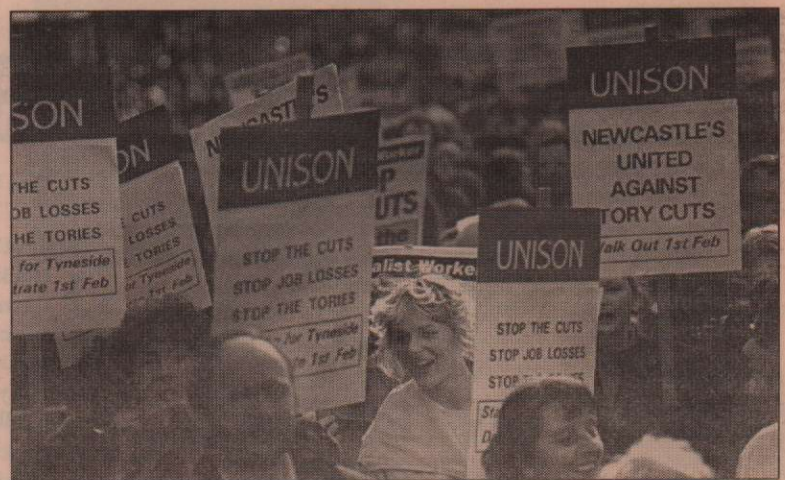
Other councils, including Oxfordshire and Shropshire, are also talking about setting budgets above the government limits. At this stage it is not illegal, if they are going for "redetermination", that is, government permission to set a different council tax.

Nor is it necessarily very radical: the councils are not demanding more money from central government, to be got by taxing the rich, but only permission to get more money themselves from council-tax payers, that is, predominantly, the local working class. However, the talk of above-limit budgets is opening the field for action in a way not seen for years.

Kenny Bell comments: "We are going through a period of change. Other regions are now planning action.

"Action is planned in Birmingham for 22 March. Strathclyde will have a one-day stoppage at the end of March. There is also a day of action by the National Union of Teachers at the end of March.

"A political and industrial strategy is necessary to defend public services, but not just as a defence mechanism. We have to decide what type of public service we want. Now is an important time, in the light of Labour's re-evaluation



Newcastle protest. Photo: Mark Pinder

of policies on the public sector, and it is an opportunity we have to take."

Newcastle UNISON is also discussing a longer-term plan of action with other union activists. Resolutions going to UNISON conference this June call for a campaign of political and industrial action and publicity across the summer, around demands for

increased central government money to save and restore public services, leading up to major nationwide action around the government's Budget Day in the autumn.

This plan opens possibilities of uniting trade union activists nationally with community groups and Labour Parties in a powerful anti-cuts crusade.

End the starvation industry

WOMEN'S EYE

Wendy Holmes spoke to Alice Mahon, Labour MP for Halifax, about the Bill she has introduced into Parliament to regulate the diet industry.

"FIRST became concerned about the diet industry about two years ago. Two young girls, aged 11 and 13, who had starved themselves into serious illness, came to my constituency surgery. One of them had stopped having periods because of her anorexia.

"I began to realise that dieting is a serious threat to health, especially women's health. Ninety per cent of British women diet at some time in their lives, and a recent report suggests that weight obsession amongst young girls has reached almost epidemic proportions.

"Women and girls are bombarded with media images, from Barbie to Naomi Campbell, which say that you have to be thin to be beautiful. When I was a girl, the role model was Marilyn Monroe. She was a natural size 16, but was (and still is) thought of as a goddess.

"The Bill which I have introduced is supported by Diet Breakers, an excellent organisation which challenges the perils and futility of dieting, except for medical reasons such as diabetes. They organised an International No Diet Day, which I actively supported.

"The diet industry is a multi-million pound industry. In Britain alone, more is spent on diet products each year than the Gross Domestic Product of Gambia.

"Apart from the various over-the-counter products supposed to help weight loss, the more dangerous side of the diet industry is slimming clinics. These clinics offer appetite suppressants, diuretics and laxatives as slimming aids. Some of these medicines can be very dangerous if taken without proper medical supervision.

"Leading health professionals agree that dieting is bad for our health, and that diets do not work. 95% of dieters will regain all weight lost within two to three years. Almost everybody you meet who has an eating disorder started off by dieting.

"This Bill is an attempt to regulate what is sold and to ensure that everybody who goes to a weight loss centre or buys diet products is properly informed of what they are taking and that rapid weight loss can be dangerous to health. Of course, it won't stop everyone from dieting but it will help them to make a more informed choice.

"I have had good support for the Bill from other Labour MPs and some cross-party support. However, it is being opposed by many Tories on the grounds that it will cost the industry profits.

"I had a note from Edwina Currie saying 'No, I can't support this, Alice, some of us are not naturally thin.'"

Bloodbath brews in Mexico

LETTER FROM MEXICO

Pablo Velasco reports from Mexico City

IN A frightening but not unexpected move on the night of Thursday 9 February, Mexican President Ernesto Zedillo unilaterally broke the recently agreed truce between government and the Zapatista rebels in the southern province of Chiapas, ordering the arrest of its leadership and "unmasking" sub-commandante Marcos as Rafael Sebastian Guillen Vicente — a 37 year old ex-university lecturer.

The pretext was the "discovery" of two arms caches in Mexico City and Veracruz, which, said the government, signalled that the "Zapatistas were using the peace process for preparing for war." By Saturday two of the Zapatistas' leadership were in the hands of the army, and 30 others were reported as arrested — but the real figure, along with further violence in Chiapas, has not been reported.

Indeed, the picture on the pro-government TV on Monday morning was of peace and normalcy in Chiapas.

The truth is very different. The real reason for the crackdown is completely different, as the Zapatista commandante Marcos recognised in his last letter to the government, dated 2 February. In it he said to the Interior Secretary:



"You may remember that, in our interview of the 15 January 1995, you said to me that many thought that we were only playing for time with this dialogue, and that I replied that we were thinking that you were in fact playing for time in order to prepare for a military solution. Perhaps this will ultimately be the truth and perhaps it is a secret condition of the agreement which Mr Zedillo made for the loan from the United States. If this is so, well, you can proceed when you like. We will fight until the last man."

The arms cache theory is nonsense — hardly any have been seized. Any of Mexico's narco-traffickers or the landowners' white guards in Chiapas have far more sophisticated weapons, and in far greater numbers. Mexico's English language daily *The News* said in its

headline on Saturday that the real motivation was that "Zapatista Arrest Warrants Bolster Financial Markets." Similarly, the sop of an amnesty for "confessed" Zapatistas only serves to isolate the leadership and behead the opposition movement.

It has been revealed that Maria Benavides, the so-called "sub-commandante Elisa" was blindfolded and forced to sign a confession without having read it.

In fact the whole point which the Zapatistas have been making in recent months is that they want to form the base of a national opposition movement. Last weekend in Queretero, on the anniversary of the 1917 Mexican Constitution, the pro-Zapatista forces met to rename themselves the National Liberation Movement, with the express

aim of removing the PRI government and its system.

And as Sergio Rodriguez, a prominent Mexican Trotskyist, explained in the press on Saturday, Marcos had in fact called in August at the founding of this movement that its aim should be "to make it so that our weapons will be useless." This is the real target of the government. It is such a political opposition movement that frightens them.

But the opposition has not been slow to act — 100,000 marched in the Zocolo in Mexico last Saturday (11 February). Further demonstrations are planned under the slogan "We are all Marcos." Solidarity was given in other parts of the world outside Mexican embassies. And this will be urgently needed in the coming period, as a bloodbath is likely to ensue.

Short on answers

STAMP OUT HOMOPHOBIA

By Janine Booth

SUNDAY afternoon in Hackney, and the local Council has booked the Rio Cinema to host a consultation meeting with the lesbian community. And a couple of films to follow.

In Hackney, the London Borough with the highest dyke population this side of Lesbos, this seemed the ideal opportunity to find out what's on offer locally, as it were. Around one hundred Hackney dykes turned up to find out. And this is what we found...

Hackney Council has a Lesbian and Gay Sub-committee. It seems that they desperately want people to come forward to be part of the Sub-committee, but that you can

only do so if you are nominated by an organisation. So, they told us, set one up.

It soon became apparent that there was no one there who can answer politically for the Council's actions. The two Council officers present were left to say: "I don't know about that", "I'll pass that on", or: "Give me your name and address and I'll send you more information."

"What's happening about Jane Brown?" (the lesbian head-teacher harangued by the tabloids, supported by parents, sold out by the council): "We can't say until the investigation is finished."

The Council officers were especially ill-informed on the issue of rumoured cuts in the Borough. "We don't know" was the (no doubt honest) answer to queries about the threatened closure of Hackney Downs School, cuts in meals on wheels, and the

rumoured shutting down of old people's homes. All this whilst Hackney Council gives chunky pay rises to its top directors.

One woman asked about equal opportunities training for senior managers. I thought of the irony of teaching equality to people being paid over £80,000 per year by a borough many of whose citizens struggle on less than a tenth of that.

Other issues addressed included the lack of mental health services specifically targeting lesbians, fostering and adoption policy, the Housing Department's definitions of 'families' and the shortage of nursery schools (there are only two in the borough).

Rest assured, when I receive my Hackney Council info pack I'll report its contents in this column.

OK, I probably shouldn't sound so negative. A consultation is a right and laudable thing

to do. And it may be that some points may be acted on. The one that seems to matter most — the appalling treatment of Jane Brown by Hackney Council, and particularly by education chief Gus John — saw the meeting unanimously express disgust in the Council. I can't help feeling it will take more than a consultation meeting for the Council to sort itself out on this one.

Local dykes (and other sections of Hackney's population) should be given the chance to put our grievances directly to those responsible: councillors should show up themselves instead of using their employees as gofers.

Perhaps the best thing was that a number of women seemed determined to take the matter into our own hands and form a group to campaign on behalf of dykes in Hackney. I signed up. Watch this space...

Slimmer of the Week • Slimmer of the Week

"I couldn't believe I was 16 stone!"

WOMAN'S OWN DIET CLUB

BEFORE **AFTER**

Super slimming looks!

EXERCISE OF THE WEEK

UPPER ARM TONER

YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED

Woman's Own "diet club" page

Stop the veal trade!

The cruel veal trade and the campaign to end it continue. Opposite: protestors clash with police (3 February) at Coventry airport as exporters resume flights just two days after campaigner Jill Phipps was killed there by a lorry. The protests are having an effect nationwide. Councils are increasingly wary of sanctioning the trade in their area because they know that protests will follow wherever the exporters go.



7
YOUTH FIGHTBACK
Rebellion

... the voice of revolutionary socialist youth.

This page is separately edited.

Editor: Mark Sandell

Phone: 071-639 7965 for details of our activity.

Letters and articles to *Youth Fightback* c/o PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA.

Youth Fightback is...

Labour Youth conference

Young people deserve better

Dear Youth Fightback,
YOUNG LABOUR Conference in Brighton (3-5 February) was so stitched up you couldn't see the seams!
 So many people commented on how orchestrated the proceedings had been! It was difficult for many delegates to see the way things

were run during the conference as fair — even though they were Labour Party procedures — when debates were so blatantly stifled.

- We couldn't hold the chair accountable.
- National Executive Committee [NEC] recommendations on how to vote on composites were constantly

announced.

- The NEC youth rep reports were conveniently forgotten.
- We couldn't even discuss changes to the constitution.

Clare Ward, youth rep on the NEC, became flustered during the education debate when conference seemed to agree with a text that said: "Graduate tax

would serve only to discourage the most disadvantaged from entering higher education."
 Then she proceeded to select known "moderates", that is right wingers, to speak and steer conference back to sense!
 Tom Watson, Development Officer (Youth), was hailed as some kind of God, with the

obscene power to rule out "naughty" delegations (including the Rail, Maritime and Transport Union) and mess delegations around appallingly.
 Of course, we all know him to be simply an incompetent right winger.
 Young Labour members now number 17,000. Brighton, however, was mostly a gathering of select, self-congratulatory right wingers, desperate for jobs at Walworth Road. Real Labour youth didn't get a look in!
 This is alienating and very wrong.
 What we should have are vibrant groups of Young Labour and young trade unionists working at grass roots level. Young people should have the right to challenge Labour's right wing on issues.

Sack the monarchy!

By Harriet Gordon

THE RESULTS of a *Guardian* poll show that the majority of 15-24 year olds do not believe the British monarchy will still exist by the time they retire. Here are nine good reasons why we should sack the monarchy.

1. Unelected power. The Queen has many political powers, including the right to veto an Act of Parliament, the right to intervene in government policy decisions, the right to dissolve and convene governments. In 1975 the Governor-General, acting on her authority, dissolved the Labour government in Australia because she didn't like its policies.
 She can take over government in circumstances which may threaten the state, such as a general strike or mass civil unrest. She has the right to sell the navy, call up a royal militia and assume command of the armed forces. She can have individuals arrested and imprisoned without jury trials.

We are supposed to live in a democracy, yet the Queen is unelected and unaccountable to anyone, even though she has potentially tyrannical powers.

2. We pay for it. The taxpayer spends over £60 million per year on services related to the monarchy. We spend 10 times as much on the royals as Germany does on its head of state. This money would be better spent on creating jobs and homes for people.
3. Bad for tourism. It is argued that the Royal Family are essential because they bring in tourists. The money spent on pompous ceremonies would be better spent, for example, on repairing London's rotting underground system for visitors and residents to use.
4. Poor value for money. What do the royals do? Not a lot, really. Diplomatic visits to foreign heads of state could be performed just as easily by a president, at half the cost. As for those patronising royal walkabouts... abolish them!
5. A national disgrace. People used to argue that the royals set an example of family values and respectable living to the rest of us. Today they clearly do not display any of the fam-

ily values which they have always hypocritically espoused. Anyway, a lot of those values are completely rotten. A royal family which tries to cover up or ignore the fact that one of its number is gay, or in an unhappy marriage is telling other people to be ashamed of being gay or divorced or a single parent. And what's so dignified about every British citizen being a "subject" of a feudal aristocracy?

6. Shameful history. Royalists say we should be proud of our great British history of which the monarchy is an essential part. But the history of the British state is one of exploitation and oppression, violently invading and taking over other people's land to gain huge wealth and power, very little of which was ever seen by ordinary British people. We should be proud of the history of ordinary people, like the history of the English civil war when ordinary people rose up against the monarchy and a democratic movement called the Levellers was built in the revolutionary army.
7. Aristocrats. The royals are part of a whole layer of aristocrats who enjoy money, land, status and power simply because of their family name. So much for living in a democracy!



8. Inequality. Until recently the Queen paid no tax whatsoever on her property or income. What happens to one of us who dares not to pay our council tax? I would rather live in a society in which everyone truly has the same rights. We should tax the rich!
9. It's a start. Getting rid of the monarchy would not deliver a classless, socially just society overnight. But it would be a huge boost to all those people fighting poverty, unemployment and social prejudices, which are clearly propped up by the monarchy.

- We want to challenge the Criminal Justice Act.
- We want an equal age of consent.
- We want a clear commitment to free education.

We don't want to accept excuses for Labour abstaining on the Criminal Justice Bill. We refuse to believe that sexual equality is a matter of conscience — the excuse for Labour refusing to back an equal age of consent for all. We refuse to believe that it is impossible to fund education for all. Young Labour demand answers and recognition of young people's right to a decent future.

A Young Labour conference delegate

Mumia Abu-Jamal

Fighting for his life

MUMIA ABU-JAMAL is on death row in Pennsylvania, USA for a crime he did not commit.

He was accused of shooting a policeman Daniel Faulkner, even though four witnesses said they saw someone else shoot Faulkner. Jamal was shot in the stomach by the police.

In 1970 Jamal was a teenage member of the Black Panther Party. At his trial the Prosecutor, McGill, used selective quotes from Black Panther publications to 'prove' Jamal was a cop killer and to secure a death sentence.

As Jamal explains below, he was denied the defence advocate of his choice, or the right to defend himself, and for much of the trial he was removed from the court by the Judge, Albert Sabo.

The judge ordered a reluctant lawyer, Tony Jackson, to defend Jamal. Jackson was later disbarred.

Jamal was framed because he is a black activist and currently supports 'MOVE', a black nationalist/religious organisation founded by John Africa.

Below we print Jamal's speech from the dock after his trial.

"TODAY'S DECISION comes as no surprise. In fact, many will remember that I said this would happen last week when John

Africa predicted and prophesied this jury's decision. I want everyone to know it came after a legal, trained lawyer was imposed upon me against my will. A legal, trained lawyer whose interests were clearly not my own. A legal, trained lawyer named Tony Jackson, a man who knew he was inadequate to the task, and chose to follow the direction of this black-robed conspirator, Albert Sabo, even if it meant ignoring my directions.

To quote John Africa, "When a lawyer chooses to follow the conditions of the court, he compromises his obligations to his 'client'."

It was a legal, trained lawyer who followed Sabo's direction not to introduce the testimony of Policeman Gary Wakshul, a cop who, according to his statement of 12-9-82, arrested me, carried me to a wagon, accompanied me to Jefferson Hospital, guarded me, and returned to Homicide later that morning to make a statement. According to Wakshul, quote: "We stayed with the male at Jefferson until we were relieved. During this time, the negro male made no comments." According to Wakshul's statement of February the 11th, 1982, over two months later, Wakshul recalls, "Oh, yeah, Jamal said: 'I shot him, I hope the M.F. dies'." Did he not consider that a "comment"?

According to Sabo, Wakshul is on vacation, so despite the fact his testimony is directly linked to a supposed confession, he would not be called in to testify. How convenient.

It was a legal, trained lawyer who told the jury, "You have heard all the evidence," knowing that wasn't so. The jury heard merely what Sabo allowed — nothing more. Many jurors were told I would cross-examine witnesses, make opening and closing arguments, and explore evidence.

What they also heard was that I would act as my own attorney, my own lawyer. What they heard was nothing, gagged by judicial decree. So what they heard was nothing.

A man ordered not to fight for his life. Every so-called "right" was deceitfully stolen from me by Sabo. My demand that the defence assistance of my choice, John Africa, be allowed to sit at the defence table was repeatedly denied. While, meanwhile, in a City Hall courtroom just floors directly above, a man charged with murder sits with his lawyer, and his father, who just happens to be a Philadelphia policeman. The man, white, was charged with beating a black man to death, and came to court to have his bail revoked after a public outcry in the black community about the granting of a bail at all. Of course, my bail, a ransom of \$250,000, was revoked one day after it was issued. For one defendant everything is granted. For another, everything is denied.

But, isn't justice blind, equal in its application?...

Does it matter whether a white man is charged with killing a black man or a black man is charged with killing a white man? As for justice, when the prosecutor represents the Commonwealth and the court-appointed lawyer is paid and supported by the Commonwealth, who follows the wishes of the defendant, the man charged with the crime? If the court-appointed lawyer ignores or goes against the wishes of the man he's charged with representing, whose wishes does he follow?

Who does he truly represent or work for? To again quote John Africa: "When you judges hang a person, put a person in an electric chair, gas a person, shoot a person to death for a crime you all didn't see that person commit, you ain't solving the problem of the crime, of the so-called criminal or the victim. You've caused a burden for the mother that is now without a son, the wife that is now without a husband, the daughter that is now without a father, and society for putting faith in this goddamning procedure, for it is the system that is guilty of the crimes; of all that is criminal. All crimes are committed within the system, not without, because the influence of that ignorant black boy you judges gassed to death, poor white boy you judges shot to death, unaware Puerto Rican boy, girl, adult you judges electrocuted to death came straight from you judges, your bosses, their crimes. In short, this system." A quotation from John Africa.

I am innocent of these charges that I have been charged with and convicted of, and despite the connivance of Sabo, McGill and Jackson to deny me my so-called rights to represent myself, to assistance of my choice, to personally select a jury who's totally of my peers, to cross-examine witnesses, and to make both opening and closing arguments, I am still innocent of these charges.

According to your so-called law, I do not have to prove my innocence. But, in fact, I did have to by disproving the Commonwealth's case. I am innocent despite what you 12 people think and the truth shall set me free.

This jury is not composed of my peers, for those closest to my life experiences were intentionally and systematically excluded, peremptorily excused. Only those prosecution prone, some who began with a fixed opinion of

guilt, some related to City Police, mostly white, mostly male remain. May they one day be so fairly judged.

Long live John Africa!! for his assistance in this fight for my life. It is John Africa who has strengthened me, aided me, and guided me, and loved me! Could John Africa have done worse than this worthless sell-out and shyster who promised much and delivered nothing? Could he have done worse than Tony Jackson?

It was John Africa's influence that this Court feared and his assistance that this Court resisted, and denied, as if it were unfair to have him help me fight for my life. It is his protection that remains despite this Court's resistance and opinion.

On December the 9th, 1981, the police attempted to execute me in the street. This trial is a result of their failure to do so. Just as police tried to kill my brothers and sisters of the Family Africa on August the 8th, 1978, they failed, and hence, a so-called trail was conducted to complete the execution. But, Long Live John Africa for our continued survival!

This decision today proves neither my guilt nor my innocence. It proves merely that the system is finished. Babylon is falling!! Long Live MOVE!! Long Live John Africa!"

● Taken from *Still Black, Still Strong* — survivors of the war against black revolutionaries. Published by Semiotext, 522 Philosophy Hall, Columbia University, New York, NY 10027.



THE CAMPAIGN to save Mumia Abu-Jamal's life gets increasingly urgent. Republican Tom Ridge recently won Governorship of Pennsylvania and has pledged to sign death warrants.

Over 4,000 people have written to the Governor opposing Jamal's execution. Add your voice to theirs.

Contact: Partisan Defence Committee, BCM Box 4986, London WC1N 3XX

Abolish

Judicial

America



Right-winger Newt Gingrich, the Republicans

By Mark Sandell

ICAN remember clearly my childhood revulsion as I heard news reports of an American execution. Society had taken an individual over whom it had total control and murdered them in a coldly-calculated ritual.

There is an international trend towards abolition of the death penalty. In the British House of Commons more MPs voted against reintroducing the death penalty in 1990 than in 1988.

But in the world's leading capitalist nation, the USA, the human slaughter has grown steadily since the death penalty was reimposed in 1976.

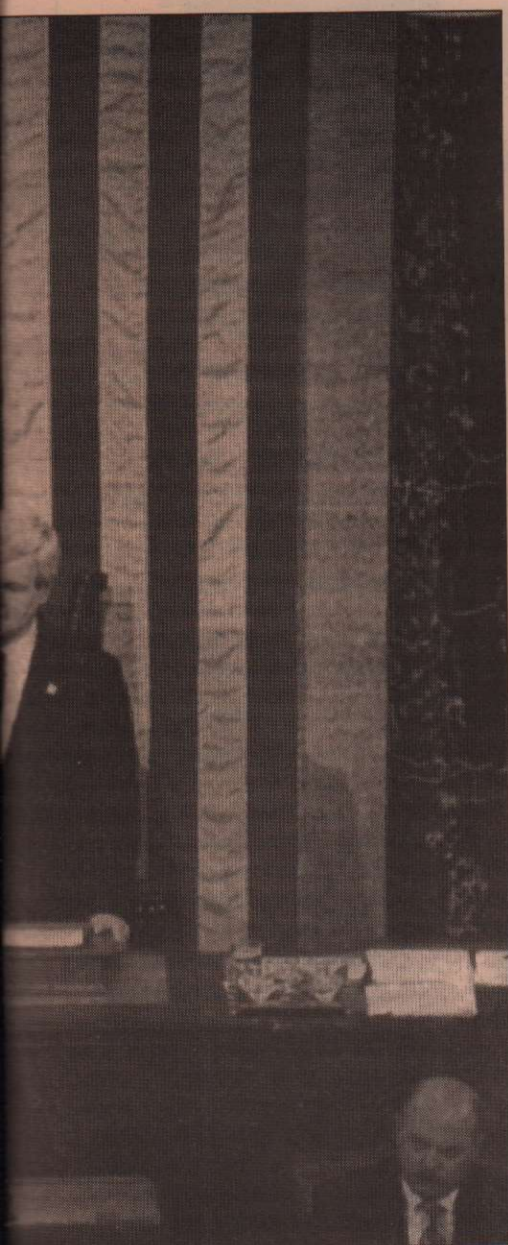
There is a mountain of evidence showing that the death penalty targets the poor, ethnic minorities and the mentally ill. Rich people can always pay enough lawyers to stave off the penalty. And those states in the US without a death penalty show no greater increase in crime than those which have it.

Right across the political spectrum of official US politics, there is a push for more

the death penalty!

cial slaughter at

rica's rotting heart



choice as Speaker of Congress

executions. President Bill Clinton's only notable "success" has been his US crime bill, which has legalised the death penalty for a further 58 crimes including some which involve no killing, such as attempted assassination of the President, treason, espionage and major drug-trafficking. Clinton approved an execution on the day of his inauguration as a taster of how he was going to be "tough on crime."

Clinton's body-count has not quenched the blood-lust of the American right. The Republicans who swept the board in the November elections campaigned for speeding up the killing. Republican candidates for state governor promised to sign more death warrants if elected. In January, Jesse Dewayne Jacobs was executed in Texas even after the public prosecutor admitted he had not killed anyone, but was only an accomplice.

The victory of Republican George E. Pataki as governor of New York looks set to bring the executioner back to New York's jails for the first time since 1965. Since 1991 seven states have resumed executions, and there is a growing queue for the slaughter. There are now some 3,000 death row inmates in 37



Clinton: approved an execution on his first day as President

states.

The average wait for execution is seven years. Seven years, locked up for 23 hours a day in a cell, with one hour to walk around in a larger cage, never knowing if it will be your last day of life.

40.3% of those on death row are black, though black people only make up 12.6% of the USA's population. 84.5% of those executed since 1977 were convicted of killing white victims, although blacks are killed in almost equal numbers.

Many black people on death row were tried by white juries, purged of all black people by prosecutors in jury-vetting procedures.

The poor are far more likely to end up on death row because many states have arbitrary, underfunded and ineffective legal representation for the poor.

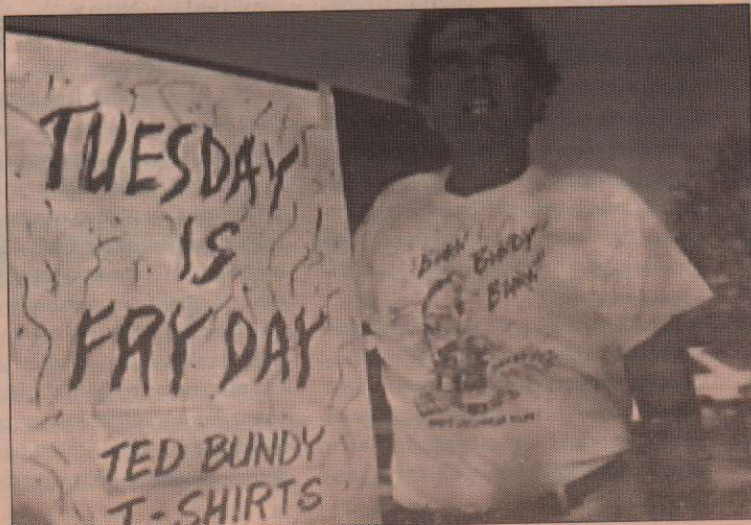
The mentally ill or retarded are often unable to defend themselves. In 1994 John Thanos was executed in Maryland after waiving his right to appeal; he was suffering from severe mental disorder and was not fit to make such a decision.

Roy Stewart was executed on the basis of a confession bullied out of him. He had serious mental problems. The confession did not fit the facts.

Mario Marquez, executed in Texas last month, was so retarded that he put aside the dessert from his last meal "to eat later."

The USA is one of the few countries in the world that executes juvenile offenders. In 1993 the USA executed four juvenile offenders.

Despite all this, many people claim that the



Fearing violence — and demanding more

death penalty works. Clinton's Attorney General Janet Reno welcomed the 1994 Crime Bill claiming it "will mean fewer victims, fewer tragedies, fewer lost lives."

However, there is no clear evidence that the death penalty reduces crime. It is social conditions, material and cultural, that determine the level and type of crime in a society, not punishment.

For example, the murder rate has dropped by 27% in Canada since abolition of the death penalty in 1993. No one commits a crime like murder thinking about the punishment. Either they don't think about it or they do not think they will get caught.

The death row philosophy of social control is an integral part of the right wing's social theory of the war of all against all, of an individualistic and greedy human nature curbed by fear and force. Its solutions have always failed, but then the failure is used by the right to justify more of the same, not a new analysis of society.

Socialists should oppose the death penalty. The state should not be allowed to ritually kill someone over whom it has total control. The death penalty can not stop crime. It is a crime itself, murder for some twisted social vengeance.

The current slaughter frenzy in the USA is the result of a deep social crisis. The fabric of American society, and particularly its cities, has been shredded by recession and mass unemployment.

Material and cultural poverty has led to the rise of serious crime, drugs and murder as a way of life in the rotting inner cities. Faced with these results of economic collapse, the ruling class has launched a war on the victims of their system's failure.

Instead of more

jobs they have built more prisons. Instead of rebuilding the inner cities they have reinforced the police and built fences around their well-off areas.

Worried by the real rise in crime, and terrified by media scare stories, many white — and black — workers without a working-class alternative to the bosses' political parties, and without socialist answers, go along with this.

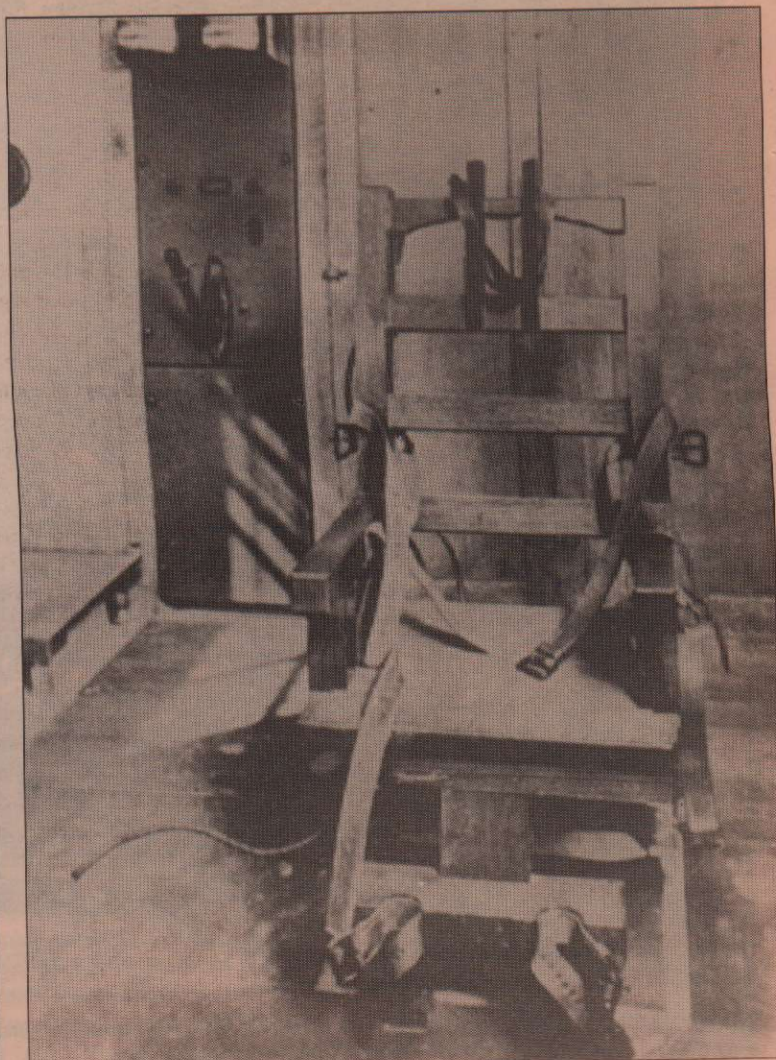
No amount of judicial slaughter can solve the problems of the rotting heart of American capitalist society. The only hope for black and white American workers and unemployed is a socialist revolution.

A mass workers' party needs to be built by the trade unions to offer an alternative to the slaughter frenzy of the Republicans and Democrats.

The British labour movement should also take note of Clinton's murderous policies on crime, since his pint-sized admirer Blair wants Labour to be "tough on crime" too.

We have one answer to them both: crack crime, crack down on capitalism!

Information from Amnesty International, 99-119 Rosebery Avenue, London EC1R 4RE



The death penalty: no answer to murder but a coldly calculated, ritualised form of it

Crime, punishment and executions

Bourgeois blood lust

The frenzy of official killing and jailing in the USA is a more drastic and violent version of a trend also visible in Britain, where the Tories are cramming the jails and howling for harsher punishment. Robert Fine (author of "Democracy and the Rule of Law") shows that this right-wing drive turns back the clock on 150 or 200 years of the battle of science and enlightenment against brutality and caste prejudice



Hanging was meant to instil terror in the hearts of working-class people

and so forth.

The hanging itself was a public ceremony with all the trappings of a military parade. The condemned person would be taken in an open cart from his or her place of confinement to the gallows (e.g. at Tyburn, where Marble Arch in London stands today). In full view of the public at large they would be strangled to a painful death by the rope.

The whole gruesome business was a show of power by the ruling class. It was meant to instil terror into the hearts of the masses and at the same time to make them aware that power over life and death lay at the discretion of their rulers.

As often as not, the victims could be

pardoned and transported overseas on a convict ship instead; but this act of mercy, which could be left until the last moment, depended absolutely on the good grace of the monarch and his fellow rulers.

This combination of terror and mercy formed the essence of punishment at a time when the ruling class was defending its own form of domination with all its might.

In the course of the eighteenth century, however, we also find the great bourgeois reformers (Beccaria, Manzoni, Howard, Romilly etc) make their case against capital punishment as both barbaric and futile.

They declared that capital punishment violated the fundamental rights of human beings, that it was an inhuman punishment. They declared also that such punishments were useless in the modern world.

Far from deterring people from violence they set an example of the most horrific and cold-blooded violence being given legal sanction. By definition, they cut out the very possibility of reform.

Juries were becoming unwilling to convict and judges unwilling to sentence, when the punishment was so out of proportion to the offence committed. The manufacturers argued that they needed certainty of punishment and not the remote threat of a dreadful punishment if their property was to be adequately protected.

On the basis of these and other arguments, the reforming bourgeoisie won. Capital punishment was reserved for a few major offences (mainly murder). Hanging was removed from the public domain and hidden behind prison walls. The torture associated with hanging was as far as possible done away with — improvements in the technology of the knot and the drop were intended to make death as quick and painless as possible.

In place of the rope, there arose the familiar institutions of the modern age, the police and prisons.

The spirit of punishment in the new age of bourgeois rule was caught by Kant and Hegel. Hegel wrote: "punishment is the right of the criminal. It is an act of his own will... His crime is the negation [overturning, denial, subversion] of right. Punishment is the negation of the negation and consequently an affirmation of right solicited and forced upon the criminal by himself."

The new penitentiaries of the early nineteenth century were intended by mental torture, to link vengeance on the criminal with penance in the criminal, the corporal punishment of isolation with the spiritual punishment of guilt.

This penal theory was expounded at length by the philosopher of utilitarianism, Jeremy Bentham: punishment must make the criminal the judge of his own crime; it must appear that in their punishment criminals pass sen-

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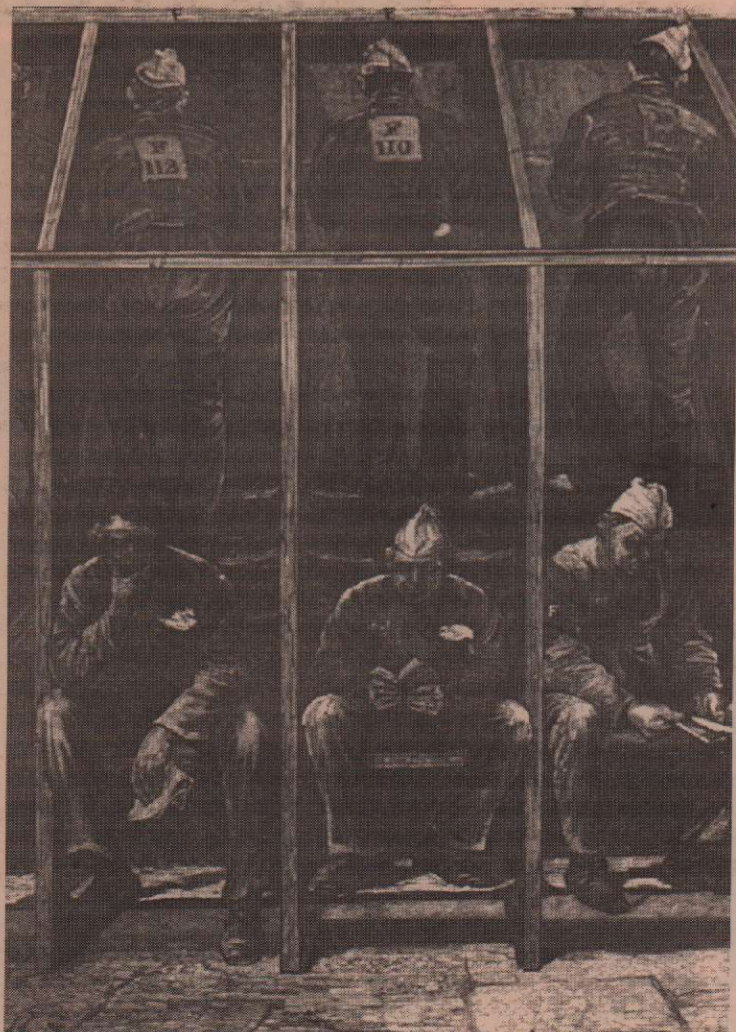
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A whole machinery of control was set up in the Victorian prison in order to make prisoners appear to "consent" to their punishment

tence on themselves. A whole machinery of power and control was set up to ensure that this fetish of power was sustained.

The convicts were shut behind prison walls, cut off from intercourse with the outside world, subjected to a regime of constant surveillance, subjected to an internal regime of rewards and punishments to ensure that in word and gesture — if not in their hearts — they consented to the punishments inflicted upon them.

In today's prison codes, the watchword of the prison is penance, or the reformation of criminals into human beings. The reality of the prison is less fine: we find in fact a reinforcement of all the inhuman conditions — the deprivation, isolation, mutual competition, racism, etc — that led men and women to commit crimes in the first place.

The crisis of modern punishment is that the reality increasingly deviates from the ideal. The right-wing answer to this crisis is not to alter the reality but to do away with the ideal. And so the Tories call for longer sentences, life imprisonment without parole and some of them — following the exam-

ple of their right-wing cousins in the States — call for the return of the death penalty.

The ultimate penalty would be used on the murderers of those in power, the police and prison officers, and not against the vast abuse of their vast powers which the police and prison officers commit when they kill innocent civilians.

No rational argument supports the death penalty. By definition it cannot reform the criminal. It rolls back 150 years of the progressive spirit of the bourgeoisie which bases punishment on the desire for reform.

Marx's comment upon capital punishment in his own time still holds good as a

perspective today.

"Is there not a necessity for deeply reflecting upon an alteration of the system which breeds these crimes, instead of glorifying the hangman who executes a lot of criminals to make room only for the supply of new ones."

The onus of consistent support for the defence of the most basic humanitarian rights lies with us. In Britain, in the USA and elsewhere in the world, socialists must fight against capital punishment.

"The onus of consistent support for the defence of the most basic humanitarian rights lies with us."

Film violence: dramatic or disgusting?

Blanket condemnation will not do

By Matt Cooper

When I wrote last year in defence of *Pulp Fiction* I never expected such a torrent of abuse to rain down on my head. I am, according to Alan Johnson, a "chic but plebianised intellectual", "morally comatose" and by implication not a "decent human being" (SO 620) for suggesting that it is not sensible to dismiss violence in film for serving "merely to entertain". The debate has continued but, with the exception of Clive Bradley's article (SO 621), hasn't progressed.

There are three inter-related levels to this debate: the sociological, the aesthetic and the political.

(1) Sociological. There is a point that no-one has quite made in this debate — that there is a link between screen and actual violence. Alan Johnson pussyfoots around the issue — he builds up a picture of disintegrating inner-city communities and then slips in that "Hollywood may not explain this catastrophe... [but] it plays its part." Proof is avoided by a journalistic flourish of the pen. Does he really expect us to believe that film is to blame for the rate of burglaries in South Shields? If not, why is it in his article?

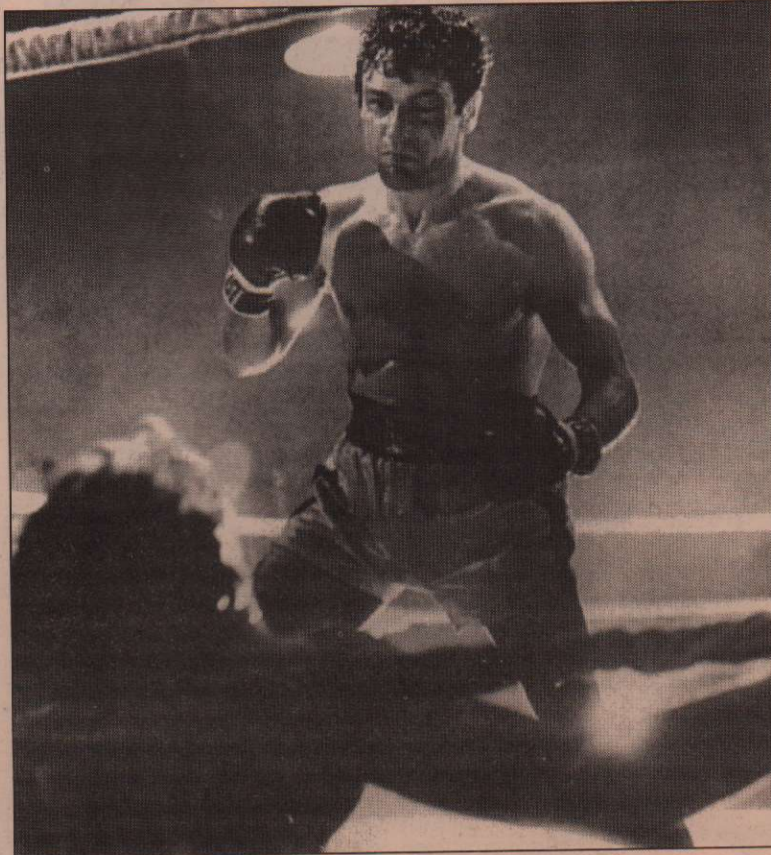
If Alan is suggesting a link between crime and screen violence, the research contradicts him absolutely. Young male offenders' favourite programme is *The Bill*. They have little access to cinemas and videos. The more videos (of any description) a youngster watches, the less likely he is to be involved in crime, including violent crime. Although a connection between screen and actual violence has been sought for decades, most evidence is negative or marginal. Exposure to real domestic violence is the major cause of violent behaviour in the young.

(2) An aesthetic and critical debate. A second case that Alan Johnson makes is that screen violence is bad "art". Clive Bradley (SO 621) makes the point that there is no single category of film violence under which everything can be subsumed (Bruce Lee is very different from Peter Greenaway).

Alan Johnson is arguing as a liberal when he approvingly quotes David Selborne; "Violence is not the purpose of art, but is purged by it, and fears aroused are also allayed by a sense of restored order, human or divine." A moment's reflection on this should

show it to be the worst kind of bourgeois nonsense mixed with a very standard notion about what drama is. Virtually all drama fits into the basic structure of order upset — conflict — order restored. That conflict may be emotional or violent, it can involve cartoon pussycats, or Arnie with an Uzi. That Hamlet fits this general scheme is not the issue. The point is that cheap and sadistic "action thrillers" do too.

Take the early Arnie star vehicle *Commando*. Our hero is an ex-commando who had given up his violent trade, but when his daughter is kidnapped there follows a bloodfest at the end of which order is restored, fears are allayed etc. etc. This fits the good art definition, Arnie only dons the mantle of violence in order to "purge" the world of it.



Raging Bull: violence with dramatic purpose

On the other hand those who have attempted to extend the dramatic form to make it part of real struggles (class struggle in particular) attempt to leave the conflict unresolved, leave fears not allayed but focused and heightened, the drama open-ended. Lindsay Anderson's 1968 film *If...*

which finishes with a civil war breaking out between students and the Establishment, closes with conflicts far from resolved. Order is not restored, but a new order is hinted at. After the premiere, Anderson told the audience "the rest is up to you". Not all will agree with Anderson's

romanticisation of violence and his vague politics derived from anarchism and sixties coffee-bar Maoism. But these are political criticisms of Anderson's work and do not distract from its dramatic effectiveness.

Alan Johnson's criticism is part of the metaphysical moralism of the bourgeois liberals who attempt to present their order as the ultimate order that should be protected and cherished.

I would not deny that much of the muck that makes its way on to the screen is the product of a hopelessly corrupt and twisted culture, often reflecting the worst elements of our society. But this can not simply be turned into a blanket condemnation of screen violence.

(3) Political. Those who lambast screen violence have been loath to draw political conclusions. Should these films be banned, even by a capitalist state? Or should we mount a workers' boycott of them, explaining to cinema-goers that the violence they are about to see is the corrupting supuration of a corrupt society: that they should save their violence for the overthrow of the bourgeois state?

Obviously I should never be allowed to write another film review in a socialist newspaper, perhaps instead plying my wares to *Gun Maniac's Weekly*. Blanket condemnation of violence is about as sensible as blanket praise (in life as in film).

Not "harmless entertainment"

By Alan Johnson

CLIVE Bradley and Mark Sandell (SO621) pretend I argue (SO620) that real life violence is a result of screen violence. They then criticise this view saying, unsurprisingly for two Marxists, that real life violence is rooted in the social conditions of capitalism, not in the violence of the movies.

Now, this is all a bit strange as what I actually said in the original piece was: "The mass consumption of the degraded products of Hollywood may not explain this catastrophe, but it can't be just patted on the head as harmless 'entertainment'. It plays its part."

So what is the argument about? In fact, while I explicitly did not put all the blame on screen violence, Clive and Mark seem to deny that screen violence is a problem at all. That is where the disagreement lies.

Clive and Mark argue popular culture simply 'reflects' what is going on in society. This is the wrong way to pose the question. It grossly underestimates the importance of popular culture. Do they really believe that the industries of the mass media merely reflect rather than play a big role in actually constructing social reality?

structuring social reality?

This is not to suggest socialists cannot hope for the mass media to be outflanked by social struggle. If we did not think that to be possible we should give up. But it does mean that the mass consumption of degraded products of popular culture is a problem for socialists seeking to foster a socialist consciousness and a socialist morality in the working class. It is a site of struggle, certainly not the most important one but, equally, not some harmless interlude from a real struggle which takes place somewhere else.

And then Clive and Mark play with the idea that it is a good thing that Hollywood films are really violent because society is. Apparently films 'deal with the reality of the world'.

This is laughable. Hollywood does not deal with the reality of violence in the world. A pouting Keanu Reeves saying "What do you do? What do you do?" and saving the world is not reality, Clive. And nor is the second hand crabbed video-shop imagination of Quentin Tarantino.

If you want a cinematic portrayal of the real violence of inner city Britain today, look to a film like Ken Loach's

Raining Stones — and how many of those are around?

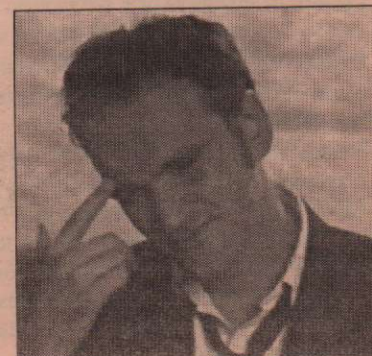
And then we have the hoary old legend of the liberal left that watching violent films has no effect on the watcher. The idea only needs to be considered for two seconds to realise it is just stupid. It is also incompatible with Marxism, which does tend to assume the importance of social environment. The idea is actually a symptom of the colonisation of Marxism by the mushy thinking of the language of the liberal left, all rights and no responsibilities, all individual self-expression and nothing about the conditions for social solidarity.

The idea that censorship is 'the only political matter which this discussion raises' (!) is a chemically pure example of the take-over of the vocabulary of the left by this kind of liberalism.

Both Clive and Mark defend Tarantino. I never mentioned him, but since you ask I think you are both wrong about him as well. Mark Sandell says Tarantino does not glorify violence. This rather like saying Eric Cantona has a cool head. The man is in love with violence! He obviously wants to be Mr Brown, Black, Pink or

whatever crappy names they have. He is fond of saying "At school I wanted to be the 'wrong guy', as in 'you picked the wrong guy to fool with, Buddy'". He used to dress up in combat gear and send his picture around.

I agree with the reviewer of *Pulp Fiction* who said of him "Unlike in, say, Scorsese's films, where violence grows out of character and is essential to the dramatic arc of the story, Tarantino's films are violent for no better reason than he thinks it's cool. He really is Butt-Head. Tarantino's films are like the phoney machismo of a middle class white guy whose drunk too much beer". Sober up boys!

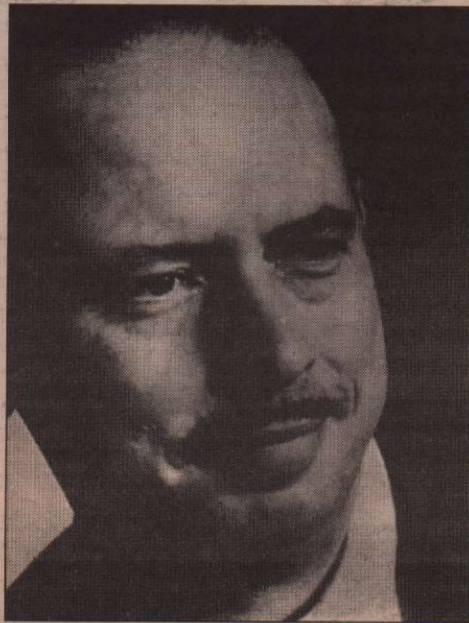


Tarantino: violence is cool

Max Shachtman on the pioneers of American Trotskyism

Trotskyism on trial

The Trotskyist movement in the English-speaking world started with the expulsion of James P Cannon, Max Shachtman and Martin Abern from the American Communist Party in 1928. Their crime was to have read and been convinced by Trotsky's "Critique of the Draft Programme of the Communist International", an analysis of the disastrous course of the Stalinist leadership in the USSR and the Communist Parties internationally. This article by Max Shachtman (the second part of a reprint from *Socialist Appeal*, 22 October 1938; part one was in SO 621) describes their expulsion and early struggles with the CP.



Max Shachtman

IT WAS A serious affair, all things considered, but at the same time, if ever there was a funnier one, I have not heard of it. The Comintern delegation had hardly returned to the US and we had scarcely begun our prudent agitation — we wanted to gain as much time as possible in order to reach our friends inside the party — than we were confronted with charges of conducting "Trotskyist agitation" in the party, with expulsion awaiting if we were found guilty. Our trial lasted for several days before an enlarged meeting of the Political Committee of the party.

The prosecutor-in-chief was none other than John Pepper, one of the hangmen of the Hungarian revolution, aided by the then secretary of the party, Jay Lovestone. As nowadays, Earl Browder was the principal party nobody, with only this difference that ten years ago he had not yet been appointed party Fuhrer. Which doesn't mean that the

Glossary

Comintern: Communist International, the world association of Communist Parties. Founded in 1919 on a revolutionary basis, by 1928 it had become very bureaucratic and subordinate to the twists and turns of USSR foreign policy.

Hungarian revolution: the workers took power between March and November 1919. Their defeat was due to bungling by CP leaders like Pepper.

Lovestone: Long an opponent of Cannon, Shachtman and Abern in the American CP's internal arguments — even before Trotskyism became an issue — Lovestone was the chief party leader, under the overlordship of Stalinist Moscow, in 1928. When Stalin turned against his former ally Nikolai Bukharin, Lovestone sided with Bukharin and got expelled. He led a dissident communist group in the 1930s; later he worked for the CIA.

Browder: American CP leader in the '30s and early '40s. In 1928 he was a Fosterite (see below).

Fosterites: members of a CP faction led by William Z Foster. Foster had allied with Cannon against Lovestone, but when Cannon came out for Trotsky, Foster became a loyal Stalinist.

Hearst: the Rupert Murdoch of that time.

Inprecorr: the Comintern magazine.

China: The Chinese revolution of 1925-7 had ended in a massacre of the workers because the Chinese CP had been forced by Stalin — against Trotsky's protests — into joining the bourgeois-nationalist Guomindang.

GPU: Stalinist secret police.

Fosterites were in the least friendly. On the contrary, led by Bittelman, they vied with the Lovestonites in driving for our expulsion. It was at once amusing and revolting to watch them, like hounds on a leash, waiting to jump in ahead of Pepper and Lovestone with a motion for our expulsion, so as to be able to cable Stalin the news of their zeal in servility.

The stenographic record of the trial makes good reading even now, and some day it ought to be printed in full as a murderously telling portrait of our prosecutors and judges. We defendants, who perversely acted more like accusers, did not yet know too much about the great disputes; at all events, we did not know as much as we might or should have known. But we already knew a thousand times as much as our opponents in the Political Committee, who knew nothing but a few catch-phrases from the official filth in the "Inprecorr". We already knew enough and more than enough to answer the standardised slanders and falsehoods which served as arguments against the Opposition and its views.

Some of the questions put to us were exceeded in pricelessness only by some of the charges and "evidence" presented against us. The manger of the party bookshop was solemnly ushered into testifying that "only recently" I had come into the shop to ask for some literature on China; and he added, giving deadly weight to every word, "everybody knows that China is a Trotskyist question!" To read books was bad enough, but to read books on China — a "Trotskyist question" — was pretty damning.*

Characteristic of that trial, and those which followed, was the dialogue between Lovestone and Ellis Sulkkanen, head of a group of Finnish party members who were tried for heresy after us.

"Lovestone: You are prepared to help the party to fight against Cannon?..."

"Sulkkanen: I have to find out and study what Cannon has to say. What program he has and what information he has.

"Lovestone: But you are officially informed that Cannon, Abern and Shachtman were expelled from the party. Do you, as a party member, think that your first duty is to find out or is not the mere fact that they were expelled unanimously by the Polcom sufficient for you as a guarantee to treat him as an enemy of the party today?"

"Sulkkanen: You put the question in a very incorrect way. One has to find out things

before one can fight anybody."

Instructive dialogue. A few months later, Lovestone, himself expelled, was compelled to plead in vain with the party members "to find out" what he stood for before they decided to "treat him as an enemy of the party." In our case, the mere fact of our expulsion was considered enough, and God help any party member who, before condemning us, had the impudence to want to find out what we stood for. In the subsequent "trials" Lovestone, Foster and Co. did us many a good service by expelling out of hand any party member who wanted "to find out things," for in every case, once the expelled comrade did "find out" he entered enthusiastically into our ranks.

OUR PRESENT headquarters may not be very sumptuous, but they are certainly less modest than those we started with. For many months after our expulsion, our "office" was one of the

rooms in Jim Cannon's home on East 19th Street, New York; then — progress! one desk in a room of my home on the next street. On 23 December, two months after our expulsion for the party, our "office" was raided in its occupants' absence, raided not by the police, but by Messrs. Lovestone, Stachel... and the GPU — a job just as thorough, we dare say, as the one recently accomplished on the private residence of the same Jay Lovestone, by the same GPU in connection with the fight in the auto workers union. Times change...

Everything in sight was taken, once the door was jimmed open by the experts. Four days later, in Lovestone's *Daily Worker*, there began a really hair-raising exposure of the "American Trotskyists," in good Hearst style, based on what had been stolen from our "office". A subscription to our paper, *The Militant*, had been sent in for Amos Pinchot, showing, according to the *Daily Worker*, our connections with "out and out bourgeois individuals." The *Freiheit* embellished the story by writing of "a series of documents about the American Trotskyists which demonstrated that they are allied with big capitalists who give them money to carry on their propaganda against the Communist Party." (Among the *Daily Worker's* subscribers at that time were the National Association of Manufacturers, Warner Brothers and the Commander-in-Chief of the US Fleet!)

No less damning was proof of our illicit relations with Max Eastman who, as Trotsky's translator, had give us a letter of introduction to the publishers of "The Real Situation in Russia," asking that we be allowed to see the press clippings. This purloined evidence of our cynical counter-revolutionary activity was duly reproduced in the *Daily Worker*.

Another reproduced letter revealed the existence of a Mr Sard who seems to have been interested in the movement. Interested also in music and director in this country of "Schubert Week," he had apparently visited President Coolidge in order, with the aid of the Vienna government, to facilitate putting over

the commemoration of the great composer. The *Daily Worker* did its very best to argue that barely started, we had already joined in a sinister plot with American imperialism and the Austrian government (but why the Austrian, or only the Austrian?) to overthrow the Soviet Union.

In a couple of days, the "sensational exposure" petered out. But we never got back our documents and letters; we never got back the petty cash and money orders that had been stolen; and Marty Abern never got back his five beautifully-bound volumes of the *Inprecorr*, which probably

repose to this day on the shelves of Mr Jack Stachel, noted contemporary advocate of democracy and law and order.

There is a very interesting sequel to this burglary, which inaugurated a large-scale campaign of meeting-disruption, gangsterism and violence against our movement, first by Lovestone and the Stalinists, and

then by the Stalinists. The sequel occurred some eight months later, shortly after the expulsion of Lovestone from the party. He was charged with having burglarised the National Office of the Party and lifting a lot of documents for his ousted faction. The moral indignation of the remaining party leaders may well be imagined. One of them, William Abrams, wrote a comment on the affair in the *Freiheit* of 1 September 1929, which merits perpetuation as a document:

"And it is to you, former comrades — again, to those who ran after a Lore, a Salutsky and other pestilences — that I come with the question: Don't you think that the same tactic that is applied against Cannon is criminal when applied to the Communist Party? Don't you think that breaking into the offices of the Central Committee and of Section One, the taking away of documents and lists from there, is an act that must be condemned?"

These two plaintive sentences say everything that is necessary — about Burglary-Bolshevism, about William Abrams, about the man he called his "former leader," Jay Lovestone, about the whole poisonous mire of Stalinism.



Lovestone

"The expulsion was followed by a large-scale campaign of meeting-disruption, gangsterism and violence against our movement by the Stalinists."

Heavenly outsiders

Baywatch
with
bustles



Geoff Ward
reviews *The
Buccaneers*

BBC1
Sundays 9.05pm

THE BBC must think it's onto a winner with *The Buccaneers* — the latest in a long line of period romps.

The story of four American debutantes on a quest to bag British aristocratic husbands should go down a storm in the US. The plot packs in four whirlwind romances. The book by Edith Wharton from which the series derives was unfinished, so the Beeb can tag on any surprise ending it can think up.

The problem for me is that these "love stories" are completely unmov- ing. It's not so much the effervescent exuberant young women, two of whom are clearly Uma Thurman lookalikes. With all the ostentatious sumptuous scenery and cleavage on display, it's like watching Baywatch with bustles.

"These marriages were essentially trades — he gets a wife with money and she gets a place in the aristocracy."

However all this courtship carries a cynical undercurrent. Its underlying motive is the attainment of wealth, titles and a place in the British aristocracy. All of which — if you think about it — kills the "romantic" element stone dead. So much for marriage being a 'bond of love'. And the relationships are so patently false: the leading males tend to propose after one picnic and a roll in the grass.

Some of the dialogue was mildly anachronistic. For instance would a Duke have told an 18 year-old American woman in 1870s England that smoking was bad for her, given that the common wisdom of the time was that smoking was a healthy pursuit. He would be more likely to have called it 'unladylike' behaviour.

With 20th century wisdom an American industrialist tells a British aristocrat that Britain is in danger of 'resting on its laurels', allowing Germany and America to leap ahead. Words in deaf ears: this aristocratic parasite wouldn't dream of sully- ing his hands by making or doing any- thing useful.

These marriages were essentially trades — he gets a gorgeous, healthy, wife with money to restore his state- ly home, and she gets a title and a place in the aristocracy.

The acquiescence of these lively young women in a life of inane social drudgery, stifling etiquette and hyp- ocritical manners seems to me to be too high a price to pay. If it all ends in tears, I for one will be pleased. But I won't. "Auntie" will see to that.



Juliet and Pauline

Hulme (Kate Winslet), the largely unloved child of English academic Henry Hulme (Clive Merrison) and his philandering wife (Diana Kent), who uses her work as a marriage guid- ance councillor to offer estranged husbands "deep therapy". Second is the frumpy and equally estranged Pauline Rieper (Melanie Lynskey), a stranger and more deeply unhappy

child. When Juliet arrives in New Zealand she and Pauline become immediate and inseparable friends, retreating into a fantasy world of their own creation.

Jackson creates a hyper-real, almost cartoonish, reality in which the two live, matched only by the genuinely cartoon fantasy world that they cre- ate to blot out their emotional

isolation in the real world. As the girls' relationship becomes more intense it becomes sexual too: this is treated as a sickness to be cured.

The flits between fantasy and real- ity are tied together by authentic extracts from Pauline's diary which show someone deeply unhappy and unable to face up to reality, but with a febrile and lively mind which has found a real and deep love.

This is dressed up by Jackson in a film of a rich and luscious texture, with sweeping cameras, outlandish colours and wonderful imagery that reflects the world as seen by the women. At times, as the film dips into the fantasy world of the imagi- nary country, "Borovnia", it teeters on the edge of the ridiculous.

Where the film is at its weakest is in its general sense of direction. Despite

"An uneven but thoroughly splendid film that attempts to explore the motives for a savage murder."

being a film about murder it is often also very funny (there is a quite glo- rious scene when Pauline is sent to a child psychologist for her "problem"), a humour which isn't always perfect- ly fitted with scenes of suffering and estrangement necessary to understand why the two ended up murdering.

Nonetheless this is an unusual, sym- pathetic and intense portrait of murder, surprisingly light-hearted but never trivial.



Matt Cooper

reviews

Heavenly

Creatures

Directed by
Peter Jackson

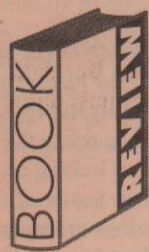
JACKSON'S previous work consists of a handful of tongue-in-cheek slasher movies, the most recent the gore-filled *Braindead*. *Heavenly Creatures* in some ways could not be further from these origins, but in others bears the marks of the film maker's past.

Like John Waters, Jackson has crossed into the mainstream to make films that still have a cultish feel about with them. The product here is not dissimilar to what would happen if Waters, with his anarchic blend of cheerful fantasy, had tried to make a David Lynch film, with its mixture of hyperbolic good and an evil that lurks under the surface of the everyday.

The result is an uneven but thor- oughly splendid film that attempts to explore the motives for a savage murder.

The film is based on the true story of how two teenage schoolgirls in the repressed and stuffy society of fifties New Zealand came to murder one of their mothers. The first of the two girls is the outwardly cheerful Juliet

Speaking out against persecution



Dan Katz

reviews *Shame*

by Taslima

Nasrin

£5.95
Penguin

SHAME FOLLOWS a Bengali Hindu family through 13 days of pogroms, during December 1992.

Shame was written early in 1993 and banned a few months later by the Bangladeshi government, who preferred that the vast brutality of the anti-Hindu riots of 1992 — essentially ethnic cleansing, which aimed at killing Hindus or driving them out to India — went unmentioned on.

One of Taslima Nasrin's central characters is Sudhamoy. Sudhamoy — now nearing retirement age — has been a politically active national- ist for most of his life. Rational and modern, he had joined the oppo- sition to West Pakistan's domination of the East. The West Pakistan rulers

had acted as bloodsuckers, racists and imperialists. They drained the economy, imposed Urdu, and referred to the Bengalis as short, dark- skinned, inferior people.

East Pakistan had fought. After a brutal war — in which Sudhamoy had been tortured and mutilated — the West Pakistan military were withdrawn and Bangladesh was created. That was 1971 — the high point of secular nationalism.

Since then the Muslim bigots had steadily made ground in Bangladesh.

The violence of December 1992 began in India, where Hindu chau- vinists destroyed a Muslim holy place. As the reaction falls on Bangladesh's Hindu minority, Sudhamoy has a heart attack and is paralysed — his secular nationalism is losing all pur- chase.

Sudhamoy's son, Suranjan, has had his father's politics. But Suranjan is of a different generation, which was not active in 1971 and which feels alienated by an increasingly hostile society.

When Suranjan's sister, Maya, is kidnapped — and probably raped and murdered — by a gang of Muslim thugs, Suranjan collapses into Hindu chauvinism. He says: "These Muslims did not let me stay human. They made me a Hindu." In the end, the family — defeated — leave for India.

Shame is an absolutely relentless tirade against communal stupidity. As such it deserves to be read.

But *Shame* is also a brave book. Taslima Nasrin was persecuted for writing it, and for exposing the big- otry in her "own" community.

More recently, in 1994, Taslima Nasrin was driven into hiding by gov- ernment legal action — taken against her for "blasphemy" — coupled with death threats from Islamic funda- mentalists. Hundreds of thousands marched in Dhaka in June and July 1994 demanding "Death to Taslima."

Her response deserves to be remem- bered: "I will not be silenced." Hers is a stubborn voice of reason protest- ing against an intolerant society.



What is the Alliance for Workers' Liberty?

TODAY ONE CLASS, the working class, lives by selling its labour-power to another, the capitalist class, which owns the social means of production. Life is shaped by the capitalists' relentless drive to increase their wealth. Capitalism causes unemployment, the maiming of lives by overwork, imperialism, abuse of the environment, and much else.

The Alliance for Workers' Liberty aims to regroup socialists in a democratic organisation which can convince and mobilise the working class to overthrow capitalism. We aim not to create a new labour movement, but to transform the existing workers' movement, trade unions and Labour Party.

We want socialism: public ownership of the major enterprises, workers' control, and democracy much fuller than the present system — a workers' democracy, with elected representatives recallable at any time, and an end to bureaucrats' and managers' privileges. We stand:

- For a fight to rebuild the Welfare State; for health care, housing, education and a minimum income to be available to all, by right. For the extension of the principle of social provision for need from a limited range of services to the whole economy.
- For social planning, for a sustainable use of natural resources.
- For full equality for women, and social provision to free women from the burden of housework. For a mass working-class-based women's movement.
- For black and white workers' unity, organised through the labour movement, to fight racism and the despair which breeds racism. For labour movement support for black communities' self-defence against racist and fascist violence; against immigration controls.
- For equality for lesbians and gays.
- In support of the independent trade unions and the socialists in Russia and Eastern Europe. We denounce the misery caused by the drive to free-market capitalism there, but we believe that Stalinism was a system of class exploitation no better than capitalism.
- For a democratic united Europe; against the undemocratic and capitalist European Community, but for European workers' unity and socialism, not nationalism, as the alternative.
- For a united and free Ireland, with some federal system to protect the rights of the Protestant minority.
- For the Palestinians' right to a state of their own, alongside Israel, and for a socialist federation of the Middle East with self-determination for the Israeli Jews.
- For national liberation struggles and workers' struggles worldwide.
- For a workers' charter of trade union rights — to organise, to strike, to picket effectively, to take solidarity action, and to decide their own union rules.
- For a rank and file movement in the trade unions.
- For left unity in action; openness and clarity in debate and discussion.

SWP discovers the working class... again

EYE ON THE LEFT

By Colin Foster

THE SOCIALIST Workers' Party (SWP) is making a turn to the trade unions. It has launched bulletins for postal workers (*Red Letter*) and for civil servants (*Uncivil Servant*), and produced its *UNISON Fightback* bulletin as a tabloid newspaper. On 18 March it is holding a "Trade Union Conference"

in Manchester.

It is thirteen years now since, in 1982, the SWP shut down all the "rank-and-file" trade-union groups and papers it had built in the 1970s and late '60s. It turned decisively from a "rank-and-file" orientation which emphasised immediate trade-union concerns — often at the expense of politics — to one boosting "revolution", "action", "the revolutionary party", and its various campaigns, with little regard to trade-union strategy proper.

Is it now turning back again? So far it seems not. The "Trade Union Conference" is billed as one for "Socialist Worker readers, sellers and sympathisers" only, to discuss what "individual socialists in the workplace" — note, not groups organising collectively across workplaces and unions — can do.

In the Civil Service and the public-services union UNISON, while launching its new publications, the SWP has made no moves towards closer collaboration with other left-

wingers and militants in groups like the CPSA Broad Left and Socialist Caucus and the CFDU in UNISON.

And SWP leader Tony Cliff's article in *Socialist Worker Review* (February) explains the turn as an effort "to create a network of rank and file socialists in the workplace. Any individual who plays a small role now will play a massive role when the struggle picks up."

In order "to raise other issues" and to promote "generalisation" he advocates not projects like the Welfare State Network, the Workers' Charter of trade-union rights, or the Newcastle UNISON initiative against public-service cuts, but activity already familiar from the SWP: "To bring the ANL [Anti-Nazi League] in", and so on.

The SWP has already proposed in some trade-union branches that the branch pay for members to attend the SWP Trade Union Conference. Since this conference is plainly a narrow SWP event, branches should refuse. But Marxists in the unions should take this chance to talk to SWP members about the turn they really need to make towards the unions and real working-class politics.

Jews' right to a homeland

"DURING THE 1930s... Trotsky... decided that the Jews... had the right, if they chose to exercise it, [to] a homeland of their own", writes Dafydd Rhys in the latest *Socialist Outlook* (11 February).

Rhys also explains, rightly, that Trotsky continued to oppose the Zionist project of creating a Jewish

state in Palestine at the expense of the Arabs, and argued that a Jewish state could be established only by "triumphant socialism".

This is a welcome break from the attitude common on the British left — often reflected in *Outlook* itself — of condemning any notion of a Jewish state as imperialist and racist.

And the implications for today should be clear. A Jewish nation and a Jewish state now exists in Israel. It was created — in a way that Trotsky, and almost everyone else before the 1940s, thought

impossible — at the expense of the Arabs. It continues to oppress the Palestinian Arabs today, in the Occupied Territories and in Israel itself.

Socialists must oppose that oppression. We must support the right of the Palestinian Arabs to an independent state of their own, and equal rights for all citizens inside Israel. But we must equally support, against Arab chauvinism, the right of the Israeli Jews — the vast majority of them born in Israel, or driven there by persecution — to "a homeland of their own."

Northern Ireland, a class issue

By Dale Street

"BRITISH POLITICS and Northern Ireland" was the title of a one-day conference held in Glasgow on Saturday 4 February. The conference was jointly sponsored by *Scotland on Sunday*, the newspaper, the Irish magazine *Fortnight* and the Scottish TUC.

Speakers included leading members of the Progressive Unionist Party, Democratic Unionist Party, Ulster Unionist Party, Social Democratic and Labour Party and Sinn Fein, who appeared alongside a number of Labour and Tory MPs,

trade union officials and learned academics.

Unionists and nationalist politicians tried to outbid each other in stressing the need for dialogue between the two communities in Northern Ireland. Fascinating as this was, the event revealed rather more about the politics of its organisers than of its participants. The organisation of the event was the embodiment of many conventional "left wisdoms" about Ireland.

The Unionist politicians spoke in one session; the nationalist politicians in another. The idea that dialogue (after all, the word on everybody's lips) might be promoted by getting them to speak in the

same session was either alien to the event's organisers or impossible to achieve.

In a session entitled "A New Trade Unionism", trade union speakers concerned themselves with the question of whether the trade union movement in Northern Ireland (and Scotland) "can reconstruct itself anew as an influential social partner?" The message seemed to be that the "big" political questions should be left to the Unionist and nationalist politicians, while the trade unions confined themselves to narrow trade union activities.

The idea that the trade unions might be a force for bridging the

sectarian divide and establishing a non-sectarian workers' party was not addressed.

The organisers also had some preconceived notions about the nature of Unionist politics. The agenda for the day asked the questions:

"Are Unionist politics simply reactive and negative? Or has that simply been a consequence of the unionists having neither power to change their circumstances nor friends in government?"

The second question is an answer to the first. The Unionist speakers responded by listing all the issues on which nationalist politics could be described as "simply reactive and negative."

A number of sessions at the event were given over to the historically, socially and politically dubious venture of attempting to relate the national question in Ireland to the national question in Scotland.

These were a further example of the "hidden" political agenda of the event: politics and political developments were treated as a matter of different, and sometimes conflicting, national identities and loyalties. There was no space to try to go beyond this agenda and relate the question of national identities to a broader socialist perspective which would replace inter-communal struggle by worker-against-boss class struggle.

Finally, special mention must be made of those indefatigable Scottish anti-imperialists who made it a point of honour not to attend the sessions at which Unionists spoke. Even to listen to the Unionists would, they believed, be a capitulation to British imperialism and its lackeys in Ireland!

Cantona is guilty

By Paul Mellelieu

ERIC CANTONA is guilty. His club, Manchester United, has been right to ban and fine him. Those who are defending him on the basis of anti-racism are either naïve or just plain stupid.

Like all football fans, I love watching Cantona; he is probably the English leagues' most gifted player. Amongst the big-hearted grafters and snappers of English football, Cantona is an artist. And, by all accounts, off the pitch too Cantona is a footballing sophisticate: a lover of French philosophy, an artist and poet — he is foot-

ball's renaissance man.

So when he assaults a supporter who turns out to have links with the far right and was shouting anti-French abuse, who could not sympathise? Too many people who should know better, it seems.

Take Mick who wrote in last week's *Socialist Organiser*. He knows Cantona was wrong and huffs and puffs about anti-French racism. He is missing Eric. Of course he is: Mick supports Manchester United!

Mick is level headed compared to *Militant* and *Socialist Worker*, who have both jumped to Cantona's defence. Cantona has

dealt a blow against racism — militantly, by physical force. The SWP have been petitioning outside Old Trafford to "Defend Cantona."

It is all utter nonsense. Cantona has a long history of physical and verbal abuse against referees, players, even his own team mates.

If Cantona and others want to do something about racism and injustice they have plenty of opportunities to do so. He is a gifted thug, but a thug nevertheless, who deserves punishment by football's authorities. And the left? They should wise up and stop making fools of themselves.

The Manchester Four were set up

A railworker reports on one of the most significant cases of victimisation in the history of the railways

THE MANCHESTER Four have finally had an Industrial Tribunal. All the signs are that BR managers have been exposed as liars.

In August 1991 the Manchester Piccadilly Guards LDC Committee (consisting of four RMT members) were sacked for defending a local agreement which said that no spare drivers would be used to do guards' duties until all guards had been approached first. The agreement was being routinely broken by management.

The LDC got management to agree to observe the agreement. But the next day they broke it again. Consequently guards began to stop work and demanded a meeting to decide what to do.

As trains piled up at Manchester Piccadilly the LDC tried to contact management, but without success. Eventually, at 4pm, they showed up and handed each member of the LDC a dismissal notice. The stoppage became a strike.

The next day the RMT national union, obeying the anti-union laws, wrote to each guard and instructed them to go back to work pending a ballot.

The ballot was "Yes" for action. But action was prevented from going ahead when a judge granted BR an injunction.

This was perfect for BR as it began its drive for privatisation. The union could not legally take any action but every union rep in the country was aware that an entire LDC had been sacked for defending an agreement. This has been made worse by the fact that the RMT has made no statement what-

soever about the Manchester 4.

BR witnesses at the Tribunal maintained they are fair and impartial and that the Manchester Piccadilly Guards LDC had been treated no differently to any other LDC. Then the arrogant Ivor Warburton — Inter-City West Coast Director at the time — took the stand. Warburton took the appeal hearing that confirmed the sacking.

Warburton made reference to a "document". It transpired that this "background document" was one in which BR had claimed the Manchester Four had threatened other guards and used violence. BR had not released it to the Tribunal.

Warburton was summoned back to the Tribunal. Yes, he had read it some few days before taking the appeal hearing, but he had put the document to one side and the con-

tents out of his mind!

The BR barrister later asked him a leading question about the union's claims that the Manchester Four had been set up. Did he know, he was asked, of any occasion when BR had set a trap for union activists?

He was supposed to say: "No of course, not. BR would never stoop to such a thing." Instead he said: "Yes, we tried in the workshops once but we didn't get the right people as they were on annual leave".

BR have been shown to be liars, hypocrites and slanderers of the Manchester Four. The verdict is expected sometime in March and the chances are good that the Tribunal will rule that they get their jobs back.

However such rulings are not legally binding on the employer and it is BR's policy never to reinstate anyone sacked, no matter who tells them to.

Victory for solidarity

"IMMEDIATE action can still win, even in today's circumstances and legal situation."

That was the conclusion drawn by one Manchester CWU member after an immediate stoppage reversed the suspension of CWU assistant divisional rep Pete Keenlyside.

Last month Pete was charged with the alleged crime of 'wilful delay'. He was suspended and escorted off the premises. All his

workmates then immediately walked off the floor and into the canteen. Despite a threatened injunction which led to work re-starting at Pete's office he was re-instated after just a few hours, though not at his usual office. Management insisted, bizarrely, that he "just do union work".

A week and a half later Pete was fully re-instated.

A victory for good old fashioned solidarity.

Post workers' union fined

POST

THE NEW Communications Workers' Union will have to pay a £7,500 fine and £100,000 costs after an unofficial London-wide walkout in defence of 41 Camden postal workers who were suspended for refusing to sign obedience clauses after taking industrial action over the introduction of a new delivery system.

Though CWU joint General Secretary Alan Johnson is making a big deal of the fact he refused to "repudiate" the strike in court (though he did try to stop it), the fact remains that the CWU leadership are second only to the Royal Mail management in blocking action.

The 41 have been reinstated but the dispute over the new computer system continues.

Tax workers fight job cuts

THE IRSF (Inland Revenue Staff Federation) held a Special Delegate Conference on 11 February to discuss merger with civil service union NUCPS. Members expressed anger at the Executive's recommendation to sign away up to 12,000 jobs in a 'Change Agreement' with Inland Revenue.

Key Broad Left motions were carried. These included removal of the phrase 'lawful action' from the constitution, the election of a

General Secretary within two years of a merger, and a motion to ensure that the National Executive has to call a Special Conference before it can overturn Conference policy.

Whilst no one is under any illusion that all motions passed will carry through into the new constitution, some will.

The ballot on the "change agreement" will take place between 16-21 February. Vote No!

Driving inspectors win

CIVIL SERVICE

A MAJORITY of driving examiners in the Driving Standards Agency (which conducts Driving Tests) have voted to call off their non-cooperation and accept the latest pay offer. NUCPS Driving Examiners had refused to undertake 'detached duty' — working at test centres other than their own. This caused serious disruption to tests, generated substan-

tial publicity, and enormous embarrassment to Agency Management.

Members will now receive between £300-£375 in a pensionable non-consolidated payment (the original offer was £180), a months 'attendance' payment and agreement that attendance linkage will not be a major aspect of the next pay round or the long-term basis of pay within the Agency.

Benefits Agency

Pay '95: the fight starts now

By a CPSA member, Benefits Agency

IN ANY normal union, the largest section putting in a well researched pay claim, well in time for management to take it into account in their yearly financial planning would be the subject of congratulation from the union's National Executive — but ours is not a 'normal' union.

We are now in the second year of delegated pay and we on the Benefits Agency Section Executive learned a vital lesson last year when the Union's National Executive vetoed our pay claim because it was too high!

Stop Press

900 WORKERS have been on strike at Cardiff's two main sorting offices since 9am Monday 13 February.

The strike was over job restructuring implemented by management without consultation with the union.

Management have secured a High Court injunction against the union outlawing the strike action.

As we go to press the local branch of the UCW is considering its response.

Sheffield cuts fight

COUNCILS

UP TO 2,000 workers could be made redundant by Sheffield Council on 14 February. Faced with a budget shortfall of upto £26 million the council is adopting a very tough line. This is different

to previous years when they have successfully negotiated a series of voluntary pay cuts with the unions.

There has been little information given to the unions about the cuts and it looks possible that no negotiations over redundancies will be made. The budget has to be set up 10 March and a huge lobby in being planned by all the council unions for this day.

Clause Four in the unions Rail union says keep Clause Four

By Gerry Bates

THE CAMPAIGN to defend Labour's Clause Four commitment to common ownership received a major boost last week when the executive of the railworkers' union RMT came out in support of retaining the existing wording of the constitution.

The only addition they want to make would strengthen the party's commitment to public ownership.

The unanimous executive vote sends a very clear message to all Labour Party members and trade unionists. We now know that the main trade union at the forefront of resisting rail privatisation is not prepared to go along with Blair's attempt to ditch common ownership.

The Labour leadership will also not be happy to hear that the RMT executive have invited John Prescott, RMT-sponsored MP and Labour Party deputy leader to explain to them why he is so keen on ditching Clause Four and going against the wishes of his own union.

The RMT's support for the "Defend Clause Four, Defend Socialism" campaign comes on top of backing that has already been received from the Fire Brigades Union, the Bakers Food and Allied Workers Union, the train drivers union ASLEF and the National Union of Mineworkers. The printers union GPMU and media technicians' union BECTU are both expected to back the existing Clause Four.

Blair has not yet seized any significant victories in the unions and in the next couple of weeks faces a very close battle indeed in the giant public service union UNISON.

Pro-Clause Four campaigners expect to win the day at the London UNISON affiliated political fund meeting on Thursday 16 February. As London is the second largest region of the union Blair's camp are right to be worried.

Rumours are abound in UNISON that the union's political officer, Maggie Jones, and Tom Sawyer, Labour Party General Secretary and formerly a UNISON leader have struck a back-room deal which would deliver UNISON 680,000 votes for Blair in return for a "secret pledge" from the leadership to bring in a minimum wage of £4.15 per hour.

Sawyer's problem is that he has tried this tack too many times before and delivered nothing. His ability to swing the union is also impaired by his own past as a fervent defender of Clause Four in NUPE.

UNISON for Clause Four campaigners have even drawn attention to a rather bold statement made by Mr. Sawyer to the last ever NUPE conference just before the creation of UNISON:

"I say to all Labour politicians — Stop arguing about the union link! Attack the Tories! Don't give them an inch! Don't give them a moment.

"Tell the British people the truth — what it really means to live in Tory Britain and what Labour would do about it.

"That doesn't mean saying some silly things. Doesn't mean going down diversions or blind alleys. And that doesn't mean changing Clause Four."

Apart from MSF — which is split down the middle — the other main union battlegrounds will be the shopworkers' union USDAW and the new Communication Workers' Union, CWU.

USDAW holds its conference just a few days before Labour's special conference on April 29th. The USDAW leadership have quite scandalously sent out to all branches a pro-abolition model reply to the so called "consultation" questionnaire. It is a sign that the battle is going to be very close indeed. Meanwhile in the new Communication Workers' Union formed out of a merger of the old BT-based NCU and the UCW postal union a battle royal is developing.

The joint General Secretaries, Tony Young and Alan Johnson, both support abolition. Their problem is that many ordinary union activists do not. For instance, a recent CWU meeting Johnson and Young debated Jeremy Corbyn and Tom Rigby from the *Defend Clause Four* campaign saw no speeches from the floor back the twins' call for abolition.

Both Young and Johnson intend to push for a postal ballot on this issue in April. CWU activists will have to work very hard to ensure that they are defeated and the new union is won to support for Clause Four.

Finally the giant TGWU is continuing its own consultation on Clause Four with major regions coming out for retention. General Secretary, Bill Morris has already indicated that he is unlikely to back abolition. He told the union's Automotive trade group:

"So far in the debate I have heard nothing, read nothing, seen nothing which could remotely meet our minimum requirements.

"Above all, our bottom line has always been, and continues to be, a clear and unequivocal commitment to public ownership and social justice."

In Brief

THE NATIONAL Union of Mineworkers is to hold an industrial action ballot including the option of strikes in response to the three year pay freeze imposed by Budge, the new private mineowners.

A special anniversary meeting and day of events to commemorate the 1984-5 pit strike is to be held in

Ollerton on March 6th. Speakers include retired NUM General Secretary Peter Heathfield.

LECTURERS in further education colleges should strike on March 6th in protest at the new contracts that the College Employers Forum are trying to impose, says NATFHE's further education industrial relations committee.

Union Drive '95
Join the fight for union rights
National Demonstration
Called by the National Union of Journalists
Saturday 1 April, Sheffield
• **Assemble 12.30 at Paternoster Row, Sheffield (Near rail and bus station)**
• **March to University of Sheffield for rally**
• **Plus stalls, music, children's entertainment, bars, food**
2.30-5.30pm

SOCIALIST

ORGANISER

talking point

How the media stifles politics, and what to do about it

Blind man's bluff

IT'S ONE in the eye for Tory Blair and the rest of the right-wing Labour leaders. 48 per cent of Labour voters support Clause Four!

Clause Four sets the Labour Party the goal of securing for the workers by hand or by brain the common ownership of the means of production. When they had it explained to them, 21 per cent of Tory voters supported Clause Four.

Who says so? *The Daily Telegraph*, which commissioned a poll, says so.

The Blairite argument that Labour with a left-wing face is unelectable could not be more neatly knocked on the head. That it was always nonsense was proved again and again by the exceptionally high votes that left-wing Labour candidates like Tony Benn and Dennis Skinner were able to secure in elections.

All the more reason, then, to step up the fight to defeat Blair.

But the figures I have quoted are not the most remarkable result of the *Telegraph* poll. What strikes me most is that 85 per cent of those polled had no idea what Clause Four said until it was explained to them. They did not know what all the fuss was about.

That is a fine comment on the state of British democracy!

And on the nature of the media. They spend more time making open or hidden propaganda than they do informing and educating. Indeed, their business is miseducation.

There is a contradiction at the heart of big-business-ruled democracy such as we have in Britain. The truth is that when the boss class and those who serve them control the media, then you can not have a healthy democracy. You can not have a real, functioning, democracy, in which the people really control their own lives.

People can not make decisions when they do not know what the arguments are about. Despite Britain's official religion of "democracy", people do not really make the decisions that shape their lives, not even the political ones.

Where, as in Britain, there is a vast boss-controlled industry devoted to opinion-moulding and "feedback engineering", the democratic process is poisoned. People hear one side of things, and not the alternative.

In this way the bosses and their servants conduct a class war against the working class — and even against large layers of the lower middle class — a war of ideas. It is simultaneously the war to shape a pro-capitalist outlook on the world and the fight to prevent the socialist outlook from getting a fair hearing.

Blair and the right wing of the Labour Party take it one step further. By hijacking the Labour Party for unashamed market economics and pink Toryism, they try to ensure that no mass alternative to Tory ideas is on offer. They conceive of "politics" as what will best further their careers; they therefore toady to the media which act as vigilantes for the interests and ideas of the bosses.

Those media will remain hostile to Labour so long as any real differences separate Tory and Labour. And, no matter how "Tory" Labour's policies

are, they will never trust a Labour Party linked to the unions. So Blair and his friends obligingly propose to break the union link!

The Blairites both buy the bosses' lies — it is a lie to say that people who have no idea about socialism or Clause Four are against it — and pass them on, reinforcing them in the process.

Right now, the capitalist classes all over the world have taken over the old Stalinist Big Lie that the bureaucratic dictatorship in the USSR before 1991 was socialism, and cherish it for their own. Blair and his friends pass it on! Why must Clause Four be scrapped? Because, say Blair's friends, "socialism" failed in Russia!

The result is that key options and real choices are blocked off to most voters, who depend on the boss-controlled media to tell them what's what.

We live in a world of technically wonderful communications, improving all the time. But in the hands of those who own the means of production, they become a force for confusion and disinformation. It is very like war. It is war! Class war on the level of ideas.

Just as MI5 has recently been shown to have waged a war against the 1984-5 miners' strike as if the miners were a foreign foe — Mrs Thatcher openly called them "the enemy within" — the boss-class media conduct their own dirty propaganda against most of the people in our society. They confuse, mislead, miseducate and manipulate them so that they can be kept under control.

What you see them doing to Germans and Russians in innumerable war films and spy series on TV is what they do to you and to the majority of "their own" people. I repeat: this is the class war on — as Marxists say — "the ideological front."

Usually they do it subtly, but sometimes they do it very crudely. Not only did police cavalry — sometimes acting illegally — bash miners during the great 1984-5 strike, but the media systematically misrepresented both the issues and the events. That was probably more important in defeating the miners than the direct and naked police violence used against them, for it deprived them of essential sympathy and support from millions of workers.

The miners were victims here, but so were the millions who were fed a diet of misleading lies about them by the media and thus deprived of the citizen's supposed right — the right indispensable for democracy — to know, think and decide about the real issues in any situation.

But isn't it possible to have an alternative press? Yes. That is one of the advantages of the absence of police-state oppression in Britain. We publish *Socialist Organiser*. Yet resources normally decide the issue. The alternative press can not normally compete with those who own most of the wealth in our society. The dissenting voices are drowned out like a man with a tin whistle competing with a vast orchestra.

Is the situation therefore hopeless? No — because the hypnotising power of the media is frequently undermined for more or less big groups of people by what capitalism does to them.

Workers on strike is the best example, but struggles like the fight against the Tory poll tax, or, now, the fight for the Welfare State, are also good examples.

Even when workers have Tory general ideas in their heads, they move to defend or secure their own interests. Capitalism compels them to. In those conditions it is often possible for large numbers of workers to break — on some issues at least — from the control of the bosses' ideas-industry. If socialists are active in their struggle, then some of them can be led to break decisively. That is why we publish *Socialist Organiser*. That is why socialists immerse themselves in struggles that seemingly have no direct or necessary connection with full socialism.

The current decay of the labour movement — itself the result of defeat — gives the Tories an additional power. Blair and his degenerate careerist friends are their "enforcers" in the labour movement. Yet their power is limited.

The *Telegraph* poll shows that the hold of Tory and Blairite ideas is skin-deep. Millions of people do not positively support this dog-eat-dog system. They just never hear the alternative to it. Millions who hate the system in their guts are prevented by the Tory media from learning how to think of an alternative to what they hate but have come reluctantly to accept.

Opinion polls show mass opposition to the Tory demolition of the welfare state — a 73:27 majority of those expressing an opinion want more spent on welfare, even at the price of higher taxes — yet the feeling that nothing can be done paralyses action to stop the Tories.

The good news for socialists in the *Telegraph* poll is that there are millions who can be quickly reached by our ideas. There is little reason to doubt that in a fair contest the pro-Clause-Four campaign would defeat the Blairites. If they win, it will be by power not of ideas but of boss-class backing. Even in this unfair contest we have achieved much, and it is not over yet.

The bad news is that the good news is an indictment of the left.

The left is needlessly disunited. It spends too much time posturing and sloganising about "revolution" and too little time organising in the working class and in the labour movement. Without that work of organising, there will be no socialist revolution.

There are vast numbers "out there" who agree or can easily be persuaded to support Clause Four. Go out and recruit them to the Labour Party!

The fight does not end with the Labour Party special conference on 29 April. It will go on. There are vast numbers who want to fight the Tory destruction of the Welfare State. Go out and organise them so that they can fight. Build the Welfare State Network!

The *Telegraph* poll should be both an encouragement and a spur for serious left-wingers oriented to the labour movement.



Blair cosies up to Murdoch