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No 18

March 21, 1992

# socialist OUTLOOK

# End 13 years of misery

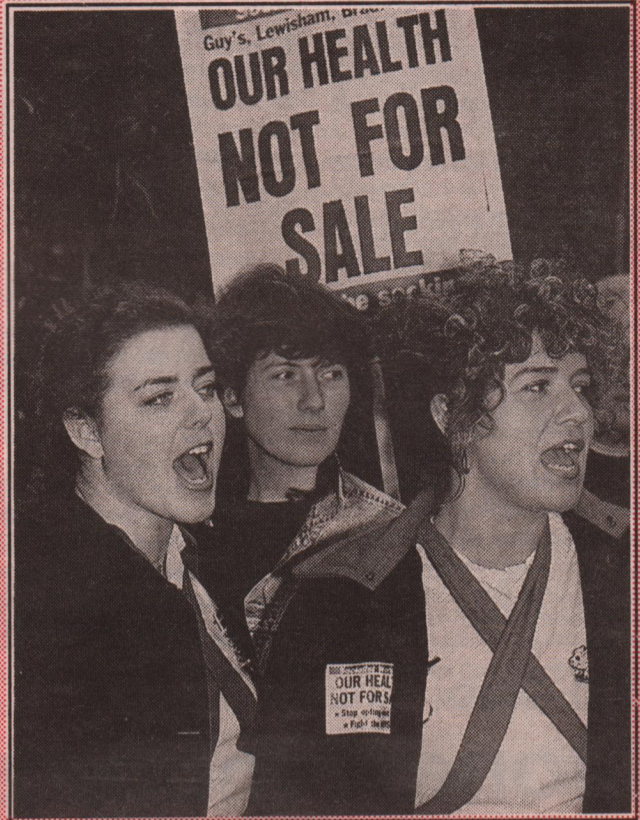


PHOTO: Andrew Ward

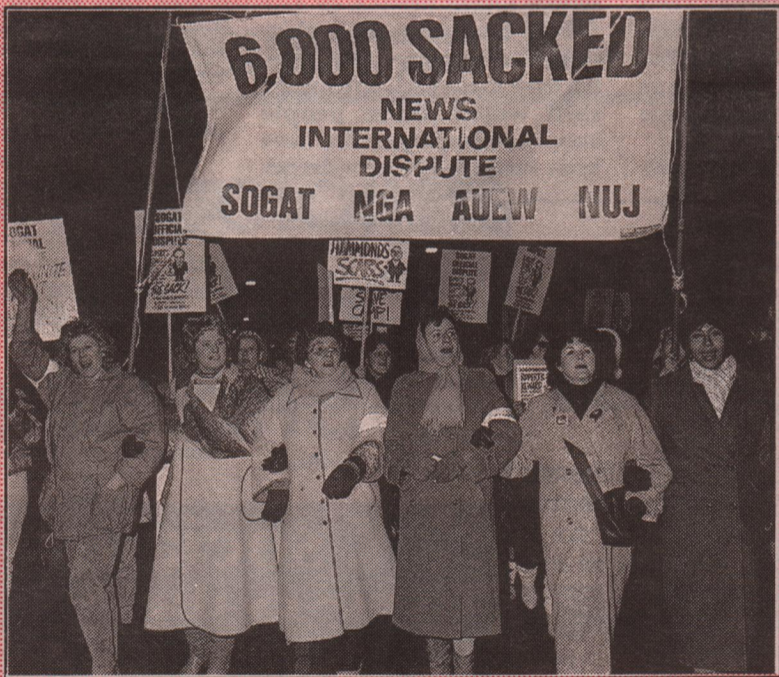


PHOTO: John Harris

# VOTE

# LABOUR

## and fight for socialist policies!

# Economic disaster blights Major's election hopes

By Paul Clarke

THE CITY went into deep gloom after Norman Lamont's budget, both because it was not an election winner and because it does nothing to get British capitalism out of its slump.

The economic figures are catastrophic. There are now officially 2.6 million people out of work, and in reality many more.

Two thousand people lose their jobs every day. Investment is at an all-time low, making eventual recovery much more difficult.

The recession is estimated to have cost £100 billion in lost production. And in a few years the public borrowing account has gone from a surplus, to a deficit of an astounding £28 billion.

The real balance sheet of 13 years of Tory government can now be seen. When the Tories

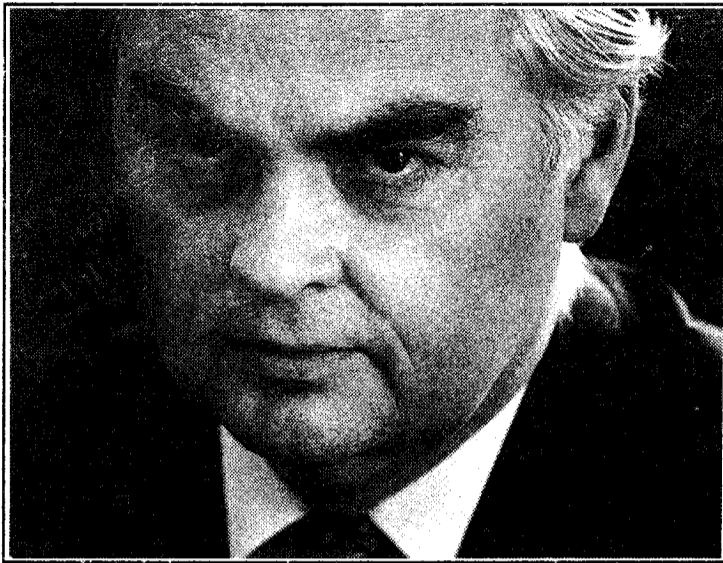
came to power in 1979, unemployment was just over one million, or 4.1 per cent, as opposed to 9.4 per cent today. Average economic growth has been a meagre 1.7 per cent per year.

These figures have to be seen in the light of two things. First, during the mid-1980s the economy went through a speculative boom, as a result as the expansion of the US economy and world trade.

## Oil revenue

Without that the economic figures would have been truly catastrophic. Second, Britain has been the beneficiary of North Sea oil, bringing in billions of tax revenue each year.

The Tories can claim to have achieved two things. First, productivity per worker has increased dramatically. But this has been achieved mainly by cutting the number of workers,



ship of the Exchange Rate Mechanism reinforces pressures towards slump. By being in the ERM Britain is forced to maintain the value of the pound by attracting overseas financial deposits.

To do that it has to keep interest rates high, which make borrowing for investment and spending very expensive, thus holding back economic recovery.

The mid-1980s boom made sure that the downturn which followed would be very severe. Because it was based on low interest rates, huge borrowing and the house price boom, public and private debt rose to enormous proportions.

Debt repayment is now an enormous burden for national and local government, firms and countless individual households. Once again, the burden of debt inhibits economic expansion.

If the Tory economic experiment has led to greater slump and decline, what is the underlying reason?

Of course, Britain has suffered from economic crisis world-wide, in 1975-5, 1979-81 and again since 1989. But that is not the essence of the matter. British capitalism has been in decline vis-a-vis its main capitalist rivals for a century.

Indeed Thatcherism emerged because it proposed a radical new way for the capitalist class to break out of that decline, but a combination of social engineering and economic restructuring, all based on inflicting big defeats on the labour movement.

John Major is in trouble because the balance sheet of Thatcherism is economic failure.

and not by expanding production.

Between 1979 and today the number of workers in manufacturing industry has declined from 4.7m to 2.4m.

But the Tories have achieved one thing - a drastic cut in the number of days lost through strikes. Last year it was 800,000 days, as opposed to nearly 30 million in 1979.

What all this adds up to is that the successive Tory strategies - privatisation, anti-unemployment laws, monetarism, tax cuts - none of them has stemmed the decline and crisis of British capitalism.

Overall Tory economic pol-

icy has been deeply recessionary. This was disguised in the mid-1980s by the financial and housing boom, itself dependent on the US debt-led economic expansion.

But once that receded, after the November 1987 stock market crash, the recessionary character of government policy re-emerged.

Britain is unlikely to re-emerge from slump in the foreseeable future.

Tory attacks on unemployment and social security benefits have made each downward shift worse. When people become unemployed they have been thrown into ever-deeper

destitution, with much less unemployment benefit to spend than they did in 1979.

Thus consumer spending and industrial production have been forced down.

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## Sheridan jailed in poll tax show trials

Leading anti-poll tax activist Tommy Sheridan was jailed last week for six months, when three judges upheld a sentence meted out in January. Sheridan's sentence does not arise from non-payment of the poll tax, but from his attendance at a warrant sale organised by Strathclyde's Labour council.

The council ordered sheriff's officers to carry out the sale of a non-payer's property, but fearing mass protests got a court order banning Tommy Sheridan from attending.

Undeterred, Tommy Sheridan attended the warrant sale and tore up the court order in front of the crowd. The judges said that he had carried out a 'flagrant and calculated breach of the court order' banning him from the sale.

Campaigners have already collected thousands of signatures calling for his release, and plan a big demonstration in Glasgow on 28 March.

Sheridan is continuing with his plans to be the Scottish Militant Labour candidate in Glasgow Poll-lock constituency.

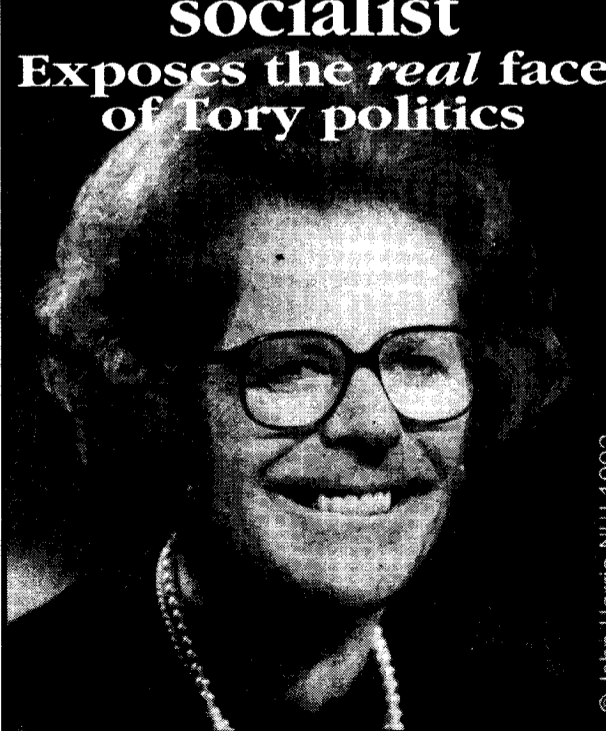
Meanwhile four people have been convicted of riot or violent disorder as a result of an anti-poll tax demonstration in Colchester two years ago. The four will be sentenced on Monday 6 April at Norwich Crown Court; and 13 others have yet to be tried on riot charges.

The case arises from a demonstration of over 2,000 in March 1990 which was attacked by police using horses and dogs. Activists claim it was a premeditated and deliberate assault.

■ Picket Norwich Crown Court on sentencing day, 6 April, 9.30am, Bishopsgate, Norwich.

■ Messages of support to Tommy Sheridan should be sent to Civil 2/92, Saughton Prison, Edinburgh: fax 031 455 7247.

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# Labour victory can turn the tide

THE OUTCOME of the general election will not just have decisive significance in Britain, it will have great importance internationally. Thatcherism has been a corner-stone of the international right-wing offensive for a decade. Its defeat would be a victory of workers everywhere.

But as we go into the election campaign a Labour victory is by no means certain. Over a decade Labour has ditched every vestige of radicalism, while the new style of the Tories has 'softened' their image. Real differences between the three main parties are hard to detect.

Indeed the benefits of a Labour government for working people, at least at the level of government policy, would be minimal. Labour is pledged to scrap the Tory health reforms, introduce a minimum wage, and may not build a fourth Trident submarine. And that's about it as far as progressive policies go.

But a Labour victory, or even a hung parliament, will have a much wider impact than is involved with government policy. A Tory defeat will create an entirely new mood, and at least the *potential* of a new phase in the class struggle. But Major back in Downing Street will deepen demoralisation in the labour movement, and further strengthen the grip of the new realist right.

Expectations in what a Labour government will actually do are far removed from those which existed in 1945, or even 1964. No thinking worker expects a 'new dawn', or major steps towards a more egalitarian and just society.

But Labour will be expected to defend the welfare state, do something for the NHS, education, the elderly and the poor. It will be



expected to stem unemployment, to defend the coal industry and not to ruthlessly use the courts against the trade unions.

Above all the very defeat of the Tories would lift the feeling that defeats were inevitable, and that resistance to the capitalist offensive is hopeless.

That the Tories are in real danger of defeat shows the ultimate *failure* of Thatcherism. It is a failure at two levels. Obviously monetarism, privatisation and the attack on the unions has failed to solve the prolonged economic crisis of British capitalism. By turning Britain into a rentier capitalism and smashing up its industrial base, Thatcherism has made ultimate capitalist recovery more difficult.

But, contrary to the ideologists of 'authoritarian populism', Thatcherism never won the hearts and minds of the British people. Ideological commitment to the welfare state and ideals of social justice is as strong as ever. Popular support for liberal social policies is

stronger than ever - witness the huge majorities in favour of abortion rights, womens equality and basic freedoms for lesbians and gay men. Both Thatcher's Victorian values and the Neanderthal venom of the popular press had little long-term impact.

The most significant victories of Thatcherism were however the defeats inflicted on the organised working class movement. The defeat of the wave of struggles including the miners strike, over rate capping and other local government struggles, and the wapping printers fight, clinched the collapse of the Labour left, and generated a steamroller crushing working class jobs, rights pushing back working class living standards.

This is the enduring legacy of the Thatcherite years, the one it is most vital to turn around. If Major wins on 9 April that task will be much, much harder.

If he loses, then we will hardly face an immediate revolution. But the preconditions for a much quicker and stronger fightback will be there.

The Tory crisis exists today for two main reasons. First, because Thatcherite arrogance lumbered them with the disastrous poll-tax, which directly led to Thatcher's personal demise and unleashed a campaign which inflicted the first main defeat against them. Second, because economic crisis cut deeply into the living standards of Tory voters in the south of England.

The final denouement of this whole development now hinges on the outcome of 9 April. Socialists must do everything possible to ensure a Tory defeat, and if at all possible a Labour victory. On 9 April it will be literally true that the whole world will be watching.

## Why socialists should back Nellist and Fields

In this election, the priority of all socialists is the return of a Labour government. However, nobody can have any illusion that a Labour government will provide anything other than ruthless pro-capitalist policies.

But a Labour government will create a new political situation, opening up the possibility of a renewal of struggles. By contrast, another four or five years of the Tories will be deeply demoralising for the left and the labour movement.

Returning a Labour government means voting for Labour candidates, no matter how hideously right-wing. Millions of workers will vote Labour with few illusions in Kinnock - to try to keep out the hated Tory regime.

*Socialist Outlook* however is calling for a vote against the official Labour candidates in Coventry South East and Liverpool Broad Green, where the sitting Labour MPs, Dave Nellist and Terry Fields have been expelled from the Labour Party.

The expulsion of Nellist and Fields, the first time for decades that sitting MPs have been expelled by Labour, has provoked wide opposition and revolution in the labour movement. It is another guarantee to the ruling class that a Labour government will have no truck with socialism, or indeed any-

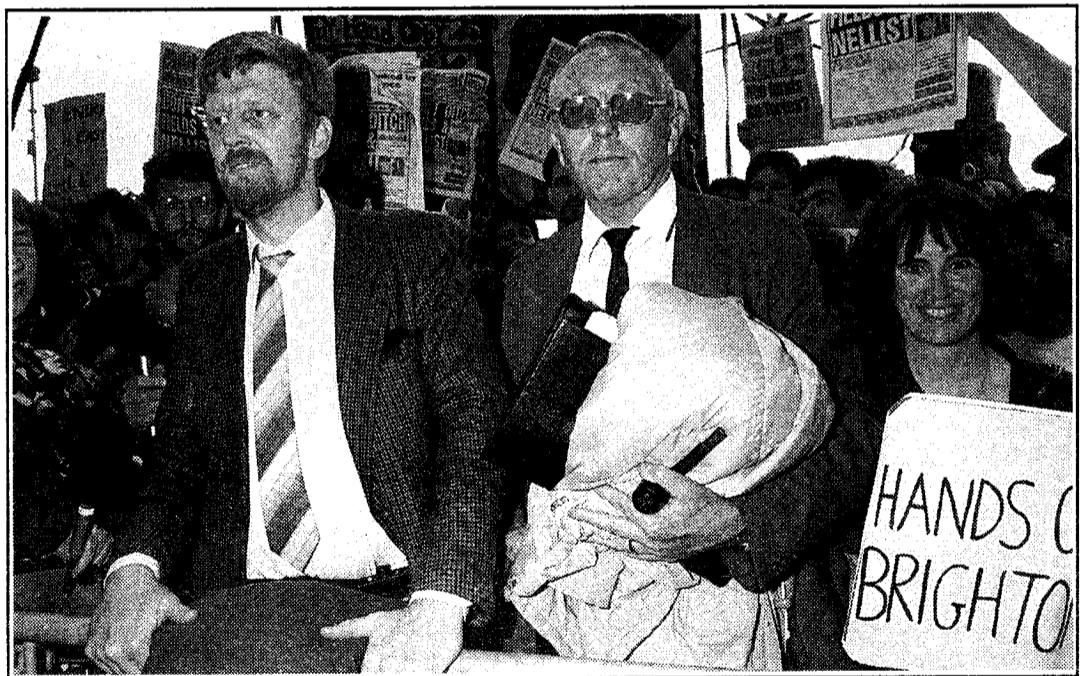
thing vaguely left-wing.

We are backing Fields and Nellist because their candidacies provide a focus for the campaign against the Labour witch hunt, and for class struggle, as opposed to class collaboration. Democracy and the wishes of the local labour movement have been crushed under foot in their expulsion.

When socialists call for a Labour vote they are not expressing loyalty to the structures and policies of Kinnock's Labour Party, but loyalty to the working class in its anti-Tory struggle. Supporting Labour candidates is not a fetish or a timeless imperative; it is merely a question of tactics. So long as there is no mass socialist alternative, we call for the election of a Labour government.

But where democracy has been trampled, and where the possibility of a fightback with a real echo in the working class and labour movement exists, backing socialist candidates is a legitimate tactic.

To maximise the effect of their candidacies Fields and Nellist should use their campaigns as a platform for all those standing for class struggle, all those who reject Kinnock's new realism. All socialists prepared to lend support must be able to participate in the campaigns.



In backing Fields and Nellist we are not sanctioning a generalised policy of standing against Labour. In every other constituency we call for a Labour vote. But a campaign for alternative socialist candidates in two constituencies is hardly going to split the Labour vote nationwide. And if, by a fluke of electoral arithmetic, votes for Nellist and Fields do allow in the Tory or Liberal Democrat candidates, the responsibility lies entirely with Kinnock and the right wing, and not with the expelled Labour MPs.

The next issue of *Socialist Outlook* will carry news of the Fields and Nellist campaigns.

*"If you want to help with Dave Nellist's campaign phone Dave Hoffman on 0203 228884; to contact Terry Fields' campaign contact Fiona Winders 051 2541298.*

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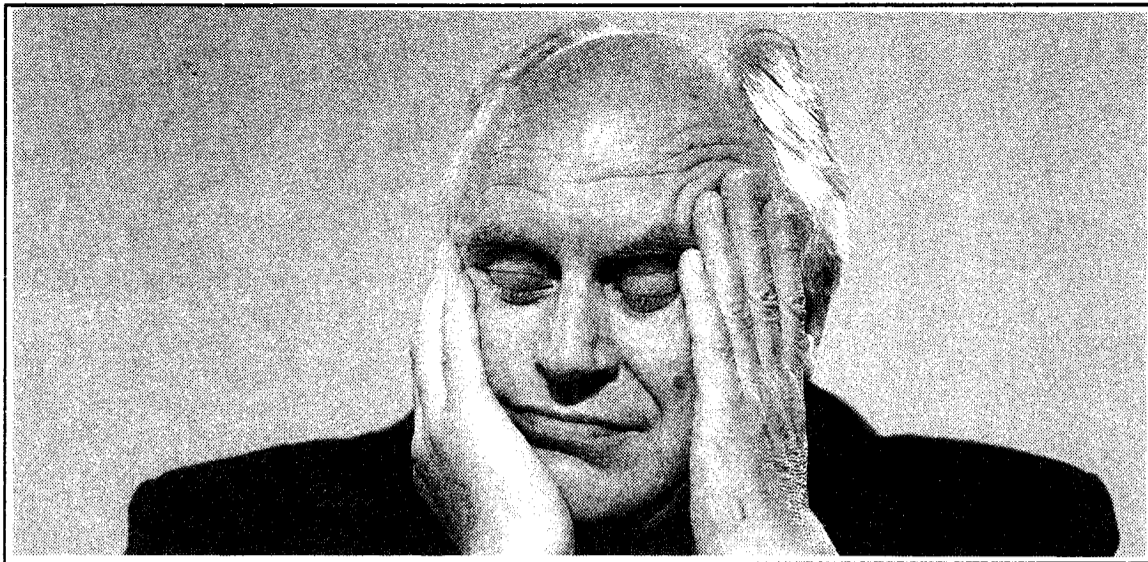
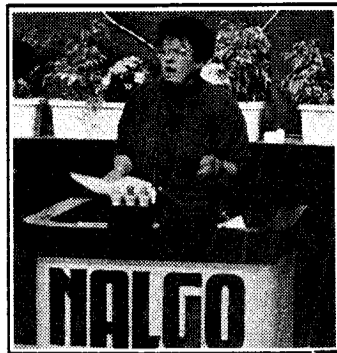


Photo: John Harris

**"the left must ensure that the super-unions become democratic, accountable and fighting working class organisations..."**



## Mergers point to new 'super unions' Bye bye to the TUC?

Most trade unions are likely to end up inside one of just half a dozen emerging 'superunions' inside the next five years.

While the left has been slow to respond, the pace of change is already dizzying.

The last weeks have seen the AEU engineers and the EETPU electricians confirm fusion into what will be the AEEU from May 1, while a special conference of local government white collar union NALGO debated terms for joining manual counterparts NUPE and health workers in COHSE.

Sources in the GMB and TGWU general unions - rivals

in many sectors - are openly dropping get-together hints, while the TGWU is in ongoing talks with the National Union of Mineworkers.

A civil service amalgamation between the CPSA and the NUCPS is currently on ice after CPSA members rejected the proposition last October, but the logic will ultimately prove compelling.

### Media merger?

The same is true of a media union, to take in GPMU printers, entertainment workers in BECTU (both born of mergers themselves) and NUJ journalists.

It's down to the left to ensure that the superunions become democratic, accountable and fighting working class organisations, rather than top-down marriages of convenience primarily designed to maintain subscriptions income.

In the more amorphous superunions, it could be appropriate to push for strong industry-by-industry organisation, with the workers directly concerned setting the overall union's agenda for their sector.

However, socialists in the unions are weak and seriously divided. A key first step forward will be overcoming deeply-ingrained sectarianism within existing broad lefts.

Long treated as little more than trophies by the SWP, Militant or Morning Star supporters, depending on who has control in any given year, broad lefts have to be turned outwards, towards non-aligned rank and file members who actually want to fight.

The genuinely broad-based Socialist Movement Trade Union Committee - now growing in influence - has the potential to become the major focus of the labour movement left.

If it succeeds, it would be the first example of such an inter-union coordinating body free from sectarian control.

What will be the future role of the TUC? General secretary Norman Willis admits in a recent release 'The creation of a small number of large unions presents the TUC with a new opportunity to which it will have to rise.'

### Problem

It's an interesting turn of phrase. 'Opportunities' are usually grasped or taken; it is problems that are risen to. And the name of Willis' problem is

the AEEU.

While the AEEU would prefer to act as a politically dominant influence inside Congress House itself, it is undoubtedly ready to create an alternative New Realist federation around itself if it is not allowed to dictate the terms of affiliation to the TUC.

Willis' statement shows he is aware of the gun being held to his head 'Where there is more than one centre or unbridled competition between large unions, the trade union movement is split and weakened - to all unions' disadvantage.'

Absolutely right. But what conclusions Willis and co. will draw is another matter. Given the EETPU's lamentable track record of organised scabbing and open attempts to bust up other unions, the admission of the AEEU to the TUC is a matter for the whole movement.

If the 'double E' is to be allowed in, it can only be on the basis of adherence to the TUC rulebook and making suitable amends to the many unions seriously wronged throughout the 1980s. Any attempt at blackmail must be rejected out of hand.

## Defend NUS democracy

By Andrew Berry, City of London Poly delegation leader

THIS MONTH'S Extraordinary NUS Conference ended in chaos as the Kinnockite leadership of the union blatantly flouted every constitutional rule in the book to push through its proposals for reform.

The two 'debates' were on the abolition of Winter Conference and on its replacement with regionalisation.

Democracy was doomed right from the very start though. Only three months ago, at what may have been the last Winter Conference of the union, the National Organisation of Labour Students (NOLS) proposal to abolish Winter Conference fell on a card vote, when it did not receive a two-thirds majority.

### Mysterious

Undeterred by constitutional rules, the following morning saw the bureaucrats put the resolution for a revote. This time they won - after 13,000 votes from Strathclyde had mysteriously disappeared overnight.

An extraordinary conference of NUS can only be called at the request of 25 colleges or more. Only 19 out of 35 such requests were ruled valid by the NUS Steering Committee (the body charged with running conferences).

When a proposal was made at a February NEC meeting to suspend conference arrangements, pending the outcome of an investigation, three NEC members - including National President Steven Twigg - walked out making the meeting inquorate.

When it was raised at the con-

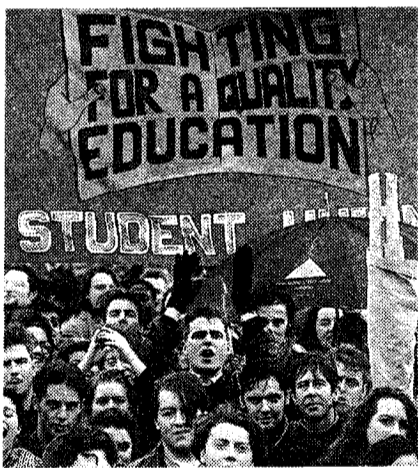


PHOTO: Andrew Ward

ference itself, Steven Twigg over-ruled it and allowed conference to proceed.

### Flouting

Further flouting of NUS democracy included:

- unelected, and therefore unaccountable, delegates to the conference.
- only 450 delegates present when normally there are 950.
- only eight delegates were from the already underrepresented FE sector - the majority of NUS's membership!
- when the resolution on abolition failed to get a two-thirds majority on a card vote, it was discovered that two colleges had not voted. After the Rules Revision Committee ruled that their votes should be cast retrospectively - yet another breach of the constitution - the vote was won.

Understandably, many student activists are furious with hacks from Walworth Road riding roughshod over the democracy of their national union.

After December's debacle, activists from Tyne Tees launched a national Campaign for Democracy in NUS.

Their petition against both the revote and the extraordinary conference was ignored by Twigg and his co-thinkers on the NEC, despite having support from activists in over 100 colleges - substantially more than those calling for the conference in the first place.

Even the Socialist Worker Student Society (SWSS) refused to condemn the conference as undemocratic, foolishly believing that at that stage the reforms could be fairly debated.

### Political fight

Given the level of anger, there may well be an attempt to try and take NUS to court over the issue. While it is highly likely that the constitutional breaches are in fact illegal, it would be a mistake to take this path.

All it would mean would be that the political fight necessary to tackle the bureaucrats would be diverted into demobilising legal wrangling. It would also fuel the fires of those who want to destroy NUS.

NOLS have got to be kicked out of the driving seat of NUS. An NEC has to be elected that will not accept Walworth Road - and possibly a new Labour government - pulling the strings.

Now more than ever we need a left-wing NUS leadership, one that can mobilise students to defend education and fight student poverty, one that can defend union democracy - the only way to defend the national union.

## New Telecom jobs massacre

By Josie Mitchell

AFTER the bad news, comes the very bad news. To add to the more than 30,000 redundancies in British Telecom in the past two years, the employers are looking for another 20-24,000 over the next twelve months.

BT's announcement last week was justified by reference to increased competition, and increased price regulation. While it is true that BT profits have fallen slightly due to the recession, the company still has about 95 per cent of the British market with Mercury only on about 5 per cent. Even if no jobs were cut, BT would continue to make hundreds of millions of pounds profit.

It is not the fear of bankruptcy which motivates BT, but a fear of any slight reduction in profits for its private shareholders, mainly big financial institutions.

Between 1990 and 1993 BT will have shed about 57,000 jobs, or 400 a week. The response of the BT union, the NCU, has been half-hearted.

General secretary Tony

Young says the NCU will insist on no compulsory redundancies. Such is the pressure of rising unemployment that it is very doubtful that this year's batch can be achieved voluntarily.

In any case, voluntary redundancies still amount to jobs lost. 'Intensive negotiations' with BT, all the NCU leadership has on offer, are not going to save them. The leadership has forgotten successive conference decisions to campaign for shorter working hours to combat redundancies.

Tony Young and his friends may be banking on a better deal from Labour. But industry spokesperson Gordon Brown says the recession 'will inevitably take its toll' on BT.

Worst of all the NCU accepts BT's logic. Acting deputy general secretary Bill McClory says that the recession and an 'imbalanced regulatory regime' (ie lower prices) are to blame for job cuts. In other words, job losses are inevitable to defend BT's mammoth profits. With logic like that, who can expect a fightback from the NCU leadership?



# Fighting racism on the frontline

MORALISING AND lecturing is *not* NMP's style. Their anti-racism forms the nuts and bolts of campaigning. They work directly with the victims of racism. They work directly with a community constantly facing police harassment and malpractice.

As Unmesh explained, their whole experience has shown that one of the biggest issues the anti-racist movement has to tackle is that black people are criminalised for fighting back against racism.

Since its inception in 1980, NMP has used the issues raised by its casework to actively campaign among both the black community and white working class youth in schools and youth centres.

Asad used the example of the forthcoming 'March for Justice' to show their approach to campaigning. The demonstration was called from mass local meetings following police violence and harassment against two local shopkeepers, Mr Deane and his son.

Following the racist murder of Tamil refugee Panchadcharam Sahitharan at the new year, NMP linked up the families and their campaigns. The Deanes attended the Sahitharan Memorial Committee, proposing they become involved in the 'March for Justice'.

Labour, Unmesh and Asad argued, still play the numbers game. 'Once you accept the logic behind the Asylum Bill then the rest follows. It's the same in France with the Socialist Party, and it's



the same with the Social Democrats in Germany.

'There is not a problem with refugees, but there is an enormous problem with imperialist foreign policy that forces people to flee their homes and countries, from wars, famine, poverty and repression'.

Both the anti-racist movement and the left need to turn this argument around, turn it from a racist argument on numbers, to an assault on imperialist foreign policy.

Central to this is the whole question of putting the black experience at the heart of the anti-racist/anti-fascist struggle. This is about white activists learning from the *history* of black struggle, working alongside black activists to do so. 'If you cannot have a strike without strikers, how can you have anti-racism without black people. Our job is to support people fighting back – not to substitute for them.'

In the fight against the National Front through the 1970s self-organised black groups were not around in the way that they are today. The white left needs to accept this self-organisation in *practice* – and not fall in the trap of abstract propagandism.

To push this point Unmesh recounted a recent example seen in Tower Hamlets. Some sixty Bengali youth were standing outside a hall, waiting for a meeting to work out how to fight the growing cases of racist police harassment in the borough. Only twenty yards away stood a group of white anti-

Newham Monitoring Project is seen by many activists as a model of how to conduct anti-racist campaigning. UNMESH DESAI from the Newham Monitoring Project and ASAD REHMAN, Secretary of the Sahitharan Memorial Committee, talked to *Socialist Outlook* about both their work and ideas about campaigning in the future.



fascists. These sort of barriers need to be broken down.

In contrast to this, Unmesh gave an account of forging black and white unity in action in one of the most racist areas in the country. The Docklands development has produced one of the biggest claims for damages in history.

From within the community

an action committee was set up to fight the developers. Unmesh is convinced that the left needs to catch up with the importance of community politics – especially in areas where you do not just see the unemployed, but also the never-employed.

Fighting fascists in the 1990s will mean trade unions and socialists implanting themselves –

while maintaining their organisational independence – in community defence. That means building a mass anti-racist/anti-fascist movement from bottom to top, giving national expression to local campaigns, but with the 'sharp political edge' necessary to combat the political and ideological offensive from the right.

## Stop Tyndall – Stop the fascists

NOW THE election has been called all speculation regarding the numbers of fascists the BNP and the NF are standing is over.

Rumours abound over an NF financial crisis which is limiting their activities to 15 seats. The BNP have restricted themselves to 14 seats, concentrating on those areas where they can try to masquerade as 'Rights for whites' candidates.

Both groups will attempt to bridge the gap between their 'streetfighting' thug hardcore, its few isolated and discredited 'intellectuals' and the respectable image that those such as Le Pen have cultivated.

This is to appeal to the disaffected Tory right who want to increase restrictions on immigration, increase police powers and ignore police racism.

It is to combat this threat that an ad-hoc committee has been set up in East London where both Tyndall,

leader of the BNP, and Edmonds his stooge are standing.

Tyndall is standing against Mildred Gordon, one of the few Labour MPs with a consistent record of fighting fascism and racism. It is also in an area where the Liberals distribute leaflets saying 'Island homes for Island people' (referring to the Isle of Dogs) in a populist attempt to appeal to all reactionaries.

The campaign was only formed on the 8th March but has already produced a leaflet exposing the true nature of Tyndall and his cronies. Other activities are going to include counter mobilisations and a large public meeting immediately prior to the election.

Co-ordinating bodies such as the 'Stop Tyndall - Stop the Fascists' campaign are a way to build a united front against the fascists and show that unity in action can be built.

Contact ST-STF c/o City Poly SU, 102, Whitechapel High St E1 7RA or ring 071 637 1181 (NUS London)

## Proud to be European?

By Rebecca Flemming  
ORGANISERS OF Euro-Pride 1992 proclaim that the event will be a *celebration* of European lesbian and gay identity, within the context of moves towards unification.

It is based on the mistaken belief that the measures coming into force in 1992 will result in a real improvement in the legal position of lesbians and gay men in Britain.

The racism implicit in most concepts of 'European identity' was demonstrated by the logo initially adopted – two, joined, *white* hands.

It marks the demoralisation and depoliticisation of much of the British

lesbian and gay community today. It also marks the fact that the last vestiges of Pride's accountability were swept away earlier this year, with the announcement that it was to become a limited company.

This completed the gradual transformation from an activist-led event to one dominated by gay business.

### Illusion

The illusion that a project aimed to unite markets and increase profits will lead to Dutch or Danish style moves towards lesbian and gay equality, is born out of the defeats of the Thatcher years.

But history shows that real changes have come from the activism

and self-organisation of the lesbian and gay movement – not the goodwill of anonymous bureaucrats.

Lesbians and gay men need to fight racism in their communities, and build alliances with black people fighting back. This means *not* bolstering concepts of an exclusive, white 'European identity' and the reality of Fortress Europe, closed to migrants and asylum seekers, that lies behind it.

A range of lesbian and gay organisations have protested against Euro-Pride, with some success.

The logo has been changed, and there is agreement for a black space at the event. But the underlying issues of the political and organisational direction of Pride remain.

# SNP – making up policies on the hoof

PHOTO: Steve McTaggart



**By George Eastwood**  
When Alex Salmond, leader of the Scottish National Party (SNP), appears in debate there is palpable tension as people wait to see what new policy wheezes he is going to deliver, seemingly on the hoof.

In recent weeks we have had promises that the SNP will cancel the housing debt; lower interest rates; abolish unemployment in one term; nationalise Ravenscraig; and properly fund training, education and health.

These policies could be adopted by other parties, but it might be expected that these would be subject to financial constraints (if a £28 billion borrowing requirement can be called restraint!).

But the SNP just claims that an independent Scotland will have the skills, resources and people to attract industry and generate wealth.

Whenever opposing politicians try to ridicule the SNP's promises, as Labour Shadow Chancellor John Smith

did over the 'Cancel the housing debt' pledge, they are quickly wrong-footed.

Smith claimed the effect of the promise would be to give the Scottish budget a £7.1 billion deficit.

Salmond, a trained economist, quickly pointed out that the debt transfer from local to central government was financially neutral and would have no effect on public borrowing. Smith was widely seen to make a glaring and elementary error in his sums.

The point was rammed home when studies by independent (sic) economists pointed out that Scotland contributes as much to the British exchequer as it gets out. So no tax change would be necessary to finance a Scottish budget.

The overall effect was to give the impression that the SNP had won the argument, Smith was less competent than Salmond, and a Scottish parliament made economic sense.

How then did the SNP get into this envious position? Partly it is the personal qualities of their leaders – Sal-

mond in debate is bright, quick and incisive, and Jim Sillars' brand of fiery thuggery can browbeat opponents and to hell with logic. It is also partly a result of the quality of the opposition.

## Alienating

Most of Labour's senior politicians are focusing on the south of England. Those that are left in Scotland are not allowed or able to make policy initiatives for fear of alienating Scottish voters.

The Tories have also boosted the SNP. By stating that independence is a principled option, Major was aiming to squeeze Labour in Scotland.

He did that, but only by boosting the attractiveness of independence.

Suddenly the Tories have launched a campaign against the SNP, but too late – the SNP have won popular opinion on both the principle and the economics of independence.

What then are the real politics of the SNP? How do they reconcile calls for scrapping Trident, for a nuclear-free Scotland, and withdrawal from NATO with support for retaining the Gordon Highlanders?

The SNP are a nationalist party and will do or say anything to defend their varied constituency of support. But they are aware that those

drawn to left nationalism are not easily squared with the fictitious glorious history of the Highland regiments in defending the Empire.

The SNP has been described as a petit-bourgeois nationalist party, acting in the interests of neither the bourgeoisie nor the working class. They sway in the wind.

While sections of the bourgeoisie might support an independent Scotland (the *Economist*), the case for or against national self-determination doesn't rest on this.

For electoral reasons, the SNP is orienting to the working class. But don't expect a consistent socialist policy from them.

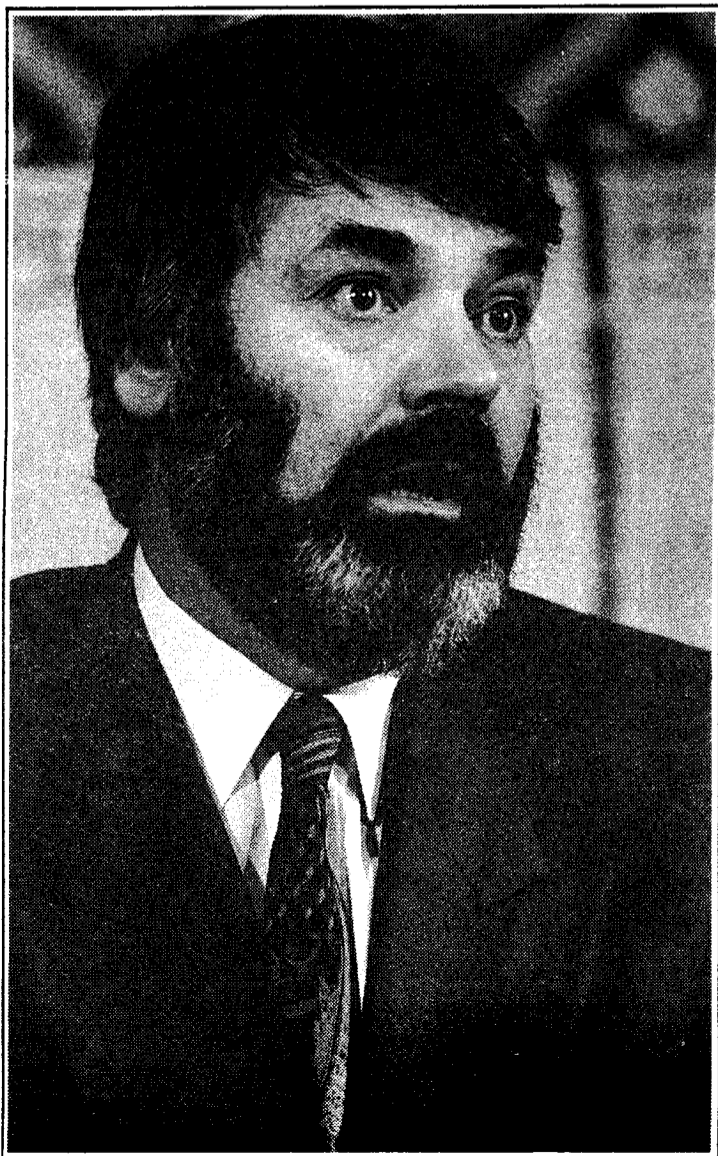


PHOTO: Paul Mattsson

# Bitter rows as 'Stickies' come unstuck

**By David Coen**

The tremors from the collapse of stalinism in eastern Europe have rippled out even to the far west. The Workers Party, a product of the split in the republican movement in 1969, has itself split.

Six of the party's seven TDs (MPs) walked out after a special conference narrowly failed to give them the two thirds majority they needed to restructure the party.

The two main points at issue were 'democratic centralism' – whether the apparatus should have control over the parliamentary representatives – and the existence (much denied) of the Official IRA.

The six who left to set up the New Agenda Party believe that there is a new constituency to the left of the Labour Party around issues such as ecology and women's rights.

They have abandoned a project which began with an isolated and demoralised republican movement following the defeat of the IRA in the border campaign of the late 1950s. In the 1960s Sinn Fein turned its attention away from partition and concentrated on economic and social questions. The IRA dumped its weapons.

When the Civil Rights movement

emerged in the North in the late '60s, Sinn Fein seemed particularly well placed. They had been involved in housing and resources protection campaigns, particularly in the South, and undoubtedly played a significant role in the growth of the civil rights campaign.

Partition soon reasserted itself. The response of the Unionists to the demand for basic rights was to launch pogroms against nationalist areas and the IRA was incapable of protecting them. Partly for this reason, the IRA split into the Officials and the Provisionals in 1969.

Three years later the Officials declared an indefinite ceasefire. Any shots fired in anger since then have been directed at the Provisionals, at breakaway organisations such as the

look. It welcomed foreign capital because it increased the size and significance of the working class. The war with the British it saw as a deliberate diversion from the path to socialism.

In some ways its programme for government was a left version of Fianna Fail's (FF). Because of the reactionary nature of FF, the Workers Party would have to step in and accelerate modernisation. Taking power would not however mean a complete change to the Free State.

At least part of the reason for the demise of the Workers Party is that neither version of capitalist development could be shown to work after the mid-1970s – a lesson learned also in other parts of the world.

Socialism in Ireland cannot avoid the national question. No amount of concentration on bread and butter issues or preaching workers' unity gets round the fact that the history of modern Ireland has been shaped by imperialism.

Partition is the foothold of the British state in Ireland. It has led, as Connolly predicted, to a carnival of reaction on both sides. The tragedy is that

neither side of the split in the Workers Party seems remotely to recognise why they failed.

**FACT: The Officials, now the Workers Party, gained the nickname 'stickies' from the Provisional wing after they produced Easter lillies one year as sticky-backed labels rather than the traditional lapel pin.**

Irish Republican Socialists (IRSP) or for fundraising purposes.

After the split, the Workers Party became distinctly more stalinist in out-



## Women launch election agenda

By Lois Lane

ONE OF the best things to emerge from the recent Women for Socialism (WfS) AGM, was the organisation's commitment to ensuring that women's demands are raised in the election campaign.

An Election Manifesto for Women is now being produced that will enable activists to raise these demands wherever they are campaigning.

### Broad demands

Within the manifesto broad demands are made, for example, around everything from Equal Pay to domestic and racist violence, reproductive rights to public transport. The initiative will give WfS a much-needed boost to its national profile, and could well draw new activist blood into both the autonomous women's organisation and the wider Socialist Movement.

By linking up the disparate struggles that feminist activists have been involved in for many years, the manifesto could provide an opportunity for socialist feminists to take the lead in the post-election period. This could in turn create the conditions for a reformed women's movement for women's liberation.

Of course, to a large extent, what is possible will depend on the outcome of the election.

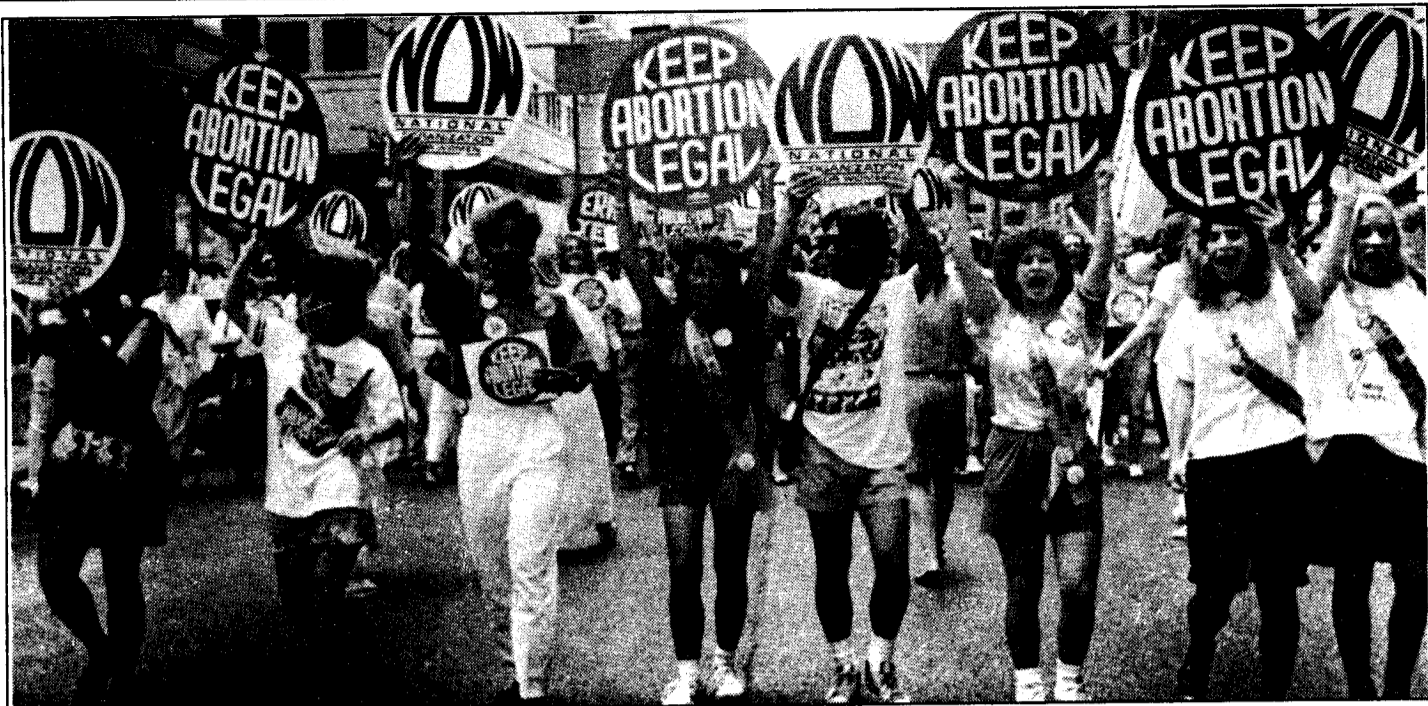
But whatever happens, the necessity of having a strong and vibrant socialist feminist network remains. The importance of using the manifesto to reach new layers of women and bring them into the network is self-evident.

### Campaigning

But the manifesto can also serve another useful purpose. It is an opportunity to put the demands of women onto the agenda of the left.

By pulling in new activists through the election campaign, October's planned Conference of the Left – called by the Socialist Movement – will be well attended, representative, and most importantly a place where a *campaigning strategy* can be mapped out with the strongest possible input from socialist feminists.

*Copies of the Election Manifesto for Women can be ordered from Women for Socialism, c/o: 57 Birnam Road, London, N4 3LJ. Tel: 071 272 7030.*



## US women defend abortion rights – 'We won't go back!'

By Sam Inman

ONE MILLION people are being called to march on Washington D.C. for the 5 April 'March for Women's Lives', expected to be the largest demonstration ever in defence of women's reproductive freedom.

The initiators of the march, the National Organisation for Women (NOW), say 'our massive numbers and our mobilised majority are our best hope to protect and restore the right of all women to birth control and legal abortion'.

Few socialists and feminists can be unaware of the raging battles around abortion rights that have taken place recently in the US.

Never before have there been stronger attacks on a woman's right to choose in the years since the *Roe v. Wade* Supreme Court decision, legalising abortion in 1973.

This is the country that spawned the most militant of anti-abortion initiatives – *Operation Rescue* – which, quite literally, terrorises abortion clinics and women's health centres.

But now, the Supreme Court itself has joined in the fray. Earlier this year

it announced that it will consider the case of *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*, the restrictive Pennsylvania law – requiring parental consent, a 24-hour waiting period, spousal notification and 'counselling' on the abortion procedure and alternatives.

This opens the prospect for a complete reversal of *Roe v. Wade*, which is why on the anniversary of the 1973 decision pro-choice rallies and picket lines were organised throughout the country, and the call for the 5 April march launched from these.

Meetings, rallies and speaking tours are now being organised to try

and reach the one million goal.

Socialist feminists in the US are worried though, that the NOW leadership is heading in the same direction as it did at the beginning of the US women's movement – that of concentrating on electoral strategies.

Mobilisations that are used as campaign rallies for pro-choice Democrats or Republicans would blunt the campaign, and make it less likely that working class women, the black and latino communities are brought into the movement.

## A small step forward for Irish women

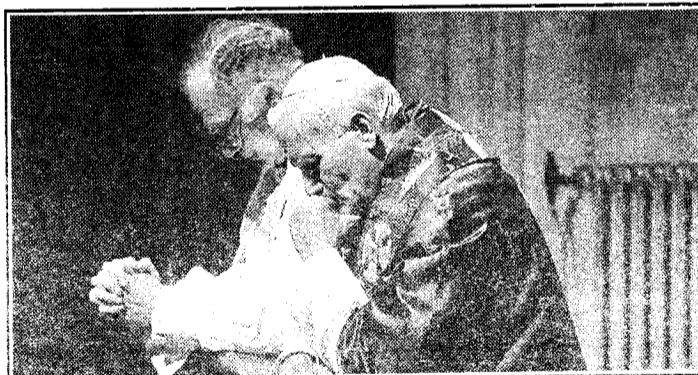
The Dublin Supreme Court has now overturned the High Court injunction preventing a 14 year old rape victim from travelling to Britain for an abortion.

Thankfully she has been able to terminate her pregnancy, but the abortion debate rumbles on. PENNY DUGGAN looks at the issues.

OUR RIGHT to choose how to express our sexuality, to decide when and whether we want to be mothers, is a basic democratic right for women, because it is fundamental to our control over our own lives and bodies.

Denial of this elementary right, as is so graphically illustrated in this case, leads inevitably to the denial of other basic rights.

Since 1983, the amendment has already given rise to a series of attacks on women's simple right to information on what possibilities exist in the case of an unwanted pregnancy. The thousands of people on the streets of Dublin who chanted the telephone number of a preg-



Catholic Church still threatens Irish women

nancy advisory service during recent demonstrations were committing an illegal act!

The recent injunction was a denial of another basic right – the right to travel. The young woman had committed no crime against Irish law. She was the victim of the crimes of sexual abuse and rape. She would commit no crime in Britain, where abortion is legal.

The only reason for preventing her – or any other woman wanting to terminate an unwanted pregnancy – from travelling to a place where it could be performed in safe and legal conditions, is to impose a view that takes no account of the individual woman's circumstances.

### Actual life

This is the view that says that the *potential* life of a foetus, is

always an absolute priority over the *actual* life and well-being of a woman. The High Court judge summed it up when he said that the risk of this young woman committing suicide was 'much less and of a different order of magnitude than the certainty that the life of the unborn will be terminated'.

But no legal or constitutional bans will offer any other certainty. Because bans only ensure that abortions are not legal – they still occur, in the worst and most dangerous conditions. Or women give birth, frightened and in hiding, like the 15 year old girl who died after giving birth alone in an Irish churchyard five years ago, too frightened to tell her family.

The Supreme Court ruled that the risk to the life – *not* the health or well-being – of women should be taken into account. This is progress, but



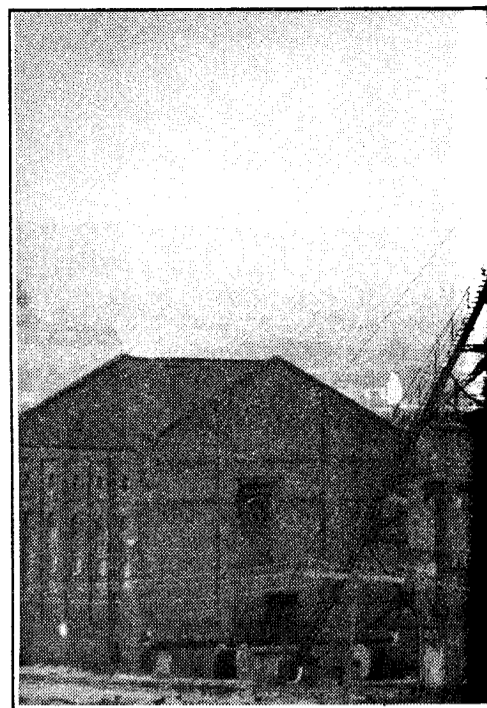
Irish Prime Minister Reynolds

limited. Women will have to threaten that they would commit suicide if not allowed an abortion.

### Independence

Only women's possibility to decide for themselves on when and whether to have a child can ensure that such barbarities do not recur. That possibility necessitates information, education, and social and economic independence.

Any attempt to impose that choice – whether it be by a so-called 'Communist' state as in Ceausescu's Romania, an Islamic fundamentalist movement, or the combined weight of the Catholic church and state as in Ireland and Poland – has consequences that are disastrous for individuals and restrict the rights of society as a whole.



**Paul Clarke looks at what Labour ought to be saying, but won't**

# The socialist alternative

## Things fall apart

A VISITOR from Mars would be gobsmacked. The election is being held in a society falling apart. Thirteen years of Thatcherism have greatly deepened the chronic crisis of British capitalism. Britain today is in deep decay – decaying industry, decaying living standards, decaying health and social services.

The country's whole infrastructure – its industry, communications, schools, hospitals, transport – need totally renewing. Yet none of the major political parties challenges the absurd idea that the capitalist market can solve these problems.

Labour is standing on its least radical programme since the second world war. In 1974 it promised 'a fundamental shift in wealth and power to working people'. In 1983 its manifesto contained dozens of radical reforming proposals. But today's Labour leadership is a model of pro-market, tight money, rectitude.

That is the measure of Thatcherism's impact on British politics. Successive defeats inflicted on the trade unions – above all in the miners' strike, created the basis for the crushing and marginalisation of the Labour left.

Nowhere is this more vividly shown than in local government. Yesterday's radical municipal socialists are today's local Kinnockite apparatchiks, cutting jobs and services with cynical glee. Erstwhile Bennite crusaders like Margaret Beckett sit on the Labour front bench preaching orthodox monetarism.

Thus the door to radical politics stays firmly shut in Labour's new orthodoxy. But there is a socialist answer. The crisis

can only be solved by making a radical break with pro-market politics.

## Socialist Movement

If there is a hung parliament with Labour the largest party, socialists must demand that Labour fronts a minority government. But there is still the possibility of an outright Labour victory.

If Kinnock becomes prime minister, the left must regroup and build broad support from a charter of alternative, anti-capitalist policies. The Socialist Movement could play a major role in organising such an opposition in every part of the labour movement.

Such a programme of demands would necessarily be limited to a few key demands which break the logic of pro-capitalist politics. But today socialists must elaborate their own answers, not just bemoan the fact that Kinnock has none.

## A Barlow Clowes society

Tory Britain is a rip-off society. A few spectacular rip-offs make the headlines, while the daily rip-off by big business, financiers, insurance companies and stockbrokers go unreported.

Dozens of people are being imprisoned for poll-tax non-payment. At the moment people owing £300 get around five weeks. Financier John Barlow, kingpin of the Barlow Clowes empire, stole £150m from small investors and got ten years. At the same rate as poll tax defaulters he should have got 36,000 years! Robert Maxwell and his

sons stole £450m from pensioners and it is still to be seen whether anyone goes to jail.

John Barlow was unlucky; he bent the rules a little and got caught. For years the Bank of England and financial institutions knew about his activities and nothing was done. But the vast majority of the rich who make a killing from the misery of ordinary people do so perfectly legally.

They are the moneylenders and the people responsible for a society in which tens of thousands lose their homes from mortgage default each year, and millions are put on the dole.

Thirty years ago people talked about Britain as a society of 'private affluence and public squalor'. Today it is a society of super-affluence for a tiny few, and chronic despair for millions.

British capitalism is a society incapable of providing the basic necessities of life; a secure job with a living wage, somewhere to live, decent education and training, a health service that works, equality for women and freedom from racial attacks.

Even services which *are* available in some capitalist countries – like a functioning transport system and clean streets are a utopian dream in 1992 Britain.

London, the centre of Thatcherite 'affluence', is a living testimony to the real state of British society. Hundreds of the swanky new apartments in Docklands are empty because no one can afford them.

Huge new office blocks stand empty. At the same time, thousands of people, mainly young people, are living rough on the streets. Nothing could be a more eloquent statement about the real state of the country.

## Capitalism isn't working

The long decay of capitalist Britain is now compounded by a terrible slump. Two thousand workers are losing their jobs every day. Official unemployment is at 2.6 million, but real unemployment is rocketing towards 4 million. But the real employment situation is much worse than that.

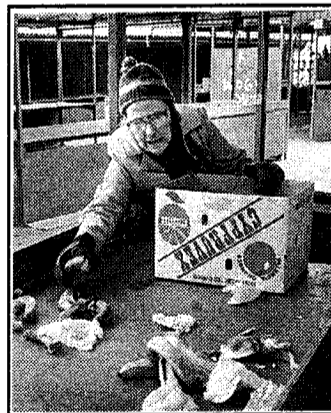
One of Thatcherism's terrible legacies is the vast increase in part-time, low-paid, insecure jobs – especially for women. This, combined with the semi-destruction of the benefits system, has created a vast army of the new poor.

Over twenty per cent of the workforce earns less than the Council of Europe decency threshold, about £9,300 a year. Single parents, pensioners, and young people unable to get a job constitute the new underclass of the impoverished.

Students are being forced into dire poverty by the attack on the grants system, and the quality of their education is fading fast. The simple necessity of finding somewhere to live, and then continuing to afford it, has become a nightmare for millions.

Irony of ironies, all this comes at a time when the 'victory' and 'success' of capitalism is being trumpeted by ruling class ideologists. People in East-

ern Europe are being told every day about the wonders of Western-style capitalism. But Western capitalism isn't working, especially in Britain. That is the truth that Labour's leaders refuse to tell.

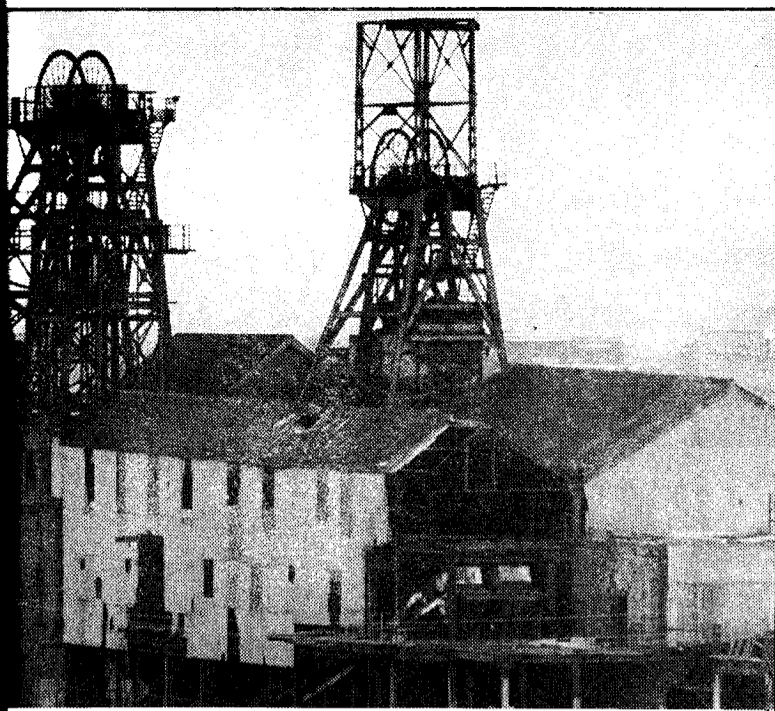


## Fight for socialist policies

In this general election campaign socialists have to tell the simple truth. We need a Labour government to break the logjam represented by Major's Tories, but a Labour government will by itself solve nothing.

Workers will need to fight back under a Labour government, and the left will have to campaign for socialist policies, as well as championing every workers' struggle.





Socialists will have to fight around those policies which can lead the way to a society which answers basic human needs. Socialism is not an old discredited idea; it is an idea which has never been tried, the only one which opens the way to a radically different future.

## A Programme of Action

How could a Labour government start the process of breaking the long crisis which Britain has been living through? The first thing it would need would be a programme of economic and social reconstruction.

Such a programme would have to be based on a national economic plan of investment, industrial rebuilding and infrastructure reconstruction. This would require the mobilisation of billions of pounds. Thus any Labour government intent on a break with the priorities of capitalism would have to answer this first question: where would the money come from?

There are two answers: first, it is a prerequisite of such a plan that the banks, insurance houses, building societies and all other financial institutions be nationalised. A national plan without control of capital would be unworkable. Second, there should be a punitive wealth tax on the rich.

Government spending on defence should be cut by at least 80 per cent, and a programme of reconversion of the arms industry undertaken. Money saved in defence should be redirected towards investment in industry and social welfare.

The export of capital would have to be subject to strict government controls. The billions which leave the country each year to boost the profits of the few must be brought under social control.

All the de-nationalised industries should be renationalised, together with those major firms which control the economy. Nuclear power should be phased out, and the coal industry rebuilt. The energy network, controlled by a nationalised electricity and gas industry, would have to utilise the ecologically sound techniques which are already available.

## Rebuilding

What are the priorities for investment? Manufacturing industry needs vast investment to introduce modern techniques. The transport system needs a radical overhaul. Vast spending on the rail network and other forms of public transport are needed to break the ecologically

damaging and socially irrational use of millions of cars.

Britain's telecommunications network is antiquated by modern standards. British Telecom should be renationalised, and Mercury nationalised, and a fibre optics national grid constructed – capable of carrying all television, broadcasting and telecommunications signals.

The country's housing stock is inadequate and crumbling. A vast programme of constructing local authority housing is needed to smash the housing crisis.

Thousands of schools and hospitals are falling to bits. Many need to be completely demolished and rebuilt.

This rebuilding sounds like an enormous scheme. But the capital already exists to do it, if it is rationally used. Millions of new jobs would be created by such a programme, including hundreds of thousands of new jobs in industry.

## Living standards

The first requirement to solve the crisis of living standards is a national minimum wage at a level to ensure a decent standard of living and freedom from crippling debts.

All benefits and pensions should reach the level of the national minimum wage, and be indexed against inflation. All wages should be indexed on a sliding scale; there should be a sliding scale of hours. Work time could rapidly be reduced to 32 hours or less.

## Welfare state

An ageing society needs billions poured into the NHS. The Tory health reforms need to be totally scrapped.

Education needs to be transformed, with the opening of higher and further education for all. Nursery education, available now only to the lucky few, needs to become available to all.

Private homes for the elderly should be scrapped, with a national system of free and universal care, including residential care, for senior citizens established. At one go, the enormous burdens on carers in the home, mainly women looking after elderly parents, would be broken.

A free national childcare and creche network would transform Britain at a stroke. The crippling burden on millions of women forced into part-time work, or forced to stay at home, would be destroyed. This in turn would unleash an enormous creative potential in society.

The fight for an alternative society requires free and fighting trade unions. The first action of a Labour government should be to unshackle the unions by abolishing the anti-trade union laws.

This should go hand-in-hand with an extension of democratic rights, in the

first place the introduction of proportional representation, the abolition of the House of Lords, and measures to bring the police and legal system under democratic control.

## Rights of the oppressed

Capitalism's crisis hits hardest the oppressed – women, black people, lesbians and gay men, people with disabilities. A socialist government would have to immediately introduce sweeping measures to break discrimination. These include:

- equal pay for women
- positive action for women, black people and people with disabilities in education and employment
- free abortion and contraception on demand
- abolition of all immigration laws
- measures to promote training and employment for people with disabilities, and to make transport and all public buildings and open spaces accessible to them.
- outlawing of discrimination of all kinds; on grounds of race, gender, sexuality, physical or mental disability or age.

● Youth

A key to the level of civilisation in any society is its ability to offer a future to young people.

Socialists must demand the right to a job, training or education at the national minimum wage to all young people. Votes should be given to youth at 16 years old. Student loans should be abolished in favour of a statutory grant at a living wage.

## International

British troops have been in Ireland since 1969, fighting a useless and destructive war against Irish unity and self-determination.

There is no British solution to this war. The troops must be withdrawn and the war ended. The Prevention of Terrorism Act must be repealed.

Britain should get rid of nuclear weapons and withdraw from NATO.

## Scotland

Support for self-government is overwhelming in Scotland. The basis of self-determination must be the creation of a Scottish Assembly with full powers.

If it is the will of the Scottish people, then they have the right to full independence. A Welsh Assembly with its own powers must be established.

The policies outlined here are unattainable without working class struggle to support and impose them.

A Labour government with the most radical policies would be a broken reed without a mass mobilisation of the labour movement. Addressing basic human needs means taking anti-capitalist measures; they would be resisted every inch of the way by the capitalist class and its allies.

A socialist economic programme would above all need the fight for workers' control in the factories and workplaces; workers' control means first of all working class supervision over the implementation of an economic plan.

But capitalist opposition would not be the only obstacle. At each stage the right wing and bureaucracy of the labour movement would try to sabotage socialist advance.

For this reason it is a major strategic task to fight for the renovation of the labour movement around class struggle and anti-capitalist policies. This is inconceivable without generating a tradition of united action on a class struggle basis by the left and the most militant sectors of the working class.

Breaking with capitalist policies means not just building a powerful class struggle left wing, but forging an alliance which includes the self-organisation of the oppressed as a major strategic force to defeat the right.

## Where to begin?

There is a central paradox and contradiction in outlining policies which would meet the scope of the present crisis. Labour is light years away from embracing such a programme.

While anti-capitalist policies are inevitable as a solution to the depth of the crisis, large parts of even the left of the labour movement will be sceptical about the viability of a complete alternative programme, or the possibility of fighting for it.

After the election, if a Labour government is elected, the task is precisely to adopt a charter of basic demands which sum up and encapsulate an anti-capitalist approach – demands which can gain a wide echo in the labour movement and the working class.

This would have to include demands such as nuclear disarmament and the slashing of the defence budget; taxing the rich and funding health and social services; scrapping the trade union laws; an amnesty for all poll tax prisoners and defaulters; a Scottish assembly with full powers; abolition of racist immigration laws, and equal rights for women.

Such demands inevitably point in the direction of an economy which works according to a different logic to the casino madhouse of free-market capitalism. Building support for such a programme is central to renewing working class politics and the fight for socialism.

# De Klerk's desperate end-game

By Charlie van Gelderen

ON MARCH 17, South Africa's white voters, representing 15 per cent of the population, will be asked to approve the reform programme initiated by President De Klerk on February 2 1990.

De Klerk has pledged that there will be no constitutional changes without the endorsement of a majority white vote.

A massive propaganda campaign has been launched to counter the right wing Afrikaner opposition. The ruling National Party is counting on 125 million Rand from big business to finance the campaign.

One giant corporation has already guaranteed R20 million. A return to even a modified apartheid would be a mortal blow to South Africa's economy, laid low by the current recession.

But it is not only big business who is endorsing the referendum. Nelson Mandela and the ANC have put all their prestige behind it.

In an open letter published in the Johannesburg *Sunday Times*, Mandela wrote that while it was 'painful and abhorrent', he nevertheless urged white ANC supporters to vote 'yes'.

Opinion polls indicate a narrow majority for De Klerk, but the recent by-election in Potchefstroom where the right wing Conservative Party scored a landslide victory points to the opposite conclusion.

De Klerk has assured whites that their living standards would not be

threatened. This is plainly poppycock if he is sincere about a genuine move towards democracy.

The privileges enjoyed by whites in the economy, in education, housing and social amenities is based on the vicious exploitation of black workers. Any more equal distribution of wealth must, in the immediate future, lead to a lowering of white incomes.

While most of the limelight is concentrated on the referendum, the 17-party Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA) seems to have agreed on an interim government by the end of the year. This won't be elected, but all the main parties will be represented.

## Mandela moves closer

Mandela and De Klerk have been moving closer towards each other, public attacks notwithstanding. The ANC has long been arguing for a transitional government, putting the demand for a constituent assembly on the back burner.

Although De Klerk at first resisted this demand, the National Party now sees it as an attractive alternative to a Constituent Assembly elected by universal franchise.

Its proposals include a two-tier parliament with regional representation, a



system of vetoes, enforced coalition and a presidency rotating among the main parties.

Mandela has got himself so boxed in by the negotiation process that it will be difficult for him to extricate himself and relaunch the armed struggle. But armed resistance to the CODESA proposals and a narrow victory for De Klerk in the referendum may come from another source.

The Conservative Party (CP) and the openly fascist AWB have joined to campaign for a 'no' vote in the referendum and vowed to fight for Afrikaner self-determination (sic) whatever the outcome. Buthelezi now appears to be in alliance with the CP to resist.

It will be the organised forces of the working class - the COSATU and NACTU union federations, who were excluded from the CODESA proceedings - who will have to provide the force which will counter the attacks of the right.



The real problem for Bush, apart from his chronic inability to get his own name right in front of a camera, is that US voters just won't buy it.

A year ago, 90% of voters backed him in the grotesque self-congratulation that followed the carnage in the Gulf. Now he is struggling to get 40%.

Which all goes to show, as Maggie found to her cost, that wars aren't a long term recipe for popularity.

The Democrats' selection process has been described as a 'circular firing squad'.

Whatever it is, it certainly isn't about policies. With the exception of radical populist Jerry Brown, you could miss the policy differences if you blinked.

Brown, who has the dubious distinction of having been Governor of California - like Ronald Reagan - did come up with some radical alternatives. He is particularly strong on green issues, demanding an immediate end to the US nuclear power programme.

As for left alternatives - a rare sight in the USA - a few heads are beginning to appear above the parapet in the union movement. An increasing number of union officials - including Tony Mazzochi, president of the Oil and Atomic workers union (OCAW) - are now backing 'Labour Party Advocates' (LPA).

But opposition to the current system is growing. NOW, the million-strong National Organisation for Women, has also been debating the need for an alternative party.

There will be no candidate representing America's black community.

Clinton is not much more inspiring than his predecessors, though he does have the distinction of draft-dodging in the Vietnam war. But the primaries, along with popular opinion polls, have shown Bush to be in a sorry state.

And they show a growing dissatisfaction with the tired old policies that are now being repackaged and served up once again. Votes for Pat Buchanan, leader of the evangelist far right in the Republican party, gave Bush a nasty shock.

Votes in Louisiana, where ex-Ku Klux Klan leader David Duke recently took 40% of the vote, give a pointer to where Buchanan lies on the political spectrum.

Three quarters of Duke's voters defected to Buchanan, in a Thatcher-esque move to integrate the loony right. Buchanan doesn't wear a pointy hat himself, but on social policy, there's not much to choose between him and the KKK.

If Britain has become a convert to elections without policies, its model has surely been the USA.

After 'Super Tuesday', the profoundly misnamed round of Democrat and Republican primaries, it seems pretty clear that a two-horse race between Bill Clinton and George Bush is in the offing.

# US Elections Pointy hats and scrambled soundbites

By Patrick Baker

'I AM TRYING to run the country and campaign on the issues that concern people, the economy and education'.

Who could this be? Apparently none other than George Bush, master of the scrambled soundbite.



# Bush plans pre-election blitz

IN AN ATTEMPT to shore up US influence in the Middle East, (and his own flagging popularity in the polls) George Bush has dispatched a massive contingent of 7,000 troops, aircraft carriers, cruise missiles and deep-strike bombers to the Gulf.

Using the pretext of Saddam Hussein's non-compliance with UN disarmament instructions, the US has embarked on a new round of sabre-rattling in the wake of the collapse of the 'Middle East Peace Conference' and a round of threats against Libya by both Britain and the USA.



But Robert Kelley, deputy leader of the UN inspection team in Iraq, said 'Their nuclear programme is devastated, just devastated... But sending bombers is not the way to do it.'

Bush knows this as well as anyone else. His real purpose is stamp US authority on the Middle East, and try to enhance his flagging popularity at home with a 'strong world leader' pose.

# Deng wins ding-dong

DENG XIAOPING, the aged but still dangerous Chinese leader, is trying to have his cake and eat it.

In a move that shows a remarkable lack of attention to the last decade of Soviet history, Deng has declared that underdeveloped countries can only develop by making proper use of capitalism.

More orthodox opponents of any diversion from the nationalised command economy such as Premier Li Peng are to take a back seat, if they know what's good for them.

But is this to be accompanied by a dose of glasnost, Chinese style? You must be kidding. Increasing marketisation is to be accompanied by the rigid regime that has been handed down from Mao.

And Deng is no stranger to imposing iron control. It was not only Tiananmen Square that saw Deng in action; in the 1950s he ordered the execution of hundreds of thousands.

The West will go along with it for the moment - after all, the sentences for 'ideological offences' have been reduced a bit, and there are profits to be made.

But the thousand million citizens of the world's most populous state won't. As economic anarchy or stagnation follow the increase in market intervention, dissent will raise its head again. Deng, Li Peng and the other stalinist rulers of the 'People's Republic' are sitting on a time-bomb.

## Ten years as Chinese political prisoner

# Survivor tells of 'hell on earth'

By Gregor Benton

LIU SHANQING was freed on December 25, 1991 from a gaol near Guangzhou, South China, after serving ten years as a political prisoner.

Liu had been arrested and imprisoned on charges of 'counter-revolutionary propaganda and incitement'. He served the entire term, without remission.

Liu, aged 39, a leader of the Hong Kong student movement in the early 1970s, was arrested while trying to visit the families of He Qiu and Wang Xizhe, arrested leaders of China's 1970s 'Democracy Wall' movement.

For the first seven or eight months he was interrogated almost daily and pressed to admit to counter-revolutionary activities.

He refused, insisting to the contrary that his activities had been revolutionary. He called

on his prosecutors to provide evidence of his wrong-doing, but they failed to do so.

In 1985, acting under great pressure, Liu wrote a letter admitting that he had done wrong and requesting lenience. He was then awarded some small privileges, including a radio.

### Solitary confinement

A year later, he withdrew his confession and was returned to solitary confinement. He was also refused the right to work, and was thus deprived of both exercise and a small income.

The worst time came when it was discovered that he had given his family a copy of the verdict against him and asked them to publish it in Hong Kong.

As punishment, he was kept in a darkened room for one month. He said 'When I was in a dark cell, I was chained at the feet...At times, nobody came



PHOTO: Bob Garrison/Insight

for 24 hours on end...The Chinese prison system is really like hell on earth. Human dignity is completely downtrodden.'

Amnesty International adopted Liu as a prisoner of conscience, and his friends in Hong Kong organised hunger strikes and appeals to keep his case in the public eye. Liu's name was on the list of prisoners given by John Major to Li Peng during his visit to Beijing in September 1991.

The Hong Kong colonial authorities also appealed on his behalf. But he was shown no mercy, unlike other political prisoners who had displayed 'a cooperative attitude'.

Liu was greeted as a hero on his return to Hong Kong, where he continues to campaign for the release of China's

other imprisoned dissidents, particularly Wang Xizhe (a revolutionary marxist) and Wei Jingsheng (a liberal democrat).

But not all Hong Kong's pro-democracy activists joined in the movement to protest against Liu's arrest and imprisonment. Many were biased against him because of his Trotskyist ties.

### Trotskyist

Back in Hong Kong, Liu told a press conference 'I am a Marxist-Leninist. Trotskyite is a term generally used against us by our enemies. However, if people say that I share Trotsky's ideas, I would accept that. I support Trotsky.'

Zhang Wenguang, a member of the Executive of the

Hong Kong Citizens Patriotic Federation in Support of the Democracy Movement, writing in the Hong Kong newspaper *Xinbao* expressed his deep regret at the movement's failure to rally round Liu Shanqing.

With his defiant stand against political persecution, Liu is the most recent in a line of trotskyist political prisoners in China. His arrest happened twenty nine years to the day after that of two to three hundred trotskyists in 1952 by the newly-proclaimed Mao regime.

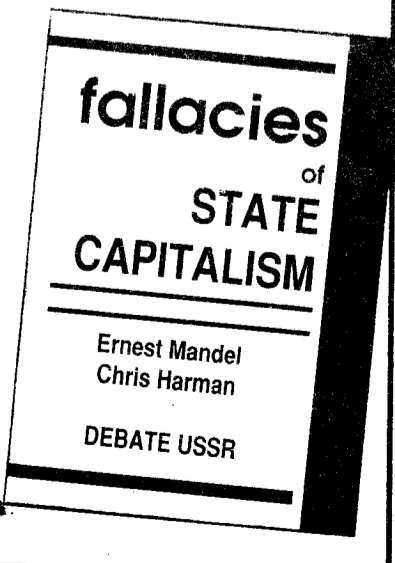
Twenty seven years later in 1979, Zheng Chaolin and eleven other survivors of this first wave of repression were freed under supervision, their ideals (like Liu Shanqing's) intact.



## Fallacies of State Capitalism

A debate between Ernest Mandel and Chris Harman

On sale now in many socialist bookshops, price £3.95. Or write to: Socialist Outlook, PO Box 1109, London, N4 2UU, enclosing £1.50 for postage. Please allow 28 days for delivery.



## Queer Nation challenges US Boy Scouts

THE AMERICAN gay organisation Queer Nation has launched a boycott campaign against the Boy Scouts of America.

The campaign was launched at a rally outside the annual meeting of the Scouts executive board in Washington on 11 February. Protesters chanted 'We're here, we're queer, and we're going camping'.

### Homophobia

Protesters are claiming the Scouts are a stronghold of homophobia and religious bigotry. In many areas Scout organisations are a stronghold of the Mormons religious sect.

Protest organiser Bart Church claimed 'The Boy Scouts must be considered one of the most dangerous, bigoted organisations in the United States', promoting respectability, homophobia, and blind

patriotism.

Scouts organisations have refused to take children whose parents are openly lesbian or gay, and have thrown out teenage scouts alleged to be gay.

### Funding

US Scout organisations enjoy huge funding. The Scouts have reserves of \$350m, and receive \$90m each year from the United Way, a right-wing Christian organisation.

Queer Nation intends to continue a campaign of harassment against the Scouts and United Way, and is demanding a congressional investigation into its funding.

Other imaginative slogans chanted by protesters included 'Scouts honour: we're queer' and 'Ban Boy Scout bigotry: your founder was a fag' - a reference to Scouts founder Lord Baden Powell.

## Hunger strike hits at Russian bigots

THINK BRITAIN'S bad for lesbians and gay men? You're right, but you should see the Soviet Union.

The barbaric laws introduced by Uncle Joe Stalin in the 1930s are one murky area where the light of glasnost hasn't yet penetrated.

If you come out in the ex-USSR, chances are that you might end up in a psychiatric hospital or prison. Gay-bashing is rampant.

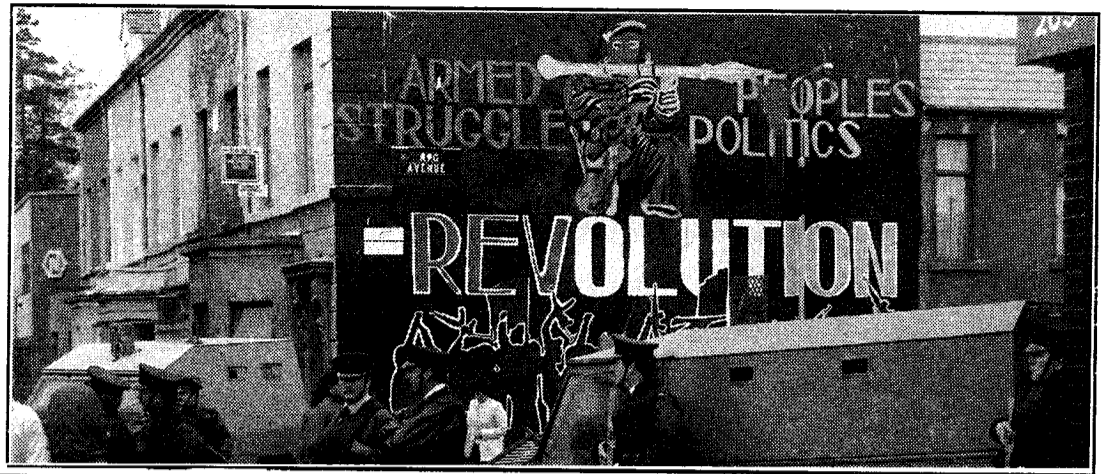
Twenty Russian lesbians and gay men went on hunger strike to highlight that bigotry is still the order of the day.

After demonstrating outside the Bolshoi Theatre in the summer, the activists are refusing any solid food for three days to protest at Boris Yeltsin's lack of action.

Roman Kalinin, editor of the *Tema* gay magazine, said 'Russia is continuing to violate human rights. ... it is time this barbaric article was removed so that gays and lesbians can at last come out of the closet.'

# Feedback

We welcome letters on any subject but please keep them brief. Letters over 350 words will be cut. Send your letters to: *Socialist Outlook* PO Box 1109, London, N4 2UU



## What hope of a new union?

I WAS disappointed to read yet another largely non-political appraisal of the impending COHSE-NALGO-NUPE merger, this time from Doug Thorpe in SO 17.

Of course unity is a wonderful thing – so long as it is unity in struggle, and not unity in retreat. Unfortunately union mergers have shown an almost universally grim record in relation to actual levels of struggle.

One example, which was naively supported by the left on both sides, was the ASTMS-TASS merger that produced the ghastly, inactive mish-mash of MSF.

Doug's optimism represents another triumph of hope over experience. In an article entirely bogged down in the minutiae of upholding NALGO's various organisational structures – effectively arguing for a 'greater NALGO' – Doug did not once raise the issue of the *politics* of the bureaucracies of the merging unions.

Whatever the fine words in the merger document, surely the photos of smiling NUPE bureaucrats signing a pledge to build a 'member-led' union should make us suspicious?

There aren't many less user-friendly unions than NUPE, whose full-timers exercise complete domination over branches, and have ruthlessly used this through most of the 1980s to crush almost any fightback on jobs, pay or conditions.

Tom Sawyer and co, having run the union to near-bankruptcy, appear to have decided that they have little choice but to make organisational concessions – at least on paper – in order to get a share of NALGO's cash.

But there is no evidence whatever of any change of heart among most NUPE officials on the ground. Instead, Sawyer and co seem to be banking on the assessment that with neither NALGO or COHSE having any comparable politically developed bureaucracy, NUPE's 'hard cadre' of new realist officials will quickly take control over the branches and structures of the new union.

Is it worth risking all this to achieve a single union? Doug ignores the progressive element that has been visible in the inter-union rivalry – at least within the NHS (where NALGO is almost non-existent as a force).

Without competition between NUPE and COHSE it is likely the 1988 nurses' strikes would not have taken place. More than once one union or the other has been driven into a more radical stance under pressure to retain and recruit members.

A single union, dominated by a cynical army of new realist officials, is likely to be more effective at stopping than starting action.

Instead of tail-ending the organisational debate and echoing platitudes about unity, the left should be sounding a loud warning over the political threat that could be posed, and organising to prepare for battle from day one.

Only through a political fight can the left ensure a genuinely *new* union emerges rather than the old NUPE wolf in the sheep's skin of a greater NALGO.

Jack Dobermann  
London

## When criticism is the key to serious support

IN THE LETTER published in SO no.17, your unnamed correspondent criticises me for not putting forward the marxist position of unconditional but critical support for

Irish revolutionaries fighting for national liberation.

I am also accused of being blind to the class criteria that one should apply in dealing with capitalist collaborators.

Well, I suppose if I'd been writing for, let's say *Socialist*

*Worker*, I'd have made sure to put in every relevant slogan from my Ladybird Book of Marxism.

I took it for granted that readers of SO would be sufficiently familiar with both our history of involvement in virtually every serious anti-imperialist initiative of recent years as well as our theoretical positions to make it unnecessary for me to go over the basics. *Mea maxima culpa*.

My intention in the offending article was to draw attention to the high level of loyalist terrorist activity, the lack of mass struggle in the north of Ireland and how this absence was isolating the main revolutionary organisation, so causing its military component to separate political and military considerations. This is the critical half of the 'unconditional but critical' formula.

My only regret is that the analysis in the article continued to be borne out by subsequent events. The IRA would not have killed the Protestant building workers at Teebane if they had been Catholic.

In a revolutionary situation it may be necessary to deal harshly with collaborators, but political considerations come before moral or military ones.

Peter Brooke does not give a damn about the dead men and the British Army will pay whatever is necessary to have its border posts built. But how will such an action be judged by Protestant workers?

How does it break them from loyalism? It just makes them more likely to believe Ken McGuinness when he talks about a campaign of genocide around the border.

And how does leaving bombs in railway stations or disrupting football matches bring British workers to support the right of the Irish people to self-determination? It just strengthens all the reactionary, chauvinist prejudices.

When a revolutionary organisation forgets that its politics and its support among the working class and the oppressed are infinitely more valuable than propagandist actions in which it substitutes itself for the working class, it is on a road to disaster.

Support which is frightened of criticising mistakes is worthless.

Liam Mac Uaid  
East London

## Is anti-racism anti-fascism?

I WAS SURPRISED to find such confusion in Paul Clarke's article in *Socialist Outlook* 15 'ANL yes but back anti-racism'.

In my view it is one thing to correctly condemn the strong-arm tactics of the SWP on the Asylum Bill march, but something else to place the SWP's sectarianism within a confused theoretical framework purposefully constructed around that condemnation.

As Paul takes sides around the incident it would appear that he swallows most of the main arguments championed by the most vocal elements of the ARA leadership. In reality it is clear that there was real sectarianism on both sides.

Paul shows his lack of understanding of the real issues at stake when he refers to the ANL of the 1970s. That the 'ANL' tactic always contained within it the danger that the struggle against racism would be reduced to fighting the fascists.

It was a danger because the biggest threat to black communities in Britain was and remains state racism.

Thankfully, Paul does not reproduce the misunderstanding common to many of the national ARA spokespeople. That is that the anti-racist and anti-fascist struggles are one and the same thing, as if the terms racist and fascist were interchangeable.

I think that there are two elements that have to be understood. First, although they overlap, anti-racism and anti-fascism are far from being the same thing. Racism pervades every nook and cranny of modern society, from education, employment and housing to police harassment.

Anti-racism is thus not a single-issue campaign and has no overall focus, whereas anti-fascism provides an immediate and very tangible one.

Second, state racism has always been with us and it may be the main problem now, but it could be overshadowed if there were the rise of a fas-

cist mass movement or indeed a fascist state apparatus.

As marxists, we should remind ourselves of what fascism is, a concrete socio-political phenomenon that has to be fought at every juncture.

Black self-organisation and opposing racism in general, on the other hand, is perhaps of more immediate relevance. The construction of an organisation for this has been a long time in coming.

There is potential for both an anti-racist and an anti-fascist movement. However it presently appears that neither the SWP nor the ARA leadership see it that way, and instead see themselves as rivals.

Although it is an incorrect method to construct a hierarchy of important issues, we should always remember that the fight against fascism is the fight against an explosive potential. Can it rise overnight? Look at the rest of Europe and the growth of the BNP.

Trevor Wongsam  
Manchester

## The myth of the Red menace

YOUR FRONT page on Trident (15 February) was extremely misleading about what the cold war was – and is.

It said that 'with the collapse of the Soviet Union the cold war arguments of nuclear deterrence are redundant.

'The hundreds of nuclear warheads will not be there to defend anyone. ... The case for billions spent on nuclear submarines is as dead as the Soviet Union.'

The implication is that the Soviet Union was a threat to the British people, who needed defending against it. This is nonsense. The Soviet Union since 1917 had to defend itself against imperialist invasions and threats.

Each move in the construction of its nuclear capacity was a response to previous escalation by imperialist countries. For socialists, the nuclear weapons of the British state were never justified.



You are also wrong to say that this issue has changed fundamentally with the collapse of the Soviet Union. We are not at the end of the cold war. On the contrary, it is now in its sharpest period.

The aim of the cold war has been to restore capitalism in the non-capitalist countries. This is not yet achieved in the CIS. The imperialists are using both their military superiority and economic blockade to force it through.

As the CIS countries make sweeping unilateral cuts in their military capacity, the imperialists are able to make

modest cuts in theirs, and thus save money; but they are maintaining their military superiority.

Your comments that the Tories' commitment to a fourth Trident is 'loony' and merely 'enables capitalist Britain to pretend to be a world power' are therefore wrong. The British ruling class needs nuclear weapons.

First to push through the cold war against the Soviet Union/ CIS to its desired conclusion; second to maintain pressure on the remaining deformed workers' states (which include the largest country in the world); and third as a toll in its intensifying economic, and potentially military, rivalry with other imperialist countries.

Your front page minimised and trivialised this world imperialist offensive.

Jamie Gough  
Camden



## Exaggerating capitalism's successes

# The end of history?

### *The End of History and the Last Man*

Written by Francis Fukuyama Chatto and Windus, £20

Reviewed by Paul Clarke

US STATE Department policy adviser Francis Fukuyama became an instant celebrity when he published his 1989 article *The End of History?* in 1989.

Although published in an obscure right-wing foreign policy magazine, *The National Interest*, Fukuyama's thesis, coinciding with the collapse of Stalinism, struck an immediate chord.

His new book elaborates the thesis in more detail. The collapse of Stalinism represents the final and definitive victory of capitalist democracy over all forms of totalitarianism. History, far from being indecipherable as weak-minded postmodernists say, has a direction and logic. The logic is towards economic growth, which represents the great Mechanism of history. But Marx was wrong to imagine that socialism provided the basis for sustained economic growth; actually free market capitalism is the answer.

But human beings do not live by economic advance alone. They demand 'recognition', a feeling of personal worth and esteem. Only liberal democracy can provide this. Democracy is the most functional system in providing the best framework for capitalist economic efficiency; and, fortunately, liberal democracy gives human worth and dignity as well.

Fukuyama openly adheres to the theoretical framework of Hegel rather than Marx. The end of history, or rather human pre-history, is not socialism but the liberal con-

stitutional state. Thus the dawn of the end of history can be said to have been the battle of Jena in 1806, in which Napoleon's bourgeois republican army defeated the Prussian Junkers.

Fukuyama at least has the merit of trying to interpret history and discover its underlying logic and patterns. For this he has been roundly attacked by French right-wing 'new philosopher' Bernard Henri-Levi as 'the last Marxist'. But can his ideas be sustained against the evidence?

In fact the basic idea is old hat - that advanced capitalism more or less automatically gives rise to liberal democracy; Seymour Martin Lipset was making his intellectual reputation saying the same thing in the 1950s. Empirically, Fukuyama can point to the fact that all the main advanced capitalist countries are liberal democracies.

But he makes several assumptions without which his propositions begin to collapse. First, that liberal democracy is based on a more-or-less stable capitalist economic system, and thus democracy is secure. Second, that democracy is an automatic product of advanced capitalism. And third, that all the countries of the 'third world' can become advanced countries provided they adopt a rigorous free market economy.

### Wrong struggle

Democratic rights under capitalism are not simply the product of the bourgeoisie's struggle against pre-capitalist classes. On the contrary, there is a mass of historical evidence that the key class in securing the establishment of democratic freedoms is the working class and its struggle.

Constitutional democracy is far from having conquered the world after the collapse of Stalinism. There are about 25 states which can be reasonably said to be liberal democracies. There is no guarantee that, for example, the ex-Soviet Union and China are headed in that direction.

The era of liberal democracy after world war two coincides with the long post-war economic boom. Bourgeois democracy is much easier for the ruling class when there are big concessions to be made to the working class. But once economic crisis and massive class struggle set in, the bourgeoisie itself moves against democratic rights, and anti-democratic movements with big support among the bourgeoisie start to emerge.

Fascism emerged in Germany (ironically Hegel's own country) after constitutional democracy had been established in a revolution

against the liberal democratic Weimar republic. There is no proof that capitalist democracy is absolutely secure; the rise of Le Pen's Front National in France shows that it could face short-term threats.

Fukuyama's assumption that the economic development of Korea, Singapore, Taiwan and Hong Kong shows that free-market capitalism is the answer for the whole third world is preposterous. Thatcherism in the Sudan or Bangladesh boggles the imagination!

### Idealism

Equally, Fukuyama's picture of the advanced capitalist countries as being a big friendly 'Sweden' (or Sweden as it used to be) with bored consumers, massive health and social security provision, and general affluence is also highly idealised.

US voters abstain in huge numbers not because they are satisfied affluent zombies, but because there is no real choice on offer from the main parties. Crisis-free affluent capitalism is another Fukuyama myth.

There is a correction, or rather a deeper speculation, introduced in the book as opposed to the 1989 article. Fukuyama wonders whether the satisfied citizens of liberal democratic capitalism ('the Last Man') will be content with their lot. Will they be prepared to put up with a life, which involves no further challenge than choosing the next consumer goodies, with no challenges, no struggles? Might they not rebel against the 'end of history'?

He has a point here. Even assuming his idyll came true, the victory of the commodity spectacle would be a crushingly boring and stifling affair. But in any case it is highly unlikely ever to come about.

Francis Fukuyama has the great merit of posing the big questions. He is a coherent opponent of Marxism, who takes history seriously, unlike the nihilistic postmodernists. Much of the hostility to him in the British academic establishment is backward, a refusal to debate generalising and historical theories.

But to make his extravagant claims he is led to systematically exaggerate capitalism's successes, most obviously in the third world. Part of the reason he can get away with it is the relative weakness of the left and the labour movement, and the disorientation which the cold war victory of the US had caused.

Refuting Fukuyama is in the end a practical task. Swatting capitalist ideologues won't matter much if a serious socialist challenge is not built in the advanced capitalist countries.

## Flashbacks and puzzles

### *Merci la Vie*

Directed by Bertrand Blier

Reviewed by Geoff Ryan

*Merci la Vie* (Thank you Life) is very difficult to describe.

The title is heavily ironic: the film basically tells the story of two young women, one of whom has AIDS, and the way in which she is treated by society as a whole, and by men in particular.

However, it is the way in which the film is put together that is interesting. The film moves from colour into black and white and back to colour; characters comment on

their actions as they are making them; there is a film within the film so it is never clear whether or not people are 'themselves' or 'characters' in the film.

The chronology jumps about with numerous flash-backs - some of which are impossible, putting the women into scenes that took place before they were born!

There are breaks in continuity, so the women sometimes finish a scene wearing different clothes to those they had on at the beginning.

About half-way through the film we are suddenly transported back into the Second World War, with France under Nazi occupation. The treatment of occupied France by the Nazis becomes a metaphor for the way in which people with AIDS

are treated.

However, given the structure of the film then the incongruity of AIDS existing at the same time as the Nazi occupation has to be commented on.

One of the characters points out that 'If there is AIDS there can't be Nazis, and if there are Nazis there can't be AIDS and we can all carry on fucking'.

*Merci la Vie* is certainly not an easy film to watch and needs a lot of concentration to try to work out what is meant to be happening.

The performances of Charlotte Gainsbourg and Anouk Grinberg as the two young women, as well as the ubiquitous Gerard Depardieu as a doctor/actor/resistance hero, make it worth the effort.

# Stalinism and the state

LENIN argued that the revolutionary workers' state – 'the dictatorship of the proletariat' – was to be a different type of state, for the first time representing the interests of the vast majority of the population. As it progressed towards socialism and communism, the state would 'wither away', as the disappearance of class divisions made compulsion and repression ever less necessary. Though workers led by Lenin took power in the October 1917 Russian Revolution, this is obviously not what took place in the Soviet Union.

What went wrong?

LENIN spelled out the perspective of a workers' state which would wither away through disuse, as the elimination of class divisions rendered it unnecessary.

This conclusion flowed from the analysis of the state as an organ of repression welded by the dominant class against those it sought to oppress.

Once the 'working class' – the overwhelming majority – became the ruling class, and the bourgeoisie became an oppressed minority, it was obvious that the *form* of the state machine would have to be very different. As Trotsky wrote, summarising the theory in *Revolution Betrayed*:

"The regime of proletarian dictatorship from its very beginning thus ceases to be a 'state' in the old sense of the word – a special apparatus, that is, for the holding in sub-

By HARRY SLOAN

jection of the majority of the people. The material power, together with the weapons, goes over directly and immediately into the hands of workers' organisations such as the soviets. The state as a bureaucratic apparatus begins to die away the first day of the proletarian dictatorship."

Of course this didn't happen in the USSR, as Trotsky stressed:

"The bureaucracy not only has not disappeared, yielding its place to the masses, but has turned into an uncontrolled force dominating the masses. The army not only has not been replaced by the armed people, but has given birth to a privileged officers' caste ... while the people, 'the armed bearers of the dictatorship' are now forbidden in the Soviet



Union to carry even non-explosive weapons."

## Materialist view

What then was the key to this apparent refutation of Lenin's most essential theory? Trotsky returns for explanation to Marx's materialist view of law and social relations.

He pinpoints the problem as the painfully inadequate economic growth of the post-revolutionary Soviet Union. The Bolsheviks inherited the war-ravaged, backward peasant economy of the collapsed Tsarist empire, and then faced international isolation and blockade with the failure of revolutions elsewhere in Europe.

These were the material conditions that made socialism – the elimination of want – impossible, and communism – the eradication of class divisions – inconceivable.

Without this development of the material base for socialism, the related political developments were impossible. Trotsky quotes the early Marx from two years before the *Communist Manifesto* spelling out the painful truth that:

"A development of the productive forces is the absolutely necessary practical premise [of Communism], because without it want is generalised, and with want the struggle for necessities begins again, and that means that all the old crap must revive."

Thirty years later, Marx touched upon the same theme when he argued that:

"Law can never be higher than the economic structure and the cultural development of society conditioned by that structure."

How, then, did the proletarian state of October 1917 degenerate into the bureaucratic parody of itself that Trotsky so ruthlessly dissected 20 years later?

Lenin, echoing Marx, accepted that until it could radically change the economy and eliminate shortages, the early stages of the workers' state would 'inevitably' continue bourgeois law in the allocation of insufficient supplies of commodities. Until it could generate sufficient wealth to create equality it would have to defend inequalities. He argued that:

"Bourgeois law in relation to the distribution of the objects of consumption assumes of course inevitably a bourgeois state, for law is nothing without an apparatus capable of compelling observance of its norms. It follows that under Communism not only will bourgeois law survive for a certain time, but also even a bourgeois state without the bourgeoisie!"

Lenin did not accept this as a norm; he saw it as a transitional stage to be overcome by breaking the isolation of the Russian Revolution, opening up links with more advanced economies to make rapid progress.

Trotsky emphasised the importance of Lenin's analysis in understanding the dual role of the state under Stalin's burgeoning bureaucracy:

"The state assumes directly and from the very beginning a dual character: socialistic insofar as it defends social property in the means of production; bourgeois insofar as the distribution of life's goods is carried out with a capitalistic measure of value ..."

Who, then is to uphold the authority of this state? Not the workers, who have no interest in defending the privileges of the minority:

"For the defence of 'bourgeois law', the workers' state

was compelled to create a bourgeois type of instrument – that is the same old gendarme – although in a new uniform."

The privileged minority defended by this gendarme was no longer the bourgeoisie – long gone – but now the bureaucracy.

As the bureaucracy itself became entrenched, this led to a complete break from the methods and programme of Bolshevism.

Of course the Soviet Union carried through a huge industrialisation programme that would have been inconceivable under capitalism, without which it would have languished in even greater backwardness.

But Trotsky had little time for those apologists for Stalinism who consoled themselves on the lack of workers' democracy by marvelling at the economic advances that had been made under Stalin, comparing conditions in the 1930s with those of the old Tsarist regime.

The real comparison that counts, said Trotsky, is between living standards in the USSR and those in the advanced capitalist countries.

Socialism requires a higher development of the productive forces than is possible under capitalism. It is this same comparison that is today exploited by those arguing for capitalist restoration in Eastern Europe.

## Eastern Europe

Trotsky's writings on the USSR help us understand today's complex events. The failure to eliminate want has brought back all the 'old crap' in the shape of restorationist currents and the chaotic fragmentation of the Soviet Union into nationalistic religious and ethnic strife.

The new, bureaucratic regimes in the ex-Soviet republics are now committed to privatising their economies, while still relying upon the state machinery of the bureaucratized 'workers' state' to maintain them against mass opposition from the working class.

Marxists fighting against the stream for a working class programme in Eastern Europe and the ex-USSR are hampered by the way in which the whole concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat has been discredited by association with prolonged Stalinist rule, which in reality represented the antithesis of the marxism fought for by Lenin and Trotsky.

## Alexandra Kollontai (1872-1952)

FORTY YEARS ago this month, Alexandra Kollontai died, shortly before her eightieth birthday. Her contribution to socialism and feminism was immense, as were her personal achievements – she was the only woman in Lenin's revolutionary government.

Fifty years before the slogan 'the personal is political' became a mainstay of the women's liberation movement, Kollontai was championing ideas about sexual morality and freedom, in relation to liberating women from sexual exploitation, that would make, even today, some on the left squirm.

Certainly, at the time, her ideas were considered not only unorthodox but positively dangerous. But such was her stubborn bloody-mindedness, alongside her outstanding talents as an agitator and propagandist, that Lenin, Trotsky and the rest of the Bolshevik leadership could not do without her.

The biggest unresolved question of her life though, is why she ended up not opposing Stalin's conquest of the Party. It ran completely against the grain; if anything Kollontai was by instinct an oppositionist. Stalin's reversal of most of the gains of the revolution for women, and the new prominence for the 'Soviet Family' ran completely contrary to Kollontai's lifelong work.

This question will probably never be answered. But it is highly likely that after her experience in the Workers' Opposition (1920-22) she became extremely cynical about the leadership of the Party in general. At the Tenth Party Congress, Lenin and Trotsky – among others – attacked her ideas with extreme ferocity, and with a large degree of personal ridicule, before banning factions in the Party – thereby stifling the debate.

It seems that after this she concentrated on leading trade delegations and doing diplomatic service, rather



than be involved in internal debates in the Party. It is likely that by this point she no longer trusted anyone, and decided to keep her head down to prevent it being shot off.

It is easy in retrospect to say she should have joined the Left Opposition – and yes, she should have. But it seems that by this time her spirit, once so formidable and passionate in her defence of the ideals of the revolution, had been crushed. She probably died a very bitter woman – and who could blame her for that.

Cathy Porter has written the best biography of Kollontai, published by Virago.

## Civil rights attacked by the back door

How many socialists know or care about Operation Spanner? Recently, a group of gay men into sado-masochistic sex (SM) were convicted of assault.

They received long prison sentences (up to four and a half years). They appealed, but the Court of Appeal upheld their conviction. It was one of the last judgements it made headed by Lord Lane, notorious for dismissing the appeals of the Birmingham Six, before he retired.

Their sentences, however were reduced to no more than three years, with some of the 'participants' getting only a few months. They had been convicted following a massive and complex police operation, Operation Spanner.

So why should socialists care if a few people into rather peculiar things get locked up? Clearly, there are some rather unappealing things going on like pseudo-fascist rituals, prisoner/warder role-plays and beatings.

But these convictions establish a new way for the courts to pry into our bedrooms and contribute to anti-gay opinion. And they establish a precedent, in a general sense, that is a very dangerous one.

This is the idea that a crime is a crime, regardless of whether there is any victim. This has been used to harass 'minorities' on numerous occasions, but has been particularly aimed at lesbians and gay men.

The right to privacy is an important one. So is the general rule that 'crimes' should not exist without victims, particularly when the parties involved freely consent.

Socialists should fight all such attempts to extend the law in this direction, criminalising lesbians and gay men and attacking civil liberties.



## Thousands join strike against cuts

Thousands of workers came out on strike in Tory-controlled Ealing on March 5 in a protest against cuts in services.

NALGO local government workers, NUT teachers and NATFHE lecturers took to the streets in the first joint strike of its kind. The Tory council, having announced 10 million worth of cuts, tried to play down the effectiveness of the action.

But Eve Turner, a NALGO convenor in Ealing, told us 'The strike was a big success. Because of the good preparations and the cooperation between unions, we had over a

thousand marching against the cuts.'

The 'Save Our Services' campaign also attracted support from the local community, with more than 5,000 signing a petition and local pensioners lobbying the Town Hall.

The only damper on the action was the withdrawal of the wringing-wet GMB general union. After agreeing to take part, the GMB withdrew at the last minute on the instructions of their regional office. Whether they had had a phone call from Walworth Road is a matter of speculation.

## BECTU fiddles while BBC jobs burn

Ten thousand BBC workers are to face the jobs axe in the next three years, in a campaign to cut its workforce by nearly 50 per cent.

The recommendation to BBC director general Michael Checkland comes in an unpublished report, inappropriately titled 'Providing Our Services'. Broadcasting union BECTU described the move as 'a political attack to destroy the BBC

and its independence.' The report described the massive cuts as 'a commitment to becoming leaner and fitter.'

BECTU is planning a day of action as a vote of no confidence in either the incoming director general, John Birt, or chairman Duke Hussey. But if the cuts are to be beaten back, BECTU and other media unions will need to give a firmer answer than that.

## Women's TUC backs Irish abortion rights

By Marian Brain, NCU delegate

Delegates to the TUC Women's Conference should be women. Pretty obvious, you might have thought. But it was actually very controversial among the three hundred delegates to this year's conference, only passing by a whisker.

The delegates also sent a strong message to Norman Willis that Congress House cuts shouldn't hit equal opportunities first, as they had with the amalgamation of the TUC's equal rights department with areas as varied as environmental protection.

Continuing a tradition of militancy, the Blackpool conference agreed a campaigning agenda, sending a message of

solidarity to women in Ireland and asserting Irish women's right to choose.

MSF delegate Ann Hope pointed out that 'We are represented as part of the United Kingdom when it comes to repressive legislation such as anti-union law, but not when it comes to extending the Abortion Act'.

Delegates also called for a union campaign for unconditional cancellation of the Third world debt, and a new focus on the rise of racism and fascism.

Women for Socialism and the Socialist Movement Trade Union Committee held a fringe meeting 'Women in Struggle'. Speakers from the eight-month-long Camden strike described their experiences.

Anna Wagstaff stressed the need to fight the anti-union legislation and Carolyn

Sikorski (SMTUC) outlined the history of women's militancy in the British Trade Union movement.

Vanetti Almeida from the Brazilian rural workers federation spoke about the struggle of women in unions and the resistance from male trades unionists to their involvement.

She couldn't give details of anti-union legislation because despite the very high level of violence directed at union activists the universal practice in Brazil is to ignore such laws and take action.

The next women's conference organised by the SMTUC and Women for Socialism 'Women in the Unions - Fighting for our Rights' will be held on Saturday September 12th in the London Women's Centre. Details from Carolyn Sikorski 53a Geere Rd. London E15

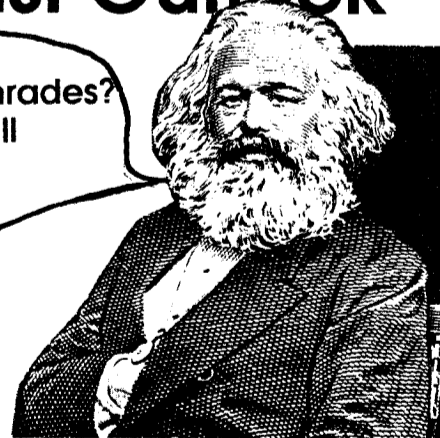
## agenda

If you have any event that you would like us to advertise please send details to Socialist Outlook, PO Box 1109, N4 2UU

- Every Monday picket of the Foreign Office, 5-7pm
- 20 March *Wholesome Fish* fundraising gig for Fourth International Youth Summer Camp, 8pm, SOAS Student Union, Malet St, London, WC1.
- 20 March 'Rave for Justice', fundraiser for 'March for Justice', 8pm, Kharisma Club, 18-20 Sprowston Rd, London, E7.
- 22-29 March Central America Week, contact CAW, 82 Margaret St, London, W1N 8LH, for local details.
- 27 March Campaign against Fascism in Europe public meeting, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square 7.30pm.
- 28 March 'March for Justice', 12.30pm, Plashet Park, London, E6.
- 28 March 'Free the Media - electing a democratic media for the 1990s', organised by Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom, 10am-5pm, NATFHE, 27 Britannia St, London, WC1. Tel: 071 923 3671, for details.
- 30 March Candlelit vigils outside all NHS hospitals to Defend the NHS, organised by NHS Support Federation, 8-9pm.
- 1 April Julio Garcia Prieto, Gen. Sec. SICAFE (Salvadorean Coffee Processing Plant Workers' Union), speaking at 7.30pm, Reading International Support Centre, 103 London St, Reading. Tel: 0734 586692, for details.
- 4 April Demonstration against sanctions on Iraq. Assemble outside Notting Hill Gate tube, south side at 11am. Wear black.
- 9 April General Election (if you didn't know already!)

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# socialist OUTLOOK

## South Africa referendum:

# This is no road to freedom!



ON THE EVE of South Africa's all-white referendum on reform, the odds were heavily on state president De Klerk winning a 'yes' vote. Nelson Mandela has warned that a 'no' vote would mean a lurch towards civil war. Certainly a 'no' vote would result in a further international isolation of South Africa and a blow to the hopes of big business.

The proposed reforms, crystallised in the CODESA process towards a transitional government, are not about a liberal South African white regime having seen the injustice of apartheid. Rather it is about a political elite which has seen the *unworkability* of the apartheid system in modernising South African capitalism.



The maintenance of 'racial capitalism', a capitalist system in which blacks make up the bulk of a super-exploited working class, and whites the bulk of a capitalist and middle-class elite, is not dependent on keeping petty apartheid rules.

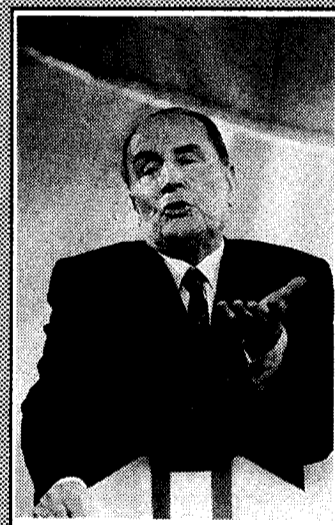
For example, the Group Areas Act, keeping blacks in designated territories and relying on widespread migrant labour, is economically inefficient. For the white ruling elite old-style apartheid is unworkable economically and politically; a new form of running South African capitalism has to be found.

The transition in South Africa is about finding that new mechanism. It means, of course, that whites *especially poorer whites* will have to give up some of their privileges. In particular, space will have to be found for a new, emerging middle class.

The mid-1980s culminated in a huge semi-insurrectionary wave of struggle by the non-white population of South Africa. What is being played out now is how that process will finish. The road of the ANC towards integrating the black population into a reconstituted South African capitalism is not set.

It remains to be seen whether the South African masses can chart another course.

## French Socialists face poll drubbing



The French Socialist Party government of Francois Mitterrand is about to suffer humiliation in next Sunday's elections for local councils.

Opinion polls put the Socialists - the country's governing party - on between 15 and 17 per cent. For the party in power this is a devastating result.

The extreme right-wing Front National of Jean-Marie Le Pen looks certain to win the elections in the prosperous Provence-Alps-Cotes D'Azur region.

This area, besides being next to Marseilles with its huge immigrant population, is also home to hundreds of thousands of 'pieds noirs' - white former residents of French North Africa.

### Disillusion

Defeat for the Socialists and

the rise of the Front National stems from the same root cause - utter disillusionment with the Socialist Party in government.

When Mitterrand came to power in 1981 it was on the wake of extravagant promises for a new France. The SF built itself in the 1970s by posing as the 'modern' face of socialism, compared to the old-fashioned Stalinism of the Communists.

Until 1984 Communist ministers participated in the government. After an initial attempt to reflate the economy, the Socialists adopted rigorous deflationary policies, presiding over growing unemployment and worsening living standards.

The organisational base of the SF in the working class has withered. SF leaders, including prime minister Edith Cresson, have capitulated to the racism of the Front National and begun expelling im-

migrants. And scandal and corruption have rocked the government.

### Anti-racists

The current election campaign has been marked by the adoption of a new and more militant tactics by anti-racist and anti-fascist organisations.

After the huge success of the 25 January anti-Le Pen demonstration, the anti-fascists have turned to mass street demonstrations against the Front National at all its election rallies.

This culminated with street battles in Chartres last Sunday after Front National thugs attacked demonstrators with baseball bats.

It seems likely that the Green vote will suffer from a split which means there are two ecologist slates. The only far left lists are those of the Trotskyist organisation *Lutte Ouvriere*.