


# SOCIALIST OUTLOOK

No. 25 June 1990 £1

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- Women's pay
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- Peru



**“I  
like it,  
Roy  
likes it,  
you  
better  
like it”**



# SOCIALIST OUTLOOK

No 25, JUNE, 1990

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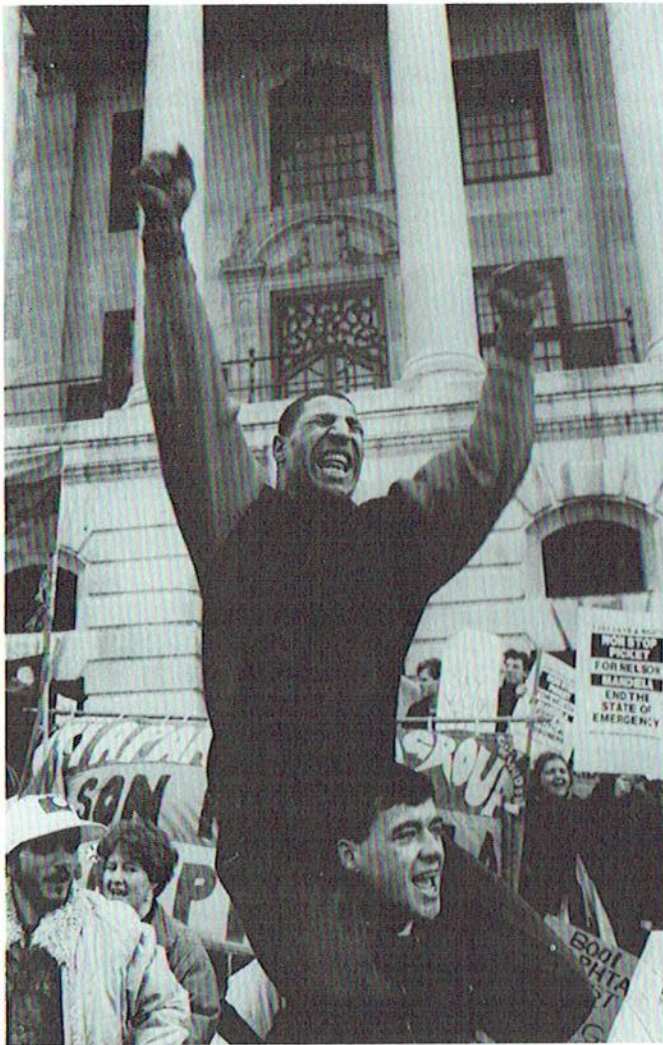
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John Harris (NUJ)

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# Kinnock's recipe for disaster

ONCE AGAIN, 'Spitting Image' has summed up the situation: the Kinnock puppet in front of the shadow cabinet confessed 'We're useless; the only way we can win the election is if we do and say absolutely nothing at all'.

If only they would! Instead the Kinnock team have, since the local elections, unveiled a grim package of economic policies – seemingly designed to appeal to the bankers and deter working class voters; and mounted a new witch-hunt against Militant and the Anti Poll Tax Federation – which is certainly intended to isolate poll tax resisters, and will also give the red-baiters of the Tory press merry sport for months to come.

The local elections themselves saw Labour win 300 seats – which only the Tory press could portray as some kind of defeat. But since then there has been a falling back from the false dawn of opinion polls in which Labour held a 25 percent lead over the Tories, and which suggested an unstoppable momentum towards a Labour landslide combined with a total Tory collapse. On the May 3 results, Kinnock could win a majority in parliament but not a huge one: worse, it seems that the element of Labour's support based on gut anti-Toryism may already have peaked, while the Party has little to offer as attractive policies to win votes.

With possibly two years to the next election, and the Thatcherites regrouping, perhaps the most telling results were the abject failures of classic Kinnockite Labour Parties in Wandsworth, Westminster, Ealing and Brent.

The May results also underlined the extent to which the Labour leadership is squandering the opportunities presented to it on a plate by the crisis of the Thatcher government (some of which are discussed in more detail elsewhere in this magazine). There is scarcely any issue of substance on which the Tories are in difficulties – from poll tax to mad cow disease – where Labour has mounted an effective challenge. The whole focus has been on piecing together a programme that pleases big business and offers as little as possible to the working class. According to the latest policy review documents and recent statements, the menu goes something like this:

■ **Vote Labour, pay the poll tax:** while workers seethe and refuse to pay, Labour's National Executive has voted with only four against to condemn those who have fought the poll tax – the Anti Poll Tax Federation – as a 'Militant front', and to instruct Labour Parties not to support its campaign for non-payment. Instead people are told to pay up now, and that a Labour government would retain the tax for at least two years, while its nebulous alternative ideas are worked out.

■ **Vote Labour, hold down wages!** While John Major scrambles around in the wreckage of the Tory 'economic miracle', admitting serious mistakes have been made, Labour's John Smith, the new darling of the bankers, has already committed himself to enter the European Monetary System as a 'counter-inflationary' measure to pressure employers into holding down pay settlements. Labour apparently rejects an incomes policy, but is proposing ominous-sounding arbitration arrangements on public sector pay, including possible no-strike deals for ambulance and fire services.

■ **Vote Labour, for anti-union laws:** none of the battery of Tory anti-union laws would be repealed or modified by a Kinnock government. The threat of sequestration will remain; mass picketing would still be outlawed, secondary picketing restricted, the closed shop abandoned, and a new, sinister 'industrial relations court' would enforce the restrictions.

■ **Vote Labour, and wait:** the state of the NHS as a weak link in the Tory armoury has been left unexploited by a timid Labour leadership scared to pledge the spending necessary to halt the cuts and reopen closed hospital beds. Even the political pledges have been thin on the ground: next month the hugely unpopular NHS and Community Care Bill will become law, with the Labour Party and TUC having mounted no campaign and no demonstration against it, and with no promise it would be repealed.

■ **Vote Labour, and wait:** restoration of savaged education, housing and social services, all of which require increased public spending, will have to wait until John Smith has restored the capitalist economy: 'I'm going to maintain a close control over spending commitments because I don't want them to get out of hand'. On many of these issues

(sales of council houses, education policy) Labour simply tail ends the Tory line.

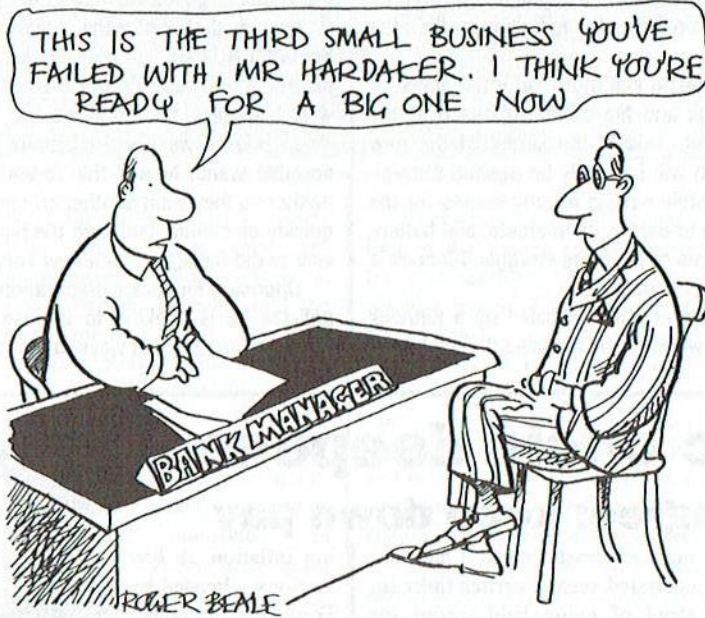
■ **Vote Labour, stay out of work:** as the Tory squeeze on the economy begins once again deliberately to push up unemployment, and firms announce long lists of redundancies, John Smith, sounding like the CBI, argues that a Labour government would use similar means to contain 'inflationary' wage settlements, and would not intervene to prevent massive job losses.

■ **Vote Labour, back the police and judges:** cases such as the Guildford Four, the Winchester Three and now the Maguires, the Birmingham Six and the Broadwater Farm Three have all helped expose class justice in Britain and the flimsy basis on which the police have been allowed to frame up victims 'guilty' only of being Irish or black. The Labour leadership has consistently lagged well behind the Court of Appeal and the Tory press in any criticism of the judiciary or the police, and always sides instinctively against the victims of abuse – as in the Trafalgar Square poll tax riot.

■ **Vote Labour, fork out for defence:** while even the Tories look towards a substantial cut in defence spending as a means of easing the pressure on the exchequer, John Smith refuses to count on any savings from that quarter. While Eastern Europe is transformed, the Warsaw Pact collapses and the mythical 'red threat' disappears before our very eyes, Labour insists on being the very last to propose any serious cut-backs in the armed forces, and will cling on to nuclear weapons.

■ **Vote Labour, keep the troops in Ireland:** the Kinnock leadership's craven capitulation to the British state finds its most wretched expression in the refusal to contemplate a military withdrawal from the six counties of Ireland, and its condemnation of Tory minister Peter Brooke for even suggesting the possibility of talks with Sinn Fein.

■ **Vote Labour, ignore racism:** as Norman Tebbit spearheads a new ugly wave of open racist agitation, giving a 'respectable' focus to





localised street violence against black families and communities, Labour is pathetically silent, offering no alternative to Thatcher's racist, elitist quotas for Hong Kong immigration.

With policies like these on offer from Labour's ineffectual front bench, the biggest mystery is why the Tory Party should bother to launch its 'summer offensive' to discredit Labour as a potential party of government. The Kinnock leadership parades itself as a group who have learned nothing and forgotten nothing from the disastrous policies of the last two periods of Labour government.

Of course this wholesale plagiarism of the SDP's sub-Thatcherite policy scrapbook runs flatly opposite to the radicalisation of sections of the working class, reflected in more militant pay demands and a renewal of trade union struggle. While Thatcherism galvanises layers of workers the left has never reached, top union officials are still politically prostrate before the employers and the Tories: a real tension is building within the workers' movement.

Kinnock's response has been to initiate still more 'reforms' aimed at killing any influence of the party rank and file or the unions over the policies of a new Labour government. This is the kernel of the new proposals for party conference (which will ironically be pushed through using trade union block votes). But while cutting off any means for the working class to use the party formed to defend its interests, and battering down the hatches against the storms of the class struggle, Kinnock is bottling up contradictions and troubles to come.

Workers' demands will neither be met nor eradicated by a Kinnock victory, but the expectations of many workers will increase if Thatcher as

the main enemy is removed: more groups will feel confident enough to embark on industrial action and mass struggle. The scenario of the 1978-79 'winter of discontent' could be re-run as easily as the bankrupt policies which produced it. This helps explain the Labour leaders' reluctance to repeal Thatcher's anti-union laws: they are getting ready to use them against the working class.

First steps in preparing the political leadership that will be needed for in these conflicts to come have already begun. The Socialist Movement has held several successful conferences and begun to organise a socialist opposition in the trade unions and, most recently, in the Labour Party. Its discussions on policy and programme go beyond the abstractions of a debate on what we want from the next Labour government, and spell out the need to link up now with the struggles of the working class against the Thatcher government, and to organise a class struggle current ready to oppose the right wing policies on offer from Kinnock and Smith. **Socialist Outlook** has consistently argued the need for a Socialist Campaign for a Labour Victory that will spell out genuine alternatives to the wretched line of the Kinnock team.

Of course we want a Labour government to replace Thatcher. No socialist wants to see the Tories allowed back for a fourth term: but neither do they want another cringing, right wing Labour government that quickly discredits itself and the name of socialism, and which paves the way as did Callaghan for a new Tory resurgence.

Opposing Kinnock's preparations for government, and challenging the policies he is seeking to impose, while building the widest possible fightback are the best ways to guard against defeat – and betrayal.

## Economic crisis deepens

### Two Johns agree: keep down pay

AMID ALL the 'doom and gloom' economic figures churned out in the last few months – showing inflation, the trade deficit and now unemployment all *up*, manufacturing output and productivity *down* and the stock markets *up and down* – the statistics which most worry the employers are those showing the level of pay settlements.

This is not because the capitalist class are fooled by the argument wheeled out by Tory ministers (like their Labour predecessors under Wilson and Callaghan) that 'excessive' pay increases cause inflation.

As Samuel Brittan recently summed up in the *Financial Times*:

'Not much is gained by a high theory argument on whether pay increases cause inflation or not. They are a link in the chain, but come fairly far along it. They are themselves influenced by price changes, labour market pressure, exchange rate movements and expectations about these variables, to name only a few. Counter-inflationary policy has usually been

more successful when it has concentrated on the earlier links instead of going bald-headed for pay itself.' (*FT* April 26)

In any event most employers are quite happy to live with a controlled element of inflation, which they can use to nibble away at the living standards of their workforce while they protect their own profits through price increases.

Employers are concerned about pay settlements because they focus on the key issue of profitability – the level of exploitation of the workforces as shown by the share of created value that is retained by the employer as profit. This is the very crux of the class struggle, and the bosses are beginning to grasp just how temporary was the change in the balance of forces brought about after the defeat of the miners' strike.

Once more even some notoriously timid unions are pushing for – and often winning – much larger pay settlements, goaded into action to placate a rank and file that has been angered by years of concessions, job losses and now by accelerat-

ing inflation. A few sections – headed by Fords and the power workers – have just exceeded the current 9.4 percent level of inflation; but few private sector settlements are below eight percent, and this is now putting pressure onto the public sector management.

NALGO local authority staff and even the usually passive NALGO NHS white collar staff are moving towards strike ballots.

Alarmed at this evidence of a new combativity and resistance to further cuts in the real value of pay packets, the employers and ministers have begun a predictable chorus of warnings that 'excessive' pay rises could cause job losses. Early in April, the Governor of the Bank of England, Robin Leigh-Pemberton, admitted that:

'over the past two or three years something has gone quite badly wrong ... policy mistakes



John Smith MP: no friend of the workers

and forecasting errors played a part.'

Who should pay for these mistakes? The workers! He called for a tight monetary policy and wage restraint – the old formula under which the workers are once more urged to tighten their belts to bail out the bosses.

The panic grew. By the end of April the Tory chair of the Commons Treasury Committee was demanding the publication of a Treasury document that predicted British labour costs would *double* this year. In early May the CBI joined in the effort to intimidate



workers: Director General John Banham warned that:

'Higher interest rates and the uniform business rates mean that employers' ability to pay high wage settlements without job losses and unemployment is diminishing.'

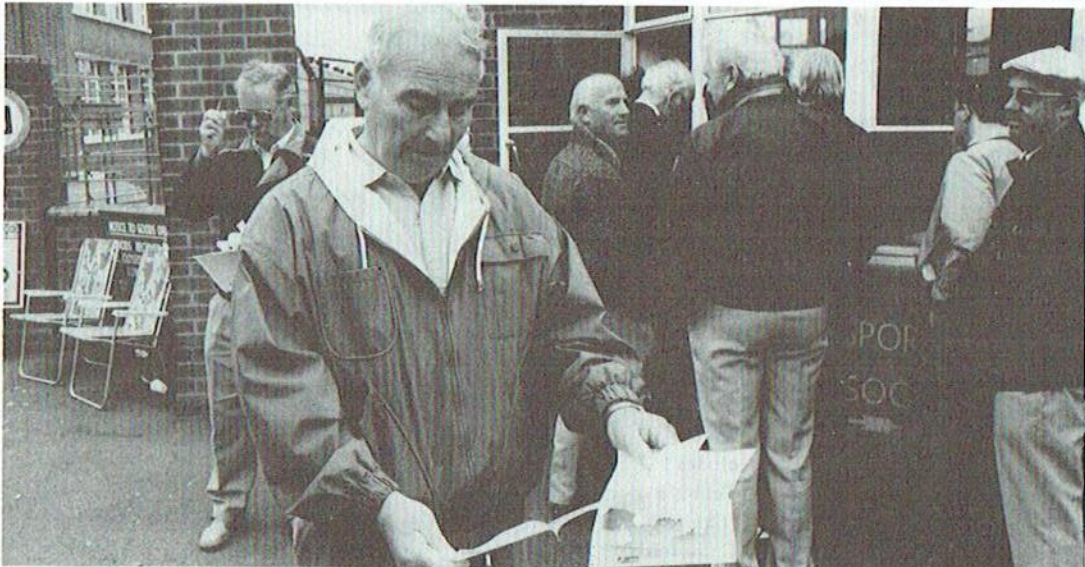
Interestingly Mr Banham also criticised the fact that company dividends are rising twice as fast as corporate earnings, meaning that the capitalists are sharing and spending the profits almost faster than the workers can create them, and opting for inflated life-styles rather than investing in plant and equipment. This message has been studiously avoided by the tabloid press.

The hectoring of the workforce intensified. May's inflation figures showed a three per cent leap in the Retail Price Index during April. Labour's John Smith pointed out that even the phony figures for the 'underlying rate' of inflation (favoured by Nigel Lawson because it excludes mortgages) is now at 7.9 percent, and that even if poll tax is left out of the sums it is still 6.5 percent - well above the European average.

Nevertheless Chancellor John Major told a guzzling crowd of capitalists at the CBI's annual dinner that they must hold down wage increases for their workforce and boost exports if 'we' were to beat inflation, which 'could destroy all our hopes for the coming years'. Major apologised to 'many of the people who regard themselves as the government's natural supporters - in particular small businesses and homeowners on modest incomes', saying 'a pain-free cure for inflation simply does not exist'.

Thatcher herself joined the fray, with familiar threats that workers could 'price themselves out of a job'; meanwhile figures showed productivity actually fell in 1989, while wage costs per unit of output rose to an average 10.1 percent.

Not a moment before John Major wanted it, came the first real signs that the squeeze he has been applying through punishing interest rates had borne fruit in a new round of job losses unemployment edged back up in



John Harris (NUJ)

Workers are not impressed by John Major's effect on their wage packets

April for the first time in nearly four years. There were announcements of jobs axed at Ford, British Telecom and the steel industry, and the CBI declared 50,000 jobs would be slashed in manufacturing in the next four months.

The financial whizz-kids actually welcomed the rise in unemployment (which of course is ludicrously understated in government figures: after more than 30 'adjustments' in eight years, the Unemployment Unit calculates that the real level of jobless people seeking work is almost a million higher, at just under 2.5 million).

The employers, too, see unemployment, and the limited evidence of a slide

back towards recession, as a positive help in their efforts to contain the working class. It is a pressure to hold down pay settlements, especially when used to frighten 'new realist' union leaders. However the poll tax - a flat rate tax falling most heavily on the lowest paid - has radicalised new layers of workers, to the extent that even the anti-union laws are not having the expected effect: instead of producing votes against strike action, ballots in favour of action are delivering a weapon into the hands of surprised union negotiators.

**"company dividends are rising twice as fast as corporate earnings: the capitalists are sharing the profits faster than the workers can create them"**

Meanwhile the level of sterling in the money markets also takes account of the wages struggle as a gauge of the balance of class forces and the likely profitability of industry, as well as the balance of payments situation and interest rates. The Thatcher government has shot itself in the foot on every count: its own policies have stoked up inflation; the balance of payments are showing their second worst deficit in history, with exports almost static and imports still rising; and the working class is fighting back.

As a result, interest rates have to be kept sky high in order to attract sufficient speculative investment to keep sterling

afloat. These rates could be forced up again as the West German government carries out its hugely expensive and inflationary unification with the GDR.

While the two Johns - Major and Smith - appear agreed on the desirability of 'stabilising' sterling by entering the European Monetary System, this would only be at the expense of the working class and weaker sections of capital. John Smith points out entry into EMS would be 'counter-inflationary' in that it would prevent any competitive devaluation of sterling that might allow companies to pay wage in-

creases more easily.

For John Major and the dominant sections of capitalists, the best scenario would be a relatively swift, sharp pinch of recession to 'discipline' the labour force, reduce spending power and thus imports, and allow a relaxation of interest rates to create the semblance of a pre-election 'boom'.

Nothing could more clearly show the opposing class interests of workers and employers: yet John Smith, spelling out Labour's 'alternative' economic policy, calls ludicrously for a 'partnership' of labour with capital. Not waiting for the IMF to force a Labour government to cut public spending and workers' living standards, Smith is already volunteering to do so from day one. This is what Kinnock means when he says 'Capitalism is the system we live under; we must make it work better'.

The job of the trade union and labour movement is not to defend employers' profits but to improve the living standards of the working class. As the tide of inflation swells, there is an urgent need to include a demand for wage settlements to be protected through *cost of living clauses* to provide regular adjustments to keep pace with price rises. There must be new trade union efforts to defend jobs and halt closures.

All this sounds grimly familiar. Despite the hype of a Thatcher 'revolution', not much has changed: and if Kinnock gets his way, not much will.



# Tories play the racist card

Once again senior figures in the Tory Party are looking to that trusty old stalwart racism to rekindle popular support, most clearly exemplified by Norman Tebbit

Tebbit and his band of chauvinistic rebels have gone on a binge, expressing the overt racism that always bubbles beneath the surface of Tory political practice.

Not only were the people of Hong Kong the victims of the Tory right's attempts to stir up racism – but all non-white people in Britain were spotlighted for abuse by Tebbit's infamous 'cricket test' remarks.

Whilst a worried press tried to convince the public that others in the Tory party did not agree with him, there was quite clearly not even a mild rebuke from the leadership.

Although some have drawn parallels with Enoch Powell's 'rivers of blood' speech, also made when the Tories popularity was on the wane, today's developments are very different. Then, Ted Heath was seen to wag a finger and proclaim 'that way lies tyranny'; now, from Thatcher there is merely a telling silence.

The fact is that what caused the slump in fortunes for the fascist right in the late 1970s was that Thatcher and the Tory Party stole their clothes when she proclaimed that the British sub-culture was being 'swamped', and insisted on the need for more immigration controls.

However the renaissance of racism in the Tebbit form has been a kiss of life to the remnants of the old fascist groupings; this has been particularly the case in East London. In the last few months racist attacks throughout the area have been increasing.

The British National Party (BNP) has felt able once again to hold meetings in predominantly black areas such as a school in

Brick Lane.

In Waltham Forest (the council which includes Tebbit's constituency of Chingford)

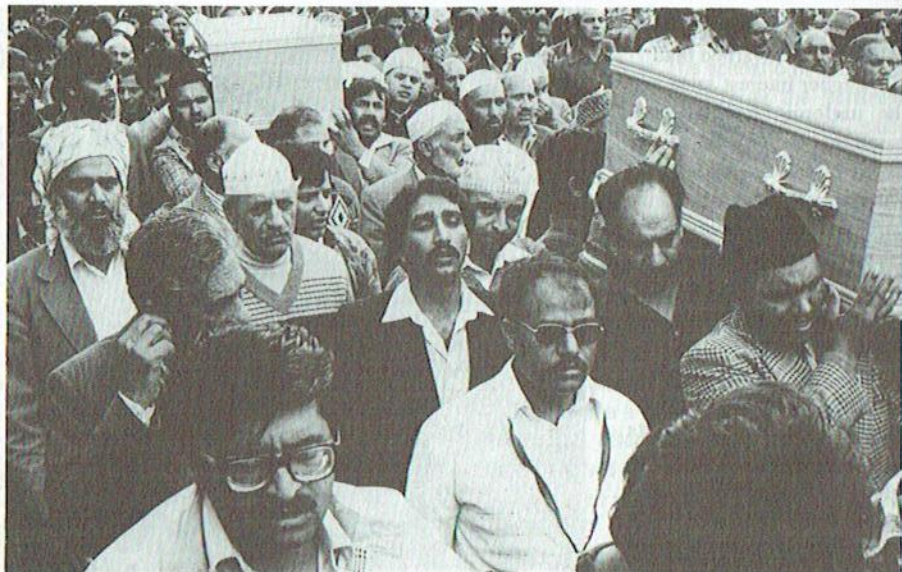
there have been racist marches

against the Labour council creating three holidays on non-Christian religious festivals. This was at first organised by individual racist parents, but it did not take long before Tebbit latched onto the march in order to give it his blessing.

The fascists have also picked up on marches/initiatives by unorganised racist parents elsewhere. They tried to become involved in a march in Tower Hamlets concerning the stabbing of a white pupil by a black pupil at school; and there has been increasing interference from so called 'choice groups' attempting to get white pupils to the schools of their 'parents' choice'. This has continued on from Dewsbury in Yorkshire with the misnamed 'Freedom Association' attempting to give a veneer of 'intellectual' cover to an emerging new ultra-right, while hysterical headlines in the *Sun* have helped agitate the backward white working class.

Tebbit's utterings, the fascist right gatherings, and Thatcher's calculated silence have resuscitated as always not only in an increase in passive racism but also active violent racism. CAPA, a legal advice and support group based in Tower Hamlets, had 482 reports of racially motivated attacks for the year ending March 1989. The number of cases of racial harassment went up by over 20% in a similar period. Attacks in April showed a continued increase.

Labour's equivocal stance on



Funeral procession after racist murders in Walthamstow

Andrew Ward/Report

almost all recent issues of anti-racism has done nothing to halt the rising tide of racism (with the notable exception of the Campaign Group members who most recently took the principled step of abstaining on the Hong Kong Bill.) While a number of left MPs continue to be wide of the mark over the Rushdie affair, still pandering to fundamentalists by calling for an extension of the blasphemy laws, the Labour Party leadership's concessions to religious schools will do nothing but transfer power to fundamentalist leaders and fuel racism.

In addition the half-hearted multiculturalism of many councils means that resolutions are

passed but remain a paper policy since there is no effort to convince the public of such a stand. In Waltham Forest the council would not politically challenge the racist marches; it simply batted down its hatches and ignored the problem, leaving the hard left to struggle against the racists' arguments and the threat of fascist violence.

It is clear today, in the 10th anniversary year of Newham Monitoring project, that the fight for clear anti-racism should be a priority for all socialists: organisations such as Anti-Fascist Action must be supported in their mobilisations to smash the fascist groupings.

## Britain's black voters:

The rout that Labour's local leaders feared at the hands of the Islamic Party in last month's council elections didn't happen.

Islamic Party candidates stood in four seats in Bolton, two in Blackburn and one in Derby: all seats with between a third and three quarters of Muslim voters.

In Blackburn an Islamic victory could have deprived Labour of its two seat council majority (and by implication, Jack Straw of his marginal parliamentary seat in the next election). In Bolton, Islamic Party candidates fought Labour's housing chair in another key parliamentary marginal seat – a traditional testing

ground for national voting trends.

However all the Islamic Party candidates lost – and badly.

In Blackburn, Labour increased its majorities in both wards contested by the Islamic Party (one of them the scene of anti-*Satanic Verses* rallies and book-burnings), and increased its overall majority on the council by 10. The Islamic Party polled a total of only 360 votes.

It was a similar story in Bolton, where all four Islamic candidates lost, with a total of 1,201 votes between them. In the ward with the highest concentration of Muslim voters (around 20%), they got nearly 500 votes. Again Labour's overall majority on the



# Two, three, many Guildford Fours?

The Winchester Three – three young Irish people sentenced to 25 years for conspiracy to murder Tom King and persons unknown two years ago – were released in April following their successful appeal.

Within weeks, for the first time since their incarceration, the Broadwater Farm Three (Winston Silcott, Mark Braithwaite and Engin Raghip – gaoled for the murder of PC Blakelock during the Tottenham riots of Autumn 1985) have seen their campaign for freedom move centre stage with support from the BBC's *Inside Story* documentary and the Reverend Jesse Jackson.

What is the significance of this? Has the state lost control of the situation? Are we likely to witness more framed up Irish and black people walking free from the prison gates?

Seven months ago, when the Guildford Four were released some on the left were so stunned they could hardly believe it was a victory. For the first time in twenty years of struggle the frame-up of Irish political

prisoners was being officially recognised. It was tempting to regard this as some clever trick, a manoeuvre to strengthen the British hand.

The freeing of the Four may have given the Accord a vital blood transfusion at a time when it appeared to be on its death bed. But that was comparatively far less significant than the major setback it represented for the state and the historic breakthrough for the struggle against British rule in Ireland.

The government and the judiciary faced a dilemma. They could carry on holding the prisoners as, effectively, hostages to terrorise Irish nationalists (in Britain and Ireland) into silence. But they thereby risked the continued discrediting of the system that kept the prisoners in gaol. Or they could release the prisoners, but risk opening the floodgates – having recognised that criminalisation and 'anti-terrorism' had failed.

In a no-win situation they opted for a release and hoped that continued terror combined with damage limitation would

hold the line. But given the defeat they were forced to concede that was never really on the cards.

It helped prise open already existing divisions within the establishment about the efficacy of criminalisation, draconian 'emergency' legislation, dirty tricks and assassination squads as a method of dealing with the Irish 'problem'.

In freeing the Winchester Three, the judiciary may feel it has saved its bacon (albeit at further cost to the government's Irish criminalisation policy) but in reality it can only unleash a further hornets nest of problems. Foremost among these is a deepening of the crisis of confidence in the criminal justice system – whatever the liberal media pundits might claim.

The Tories are committed to



Chris Bates Post Newspapers

When will the Broadwater Three be set free?

abolishing the right to silence – as they have already done in the North of Ireland. Not only will this be more difficult, but so will the unofficial smear campaigns when Irish and black political prisoners choose to exercise that right. Thatcher campaigned against 'trial by television' when the media belatedly began to debate issues like the Birmingham Six: but it has now been recognised that such defendants themselves can be prejudiced by media coverage and public comments by government ministers.

Similarly the debate opened up by the Guildford release on the unreliability of uncorroborated confessions and the effects of police terror tactics and corruption has been a major boost to the campaigns for other framed-up prisoners.

This process cannot now be reversed. The release of the Broadwater Farm Three and the Birmingham Six must surely be attainable goals in the foreseeable future. The labour movement must therefore put these campaigns high on its agenda – defending the rights of Irish and black people.

Piers Mostyn

Jane Wells

## the challenge to Labour

council went up – by eight seats.

Pre-election fears about the 'Islamic threat' to Labour failed to produce any critical look at Labour's policies or record. Far from it: defending the lack of black councillors in Bolton (only one out of 60 after years of Labour control of the council), council leader Bob Howarth told a radio interviewer that you have to be in the Labour Party 15 years before you can become a councillor (patently not true of course, except for women, black people, and anybody too left wing).

And when leaflets distributed by an Islamic Party supporter in Bolton accused another sitting

Labour councillor of bribery, he responded by saying 'This is a complete joke. And it demonstrates the cultural chasm between Islamic fundamentalism in which bribery is normal practice and our own democratic society where it is not'.

There is no doubt that the Islamic Party's platform and campaign was reactionary. It has called for the suspension of the death threat to Rushdie – on the grounds that he was mentally unstable whilst writing *Satanic Verses*, but has called for the book to be banned. One of their main campaigning demands was for state funding for Muslim schools. Leaflets handed out in

Bolton claimed that Labour 'care more for homosexuals than they do for Muslims'.

But that's not the point, nor the end of the story for Labour.

The Islamic Party will disappear from the media spotlight, at least in the near future; but Britain's black voters will not go away – and without any serious attempts to rid the party of its racism, build its black membership and black representation at all levels of the party, and to develop policies that meet the needs of Britain's black communities – they may desert Labour.



# Poll tax: together we can defeat Thatcher!

By Theresa Conway

The attempted imposition of the poll tax by the Thatcher government has resulted in the development of one of the most significant movements in British politics for a very long time. The government has been shaken more seriously than at any time in the last ten years and Thatcher's own position within the Tory party has been jeopardised.

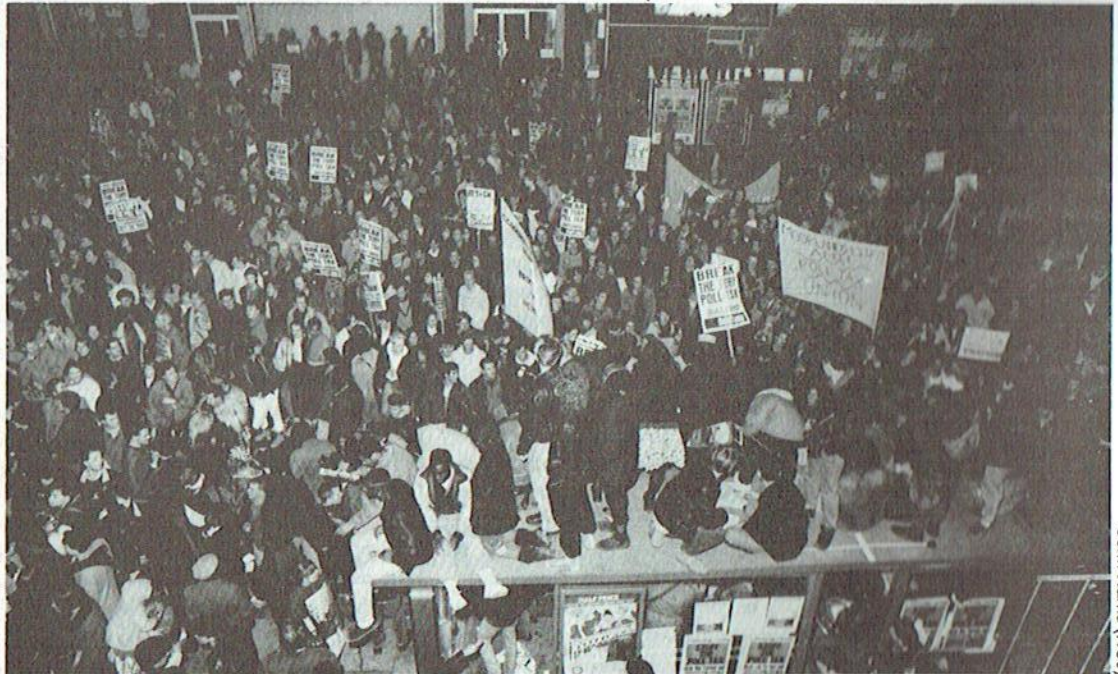
But while the movement against the tax has enormous potential, whether it is finally capable of defeating the Tories depends to a large extent on the strategies it pursues. There are a number of

key questions that have to be addressed, debated and resolved correctly. The movement must be organised in a way that involves the greatest number of supporters possible.

## Terrified of non-payment

Crucial to this are the issues and demands around which action is organised – and that participation at all levels is encouraged. The relationship between the anti-poll tax movement itself and the official labour movement must be developed and strengthened. The dead hand of new realism reduces opposition to the tax to a tokenistic level. The trade union bureaucracy, far from welcoming the development of mass action against the tax, is terrified that militancy on this issue will wreck Labour's electoral image. So both the Labour leadership and the TUC have put far more energy into denouncing non-payment than into mobilising people against the tax.

Opposition to the poll tax is extremely diverse. New forces coming into activity have been hungry for political ideas, and have listened to those that seem to have a understanding of the way to defeat the tax, and a commitment to doing so. Those involved range from dissident Tories to anarchists, from people who have never been involved in activity before to seasoned campaigners. But



John Harris (NUJ)

Organisation is needed to turn popular feeling into real power

within the organised anti-poll tax movement the forces of the far left are relatively strong. Supporters of *Militant* in particular have key positions of leadership at many levels of the movement, and as such have a particular responsibility for influencing the direction it takes – for better or worse.

Millions have taken action against the tax, in a myriad of different ways – but only a small proportion of these are involved in any ongoing way in anti-poll tax groups. A conscious struggle is required to maximise participation and democracy throughout the movement conducting discussions in the most accessible and non-sectarian way possible.

## Behind closed doors

The reality is that at various different levels, from small local groups to the Federation's founding conference, there has been a tendency for decisions to be made behind closed doors and inadequate opportunity for open debate. While a range of political forces have been involved in such manoeuvres it is the majority leadership of the Federation – supporters of *Militant* – must take particular responsibility for them. Without a conscious struggle against such practices the potential power of mass hostility to Thatcher's tax will

not be fully realised.

Within the movement there are many differences about the way forward. Initially the key debate was over the significance of a policy of mass non-payment with forces on the right either seeing this as ultra-left or only of marginal importance. The scale of mass non-payment in Scotland and increasing support for such action in England and Wales has succeeded in convincing the vast majority of activists that this is indeed an absolutely crucial tool for the movement. Some of those who are unhappy about this direction have drifted out of the movement, either as individuals or because the rival groups they set up have collapsed through lack of support. Others, to their credit, have been prepared to work for the goals agreed by the majority, while continuing to voice their dissent.

## Non-collection

There have been sharp debates too about the issue of non-implementation by trade unions and non-collection by councils. Those forces who opposed non-payment as ultra-leftist law breaking have even more emphatically condemned the idea that either trade unions or councils should take decisive action against the tax. They have pinned their hopes instead



on a propaganda campaign against the evils of the tax, and being content to wait for a Labour government.

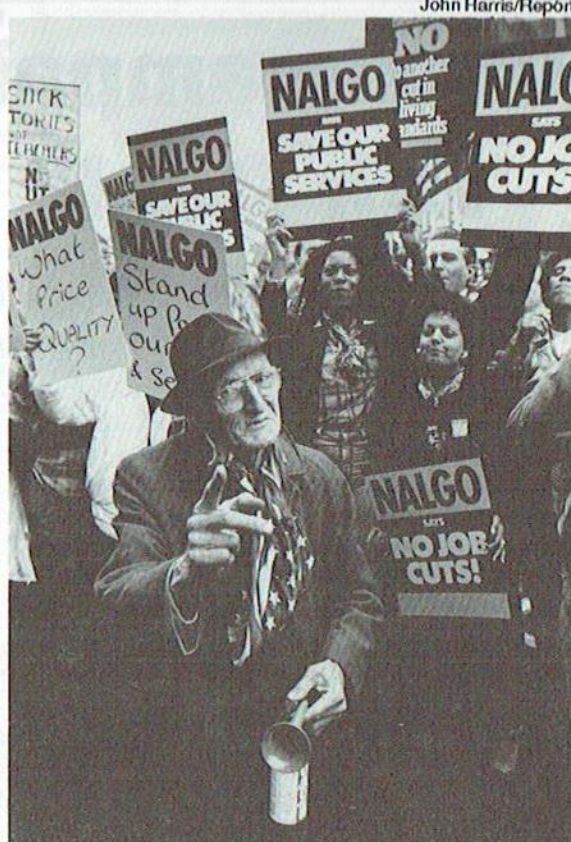
But even amongst those committed to non-payment, there have been disagreements. The forces of the soft left have argued that it is incorrect to demand councils should not collect the tax, and have also opposed non-implementation by trade unionists, although they favour various forms of obstruction. A variety of arguments have been put forward ranging from the idea that non-collection would result in the devastation of local services, to the notion that it is incorrect to ask individual councillors to face the risk of surcharge. Such arguments are a repeat of the discussion around ratecapping; again the idea of the 'dented shield' rears its ugly head.

### Differences on the left

Within the left of the movement there have also been differences. The position of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) in particular has been erratic and opportunist. Initially their attitude was typically syndicalist; that only trade union action could defeat the tax and that non-payment was either irrelevant or at best extremely secondary because it was based in the community not the workplace. The SWP completely failed to understand that the best conditions for building trade union action was the existence of a strong, confident, organisation of non-payers which can and will support such action. They ignore the fact that every trade unionist will be expected to pay the tax, and will need support not only in their workplace but on their estate or in their street in order to resist.

When it became clear that there was a strong mood for mass non-payment existed, they changed their position and began to support it. But in many areas they have campaigned on estates and in workplaces, outside the federations or at a tangent to them. They have used the support that exists for the anti-poll tax movement to build their own organisation not to involve people in the broader movement. Such sectarianism is highly irresponsible – it puts the needs of the SWP as a group before that of the class as a whole. The practical result of activity such as this will be that many people who oppose the tax may not become involved in the movement; others will rapidly become disillusioned by this sort of behaviour.

The All-Britain Federation has a formal position of support for non-collection and non-implementation, but the reality is that the majority of the Federation leadership have done little until recently to concretise work around either. Despite the fact that *Militant* have a significant number of supporters who are councillors there has been no real push either inside or outside the council chamber to make this aspect of the campaign more



The fight against cuts is key for the anti-poll tax campaign

central. There has been no organisation of councillors opposed to the tax – although moves towards this have recently been made.

But it is on the question of organising in the unions that the greatest problems have arisen with *Militant* supporters. Over recent months there has been sporadic action by different groups of workers against the poll tax, and the growth of mass non-payment in England and Wales begins to lay the basis for further action. Significant layers of trade

**“Unity in action by the whole of the anti-poll tax movement, together with left activists in the trade unions is the only way to defeat the union bureaucracy and force industrial action against the tax”**

union militants increasingly recognise that the poll tax is a trade union issue and there is the potential in a number of unions for mounting a substantial challenge and possibly even defeating the new realist leaderships on this question.

Not only in the local government unions, but more generally in the labour movement an understanding is developing that the threat to local government jobs and services posed by the poll tax must be fought. In this context the Socialist Movement trade union committee approached the Federation to propose a joint conference for trade unionists against the poll tax.

Clearly a conference organised with the resources of both organisations, each of

which has a substantial but not identical network of support in the unions, would have been a major step forward in developing a strategy for trade union action against the tax. Initially there seemed to be a favourable response from key people in the Federation leadership to such a suggestion. Within a couple of weeks, 50 organisations and individuals such as Tony Benn and Alice Mahon supported the call for such a conference. All currents in the London federation, including *Militant* supporters had participated in a very successful local trade union conference which was jointly organised with the Greater London Association of Trades Councils.

But in the end, the majority leadership of the Federation decided to go it alone, calling a conference in June, and refusing to allow the Socialist Movement to participate in the organising committee. In taking such a decision, *Militant* supporters are throwing away a real opportunity to build the anti-poll tax movement in the unions. This sectarian attitude is even more criminal given their pivotal position in the movement.

It is clear that it will be very difficult to build this initiative adequately in the unions given the short time scale involved. The publicity so far issued for the event concentrates solely on the question of wage arrestment; thus ignoring other issues – in particular that of cuts – facing trade unionists in relation to the tax. And there is a fear that the conference will be more of a rally than a working event based on an exchange of information and discussion of the next steps forward. Because of the limitations of the June event, the Socialist Movement is going ahead with a trade union conference in September.

The conference the Federation is organising should of course be supported by activists in the anti-poll tax movement and the unions. Any other attitude would give the labour bureaucracy another excuse to attack mass non-payment and weaken the movement. At the same time, there is a need for the Socialist Movement initiative and this should be vigorously built.

Unity in action by the whole of the anti-poll tax movement, together with left activists in the trade unions is the only way to defeat the new realist bureaucracy and force industrial action against the tax – a crucial component in sinking Thatcher's flagship.

So far, *Militant* supporters have shirked many of their responsibilities in leading the movement. The fight against sectarianism, for democracy and for a correct understanding of the united front will be key in taking the struggle forward. *Socialist Outlook* appeals to all forces in the anti-poll tax movement to join us in the battle for these principles.



# New council campaigns for 'Fair Deal'

## "The Tories had cleaned us out"

One of the unsung Labour victories of the May local elections was in the south London borough of Merton, where a hard-line Tory administration was narrowly beaten, giving the Labour group an overall majority of one vote.

Winning the election, however, is only the start of the problems for Labour, who inherit a bank balance emptied to keep the Poll Tax low this year, and the certainty of a huge crisis in 1991. *Socialist Outlook* talked to Cllr GEOFF MARTIN, Chair of Finance in London's newest Labour council, about the situation they face.



What support will Kinnock give new Labour councils?

**You have already been attacked in the columns of the *Sun* and *Daily Telegraph* over the new council's admission that Poll Tax next year will rise to £550. Why is this? Are the Labour group embarking on a spending binge?**

The approach of the group has been to be honest with the people of the borough on the situation we face, the scope of the financial crisis. We were up front on this throughout the election campaign. The attack from the *Sun* and *Telegraph* is pretty weak compared to some of the treatment they have dished out to other councils.

I have compared the Tory actions to those of drunken pirates knowing they were about to get caught – wildly drinking the spirits, smoking the cigars and throwing the cash overboard. To keep the Poll Tax down to £279 this year instead of the £450 it should have been, they have spent £23 million from the council's balances, effectively cleaning out the whole revenue reserve. This is before the results of any of this year's local government pay settlements are decided.

What this means is that even if we do nothing, we already face at least a £550 Poll Tax next year simply to maintain the present Tory budget.

Another interesting point is that the Merton Tories were spectacularly unsuccessful at getting any help from revenue support grant, while Westminster and Wandsworth both did

very well. Wandsworth got £570 per head revenue support grant this year, while Merton got just £320. That gap can't be accounted for by differences in needs: the two boroughs are very similar. So there is a crisis, and it's not one of our making.

**What scope have you got to make changes in the Tory budget this year?**

We certainly intend to scrap some large elements in the capital programme – some roadbuilding schemes. That will free up some revenue funding which would have been allocated to them, and which we hope to redirect into improving services. But all the time we're aware that we will be facing Poll Tax capping next year.

We have also looked at some of the grandiose schemes the Tories were proposing: the redevelopment of the Wimbledon Theatre was going to cost mega-millions when it eventually got off the ground, and we're looking to claw back the money from things like that and put it into front line services.

**The Tories' policies on housing were quite distinctive as well, weren't they?**

Council tenants in Merton faced a 44 per cent increase in rents this year – the biggest in London. The reason is quite simple: for years the Tories have been siphoning off money

from the housing revenue account as a 'surplus' and putting it into the general rates fund to keep the rates low. Then the government decided they would 'ringfence' the housing revenue accounts.

The government intended to stop Labour authorities from putting money from general rates in to subsidise council rents. But Merton got caught out from the other side, so £7 million was lost immediately, because the government have simply clawed back that much by not paying it to us in housing benefits. As a result the tenants face a huge rent increase, virtually no council maintenance, and the knowledge that for the last four years they have been ripped off to the tune of £6 million a year to keep down the rates for the nobs who live up Wimbledon Hill.

**What scope do you have to change this housing policy?**

It's an area we are going to be looking at. We are tied to this year's housing revenue account: but what we will try to do is shift some elements that are in the housing revenue account back into the general fund, and use this to keep the rents down next year. But the way they have pegged down housing in Merton is incredible.



**Looking a little wider, there is the issue of social services taking on responsibility for community care under the new NHS Bill. What is the Tory record on this front?**

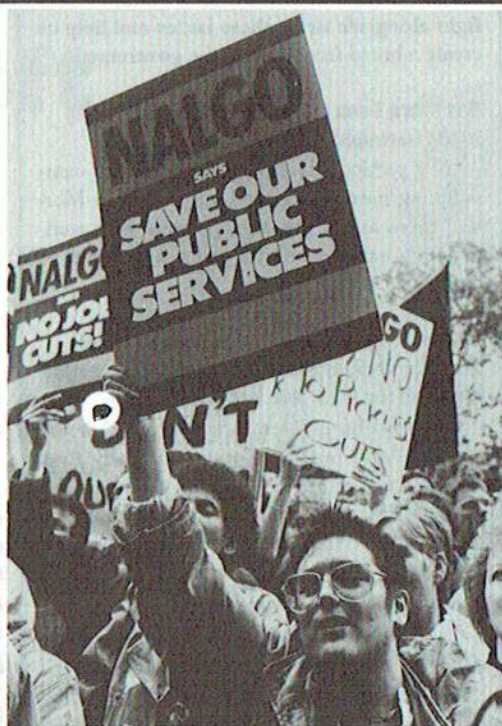
Not good! We have the added problem of an extremely right wing District Health Authority chaired by Harry Cowd, the former Tory leader of the council, who pioneered its entire privatisation programme almost single-handed. What we can expect in terms of joint planning between the new Labour council in Merton and the new business-style health authority to be set up from the autumn under the Bill, and chaired by Harry Cowd, is very limited.

The fact that the money from central government for community care – we still don't know how much it will be – is unlikely to be ringfenced (certainly not if the government gets its way) will cause more major problems. We are starting from a very backward position here: we don't even have joint care planning teams set up. Things are going to have to move very quickly, with the fear, of course, that the budget crisis will overtake everything else, and that the vulnerable people depending on us for community care will be the victims.

**Is the situation as bad for education?**

The latest figures just released show that Merton had the biggest growth in education budget last year of any authority. The reason for this is that after the council became hung last autumn we pushed through – in tandem with some of the independents who held the balance on the council – a major expansion of education services. The budget itself has been quite well protected and the level of funding is relatively high.

Education takes up the majority of our



*Workers will be crucial to 'Fair Deal' campaign*

budget, so whatever happens there will be a powerful lobby leaning on us, telling us to give whatever money there is to education: but there are competing needs, two of which are housing and social services.

**Do you wish you were able to set up a whole series of GLC-style specialist units for women, ethnic minorities and so on?**

No. There is no intention in Merton to go down that road. I certainly take on board all the questions of equal opportunities that are being raised, but I think we have to tell the management to implement these policies or

face the consequences. That way you can avoid setting up huge, expensive bureaucracies within your own authorities, which are not only costly, but often find it difficult to explain to people what they actually do.

In the GLC in the early 1980s, when money seemed unlimited, it may have seemed to make sense; but I don't think there is any justification for it in the current environment when housing is falling apart, social services collapsing around our ears, and we have high pupil-teacher ratios in the schools. These are the things that have to take priority. I think there is much more chance of involving all sections of the local community in an upfront campaign to defend services if you can demonstrate that those services are vital.

**You are mounting a campaign on the financial issue – Fair Deal for Merton. Is it a publicity gimmick?**

No. We want to get out to the public and explain the financial crisis, and that the Tories put us in this position. We must turn the fire onto central government.

The Fair Deal campaign as I see it is a vehicle through which we mobilise the public opposition to the Poll Tax and to what the Tories have done to Merton on the revenue support grant. We have to get back to some old-style on the stump campaigning rather than trying to cope with the crisis behind closed doors.

It's our only chance. If we don't campaign, people are going to blame everything on the new Labour council. We are already under fire from the right wing press: we need to win over the people who voted us into office in May. If we can get them on our side – which I

**Fighting back in Manchester**

**SHIRLEY MCCARDELL is one of a minority of Manchester councillors who have taken a position in the ruling Labour group of opposing cuts and implementation of the poll tax.**

**Eight candidates with this position stood in the May elections, seven of them declaring in their election material that they opposed further cuts and would not pay the poll tax, and that they would support others who could not or would not pay. Shirley was one of the successful candidates, and spoke to Socialist Outlook**

**Why was Labour Against The Cuts And Poll Tax (LACPT) formed?**

It was established in 1989 to protect the 1984 election manifesto which puts equal opportunities to the fore on all our policies, and to campaign for a return to a position of no further cuts by the local authority. It was

formed by the ex-chairs of the City Party.

Since the formation of LACPT we have been fighting inside the Labour group for our political perspective, discussing with comrades who share our stand, and speaking to groups of workers and Labour Party members whenever we have been invited.

**Did a clear anti-cuts, non-payment of poll tax position mean candidates fared differently in the May elections?**

My impression is that they fared slightly better, though it's difficult to prove from the figures, because there was a swing to Labour across the city. We had fewer party workers out than the candidates who support the council leadership, so it must have been the leaflets that made people go out and vote for us.

It was useful for people to know that there were Labour candidates making a stand for non-payment. In my area, the Greens were standing as they were across the city on a non-payment platform; but when they

realised I was for non-payment they didn't even put out a leaflet.

**What was the response from the City Party and the various CLPs?**

In some areas they tried very hard to stop us putting our point of view across; they threatened us with disciplinary action. We ignored this because we were making personal statements, not statements on behalf of the Labour Party in Manchester or the council leadership. Now some think they would like to have us thrown out of the party altogether, while others think they don't want to make us into martyrs.

The Labour group has removed us from any positions of responsibility, where we were chairs or deputies on committees. Now we are being removed from outside bodies, too, in case we spread dangerous propaganda!

LACPT will go on trying to bring the left together, and hopefully will become stronger now that people can see how far the Labour Party in Manchester has moved to the right.



think we can with a high-profile campaign – then we at least have a fighting chance.

I hope the unions will take an active part: obviously local government unions have a lot at stake in terms of jobs, especially if we get Poll Tax capped – and on current projections that seems a probability. The unions in Merton need to be brought together, and we hope that kind of alliance can be formed through the Fair Deal campaign.

We are going back to the old style, getting out there and having a go: it's not going to be a glossy PR-type campaign. It's going to be about getting people out on the streets, sending coachloads of protestors to lobby at the Department of the Environment, rather than the council leaders meeting with civil servants in private. We want hundreds of local tenants, pensioners' groups and ordinary people involved.

Some will see this as old-fashioned: but it's the only chance we've got of having a fight with this government. Some of the independents on the council may well support us, because they can see what has been done to Merton.

I'm also hoping that some other Labour boroughs facing similar problems will want to

fight alongside us on these issues and help us create a broad front against the government.

#### Has there been much anti-Poll Tax activity in the borough?

Not particularly strong. That kind of campaigning hasn't happened very often in Merton: there aren't the organisations with campaigning experience, it's just not that sort of area.

#### What of the Labour Party nationally? You were hardly inundated with help or even congratulations after you had won in May.

Part of the problem was that neither the Labour Party nor the Tories nationally took any notice at all of what was happening in the borough: then suddenly on May 4 everyone was running round trying to find out where we were. Roy Hattersley probably still hasn't found out.

I think the Party's obsession with Westminster and Wandsworth really played into the Tories' hands. With more campaign resources in Merton we could have won a much larger majority: and I think we could have seen victories in Hillingdon and Enfield, too.

There was a real contrast between the level of support from the London Party for the campaign in Merton and that in Wandsworth. We got on with the business – while all the help went elsewhere. We failed to win one seat by just three votes in Pollards Hill on a racist vote – we had an Asian candidate. Three votes is the kind of margin that could easily have been made up by a little extra push. I gather Hillingdon and Enfield had some similarly close results. Yet a friend of mine in Wandsworth who turned out to go knocking up at seven o'clock – the busiest time – was told they already had the whole patch covered, and was sent away.

I hope the Labour Party nationally will give us some support in the campaign, especially now that Tory MPs from obscure parts of the country are already asking questions in the Commons on Merton's finances. We gave the national leadership an opportunity to boast about a Labour gain in London after losing ground in the boroughs they had bragged they would win: we can't afford to allow the front bench to sit back and let the Tories attack us without a sturdy response.

## 'London voters back low poll tax' shock! Past retreats catch up on Labour

Everyone's talking about the 'London factor' in May's local elections. Labour won 300 seats across Britain, but London made a negative contribution, with a net loss of 20 seats. There was an overall swing to Labour in London of 5 per cent (half the national average). The Labour Party said that they would be launching an 'inquiry' into 'the London effect'.

David Blunkett stated that 'If local Labour Parties have not learned the right lessons we ought to be prepared to go in and help them get the right message across.'

Even Tony Banks MP hit out, arguing that councils must concentrate on 'bread and butter issues'.

Most of the talk of the 'London effect' is raised by right wingers looking to ditch policies they have long opposed. There is no longer any council that could really be called 'loony left

overspenders'. In the late 1970s and early 1980s London local authority spending dramatically increased, often through the flawed tactic of increasing the rates. Now with the Tory attacks biting, and the failure of the 'municipal socialists' to offer resistance, those days are long gone.

Thatcher has claimed that the results were a vindication of the principles of the poll tax: 'the community charge is beginning to work'. Yet the two highest chargers, Haringey with the highest Poll Tax of £572, and Lambeth with the second highest Poll Tax of £547, returned Labour majorities similar to those achieved in 1986.

Labour suffered its losses in the next band of poll tax levels. In Brent, the Tories played the racist card (as did the SLD in Tower Hamlets): Labour, which had made years of brutal cuts, lost overall control. Bryan Gould admitted that 'a sensible Labour leadership was unable to cope ...'.

Labour lost Ealing (poll tax £435) with a 6 per cent swing to the Tories. All sections of the Labour Party seemed surprised. Gould said that the result 'came as a shock ... it was a good council that deserved to win.' Even *Labour Briefing* was shocked because the Council had suffered 'no scandals' and 'had a good manifesto' (sic). But voters did not forget that Labour had raised the rates by a preposterous 65 per cent three years ago. The Tories had led a racist campaign against 'fringe groups', and their first act was to sack workers in the equalities units as a start to getting poll tax down to £370.

But what of Wandsworth? Its poll tax of £148 was clearly seen as a litmus test. There was a 7 per cent swing to the Tories and their majority was increased from one to 35. The £148 figure meant that local taxation fell by 28 per cent. £17 million was taken from reserves.

Without the fiddles, the poll tax might have been £432. A council spokesperson accepted

that the low poll tax was unsustainable. In Maidenhead and Berkshire, where the poll tax was £449, Tories complained that if they'd had as much help they would not have had to set a poll tax and would have given voters £200 each!

One local voter told the papers that he was 'basically' a Socialist but voted Tory because all Labour offered was a massive local tax.

In Westminster (poll tax – £195) there was a 7 per cent swing to the Tories and Labour lost 12 seats. Local taxation fell by 66 per cent. Voters were not attracted to paying for their principles.

New realist Labour has failed to challenge in action the class economics of the Town Hall. This is not so much a London effect as a credibility gap. Is it any wonder that people were not inspired to vote for Labour councillors who will raise the poll tax while offering no fight to defend and extend collective provision?

*Steve French*



# NALGO Left shows its strength

By Fred Leplat (Islington NALGO) and Carolyn Sikorski (Newham NALGO).

NALGO's first-ever general secretary election, held in April, resulted in a victory for deputy general secretary, right-wing Kinnockite Alan Jinkinson.

Jinkinson won 49 per cent of the vote. But the 23 per cent for Roger Bannister, a Militant supporter from Merseyside running on a 'broad left' ticket, showed the strength of the hard left in NALGO. Bannister's vote, with the 3.6 per cent for WRP supporter Chris Goody, gave the hard left over a quarter of the vote. The other candidate, soft left West Midlands district organiser Sid Platt, won 24 per cent.

Although elections are only ever a fleeting snapshot, the result says a lot about NALGO. Last year NALGO's half million local government workers staged their first-ever national pay strikes, which were highly successful.

In part the election result reflects the resulting militancy and new-found confidence. But the union remains much less polarised than, for example, the NUT. The union's leadership has been relatively successful, despite its tacit new realism, in maintaining a broad consensus around its just left-of-centre positions.

## Left policies accepted

One thing above all has enabled this stability to be maintained - local government white collar workers, the core of NALGO's membership, have not been so savagely attacked as other public sector workers.

Privatisation and compulsory competitive tendering have hit mainly manual workers. Employment among white collar workers has held up, although most remain very low paid. Thus the union has been able to maintain the jobs and living standards of most of its members without prolonged militant national action or confronting the anti-trade union laws. Most NALGO industrial action consists of dispersed local disputes.

The mechanism utilised by the union leadership to maintain its dominance has been largely to accept the adoption of left-wing policies on a range of political issues, while heading off moves towards militant industrial action, especially that which would involve

direct confrontation with the government.

Thus NALGO has equal opportunities policies that are among the most advanced in the trade union movement; it is affiliated to CND; and has a wide range of generally left-wing positions on international questions. Yet the union's bureaucracy headed off any serious action over rate-capping and the abolition of the Metropolitan authorities in the mid-1980s, a key factor in enabling these measures to go through.

## Poll Tax

Jim White, chair of the union's local government committee, successfully

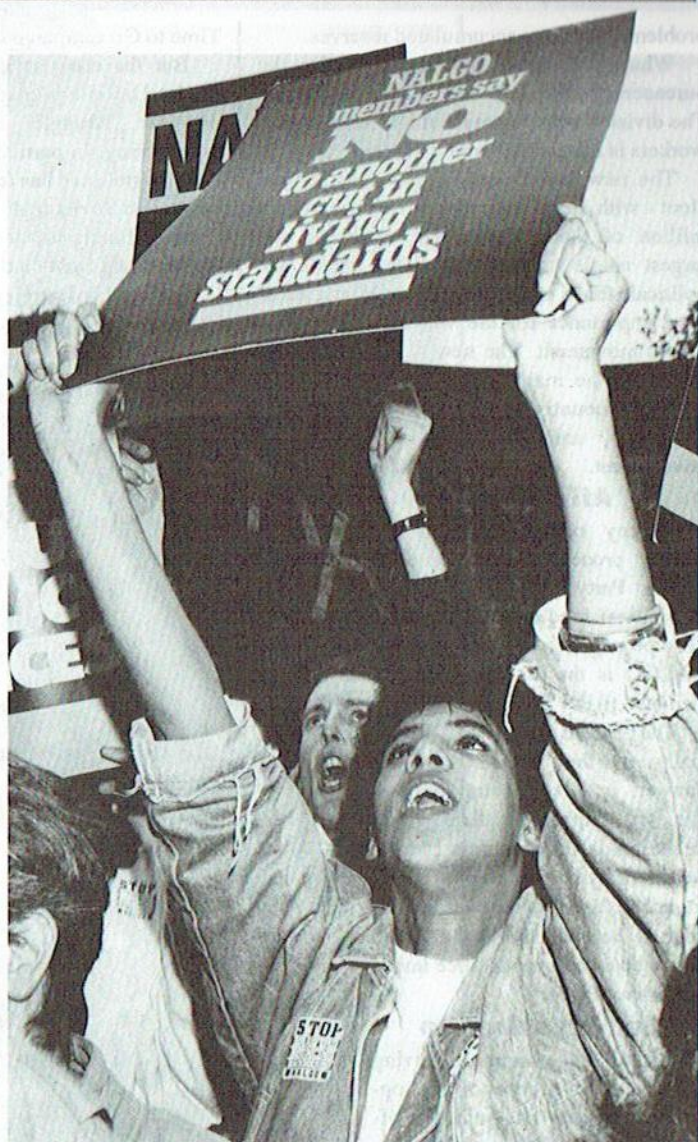
prevented the adoption of a non-implementation position on the poll tax at the 1989 conference. This will be a key issue at NALGO's Boumemouth conference in June.

Last year the union leadership just scraped a majority for a resolution that said that non-implementation should only be considered when a mass campaign of non-payment already existed. This year, it will be much less possible to use the same argument as millions of people are already not paying the tax.

The poll tax will be at the centre of the confrontation between the left and the union leadership at this year's conference. For NALGO, which has recruited thousands of new poll tax staff, and whose finance and housing department workers are deeply involved in carrying it out, is the one union that could knock the tax stone cold dead.

## Local government pay

NALGO's 1990 pay claim - a flat rate claim for £1500, an average of 14 per cent - will be a key battle in this year's pay round. The local government employers seem unlikely to offer more than 8 per cent, well below



John Harris/Report

*Industrial Action over this year's pay claim likely*

the rate of inflation. This would almost certainly trigger a national strike ballot.

However the employers will be much more organised and prepared than in 1989 and national strike action could turn into a long slog. The NALGO leadership's tactic of selective strike action could prove much less effective than last year. Militants in the union have to organise for an all-out strike, as the most effective way to win.

## A mega-union?

For more than two years NALGO has been discussing merger with the manual workers public sector union NUPE - a process which the health service union COHSE joined in last year. Without doubt, the drive for merger is motivated by bureaucratic self-interest.

The trend is towards the creation of half a dozen 'super unions' through mergers. The NALGO, NUPE and COHSE leaderships are protecting themselves from predators like John Edmonds' GMB through this merger. Financial considerations play an important role; NUPE, whose membership has declined much faster than NALGO's, is in dire financial straits. NALGO, despite temporary



problems, has huge accumulated reserves.

Whatever the motivation of the bureaucracy, the left also supports merger. The division between manual and white collar workers is increasingly redundant.

The new union could wield considerable clout - with 1.6 million members (more than a million of them women) it would be the largest single union in the TUC. Thus the political stance of this new union would be of vital importance for the whole future of the labour movement. The new union would be the major union in the NHS (the country's biggest single employer), and dominate local government.

**Affiliation**

A key complication in the merger process is the issue of Labour Party affiliation. Despite its political fund and explicit anti-Tory propaganda at election times, NALGO is the largest union not affiliated to the TUC.

The NUPE leadership, especially in the person of Tom Sawyer, is a key component of Kinnock's right-wing flank guard in the union bureaucracy. Merger would likely be followed by a ballot in the fused union over affiliation; if carried, the fused union would be an enormous force inside the Labour Party.

**Self-organisation**

NALGO is unique in having self-organised groups of the oppressed formally recognised as official structures. Thus it has an active and dynamic black members' group, and national steering committees representing women, lesbians and gay men, and people with disabilities.

However, there has been a long fight on the issue of the autonomy of these groups, ending with a stalemate at the 1989 conference at which no position was passed. The issue has come to a head particularly over the right of the Black members group to decide its own structure. Again at this year's conference there will be an enormous set-piece battle on this.

The same issue of autonomy is involved in the refusal of NALGO's executive to agree to the right of NALGO's women's conference to submit motions directly to national conference.

**International issues**

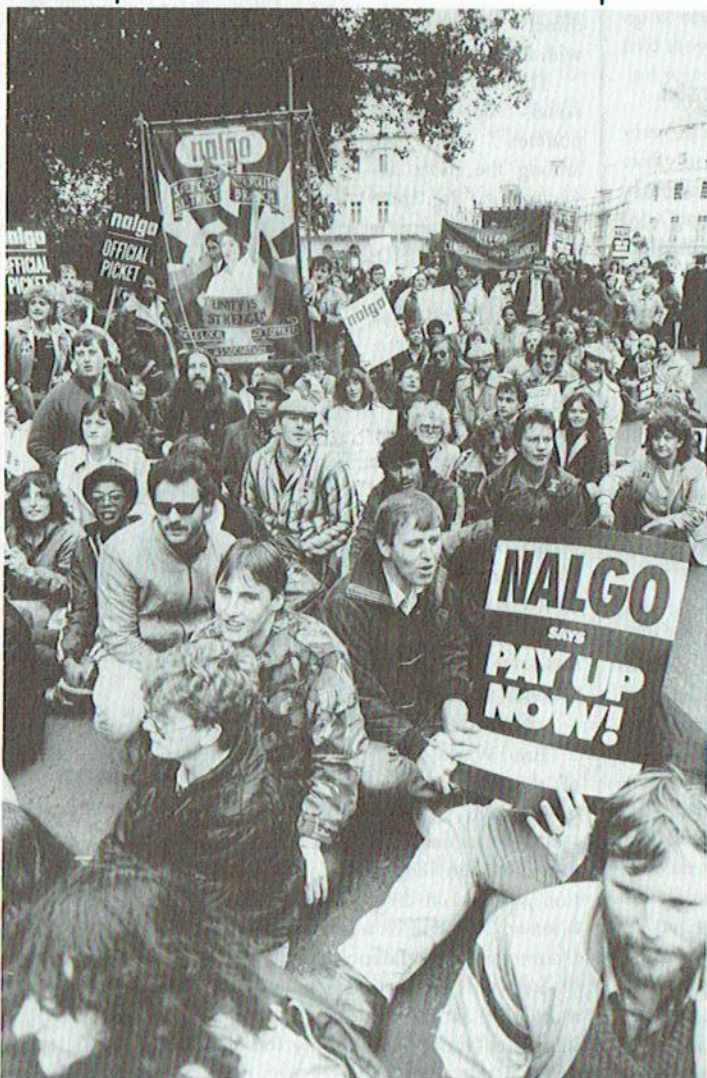
Despite the influence of the *Morning Star* Stalinists on international policy, NALGO has throughout the 1980s supported both the revolution in Central America and Solidarnosc in Poland. Last year the union adopted, against the advice of the platform, support for the

Time to Go campaign on Ireland.

But the crisis in eastern Europe and the Soviet Union has made the executive waver on the struggle against the stalinist bureaucracy. In particular the union's international committee has refused to support the independent Soviet trade union *Sotsprof* because 'the situation is not clear'. There is likely to be an important fight on this issue.

**Politicisation of NALGO**

Overall, despite the holding-operation car-



ried out by the leadership of the union, the long-term trend in NALGO is towards a sharpening polarisation and a more politicised union. The Tory anti-union laws imposed an election for general secretary on NALGO, one deeply resented by the bureaucracy.

Open elections are bound to help deepen politicisation. Merger with unions affiliated to the Labour Party will also inevitably mean a more political union. Above all, the situation facing local government workers inevitably will sharpen political conflicts.

While many NALGO branches have been able to defend their members' employment and conditions through local skirmishes and manoeuvres, this is unlikely to last. Poll tax capping is likely to result in the first wide-

ranging redundancies among white collar local government workers. The poll tax is thus a dagger aimed not only at local services, but at employment in local government as well.

**Strings**

Last year the local government employers tried to impose flexible working and local pay bargaining as part of the pay deal. Outrage at the 'strings' was part of the reason for the huge support for the strike action.

The employers have a long-term strategy aimed at undermining national pay bargaining and conditions. The NALGO leadership is starting to preach 'realism' on these issues. Concessions on these questions will lead to a major battle in the union.

Thus the NALGO leadership's policy of manoeuvres and negotiations will run out of steam: the polarisation in the union between those who want to fight, and the leadership that does not, will deepen.

**Left must organise**

The lack of a sharp political polarisation reflects itself in the absence of stable left wing organisation. The influential *Morning Star* supporters do not want left organisation; they prefer to maintain their influence through being the useful left cover and ornament of the bureaucracy. They supported the right-wing candidate, Alan Jinkinson, in the general secretary election.

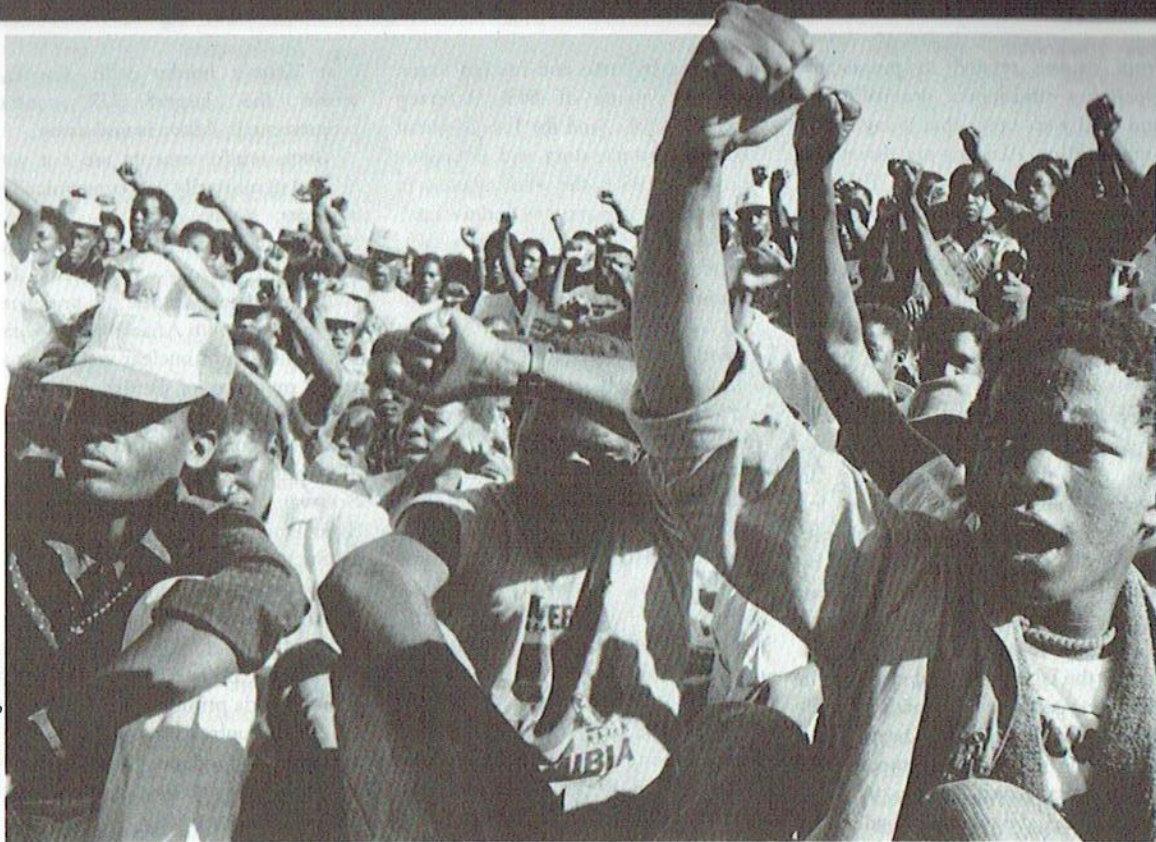
Both *Militant* and the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) have substantial numbers of supporters in the union. But successive attempts to build a functioning Broad Left had foundered on their sectarianism. *Militant* want a broad left which is a *Militant* front; the SWP is only interested in its own recruitment and propaganda.

Nevertheless the left forces in NALGO go way beyond these two currents; as the polarisation in the union deepens, the political basis for an on-going left current will emerge. The new journal *NALGO Action*, which has the backing of 30 branches, is attempting to reach out to all those on the left through information and debate on the union's strategy. This will be especially important when the merger with NUPE and COHSE goes through.

As the dominant union in local government and the NHS, the new union will be a critical component of the working class movement. Building a united and fighting class struggle co-ordination in NALGO is a key task in the fight to renovate the labour movement and defeat new realism.



John Liebenberg/NCCT



Without coherent political leadership workers in Namibia have little to celebrate

## The lost goal of a socialist Africa

by Ben Campbell

Social crises in sub-Saharan Africa have never been so acute. Under the impact of war, famine, rampant despotism, collapse of health and other public services, unemployment and falling production and trade, hundreds of thousands of people are being systematically killed.

As in the late 1920s, the most acute symptoms of deep economic depression have appeared first on the periphery of world capitalism. Yet, with the exception of South Africa, black Africa is perhaps the most neglected area of international socialist analysis. Apart from a few small circles of marxists in African cities and in exile, serious political analysis and debate on Africa's crisis has been left to 'development experts', aid agencies and bankers.

### Capitalist decay

Africa is the only continent where per capita output has declined consistently throughout the last decade, according to the World Bank. Although

there are great variations and enormous inequalities within African states, average income for each African is now over 50 times lower than the average for people in the OECD countries. Over the same period, Africa's debt has been the fastest growing in the world. (See Table 1) Historical structures of primary commodity export dependence have combined with a slump in world commodity prices and Reagan's deficit finance mini-boom during the 1980s (See Table 2). Africa's total debt is now over 80 per cent of the continent's entire production, and averages 300 per cent of its annual export earnings.

Africa's debt does not directly threaten the international capitalist banking system to the same extent as that of Latin America. This is partly because it is much lower in absolute terms, but also because most of it is not owed to private banks but to states. Nevertheless, in 1988-9 the leading imperialist states, including Britain, made highly publicised

moves to alleviate Africa's debt after the reschedulings of 1986-7 made little difference. But the moves resulted in only 1.6 per cent of the debt being cancelled. More likely, the moves were a ploy designed to establish direct IMF/World Bank control of African state economic management.

So far, 30 African governments have adopted IMF austerity 'Structural Adjustment Programmes', driving down living standards and privatising nationalised property. Contrary to World Bank assertions, these measures achieved no discernable rise in growth. To add insult to injury, for the last four years African countries have paid back *more* to the IMF than they received in loans. Rates of capital investment have fallen and public services have been slashed.

Some 10,000 children in Africa now die each day of causes linked to malnutrition and the non-availability of rudimentary healthcare, according to UNICEF. Each year 150,000 women in sub-Saharan Africa die

**"Africa's total debt is now over 80 per cent of the continent's entire production, and averages 300 per cent of its annual export earnings."**



**“militaristic Soviet aid programmes to Africa were cut in line with the declining Soviet economy. Only Angola and Ethiopia still receive substantial Soviet aid, and this is destined to end in 1991.”**

from causes related to pregnancy. Declining rural inputs, desertification and civil wars mean that today nearly eight million Africans are threatened with famine, mostly in Ethiopia (potentially worse than 1984-5), Sudan, Mozambique, Angola and Ruanda. Yet the FAO forecasts a global shortfall of food aid in 1990 and a drop in shipments to 17 African countries currently requesting emergency aid.

**Spontaneous revolts**

Falling living standards, corruption and lack of democracy in Africa's one party states have led since late last year to mass revolts across the continent. Spurred on by radio news of events in Eastern Europe, and then by Nelson Mandela's release in South Africa and by the UN supervised elections in Namibia, sections of workers, intellectuals and students have been demanding multi-party democracy in Zaire, Ivory Coast, Gabon, Algeria, Benin, Mali, Niger and Chad. Skirmishes have occurred in Somalia, Tanzania, the Central African Republic, Guinea and Cape Verde.

In most cases, dictatorial rulers at the head of neo-colonial states have tried to seek an accommodation with opposition leaders or groups, but their link to the masses is extremely tenuous. Only the absence of viable political party alternatives and the presence of troops on the streets and campuses has prevented leaders being overthrown. With client trade unions

corrupted by state and foreign union aid, an average of 54% illiteracy amongst adults, and the loss of about 70,000 administrators and managers during the 1980s, the working class in Africa has few resources to draw on.

Soviet influence in Africa was waning long before Gorbachev's reforms. Disillusioned after supporting 'friendly' tyrants like Idi Amin in Uganda and Bokassa of the Central African Republic, militaristic Soviet aid programmes to Africa were cut in line with the declining Soviet economy. Only Angola and Ethiopia still receive substantial Soviet aid, and this is destined to end in 1991. With an eye to Western donors, 'Marxist-Leninist' rhetoric has been dropped by ruling parties in Benin, Mozambique, Ethiopia and Congo.

Imperialist troops re-establish a presence

With the 50,000 Cuban troops now leaving Angola, imperialist diplomacy in Africa is the only one backed up by the threat of military action. Apart from French troops in Senegal, Djibouti, Ivory Coast, Gabon and the Comoros, a crack unit of 1,300 troops from the US Special Forces Group, or Green Berets, is to be reactivated in June explicitly to counter insurgency in Africa. Already Green Beret training teams have served in Nigeria, Zaire, Burkino Faso, Kenya and Tanzania, and Zaire is targetted as the main US logistical base. In April, 700 US troops were reported to be holding manoeuvres

near Zaire's border with Angola, where the largest US contra programme in Africa is underway.

Such reinforcements are not yet needed in militarily and economically stronger states such as Nigeria, Kenya and Zimbabwe where dissent has been quickly repressed. In southern Africa, despite the presence of the large South African army, with its acquisition of nuclear weaponry, a small presence of British army officers is now deployed in a belt across the continent from Namibia to Mozambique, including Zimbabwe, Botswana, Malawi, Lesotho and Swaziland.

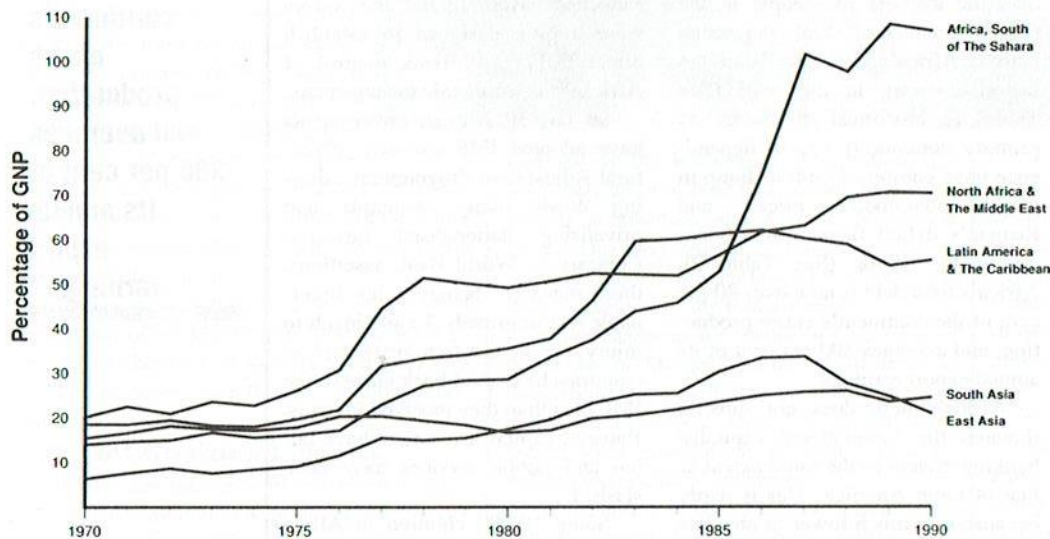
Such manoeuvres throw into sharp relief the question of imperialist plans for South Africa as a regional power. Using Zaire, the American CIA has had to take over from Pretoria prime responsibility for the Unita contras in Angola. Britain is anxious to moderate South Africa's devastating destabilisation of its front line states, especially Mozambique because its ports service most of the neighbouring states. A special role for South Africa as the regional policeman of south-central Africa is sought, but is not yet possible politically.

**No socialist response in advanced capitalism**

In the aftermath of the 1960s' flirtation with African socialism, cynicism and doubt has set in. Labour Party members, West European socialists, independent marxists and stalinists are confused about what to do. The burgeoning charity industry, with its Victorian appeal, is setting the pace with fun runs and sympathy, playing on the fears and hopes of middle class layers and youth who see the 'global village' cracking. Workers are distrustful of the new philanthropists but uninformed of the issues. 'War on Want' tried to base itself on the labour movement bureaucracy, and ended up bankrupt.

Undoubtedly, European chauvinism and racism is a major cause of the disarray. It is common to find socialists in Britain (rather, 'British' socialists) who never relate the defeat of modern racism to the social liberation of Africa. For them, equal opportunities policies, originally the stuff of the US army in Korea, have become a bureaucratic end in themselves. The actual historical material causes of racism are either not addressed, or are clouded in a 'little England' mentality.

**Rising Debt Ratios**



**Debt as a Percentage of GNP by Region 1970-1990**

Note: 1990 figures are based on World Bank projections.

Source: World Bank (World Debt Tables 1988-89)

Published by the UN Department of Public Information

September 1989

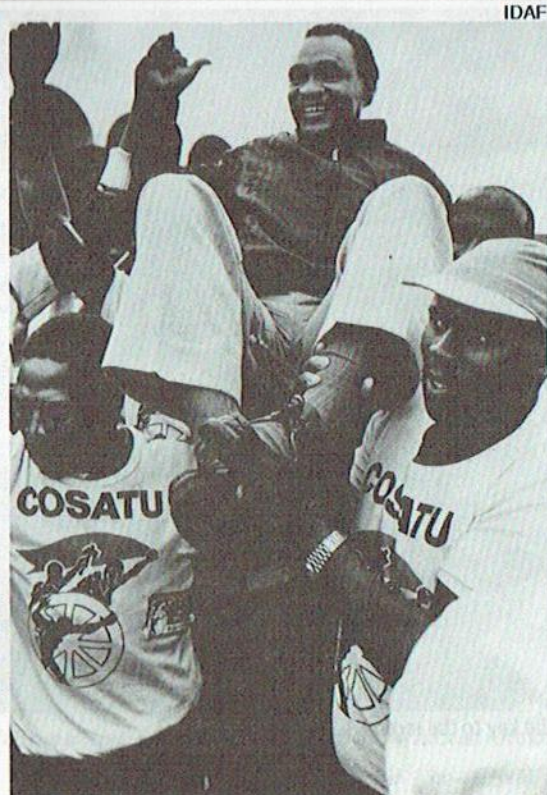


When international solidarity with Africa is ever discussed, socialists are usually deeply divided, but on a subject they know too little about. Who knows, for example, that a constellation of British military training teams now stretched across southern Africa from the Indian to the Atlantic Oceans? Or that the British trade unions, along with the German, US, Canadian and Nordic unions, are the main funders of southern African trade unions? Such issues hardly ever come up on labour movement agendas. British unionists don't ask their leaders to account for how their dues are spent abroad. The Labour Party's 'international' policy debate is a Eurocentric sham and its second Socialist International is a caricature of solidarity.

The left have by and large replicated, rather than challenged, the political bankruptcy of the labour movement over Africa. Look in vain through *Marxism Today* or other left publications for a vision which sees how socialist revolution in Africa is possible. At its last conference, leading lights in the Review of African Political Economy, showed a new despair over the simplistic, autarchic (Castroite) solutions that they themselves advocated throughout the late 1970s and 80s. Although few now believe in Ujamaa villages, most are still wedded to varieties of the neo-marxist school of dependency theory. They have either posed the question of socialism in Africa as a simple country-specific task, usually in populist-reformist terms, or haven't posed it at all.

**The marxist approach**

One of the only theorists to write seriously about revolutionary prospects in southern Africa as a whole, namely Alex Callinicos of the British Socialist Workers Party, has now limited himself purely to the study of domestic processes in South Africa (see *'South Africa between Reform and Revolution'*, Bookmarks, 1990). At a time when it is possible that an ANC government in South Africa might soon sit at the head of vital purse strings for workers and peasants from the Cunene River, the Zairian/Zambian copperbelt and Lake Malawi in the north, to the Cape Peninsula in the South, this is irresponsible. In neglecting the regional



Workers across Southern Africa must unite

dimensions, Callinicos slips back into the thinking of a long line of white South African socialists, whose chauvinism has rubbed off on African nationalists.

When Trotsky received copies of the draft theses of South Africa's incipient Left Opposition in 1935, he concluded his written reply by stressing the importance of 'a Soviet South Africa' to 'the whole black continent'. And, at the end of his meeting two years earlier with US Left Oppositionists concerning 'the Negro question', he pointed out that the central problem of real colonial liberation in Africa was the lack of support from workers in Europe.

Though much has changed, these general guidelines retain their urgent relevance for socialist revolutionaries today; yet they are only the starting point for analysing material conditions and specifying concrete tasks. Trotsky admitted that he

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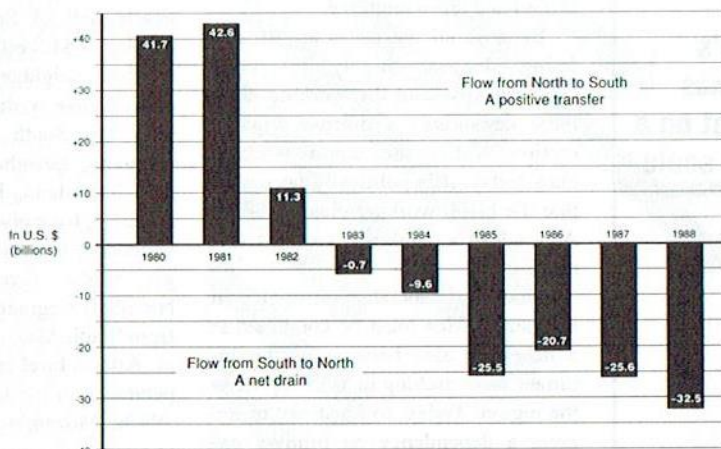
was 'too insufficiently acquainted with the conditions in South Africa' to provide 'a full conclusive opinion on a series of practical questions'. Certainly, his vision was couched in terms of some of the backward cultural notions of the 1930s: 'To help the negroes to catch up to the white race, in order to ascend hand in hand with them to new cultural heights, this [proletarian mutual co-operation between black and white in Africa] will be one of the grand and noble tasks of a victorious socialism.'

Clearly, much work remains to be done. In the absence of strong support from the workers' movement in the imperialist countries, the relatively small and impoverished working class in Africa will have grave difficulties in leading the masses to socialist liberation.

Faced with ruthless state repression, African worker leaders and socialists require support of a special kind. This complex problem should be discussed urgently. *Campaigns in the imperialist countries against racism, the IMF/World Bank debt regime, primary commodity price reductions, military collaboration and in favour of immediate cancellation of all Africa's debt, democratic trade union internationalism, respect for human rights, ecological renewal and international African representation must begin now. Most of all, support for a democratic socialist South Africa is essential.*

**"the left have by and large replicated, rather than challenged, the political bankruptcy of the labour movement over Africa"**

**Reversing Financial Flows**



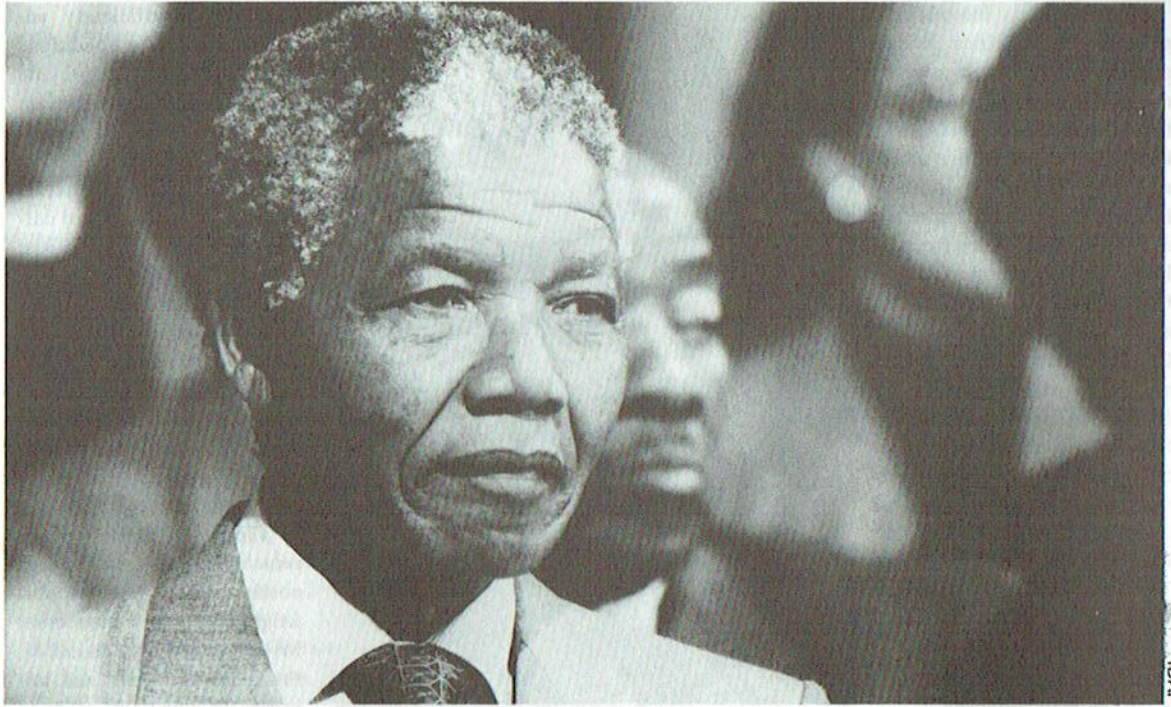
**Developing Nations: Net Transfer of Resources 1980-1988**

Sample of 98 nations - covers private direct investment, private loans, official flows.

Source: UN World Economic Survey 1989

Published by the UN Department of Public Information September 1989





The future of South Africa holds the key to the region

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## Southern key to the region

**“Setting off on the road to bourgeois democracy, an ANC government will end up having to carry out the dirty jobs of capitalist logic just as Mugabe’s regime has done, but on a grander scale.”**

Despite its smaller population of 29 million, South Africa’s medium-sized capitalist economy, with a GDP of \$76 billion, towers over that of the ten surrounding states.

Combined, the ten’s 90 million people only produce a GDP of \$26 billion. South Africa’s racially divided working class of about 7 million is largely industrial, whereas the 4 million black workers in the ten surrounding states are generally less skilled and more scattered.

Because all the states are, to differing degrees, highly integrated economically, and the working class there constitutes a discreet organic section within the world working class today, it is politically necessary that the black working class in South Africa lead a combined socialist victory.

That the socialist struggle in southern Africa must be combined is a necessity also because of the intimate, over-arching links of capital in the region. Today, to break out of too great a dependence on primary exports and low productivity, South African monopoly capital must gain significantly greater access to the

African market, both at home and abroad. The regime claims to do business in 44 African countries. Figures show South African investment in the surrounding region to have risen by 23 per cent between 1985 and 1988, and exports to Africa have risen from around \$1 billion in the mid 1980s to around \$5 billion by early 1990. The ten surrounding states, grouped into the Southern African Development Conference (SADCC), bought over 20 per cent of South Africa’s non-gold exports, and were the source of nearly half of South Africa’s trade surplus of \$1.3 billion.

Each neighbouring state does of course have a different relationship with the South African state and economy. Lesotho in particular, but also Swaziland, Botswana and now Namibia, have always been extremely dependent because of transport, energy, trade, investment and (bar Namibia) migrant labour remittances from South Africa.

After a brief spell of greater independence in the late 1970s and early 1980s, Mozambique has succumbed to apartheid terror and become highly integrated in a similar manner. Since 1967, Malawi’s regime has been a willing client of Pretoria. Zimbabwe

and Zambia are less dependent, but still have substantial ties with the apartheid economy. Only Tanzania and Angola have insignificant links, but their diamond mines are in the hands of de Beers.

### Federation of democratic workers’ states

Given the likely prospect of an eventual co-option of the South African nationalist movement, especially the ANC, into government structures within the next decade, albeit not without enormous social upheaval, a community of interests amongst the states in the region to preserve and develop the existing capitalist economy is most likely to emerge.

Already the ANC has fraternal relations with almost all regimes in the region, and the ten SADCC states have invited a ‘liberated’ South Africa to become an automatic member. This is extremely attractive to the South African bourgeoisie, because they also see SADCC as a means to secure massive foreign finance. The price the imperialists will ask for this will be to police the region, especially in fragile Mozambique and Angola.

The prospect of capitalist restructuring under an expansionist South

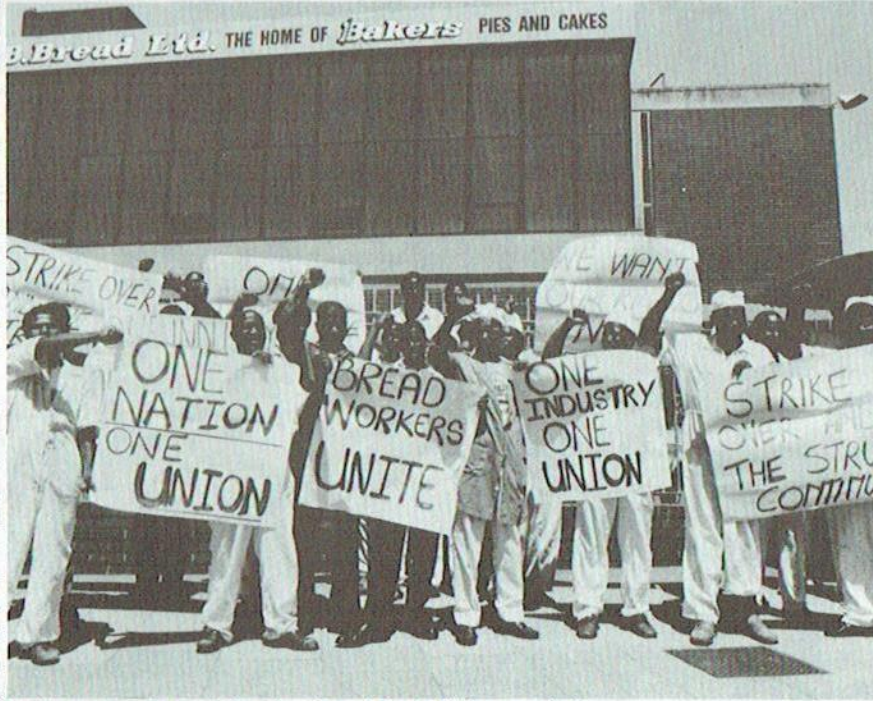


African state will be resisted by workers everywhere in the region who look to a socialist liberation as their emancipation. Following independence, the surrounding states drove down the living standards of workers in all but the most strategic sectors of the economy and bought off the union officials, enlisting them to police any organised workers.

To carry out the project of South Africa's giant monopolies like Anglo-American and SANLAM, an ANC government would have to discipline the working class in South Africa for Japanisation and line up neighbouring governments for preferential access on the most labour-repressive terms. Only in this way could it compete with US, German, Japanese and British capital.

Southern African workers must unite. Failure to do so will invite an extended period of existing poverty, unemployment, homelessness and ill-health. Independence and 'liberation' for them has been a sick undemocratic joke with marginal advances. So far very little regional organising has been done. The increased number of South African union leaders joining the 'two revolution' SA Communist Party will only prevent any such development, because of the SACP's allegiance to the ANC leadership's nationalist project and its vision of building socialism in one country. Setting off on the road to bourgeois democracy, an ANC government will end up having to carry out the dirty jobs of capitalist logic just as Mugabe's 'Marxist-Leninist' regime has done, but on a grander scale.

Revolutionary socialists understand that the national democratic tasks of the South African revolution can only be realistically undertaken through the establishment of a democratic workers' state as part of an international dynamic towards world revolution. Such has been proven by the historical experience of the working class in different parts of the periphery of world capitalism. In the concrete conditions of southern Africa, only the achievement of a southern African federation of democratic workers' states will fulfil the needs of the working class in the region.



Workers struggle crucial to direction of South African revolution

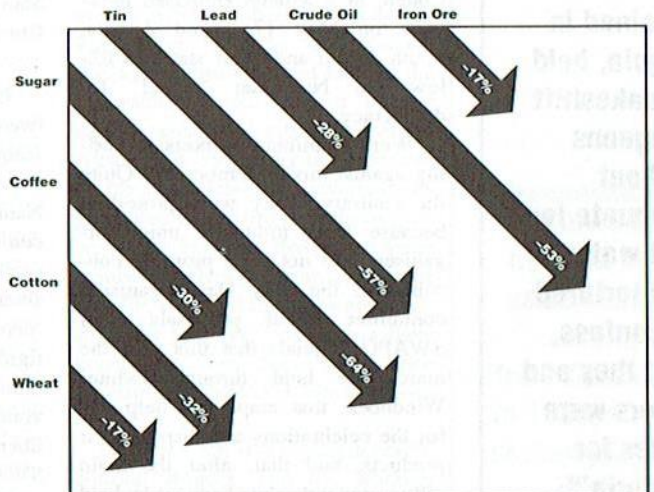
At present, socialists in imperialist countries like Britain, with close ties to South Africa as well as the left in South Africa, have still to address this strategic question in any detail and develop the necessary campaigns and other tactics to go forward. The anti-apartheid movement and other small solidarity groups in Britain, Western Europe and North America have some limited scope for such discussion, but will prevent any concerted action to combine campaigns on Africa with those on South Africa. It is necessary to create space in the socialist movement to clarify and renew internationalism.

Unlike Britain, socialists in southern Africa will be able to draw upon a common sentiment amongst hundreds of thousands of politicised workers. This was expressed by Jay Naidoo, the general secretary of COSATU, in a recent interview: "One has to accept that South Africa is part of a sub-continent and that the wealth of South Africa has been built not just by South African workers, but by workers from our (sic) neighbouring states as well...South Africa has a very important role in uplifting the standards of living not just of the South African people, but of the people of the entire region and in Africa as a whole."

To lead and strengthen such forces in revolutionary action in the sub-continent

will only be successful if workers at the centres of advanced capitalism, particularly Britain, are drawn into active support and collaboration. Going to fun concerts and buying nebulous Mandela regalia is not enough. The labour movement must vigorously oppose imperialist catastrophe in Africa and shift resources to socialists in popular democratic structures there, especially in southern Africa. Anything less will condemn socialists in South Africa to go the way of isolated Nicaragua. And events are now moving more quickly than ever.

Plunging Prices



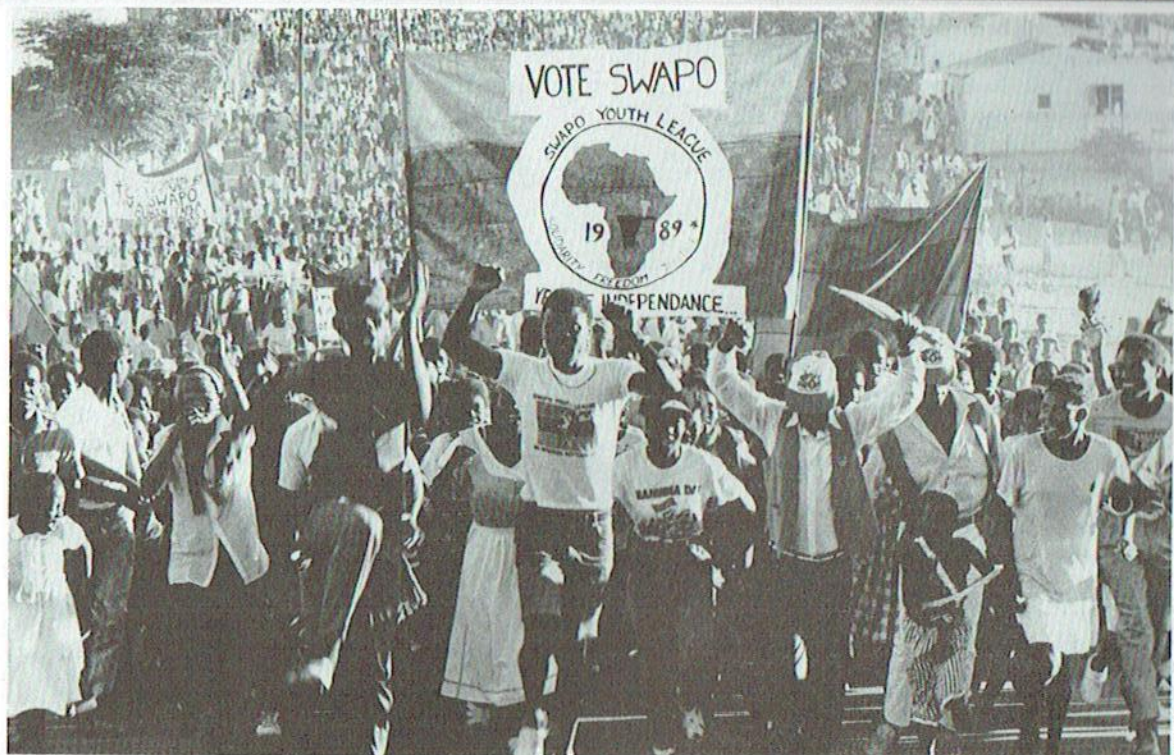
Drop in Real Prices of Selected Commodities 1980-1988

Prices of primary commodities fell an average of 18 per cent in this period.

Source: UNCTAD Handbook of International Trade and Development Statistics 1988

Published by the UN Department of Public Information September 1989





Namibian workers are beginning to develop their own trade union organisation

## Namibia: a 'model' democracy for Africa?

by Leslie Gould

Despite May Day being a public holiday and the first chance for Namibian workers to celebrate their country's independence after 105 years of brutal German and South African colonialism, most workers boycotted the officially-organised event.

In contrast, the US assistant secretary of state for Africa, Herman Cohen, in a widely-publicised interview on May 17, urged Angola, South Africa and other states to follow the Namibian 'model' for democracy.

Were Namibian workers protesting against model democracy? Quite the contrary. They were protesting because their industrial union organisers had not been properly consulted in the May Day organising committee about proposals from SWAPO officials that this year the march be held through 'white' Windhoek, that employers help pay for the celebrations and display their products, and that, after the main rally, a separate state banquet be held for overseas guests and VIPs.

Even before the event, union

leaders had insisted that employers and the state keep their hands off May Day. They wanted workers to organise their own day as had become the practice under the last years of colonial occupation. So, despite over 15,000 SWAPO-affiliated unionised workers in the capital's Katutura township, only 600 went on the march, and only 2,000 went to the stadium to hear SWAPO President, Sam Nujoma, and Labour Minister, Chief Witbooi.

### Stalinist theory

One of the great dogmas of the twentieth century, derived from Joseph Stalin and the Russian Mensheviks, is that colonial countries like Namibia must go through a 'national democratic' revolution divorced from socialism, and that socialist tasks should not be on the agenda until 'democracy' is fully established. This rigid mechanical formula has been rammed down the throats of every young activist in the southern African liberation movements, including SWAPO, for the past thirty years.

Stalinist political culture was most severe amongst SWAPO's exiled leadership in Angola and Zambia, a

section of which, throughout the 1980s in the remote war zones of southern Angola used a tribal 'securitate' to purge young militants and dissenters who questioned their decisions. At least 1,500 SWAPO members were detained in Angola, held in makeshift dungeons without adequate food and water, and tortured to confess that they and others were 'spies for Pretoria'.

Since the UN-supervised return of exiles last year, it has been confirmed that at least 120 detainees were killed by the SWAPO security branch, and 263 are officially still missing, but these UN figures are believed to be gross underestimates.

Younger SWAPO activists and union militants inside Namibia were less tightly controlled and more influenced by the politics of COSATU in South Africa. At the May Day rally, the pro-SWAPO President of the National Union of Namibian Workers (NUNW), John Shaetonhodi, said that 'The workers of Namibia would like their future to be free of exploitation, free of exploitative capitalism'. He said 'We don't want our economy to be under the

**"At least 1,500 SWAPO members were detained in Angola, held in makeshift dungeons without adequate food and water, and tortured to confess that they and others were 'spies for Pretoria'"**



control of market forces'. He urged workers in Namibia to 'pool their efforts with other working people in the world, particularly in Africa', and increase their union strength and activities 'as well as in effective management of our industries'.

These perspectives have emerged from two decades of militant worker struggle, and from building a democratic union movement along COSATU lines. Although, the small working class in Namibia is less than 200,000 permanently employed out of a population of 1.6 million, and is scattered over a vast arid territory the

size of Britain and France put together, NUNW membership is today approaching 50% of the paid workforce. The newest NUNW union, the Domestic and Allied Workers Union, has an all-woman executive.

**Power of workers**

From virtual slavery under a tribally-segregated contract labour system, and suffering a 90% white monopoly of recognised skills, workers in Namibia have asserted considerable power during the 1970s and 1980s through mass stayaways, strikes, consumer boycotts and other means.

Their persistent support of SWAPO was the main reason Pretoria could not impose its 'internal settlement' client regime on the colony. Part of their success rests on a vibrant working class youth movement, especially the Namibia National Students Organisation (NANSO) which has 105 branches and covers virtually every secondary school in the country. Now the returned SWAPO leaders are demanding simply 'patience' and 'discipline'.

As part of the Gorbachev 'new realism', the US and Soviet Union brokered a deal signed in December 1988 for South Africa to end its 75-year occupation of Namibia, in exchange for a phased pull-out of 50,000 Cuban troops from Angola. After allowing the premeditated massacre of over 300 SWAPO combatants by South African counter-insurgency forces in April last year, the

UN monitoring force managed to stage 'free and fair' elections to a Namibian constituent assembly in November.

SWAPO won a majority, but because of South African slush money, voter registration distortions and the impact of the SWAPO detainee issue, the nationalist movement ended 7 seats short of the two-thirds required under the Western power independence plan to approve the constitution.

**No right to strike**

The Assembly is said to have



South African troops in Northern Namibia

complex task than sloganeering euro-marxists believe.

The crippling legacy of colonialism has left over 30% unemployed, high rates of malnutrition, over 60% absolute illiteracy, a heavy reliance on imported foodstuffs, a grossly unequal distribution of income, enormous land hunger and a vast drain abroad of Namibia's locally produced wealth. 150,000 Namibians are in drought affected areas and dependent on food aid. How can the colonial economy, which has been highly integrated into the South African economy, be

restructured to meet popular needs and still attract foreign capital?

Namibia's roads, railways, telecommunications and electricity lines are linked to South Africa, and the country's only trading port, Walvis Bay, remains occupied by the colonial power.

90% of imports are derived from or routed via South Africa. Pretoria has also left the Windhoek administration with a \$200m budget deficit and a \$300 million debt. Sensitive talks are now underway to decide who will finance these. Namibia has international law on its side, but will probably decide that alienating the bankers and Pretoria's hawks is not worth it.

**Whites stay on**

The 78,000 white Namibians - mostly Afrikaans and German speaking settlers - have monopolised skills, local business and 80% of the cultivatable land. Worried by the rapidly changing events in South Africa, and buoyed by the overtures of the new Namibian government's guarantee of existing private property, whites have not fled in the same numbers as they did from Zimbabwe in 1980, so few skilled jobs are available. So far, very few farms have been put up for sale since November's SWAPO election victory.

With the war still raging in neighbouring Angola, and the working class in Namibia left in relative isolation, there is little room for manoeuvre. The new government

**"The whole constitution was drawn up and debated in a secret committee, and the technical drafting done by three South African lawyers"**

**"whites have not fled in the same numbers as they did from Zimbabwe in 1980, so few skilled jobs are available"**





*Despite Namibian Independence – still held by South Africa*

hopes to both redress injustices against the black majority, and to ensure economic growth in a continent starved of capital inflows, by promoting a 'mixed' economy, rather than the nationalization which SWAPO had threatened in the 1970s. While this has boosted business confidence - during 1989, a total of 584 new companies were registered in Namibia, compared to 276 in the previous year - little has been offered to workers.

Many South African firms are re-registering under Namibian names and there are few overseas multinationals among them. The overall economic slowdown experienced by Namibia during the 1980s, during which the real level of GDP dropped, might be reversed temporarily, but at the expense of the working class.

The whole economy is dominated by three foreign mining companies. Contributing 72% of all Namibia's foreign exchange earnings, mining accounts for 28% of GDP. Other major components are fishing and capitalist agriculture racially dominated by 5,000 white ranchers. Already, a government minister has said that farmworkers don't need a statutory minimum wage and many firms have continued victimising union members without official redress.

**Absentee landlords**

Under this economic system, hope for Namibia's wage-dependent peasantry is also bleak. It is estimated that 40% of white ranches are owned by absentee landlords and these are the target of the new government's Zimbabwe-style land reform plans. But such land is arid and will not support tens of thousands of peasant arable farmers resettled from the overcrowded north in addition to the

landless peasants already near the ranches and the workers employed on them.

The government also wants to develop commercial peasant agriculture to transform subsistence farming in the north, on which over a third of Namibia's

adult population depends. Such schemes require massive foreign aid and, unless carried out on the basis of social ownership, will merely produce a rich Kulak layer and more landlessness.

There is no doubt that, in the absence of a working class alternative, the small black Namibian petty bourgeois, as well as middle class layers, will try to begin a major process of capitalist accumulation - as has occurred in Zimbabwe and other former white settler colonies. Current indications are that Namibia might receive about \$300 million in foreign aid when the international donors' conference for Namibia is held in New York during the last week of June. The World Bank is helping draw up over 300 new projects. The new government intends introducing a new liberal investment code.

**Export of capital**

This strategy entails grave dangers for workers in Namibia. To reverse the 50% drop in real gross domestic fixed investment experienced between 1979 and 1987, the export of capital to South Africa must be stopped. But, to attract any foreign investment, the new government must retain, for the time being, Namibia's membership of the Rand Monetary Area and the Southern Africa Customs Union.

Dr Otto Herrigel, the Swiss trained Finance Minister, has already invited the International Monetary Fund to help create Namibia's own central bank. Even then, Namibia has insufficient foreign exchange reserves and fiscal stability, and financial power will remain with the South African government and its Reserve Bank. Herein lies the heart of 'model'

democracy.

The only way out for workers in Namibia is to link their struggle with socialist forces in South Africa and through the region. But, even then, the workers' movement desperately needs support in the US and Britain in particular. British companies are the most numerous in Namibia after those registered in South Africa and the British army has been called in to 'integrate' SWAPO's army with the colonial forces as in Zimbabwe. Some links have been established between British and Namibian trade unions, but these are mostly at the bureaucratic level and must be broadened. And the Namibian youth and student movement must be aided as well, especially with socialist literature.

**Bush's Angolan contras**

The role of the US in the region is extremely dangerous. On May 15, the Angolan contra leader, Jonas Savimbi of Unita, thanked the US government for a secret emergency airlift of weapons, which by mid-May appeared to have enabled his forces to repulse a four-month Angolan government offensive in the south-east of Angola. In April, US aid to Namibia was made conditional on Namibia's army not being deployed northwards against Unita.

With over 30,000 Cuban troops now withdrawn from Angola, the bureaucratized forces of the MPLA government can only control urban areas in much of the country. 800,000 Angolans are affected by drought as food production has fallen in war zones. Facing a sharp reduction of its once massive Soviet aid, the MPLA has also turned to the IMF and World Bank in a desperate attempt to appease US capital. Even de Beers has been allowed back in to the diamond fields. The MPLA has had to open talks with the Unita bandits, sponsored by Zaire and Portugal (under US supervision), with a Zimbabwe/Namibia-style solution as the aim.

Imperialism's preferred future of the southern African region is one dominated by South African finance capital, with the IMF/World Bank policing each of the surrounding economies. Given the extremely fragmented and backward forces of production, there is no hope of genuinely democratic structures emerging unless based upon the strength of the international working class. The question is, will socialists in the imperialist countries respond to the challenge?

**"there is no hope of genuinely democratic structures emerging unless based upon the strength of the international working class. The question is, will socialists in the imperialist countries respond to the challenge?"**





Graeme Cookson

*Trade unionists will need to mobilise against further attacks on a woman's right to choose*

# Whose right to choose?

By Rebecca Flemming

The Embryology Bill has continued to be a political battlefield as it makes its stormy way through Parliament. The fortunes of the warring factions have ebbed and flowed over the last six months, but there is no doubt about who has emerged victorious.

It is not the fundamentalist right, who suffered ignominious defeat on abortion and embryo research at the end of April, their belief that 'life' begins at conception unceremoniously trampled underfoot. Attempts by 'genetic fascist' Lady Saltoun and vociferous bigots Ann Winterton and David Wilshire to blatantly discriminate against certain groups of women, legally label them as unfit mothers and second class citizens and to explicitly prohibit by legislation the creation of 'fatherless' children have been blocked in both the Lords and Commons Committees.

Conversely, this is no unmitigated triumph for the pro-choice forces. Whilst the rout of the anti-abortionists is not to be summarily dismissed, neither must the reality of the situation be ignored. The reduction in the abortion time limit to 24 weeks is a material loss; the consensus around arguments of foetal viability was overwhelming. In this context, the champions of a women's right to choose are increasingly few and far between.

How far the new exceptions to 24 weeks and the removal of the threat of criminal sanctions from doctors who perform late abortions

will counteract this loss remains to be seen, and fought over. Undoubtedly, the possibility for doctors to carry out later abortions has been opened up. Whether they will or not, and how many women will be able to fight through the ideological pressure and decimated resources of the NHS to ask for one is still an open question. Regional and local variation in the provision of abortion facilities will certainly increase.

The defeat for the idea of a woman's right to choose may well run alongside increased access to abortion in practice.

Importantly, the 'hostage to fortune' for abortion law contained in the 14 day limit on embryo research must not be overlooked. The present political climate is clearly not favourable to a legal line of attack from 'pro-life' groups on this point, but the avenue remains open for the future. Moreover, the way the long title of the Bill is drafted means that the Statutory Licensing Authority (SLA) established under it will have monitoring and overseeing of abortion law and developments in the scientific field included in its remit. This will increase the vulnerability of abortion rights to further medical advances in the care of premature babies.

Jo Richardson's 'equal opportunities' amendment, which would have enabled the SLA not to grant or to revoke the licence of a clinic that discriminated in its provision of donor insemination (DI) and new reproductive technologies (NRTs), was defeated in Com-

mittee. Despite being very vaguely worded this would have provided a very necessary counter weight to the Government's insidious clause concerning the 'welfare of the child' born as a result of DI or NRTs.

Statements by the Lord Chancellor and other ministers that the crucial factors in a child's welfare are the 'permanence' and 'stability' provided by the marriage of the parents and the presence of a man in the household will only provide more grist to the mill of judicial prejudice and reaction and serve to intimidate the few clinics that provide a non-discriminatory service.

This setback, together with the failure of the other Labour proposals to democratise the SLA and broaden its composition mean that the Bill's restrictive effect on lesbians' and single women's access to DI and NRTs has been increased and reinforced.

The true victors are the Tory realists, who have shaped and guided this Bill from the beginning. They understand that fertility control is necessary for women's participation in the workforce, a participation which is increasingly important to the British economy. However, they insist that control should not be vested in the woman herself. Abortion laws are therefore bounded by concepts of foetal rights and viability, and empower doctors rather than women.

This current is the dominant force in the Government, and counts Health Secretary Kenneth Clarke amongst its spokespersons. It is firmly wedded to the idea of scientific progress as both the inevitable, proud product of capitalism and the motor force of economic advance; and it is also particularly susceptible to the lobbying of the medical establishment.

The Tory realists have steered a careful course between the fundamentalists and the left, sometimes sailing closer to one or the other to the keep the central project afloat and intact. The underlying aims of allowing research and the provision of DI and NRTs within a strictly regulated and controlled framework, most importantly within the context of the nuclear family, and of reconciling the immediate needs of the economy with the long term needs of the capitalist system, has been achieved and even strengthened by the amendments.

It is important to stress that this chapter in the struggle for women's reproductive freedom is not yet closed. The Third Reading is yet to come, bringing the possibilities both of further liberalisation of the abortion law and of a reactionary backlash. The Code of Practice promulgated under the Bill will be drawn up shortly. This promises further discrimination and restrictions on access to DI and NRTs unless there is a considerable shift in the political climate. Such a shift will not be produced spontaneously; it must be fought for.



# Equal pay for women – but not at men's expense

The need to draw women into the workforce – and keep them there – is increasingly determining both government policy and industrial strategy. In the House of Commons the 'sensible' ruling class have recognised the continuing necessity of allowing women access to abortion, while the chain stores have been forced to accept the argument for Equal Pay for Work of Equal Value in recent regrading exercises.

The Equal Pay Act of 1970, through which women only ever achieved about 75% of men's hourly pay, was amended in 1984, to include provision for a comparison with work of equal value. There have been a number of cases going through the pipeline since, including the three NHS speech therapists who have been claiming comparability with predominantly male pharmacists and psychologists, who earn up to £11,500 a year more. This has been continuing for five years and will come to appeal in October.

In the retail industry, where chain stores and food retailing are still making increased profits, there have been a series of developments. In October 1989 Geraldine O'Sullivan, a check-out worker in Sainsbury's Lewisham branch, won the first round of an industrial tribunal arguing that her job was comparable with that of (mainly male) workers in the warehouse. In March this year Sainsbury, recognising they had lost the battle, offered pay increases to their mostly female retail staff of between 8.5% and 20% – averaging at 11% – and USDAW dropped the case.

Marks & Spencer too have carried out a job evaluation exercise and have given their shop staff, mostly women, a three year deal worth 26.4%. The increase will be immediate, but will last until July 1993, making the annual increase 8% – less than the going rate of inflation! Marks & Spencers have even decided to offset some of this miserable in-

crease by *cutting* the real level of pay to other staff: warehouse workers, mostly men, will have a *three year wage freeze*, with only a £500 lump sum to stave off the rising cost of living. Other food chains are following suit: Tesco's 75,000 employees will receive between 10% and 20.2%, weighted towards its part-time and younger workers.

While it's true that several unions, especially USDAW, have used the new amendment to good effect, the underlying demographic changes are the real reason why

stores. The banking and insurance industry are also under pressure. In response to the demographic trends some of the banks have introduced workplace nurseries and they are under pressure to agree to parental leave and career breaks as well. The Banking, Insurance and Finance Union (BIFU) is drawing up claims for hundreds of workplace nursery places after the new tax concessions in this year's budget. But the banks haven't been immune to equal pay cases either. Lloyds Bank is appealing against a first tribunal decision in

favour of six women secretaries claiming equal pay with senior male messengers.

The underlying problem created by a decreasing number of school leavers is clearly forcing employers to submit to equal pay pressure along with other improvements in the conditions of women workers. This may lead to a less segregated workforce. If women can earn as much as an



No to a feminist incomes policy!

employers are suddenly recognising women's equal worth. The fact that the number of 16 to 25 year olds is expected to fall by 1.4 million up to the year 2000 means that more and more women will be needed in the workforce. By the end of the century it is variously estimated that women will make up between 44% and 50% of the labour force.

This demographic 'timebomb' means that industries employing a large percentage of women workers are having to upgrade their pay and conditions, not just to keep the staff they have, but to attract new female staff in an increasingly competitive labour market. Staff turnover in the chain stores and especially at the checkout has been very high in the last few years. An Asda superstore out of London recorded 100% turnover of workers on the tills every 6 months in 1986-7. Marks & Spencer's (traditionally very low) turnover of sales staff has been running at 20%, and at Sainsbury at 40%.

Nor is this trend confined to the chain

equivalent male worker then there's less incentive to keep 'women's' jobs separate from 'men's'. But we should beware of attempts such as that at Marks and Spencers to freeze male wages in order to increase those of women. This is the notorious 'feminist incomes policy' writ large. Bea Campbell, and others, argued in the late 1970s that women should get a bigger 'slice of the cake', thus setting up a situation where women are pitted *against* men for a finite amount of money. It looks like the unions involved have gone along with this, instead of fighting for an increase for *all* which would include extra for women to put them on a level with men.

The employers should not be allowed to get away with radical sounding policy for women and younger workers which at the same time undermines the wages of other sectors, and perpetuates the old tactics of 'divide and rule' in a new disguise.

Jane Kelly



# Farewell to the working class?

Jane Wells looks at Kinnock's 'final solution' for party members after the next election.

Despite some disappointments in last month's local elections, Labour is still far enough ahead in the polls to warrant serious attention by the powers that be. City businessmen take Shadow Chancellor John Smith to lunch; and a television documentary examining Kinnock's suitability as a resident at Number 10 concludes that he's not a total write-off. Praise indeed.

That's the context for the next stages in restructuring the Labour Party. As the next general election approaches, the leadership's plans to rein in members' involvement – and more importantly deny them any control over policy – come sharply into focus.

This, make no mistake about it, is Labour preparing for government. To get elected, reckon the party managers, you have to get the approval of those who count in opinion-forming: journalists, industry and the city. This you do by achieving 'respectability' and by responding (by giving in) to any criticisms they may have of your policies or party. Naturally, left-wing policies are out (unilateralism, economic planning and public ownership, trade union and minority rights). And, crucially, party structures have to be changed, to transform Labour from its working class roots into a full bourgeois, social democratic party.

In many respects Kinnock is well on the way to achieving his aims.

Since he took over as leader he has overseen the reversal of many key policies through the mechanism of the policy review. The creation of the National Constitutional Committee has ensured the snag-free prosecution and expansion of scores of socialists from the party; and the previously independent women's and youth organisations have simply been abolished and replaced with entirely leadership-friendly structures. Control is increasing-



Andrew Ward/Report

Kinnock: on the way to a final solution

ly centralised: the national membership drive now means new members come through head office first; party officers and publications are loyal to the leadership or dispensed with; regional conferences stick to regional discussions only.

Party democracy has come under attack too. Kinnock has so far managed to get his way on replacing the selection of prospective parliamentary candidates by General Committees with a local 'electoral college'; and he has ensured that challenges to his leadership within the Parliamentary Party will be less effective, with more MPs now required to re-

Tame Fleet Street reporters duly regurgitate publicity supremo Peter Mandelson's double-speak under headlines like 'Labour members to have more say on policy-making' – when of course the changes will result in just the opposite. A membership pacified by Thatcherism and New Realism, and increasingly excluded from any real say in policy-making is expected to toe the line as it has done to a large extent over the last five years.

Kinnock can only get away with it as long as the membership let him. But whilst factors out there in the real world – the balance of class forces – have allowed Kinnock to put

the party into reverse on policy, he has also used the opportunity to introduce fundamental structural changes which will protect his policy shifts when members become more confident and organised again. That is why the current priority for Kinnock is organisational changes – self protection – and why the fight for the left at this, and probably next year's conference, will centre on protecting party democracy.

## Farewell to the working class

The working class has got to go, is the ad-men's main message. Even though the pollsters are now telling us that Labour is winning the C2 (skilled working class) vote, it looks better in the papers if Labour isn't too closely linked with the unions.

This means that moves are afoot to exclude unions from choosing parliamentary candidates, through the introduction of selection by 'One Member One Vote' to replace the electoral college (similarly for the election of party leader); and to reduce their block-vote share at conference. More votes for constituency delegates at conference has long been a demand of the left: Kinnock's sudden conversion is more a sign of his willingness to move to a social democratic model than any

**"The NEC has assumed an unprecedented political and organisational weight in the party, allowing the leadership to initiate policy, and giving the NEC a wider range of executive powers"**

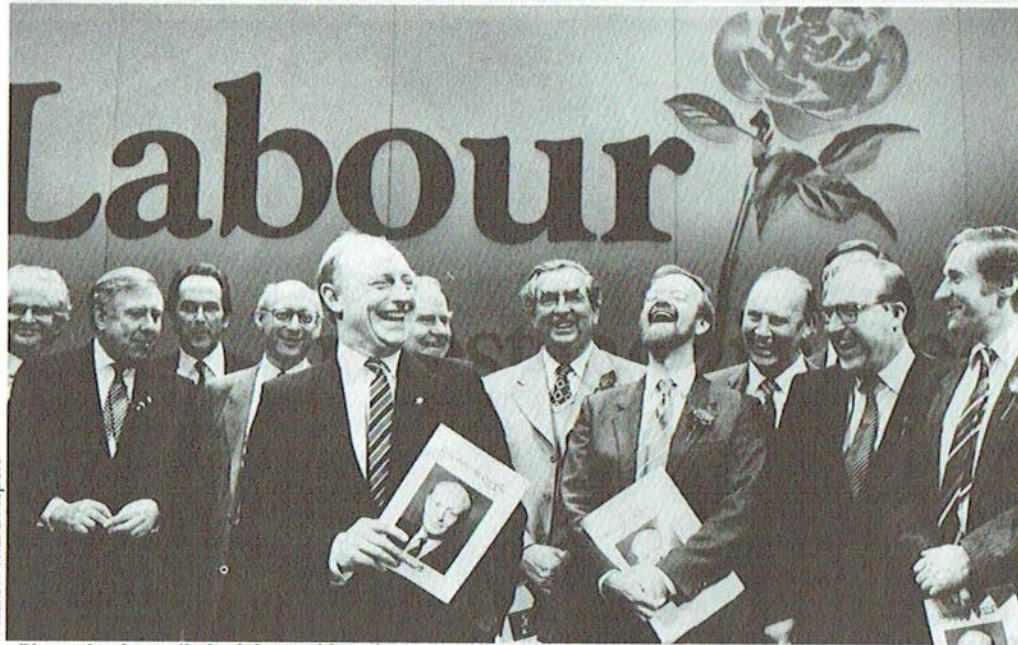
quest a challenge, and with the introduction of 'One Member One Vote' for the CLPs in any election.

The NEC has also gradually assumed an unprecedented political and organisational weight in the party, allowing the leadership to initiate policy, with the membership forced to respond, and giving the NEC a much wider range of executive powers – including the now routine practice of choosing or even imposing candidates in by-elections.

There is much more of the same – and worse – to come, though.

Next on the list and most dangerous are the fundamental – and perhaps irreversible – reforms planned for discussion at this year's conference, with implementation to stretch over the next few years into the next parliament. All are subject, in theory, to consultation – but Labour's leaders, through Walworth Road press briefings, have signalled their priority 'hidden agenda'.





Andrew Ward/Report

*Pleased to have ditched the working class*

concern to take note of the members.

Reducing the weight of the block vote has to be accompanied by an increase in a passive party membership, and a restriction in members' say over policy, if Kinnock is to continue to get his way. Press reports indicate that Walworth Road is looking to cut the trade union share of the vote at conference to, initially, 70 per cent, with further reductions as individual membership increases. Easier said than done; a miserable recruitment drive complete, with targetted mail shots and credit card incentives, has met with limited success. Nevertheless, changes to policy making procedures are coming in thick and fast.

### Consensus not class politics

Speaking at a recent meeting of Tribune Group MPs, Kinnock loyalist Tom Sawyer was reported as claiming that the policy review had been by far the most successful format for policy-making to date. He went on to argue for a revised structure which would involve a more 'sifted' gathering of delegates (from regions, unions, PLP, shadow cabinet etc) who would develop policy in commissions, reporting to conference on a two-year cycle. 'I see this as particularly important when Labour is in office' he said, in a rare moment of straight-talking.

This proposal is at the heart of the NEC's 'Future of Labour Party Conference' consultation document, and success on this is key for Kinnock. What party managers want is consensus policy developed at the top, and delivered ready-packaged to the members and the media: no more rows, or embarrassing incidents when the members propose policy or try to make up their own minds.

The replacement of conference as we know it by a highly centralised, stage-managed talking shop would effectively cut out members completely from policy making.

Short of such a complete overhaul though,

there is a 'Plan B'. This involves a series of measures, all of which will restrict democracy and carve members out.

Resolutions and even subjects to be debated will be sifted through regional conferences or specially created bureaucratic committees. CLPs will no longer be able to submit amendments to resolutions; this would cut their participation by half (whilst at the same time, the NEC could be given new powers to amend CLP resolutions!). Rule change resolutions will not be allowed except at rules revision conferences every three or four years. And changes to NEC elections to prevent MPs standing in the constituency section will ensure that left candidates have little chance of getting elected.

Many if not all of these changes, described by Party General Secretary Larry Whitty as mere 'finkering' amendments, will be put before this year's conference. As with the policy review, conference will have no right to amend the NECs proposals. Once passed, rule changes would then be put to the first conference after the general election. Only two NEC members voted against the package: Dennis Skinner and Tony Benn. All this means that a Labour Party in Government will have a free rein on policy (most importantly to impose an incomes policy): members and the unions will be powerless to object.

### 'Members Only': An end to accountability

It is in this context that the move to make reselection of sitting MPs more difficult, and to reduce accountability of MPs by the introduction of 'One Member One Vote', comes sharply into focus.

Yet another 'consultation' document from the NEC proposes that in future, sitting Labour MPs will be subject to reselection only if a majority of members agree to a contest in a postal ballot. On past experience, from the

notorious pre-1981 days when a GC vote of no confidence was the required trigger-mechanism for reselections, there hardly were any. When a vote did go through, as in the case of Newham North West MP Reg Prentice (later to become a Tory Minister), it took years of internal battles before he could be ousted.

If the NEC gets its way on this, there will be no more reselections, meaning no new women or black MPs and the domination of the PLP by white middle class men will be guaranteed well into the next century.

Most importantly, Labour MPs in a Labour Government would be at liberty to make things up as they go along: conference (whatever may be left of it) policy commitments can be torn up. No reselections, no party accountability. Members will be powerless to insist that party policy is observed.

It is an almost inevitable consequence of Kinnock's 'electioneering by proxy', with only opinion-formers (and not the working class) in his sights, that top-down reforms, introducing top-down democracy with little say for the rank and file, must follow.

Insofar as there is such a rationale, or grand plan behind Labour's lurch to the right, it is misguided – even if vote-catching is the only immediate and ultimate aim.

### Protest voting

Labour's current lead in the polls is evidence surely of common sense (and Marxist) psephology: voting behaviour (and political belief) is determined more by experience than ideas. Interest rates and high poll tax bills have much more to do with current protest voting than any positive approval of the vague package of policies that constitute Kinnock's new realism (although tragically, he will undoubtedly make political capital from the coincidence).

That evidence leads some on the left in the party to conclude that oppositions don't win elections, but governments lose them. True enough, to a point. But it is a serious mistake to go on and argue (as some do) that the argument over policy and democracy can be kept 'in the family' of Labour loyalists, and that you lay the groundwork for left-wing policies not by campaigning now for socialist politics, but by refining party procedures to make sure the structures for accountability are there ready for when the left is on the up again.

It's a tall order, but we need an approach that embraces and builds on the experiences of the struggles that working people face every day, and brings them into the party to join the fight for working class democracy. Labour Party Socialists, as part of the Socialist Movement, is an attempt to build such a campaigning approach.



# Peruvian miners fight back Caught between the army and Sendero

There are about 60,000 permanent mineworkers in Peru, plus about 30,000 on short term contracts and 25,000 involved in gold prospecting work. Mining represents about 50 per cent of foreign earnings, so we are a very key economic group. Despite this, issues of concern to miners are ignored by the government and the companies.

Every year about 100 miners die in accidents in the mines. 25 per cent suffer from lung disease as a result of their work. The mining camps are very isolated from the cities and 40 per cent of miners in Peru have no housing. Many of the 60 per cent who do have somewhere to live, live in 4 foot by 4 foot rooms without basic amenities like water and electricity. The health service which is provided by the government and the mining companies is awful.

In the majority of mining camps there is no education provided for the children of miners, except maybe at the most basic level or primary school. So the youth in the mining communities have very limited opportunities for obtaining an education. The situation has become even worse with the general economic crisis in Peru. In the last year inflation has

Recent elections in Peru have been marked by a shift to the right, with the strengthening of the FREDEMO coalition behind presidential candidate Mario Vargas Llosa. But FREDEMO's support was eclipsed at the last minute by previously unknown bourgeois independent Alberto Fujimori, who got 30 per cent of the vote. This suggests that support for FREDEMO was more a reaction to the hyper inflation, unemployment, terror and corruption of the previous APRA regime of Alan Garcia than a positive vote. The left vote was squeezed to 11 per cent from being over twice that in the mid-1980s – partly due to a split in the main coalition, the United Left.

Despite these setbacks and the increasing repression faced by workers and peasants, the Peruvian trade unions and peasants' organisations remain organised and combative. JORGE QUEZADA LINAN of the Mineworkers Federation has recently been on a European tour to highlight the repression faced by the workers' movement, and campaign for the release of miners' president Victor Taipe. Before the elections he gave *Socialist Outlook* this account of the situation facing miners and the left in Peru.

been running at something like 2,700 per cent – which really brings down the spending power of miners.

So we are fighting for collective bargaining at a national level, in order to deal with these important problems of basic wages and condi-

tions of work and life.

The way in which the unions are structured in Peru is very different from union structures in Europe. In Peru there are individual trade unions and worker's organisations because of the isolation and distance between the different zones. They relate to different economic groups, power bases and businesses in each area.

It is to bring together all those workplace unions that we founded the federation. We hoped that by having national collective bargaining we would do away with unnecessary sectoral workplace negotiation and divisions. The businessmen are afraid of this because it would mean that instead of little unions in isolated parts of the country going through their own discussions we would have some national power.

In the past two years we have organised three strikes. The first was in July of 1988. We managed to win a Supreme decree – a law recognising the right to national collective bargaining. But the businessmen went to the courts to block its implementation. In October 1988 we undertook a second strike lasting 59 days, but we didn't manage to force them to negotiate.

It is a reflection of the corruption within the judiciary that, after being bribed by the mining businessmen, they



Peruvian peasants are a key part of the left



declared the decree, relating to the national platform, unconstitutional. While we were on strike, the government declared a state of emergency in the mining sector. This was intended to break the strike. So we went to a judge and also bribed him to declare the supreme decree, declaring the state of emergency, unconstitutional.

The third strike was called in August last year. The response was a united front of government, businessmen and army in the central area of the country, where many of the mining camps are. The army militarised the whole area. They arrested the main leaders and took them to the barracks. People were prohibited from holding meetings. The army in the militarised zones presented the miners with two choices. To get into an army lorry taking them to the barracks, or get into one of the mining companies lorries and be taken

strategic role in the popular movement in Peru.

In the course of our struggles we've made some gains. For instance a law has been passed giving pensions to miners, which means that we are able to retire earlier. The 5th December has been recognised as 'the day of the mine' – it is the anniversary of the foundation of the federation and has been recognised as a day for the miners of Peru.

Those who are employed on contracts are now guaranteed a minimum salary which they didn't previously have. It is now recognised that miners contract industrial diseases – previously recognised by the International Labour Organisation but not by the Peruvian authorities. We have also won a kind of subsidy for miners who are ill or who have had accidents.

But so far we have not been able to solve

that anyone who doesn't become involved in their guerrilla warfare is a traitor. They have called 'armed strikes' in some mining areas. But their political platform doesn't raise a single union issue relating to workers. The way in which they have called strikes hasn't been democratic. The workers have not been consulted. When workers have not agreed to participate in that form of strike, Sendero have assassinated union leaders.

So the miners of Peru are caught between two fires: on one side the army and the paramilitary deaths squads and on the other side the fire of Sendero Luminoso.

Our congress in June last year passed a resolution condemning the methods of fear used by Sendero. It is not that we reject the possibility of violent change in Peru, but you can only have a revolutionary uprising with the support of the mass of people and there-



Peruvian election campaign rally

back to work.

It was impossible for an important sector of the mining area to take part in the strike. So we stopped the strike in order to prepare a confrontation over this situation through a general strike.

These strikes have been very combative and have mobilised thousands in marches to the cities to protest. Our brothers have been killed in the course of these marches. They have been assassinated by the security forces. We have had to confront a very evil campaign by the mining companies which has tried to link us with subversive actions. They have spent a fortune in the media and the mining camps in a propaganda campaign trying to isolate the miners from other workers and from the communities in those camps.

The mining companies have been arrogant and intransigent. Settling the dispute could have cost 25 million dollars, but they preferred to spend 50 million dollars to avoid giving in. They know how awful our living conditions are, but they are afraid of agreeing to collective bargaining because they know that it would give the miners a very important

the fundamental problems of living and working conditions in the mines. And so we still insist that our platform should be discussed and we should have national bargaining with the companies. We are preparing our forces so that the miners will become involved in the next strike with greater awareness in order to impose this collective bargaining platform.

We have produced our own newspaper, as a way of communicating with the base of the union. We are carrying out quite an extensive campaign to train grass roots trade unionists and we have working groups who are drawing up alternative proposals for solving the problems that miners suffer.

We are also building self defence committees to protect miners from violence in the area. These brigades have to carry arms in order to protect themselves against people who attack them, because the enemies who attack us no longer understand words, they attack us first – they don't talk.

There is a group called Sendero Luminoso. According to them they are carrying out a revolution. But this isn't true. They have killed our brother workers and they believe

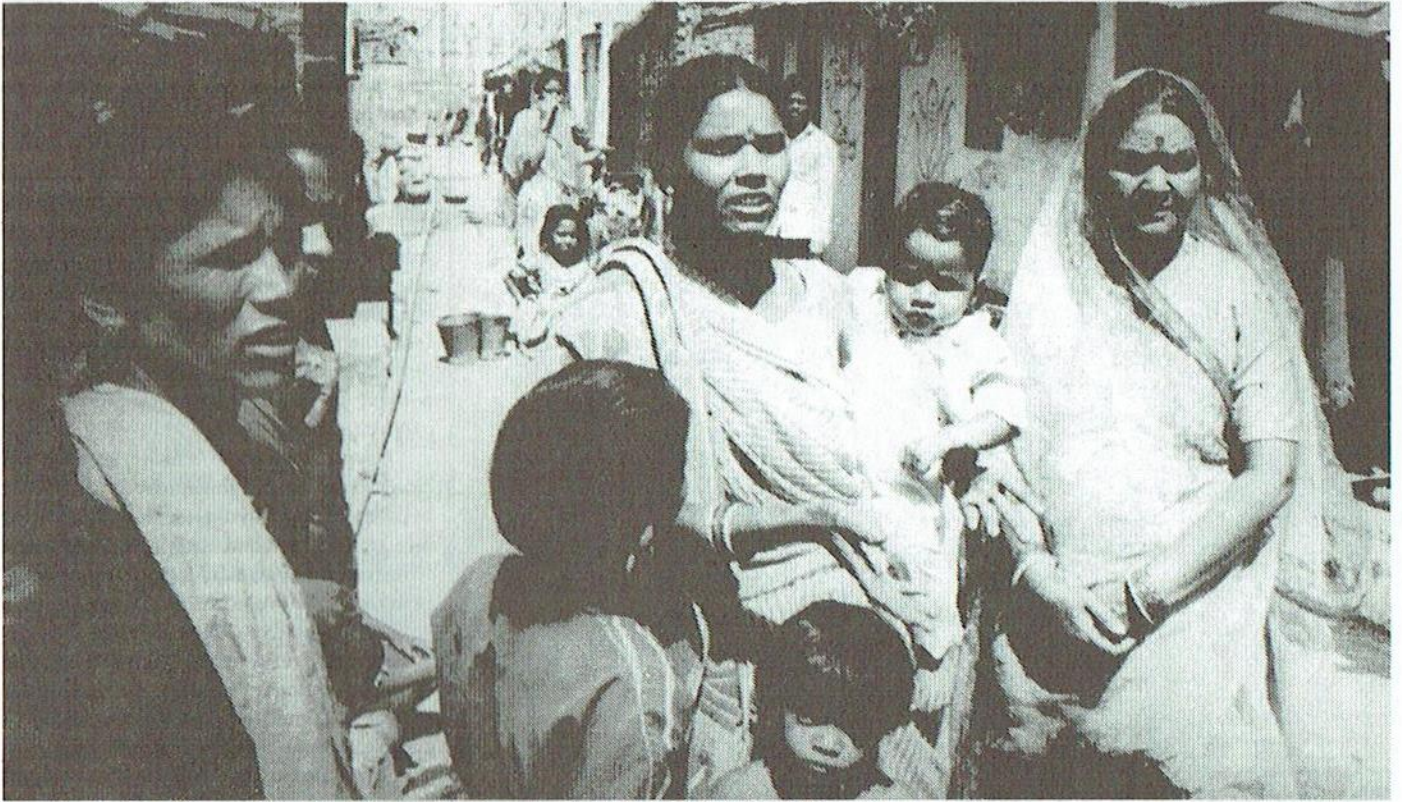
fore the way Sendero operates is not revolutionary. I want to be very clear about this. We are not renouncing violence, because there are occasions when repression is so great you need recourse to violence to achieve your ends.

The Peruvian left has many problems. But there is a will amongst the major political parties to come together – which they have done in the United Left coalition.

But this has been complicated by the 'Socialist Left', led by Alfonso Barrantes. They caused a lot of harm to the United Left by splitting from it. Barrantes had renounced the possibility of armed revolution because he felt that it was still possible to gain power through elections in Peru. That was a difference between those who have left and the rest.

Now that these problems have been resolved there is a possibility that the United Left might move forward as a revolutionary force. The popular masses represented within the coalition need to guarantee that that is respected.





Residents of J.P. Napar who suffered devastation from the Union Carbide disaster at Bhopal

## Down to Earth Ecology, Gaia and Socialism

by Sam Inman

As with art, one can find a subjective beauty in science – the pushing forward of the frontiers of human experience and knowledge. As marxists we should not feel guilty about expressing such seemingly sentimental opinions. It is not anti-marxist claptrap to marvel at the complexities of life.

Indeed, we would do better to have a deeper understanding of the role that science and culture play in an advanced capitalist economy and how this changes in time. After all, the essence of revolutionary marxism is that it is the science of making revolutions that can ultimately free the world of all oppression – a communist world.

What made comrades like Marx, Engels, Lenin, Luxembourge, Kollontai and Trotsky such outstanding leaders of the working class was precisely that they were such thorough practitioners of scientific socialism. They used the lessons of history and creatively applied them to new objective situations in the class struggle. They understood that the historic task of the world's working class was to liberate all humankind.

Today we face our own new objective situations in the class struggle. We see the

political revolutions unfolding in the degenerated and deformed workers' states. The death agony of stalinism throws revolutionary marxists a challenge comparable to previous momentous periods in human history.

In Britain we see a deepening crisis of the bourgeois state. The political crisis of the Tories and heightening social crisis in British society are only symptoms of the profound economic crisis that is its material base. We are also faced with a profound crisis of leadership in the working class. There are many more examples internationally of the deepening crisis of international capitalism: revolutionary marxists must meet 'the challenge' and provide the leadership necessary to make the change from capitalism to socialism. Times like these can greatly enhance marxist theory. But only if we learn the lessons of our own history, the history of Trotskyism, can we use them to build successful social (and now political) revolutions.

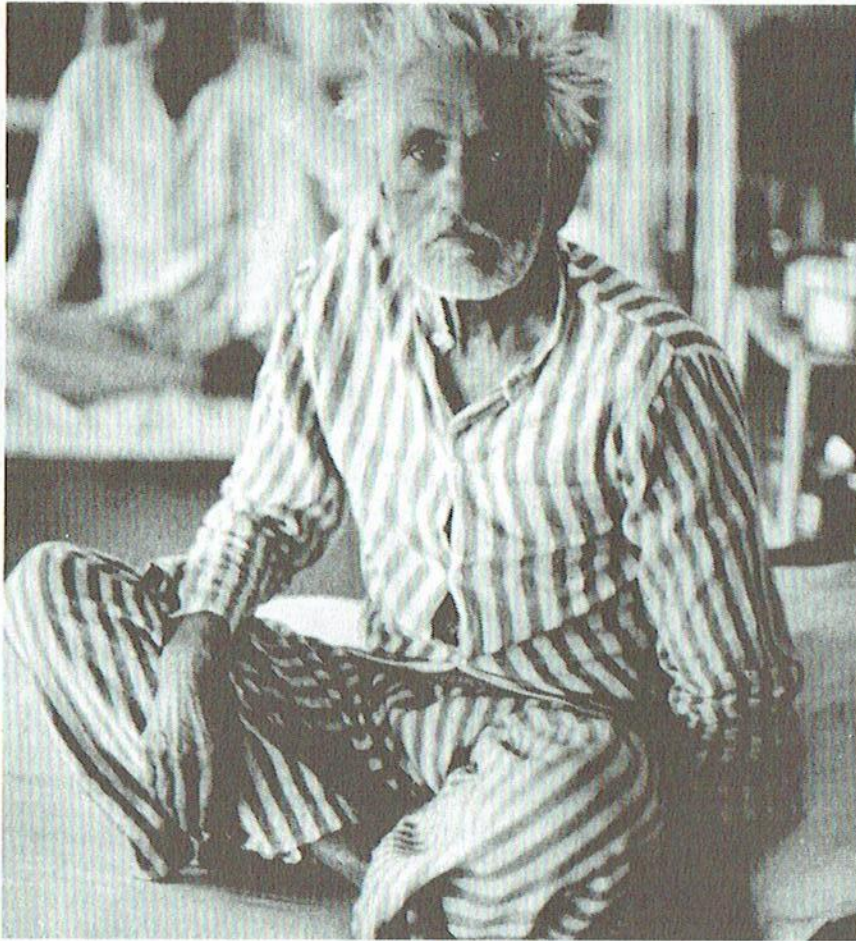
One symptom of the crisis of global capitalism is the world ecological crisis. Of course, ecological problems are nothing new. What makes them so important now is the material depth of the crisis, the huge challenge this presents to global capital and the

strengthening of the radical petty bourgeois parties that have arisen in response to this. The current situation throws us yet another challenge – how do we develop an ecological dimension to our programme?

We cannot study the world's ecological crisis without taking a brief look at the science of ecology itself, which – compared to that of natural history – is relatively new. It was born in the exciting period of biology, just after Darwin, but really took off this century. Now, as with other scientific disciplines, is undergoing great flux. Indeed many ecologists and evolutionary biologists maintain that within the field the present academic crisis could well result in a new synthesis of evolutionary theory that could have an impact as great as Darwinian theory had last century.

We should remember the impact that the *Origin of the Species* had on the thinking of Marx and Engels, but also how the ruling class has used Darwinian notions of competition, struggle for survival and 'survival of the fittest' to justify and legitimise ruling class projects by applying these concepts to the realm of human economic, social and political relations. Indeed the marxist evolutionary biologist, Stephen Jay Gould, argues in his book *The Pundit's Thumb* that Darwin may





*A moment of gas – a lifetime of pain. Victim of Bhopal disaster.*

well have cribbed his ideas from the laissez-faire political economist Adam Smith.

Evolutionary theory has been well documented as playing an important, even vital role in the maintenance of political, social and ideological hegemony in capitalist society. However, evolutionary science and ecology are intimately related, the former only really being the study of the world's biosphere over longer periods of time. Evolutionary science is the scientific study of the history of life. It is in this context that the importance of the Gaia hypothesis emerges.

First proposed in 1972 by Jim Lovelock (an ex-NASA scientist) the Gaia hypothesis maintains that: 'life at an early stage of its evolution acquired the capacity to control the global environment to suit its needs and that capacity has persisted and is still in active use. In this view the sum total of species is more than just a catalogue, 'The biosphere' like other associations in biology is an entity with properties greater than the simple sum of its parts'.

In 1974 Lovelock collaborated with the Canadian microbiologist Lyn Marquis, in a more detailed exposition. In their words the hypothesis is 'the notion of the biosphere as an adaptive control system to maintain the earth in homeostasis'.

The evidence presented is quite convincing. The relative abundance of different gases in the earth's atmosphere is completely anomalous in comparison with the atmospheres of other lifeless planets. The atmospheres of the latter are not far from chemical equilibrium, while earth's atmosphere is very different. The particularly anomalous gases on earth are methane, oxygen, nitrogen, nitrous oxide and ammonia. The simultaneous presence of highly oxidising and highly reducing gases clearly violates the laws of equilibrium chemistry, and not least the second law of thermo-dynamics.

Now either the latter is wrong, or something responsible for maintaining this anomaly. Lovelock and Marquis argued that it was the *biosphere* (i.e. life) that was responsible for this regulation. The circumstantial evidence is also quite strong. Life has been present on the planet for about 3.5 billion years. During this time the sun has increased its output by at least 30 per cent. Yet, despite this, the *mean* temperature of the planet has varied very little.

What about glaciations then? It's well known that we can be eurocentric at times, but it is useful to remember that 70 per cent of the earth's land mass lies between latitudes 45° North and 45° South (or between Milan and Christchurch, New Zealand

roughly). Between these latitudes exists the biologically productive 'core' of the earth and the glaciations appear to have had little effect here.

What is certain is that at no point during this time did the oceans freeze or the mean temperature exceed 50 degrees centigrade. This temperature regulation could be achieved via biological changing of atmospheric composition and/or possibly by changing the reflectivity of the earth's surface (the albedo). Lovelock later produced a model, the daisywheel model, to show how – *without foresight* – the biosphere could produce such regulation.

'Deep Ecologists' such as Edward Goldsmith have championed the Gaia hypothesis, and have used it to justify their misanthropic and anti-working class politics. However, it has actually touched a raw nerve in the arena of evolutionary biology, because without doubt there were holes in contemporary mainstream thinking about the nature of the evolutionary process. Goldsmith, for example is somewhat of a neo-Lamarckian (a completely outmoded theory of evolution). The most progressive elements are critical supporters of neo-Darwinism like Gould and Nils Eldredge who argue against the gradualist school in favour of a (revolutionary!) 'punctuated' model.

With recent developments in the study of non-equilibrium systems (such as the biosphere) in the form of the science of chaos – the walls of determinism are beginning to crumble. Indeed one can see many parallels between the science of chaos and dialectical materialism.

Of course the crunch comes when you bring humanity into the picture. Obviously for marxists, the evolution of humanity marked a *qualitative* change in the history of life on earth. In our struggle to overcome the limitations of nature, shown in the history of human society – the history of class struggle – advanced capitalism has alienated us from our *own* nature – the struggle to consciously control our own labour. The Deep Ecologists see no difference between us and an amoeba. That is why their politics are essentially reactionary. They elevate Gaia to the level of a new god. The achievement of world socialism with ecologically sound economic planning would essentially mean that humanity replaced 'Gaia' as an outmoded regulator of the whole biosphere, and result in a progressive mature 'science of ecology': essential if we are to clean up the ecological nightmare that capitalism and stalinism have bequeathed us.

Biology has always been used by the capitalist ruling class to legitimise its continuation. That is why it is vitally important that we recognise the question of ecology as a *class issue*, and an international class issue



# How miners found a seam of solidarity

Andrew Ward/Report

## Across Frontiers

Jonathan Saunders.  
Canary Press 1989. 290  
pages, £6.95.

### Reviewed by Finn Jensen

Jonathan Saunders' book is a detailed account of the international support for the British miners' strike of 1984-85. It provides a lot of analysis that can be useful in future major strikes in other industries; but also in discussions on how to develop internationalist trade unionist and socialist consciousness.

*Across Frontiers* is a well-written book. A lot of research has gone into describing the international support for the miners. Even for those of us who took part in that work the book is full of surprises about the scale of this solidarity work. As a historical record of this important aspect of the international labour movement, the book is second to none.

Jonathan Saunders' book places the international solidarity work in a historical and political context. A chapter on the British NUM's international work prior to the 1984-85 strike is useful to understand the links that were made before the strike started.

The solidarity work in Europe, Soviet Union, North America, South Africa and elsewhere is described in various chapters, each beginning with a brief outline of the labour movement and the political situation in that country, which helps explain the various forms the solidarity work took in the different countries.

Each chapter is full of anecdotes from the individuals actually involved. That makes the book lively and humorous, but without undermining a serious study of one of the big class battles this century.

So what difference did the international solidarity work make to the miners' strike? According to NUM's general secretary,



Peter Heathfield, 85% of the financial support at the end of the strike came from abroad (a fact that is not mentioned in the book). But according to Jonathan Saunders the international support could not have closed down the British power stations even if coal supplies from abroad had been totally cut off; this was mainly due to the Nottingham working miners.

The importance of the international solidarity work lies more in the internationalism it brought to life among millions of trade unionists and socialists across the world – a practical experience that can be used again.

Jonathan Saunders argues that this internationalism could have been developed much further if it was not for the NUM leadership restricting the fight to defend NUM jobs. His argument is that if NUM's fight had been against all job losses – in British industries as well as abroad – then it would have been more likely to get real practical solidarity work from other workers: such as respecting picket lines and sympathy strikes. And he goes a step further: it was the sectoral struggle of the NUM that 'unfortunately led directly to the isolation and defeat of March 1985.'

There is no doubt that the NUM strike would have been

strengthened if other workers in Britain and abroad had taken industrial action against austerity policies and job losses.

But Jonathan's own description of the response from the foreign workers (and my own experience inside the Danish trade union movement) indicate that these workers gave unconditional support to the British miners because they understood that this was a major test of strength in the class struggle. I doubt very much if these foreign workers' solidarity would have been qualitatively different if NUM's official demand had been against all job losses; it might make a difference for British workers. In neither case can one explain the defeat of March 1985 as a consequence of the strike defending only NUM jobs.

In the last chapter of the book Jonathan Saunders looks at the legacy of the miners' strike. Politically this is the weakest chapter of the book. He criticises Scargill for supporting the Labour Party: 'The NUM was the first union to weigh in with a big contribution (£400,000) towards Labour's election expenses. Scargill, who made the announcement, was apparently willing to swallow much of Kinnock's 'new realism'.'

First of all it is ultra-left not to ask people to vote Labour (un-

less you present a better alternative). But secondly Saunders is wrong in suggesting that Scargill supports new realism. Scargill has made mistakes, but he is still a class struggle fighter. His election campaign for NUM's presidency was just one proof of that.

Saunders

gives credit to the various left organisations that have been involved in the international solidarity work but in his last chapter makes sweeping generalisations about the British left without any nuances.

His central thesis is that 'Instead of trying to persuade miners to transcend the limits of activity being organised by the NUM leadership, they (i.e. the British Left) restricted themselves to attacking the Kinnockites and the Willisies for failing to back the strike. ... In political terms their (i.e. the left's) intervention was more or less irrelevant.'

The problem with the miners' strike was not the NUM leadership restricting the activity of the rank and file members but the lack of industrial action from other British workers in support of the miners. That is why it was necessary to put pressure on the Kinnockites and the Willisies to organise industrial support for the miners. A few hundred revolutionary miners could not have organised it.

Despite these political weaknesses, the book is worth reading by any militant trade unionist. It is also worth noting that Canary Press has published many other excellent books on the miners' strike.





American car workers queue for jobs

## Grabbing hold of the boss

### *Roger and Me*

Film directed by Michael Moore.

#### Review by Piers Mostyn.

As a one and a half hour documentary on the impact of mass unemployment on a mid-West American motor town, at first sight 'Roger and Me' would not be the average lefty's first choice for a Saturday night out at the movies. Hardly the escapism you're looking for to get away from rows at anti-Poll Tax meetings or the grind of the GMC.

Not so. That a such a film fills cinemas in London's West End and is being well received, speaks for itself.

It's good entertainment that manages to be political at the same time as very funny. Like *Atomic Cafe*, without the cartoons, it takes a chunk of the great American dream and satirises it ruthlessly by exposing the reality underneath. Warts and all.

Director and main star Michael Moore goes back to his home town of Flint to find that 30,000 jobs are being shed by *General Motors* because cheaper labour is available elsewhere.

Moore juxtaposes the naive idealism of the town's golden age – when auto production by *GM* was everything the community stood for – to the rapid collapse of the myth. Archive footage of streets thronging with annual pageants and parades is set against miles of derelict houses and wrecked cars. In the midst of

all this Moore pursues *GM* Managing Director, 'Roger' Smith, asking him to come to Flint and meet the victims of his chase for profits.

Much of the film takes the form of a spoof on the Roger Cook brand of TV investigative journalism. But it also follows Flint's hapless inhabitants as they are evicted for non-payment of rent or try to make ends meet – often with absurd results.

That Moore makes such a depressing subject so funny is partly because he raises laughs at their expense. The redundant workers are presented very much as victims. The only portrayal of any resistance to this onslaught is some anger shown by *GM* workers when the closures are announced and by one in particular who castigates the union bureaucracy for its refusal to fight.

But Moore is also portraying the bizarre nature of provincial USA where there a low premium on trade unionism and a high premium on kitsch.

There are attempts to generate hope through a series of wacky official job-creation enterprises. The only one that makes any sense is the big new prison, built to cope with the surge in crime stemming, from the town's economic devastation.

As an attack on the ethos and policies of capitalism run riot, the film is a timely reminder – given events in Eastern Europe and the crisis of Thatcherism in this country – that it wasn't only Stalinism that was discredited in the 1980s.

## Moral delusion

*A Bright Shining Lie – John Paul Vann and America in Vietnam*  
by Neil Sheehan

Reviewed by Steve Taylor

Explaining the American defeat in Vietnam has become a growth industry in the States. Unlike most of the recent accounts, Neil Sheehan's book is neither an attempt at retrospective justification nor a study in dumb ignorance.

*Bright Shining Lie* is a detailed and thoroughly researched exploration of the war, written by a Vietnam correspondent who had access to hard information and high ranking informants.

Sheehan is primarily concerned with the practical consequences of the political and military strategy adopted by the United States. The book gives full and vivid expression to the sheer vanity of the enterprise undertaken by the Americans. *Lie* deserves to be read purely for Sheehan's account of Khe Sanh and the Tet offensive.

However, the main focus of the book is the life and times of Lieutenant Colonel John Paul Vann. Through Sheehan's exploration of the *Bright Shining Lie*, Vann becomes a partial metaphor of the American role in Vietnam.

Vann understood that victory was dependent on mobilising the Southern Vietnamese and he understood that the war was being lost by this failure.

He spent most of his time, from his arrival in 1961 until his departure in 1972, attempting to convince his superiors to adopt a more sophisticated approach than the carpet bombing and wanton destruction which characterised their military strategy. Neil Sheehan was part of the lobby which Vann utilised to promote his ideas about the conduct of the war. They met and became friends.

Vann never ceased to believe that America could win the war.

Sheehan charts the Lieutenant Colonel's rise

through the competing hierarchies but is never seduced by Vann, and this is a major strength of the book.

Vann was finally given the command and co-ordination of military and social resources in the Central Highlands of Vietnam. By 1971 he was one of the few remaining commanders who still believed in America's ability to turn the war around. Vann became the first civilian General of the conflict. He was killed in a helicopter crash after momentarily halting the North Vietnamese advance at Kontum.

The personal and protracted failure of Vann is perceived by Sheehan as the historic failure of the United States.

Vann's main achievement was to prolong a war that had already been lost. It is this ultimate delusion which compounds and electrifies Sheehan's moral indictment of the American campaign.

However while Sheehan's indictment is powerful, moving and just, the strategy advocated by Vann has survived: it has become quietly incorporated into America's subsequent geo-political conduct.

A integrated command structure; the use of locally recruited soldiers; American hardware under American direction; the selective recruitment and training of both civilian and military personnel; the careful targeted use of both terror and large scale terrorism; the deployment of American advisors and technicians rather than ground forces; the de-Americanisation of completed military objectives, and the development of social programmes aimed at subverting unrest: each of these methods, advocated by Vann amidst the cacophony of the Vietnam war, have become basic elements of current US policy.

The political and military leadership which lost the war in Vietnam have survived and learned from their mistakes. John Paul Vann can take a good deal of posthumous credit for this.





Vann's legacy – American troops are now training local combatants

## Moral examples

### **Dog Soldiers**

by Robert Stone  
Picador 3.95

### **Cutter and Bone**

by Newton Thornburg  
Blue Murder 3.95

**Reviewed by Steve Taylor**

'... That winter, the Military Advisory Command, Vietnam had decided that elephants were enemy agents because the NVA used them to carry things, ... All over the country, whooping sweating gunners descended from the cloud cover to stampede the herds and mow them down with 7.62-millimeter machine guns.

'The Great Elephant Zap had been too much and had disgusted everyone ...

'And as for dope, Converse thought, and addicts – if the world is going to contain elephants pursued by flying men, people are just as naturally going to want to get high.'

John Converse is a failed

journalist at the frozen limit of Vietnam, confounded by the daily horror, his own cowardice, and in a state of permanent confusion. *Dog Soldiers* is a visceral and unforgiving fiction which tears at the heart of the American Dream. It is brutal, frank and unrelenting.

In the absence of coherence, Converse acts in hallucinatory tandem with the forces which surround him. He buys three kilos of heroin and agrees to organise their delivery to the States. The process is a vague and largely unvalued means of making sense of madness, a buying out of time and place.

He induces his Stateside wife, Marge, into the scheme and Ray Hicks, a merchant sailor and former marine. The plan is ill-conceived and poorly executed. Converse has bought into his own nightmare, a mark from the moment that he accepts responsibility. The consequences of the transaction are violent and without quarter.

Hicks takes reluctant control of the heroin and Marge, attempt-

ing to salvage the deal and survive. They flee towards the Mexican border and sanctuary, the sub-government agents who have overseen the delivery in pursuit. The flying men have come home.

'When I was in Nam, I guess I've told you, we did pretty much what all the outfits there did. Not exactly My Lais, not that big anyway, but we did our part, everybody did his little part over there ... Well, back here, with time, you know, you had time to study them, those pictures, and you know what I found out? I found that you have three reactions. Rich, only three. The first one is simple – I hate America. But then you study them some more, and you move up a notch. There is no God. But you know what you say finally, after you've studied them all you can? You say – I'm hungry.'

Cutter is a disabled war veteran, in perpetual anger and searing pain. Richard Bone is a drifting Lothario, as athletic, tanned and outwardly attractive as Cutter is unpretty and soured. Cutter's wife Mo forms the apex of their ramshackle triangle. She is quietly despairing, devoted and perennially drugged. They

live within sight of the Pacific Ocean and slow poverty. *Cutter and Bone* is a journey into hell.

Bone is witness to a murder, and under Cutter's obsessive guidance the two of them embark on a spiralling blackmail attempt of the maybe killer. The expedition is as doomed as sunset. Thornburg's novel is bitter, passionate, and extreme.

Neither Cutter nor Bone are certain of the killer's identity and neither of them are even convinced of the economic reasoning behind their project. But in the zero of an alternative, both are pulled inexorably

towards the American heartland. The place where the car decals read: My God is Alive – Sorry about Yours'.

*Cutter and Bone* is a savage, compassionate book, totally uncompromising and utterly convincing.

In addition to the quality of the writing, it is the lack of compromise which distinguishes both novels. Honesty without illusion is a rare commodity and it is perhaps indicative of a gathering reluctance that they were first published in the 1970's. Nevertheless, they tell us more about America in Vietnam than any number of revised histories and a gross of Hollywood epics.

*Dog Soldiers* and *Cutter and Bone* are a parallel response to the same dilemma: meaning and commitment in the absence of a valid moral or ethical structure. They are desperate statements without English equivalent and they deserve to be read

'... Let smiles cease,' Converse said. 'Let laughter flee. This is the place where everyone finds out who they are.' Hicks shook his head. 'What a bummer for the gooks.'



# All style, no content

## **The Krays.**

Film, starring Billie Whitelaw, Gary and Martin Kemp

### **Review by Ian McLarty**

'Clothes are important; they say what you are' say Ronnie and Reggie Kray to two new converts at their club, showing up the major fault of this movie. Throughout the film the style of *The Krays* is slick, the camera work and effects excellent, and direction reasonably tight; but equally throughout, the *content*, the naked fear the Kray twins engendered, is missing.

Ultimately it was not what the Krays looked like that terrified people; it was what was stuffed inside the suits; more important it was what they were capable of *doing* which made the Krays what they became.

The point is again made later in the film when one of their gang states that he is now considered glamorous – to be told by the twins 'fear is glamour'. Even if this dubious premise is

correct, it is certainly not true that glamour equals fear.

The film continually errs on the side of giving an impression of the Krays – showing snapshots of their life rather than telling the story.

We are not shown what made the Krays into villains. We are shown them attending a fairly barbaric school, and in a very light hearted way doing national service; but such experiences did not turn thousands of others into ruthless murderers.

In fact, much of the Krays' experience doing national service was in military prison; they ended up serving their time as the last two prisoners in Tower Hill.

The film also sanitises (although it does not glamourise) aspects of the Krays' lives. Their mother is portrayed as a caring woman struggling to bring up a family in the difficult conditions of World War Two, and not as the tyrannical person steeped in religious excesses which the biographies have presented. Similarly, Reggie's wife is

shown essentially as a weak willed person who could not take the real world and therefore killed herself, rather than a woman locked in her room by a jealous husband and bullied by an overbearing mother-in-law forcing her to go to church.

Also crucially lacking is the way top society figures such as David Bailey continually courted the twins. In the 1960s they were the people to be seen with, and many now aspiring to be pillars of respectability were so seen – but this fact is avoided. The film does not question what exactly the police were doing when the Krays were at play – or how much it cost to keep them looking the other way.

Some of the acting is superb; Billie Whitelaw as the Krays' mother puts in an admirable performance. Bell and Berkhof as Jack the Hat and George Cornell respectively (the two people the Krays were convicted of murdering) also play their parts if anything too well, creating loathsome figures which are undeserving of any pity. One mem-

ber of the audience leaving commented 'Well they *had* to kill them, didn't they?'

The answer is obviously no. But it is unlikely that Ronnie and Reggie will be complaining about such a response being evoked, especially from a film that has already been so generous with its advance payment for the rights.

However, when not being carried along by the style of the film or the acting of others, the Kemps, who play the Krays, seem unconvincing. In one of the few scenes where real acting is called for – when Ronnie is trying to get Reggie to get his act together – they are both cumbersome and wooden.

Despite all that is wrong, as a piece of mainstream entertainment the film is better than most.

If nothing else it can be hoped that this film will shatter the illusions of those numerous hordes who, according to Fleet Street's finest, haunt the pubs of the East End saying 'If Ron and Reg were here now, things wouldn't be so bad'.

## SOCIALIST OUTLOOK

### **Wrong on Nicaragua**

Gareth Mostyn ('Wrong Lessons From Sandinista Defeat' *Socialist Outlook* 24) is right to say that we must show our solidarity with the oppressed in Nicaragua. But we must also be honest about what happened.

The FSLN split from the PSN, Nicaragua's Stalinist Party, in 1961, just two years after the Cuban revolution sent shock-waves through Latin America. While the PSN leaders argued for support to Samozá, and for a 'democratic alliance' to push him left(!), the FSLN founders looked to the Cuban road of revolution. But the FSLN kept many ideas it learnt in the PSN.

Its 1969 program calls for a 'revolutionary government based on the worker-peasant al-

liance and the convergence of patriotic anti-imperialist and anti-oligarchic forces'. This perspective was based on the Stalinist strategy of a cross-class 'Democratic Dictatorship', rather than working class power.

The FSLN's perspective led them to make a governmental alliance with the capitalist class, not an action front around limited proposals like Lenin's Anti Imperialists United Front. As the

Samozá regime fell in 1979 the FSLN and the capitalist 'National Patriotic Front' formed a joint ruling junta. After the revolution the junta nationalised some of the economy: not a majority; not under the control of the workers and peasants; but keeping wages low. The FSLN campaigned against two marxist parties which had been in the front line of the struggles against Samozá: the Maoist MAP-ML and the Fourth International's LMR. It was only after the nationalisation of Standard Fruit the next year that the blockade started that eventually killed the Nicaraguan revolution.

When tragedy befalls the workers' movement: in Chile or Bolivia; in China or Nicaragua, we have to learn the lessons of those defeats or we will repeat them. The

FSLN had state power, the Nicaraguan people did not. The FSLN had a mistaken strategy of collaboration with its bitterest enemy – the capitalist class. The fatal mistake of the Nicaraguan revolution was that the FSLN and its supporters failed to break with the capitalists. And they were destroyed by their failure.

A new Nicaraguan revolution is needed. Nicaragua's workers and peasants must abandon the pro-capitalist strategy of the FSLN. Instead they must look to the spotless banner of Trotskyism. Our solidarity is only worth more than words if we help build a Trotskyist party in Nicaragua today!

**Chrissie Brookes  
Manchester**

**We welcome letters on any subject: but please keep them brief! Letters over 400 words will be cut. Send to Socialist Outlook, PO Box 1109, London N4 2UU**



# Sloan's Square

## G'day Oxford!

APPLICATIONS are now open for the Rupert Murdoch Chair in Language and Communications, following the Dirty Digger's £3m donation to Oxford University.

The handout brings this venerable dumping-ground for public school chinless wonders another step closer to the Thatcherite ideal of a university parodied in television's *A Most Peculiar Practice*. The new professorial chair will carry as much prestige as a Ron and Reggie Kray Chair in Social Work, a Crippen Foundation of Women's Studies, or a Nicholas Ridley Institute of Ecology.

The day before the Wapping gift was announced, the *Sun* was stoutly defending itself in one of its exquisitely-written Editorials against censure from the Press Council for using the words 'poof' and 'poofers' to refer to gay men:

"The Council's chairman, Louis Blom-Cooper, QC, knows a lot about the law.

"But we know a great deal more about how ordinary people think, act and speak.

"Readers of The Sun KNOW and SPEAK and WRITE words like poof and poofers.

"What is good enough for them is good enough for us".

No doubt it will also be deemed good enough for students of the new Rupert Murdoch professor.

While we know the well-educated highly-paid and patronising journalists who produce The Sun speak and write such words, we surely need more evidence as to whether (and where) Sun readers write them.

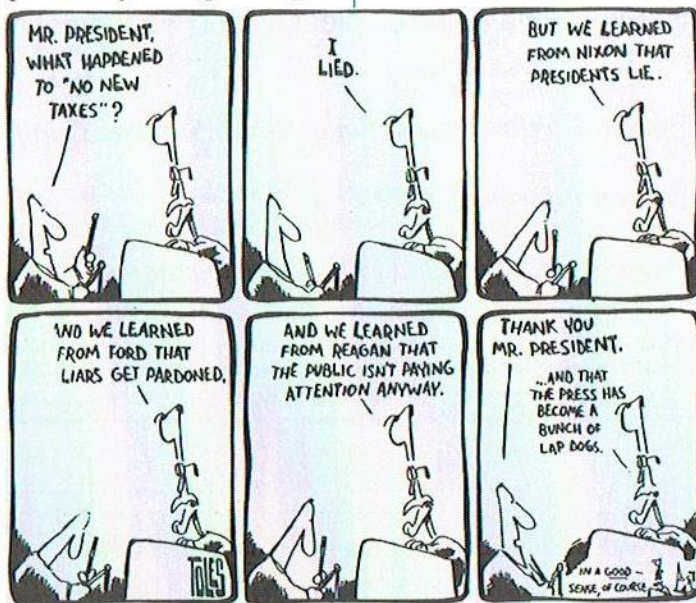
No doubt Margaret Thatcher (who has herself given an undisclosed personal donation to Somerville, her old Oxford college) is delighted that these standards of literacy are to be

part of a 'core curriculum' for the sons and daughters of the bourgeoisie in generations to come.

## Last resort: equal rights

Bloomsbury District Health Authority has been finding it hard to recruit and even harder to retain staff to work in its hospitals: some departments' staff turnover is at burger-bar levels.

After everything else has been tried and failed, Bloomsbury bosses have now resorted to promoting equal opportunities policies, producing a



special newspaper to show us how right-on they are.

Seeking to reach sections of society other employers have not reached, Bloomsbury invite people with mental health problems to come in and work for the usual abysmal NHS pay rates.

We understand managers are scurrying round departments telling them to take down all those silly office postcards that proclaim 'You don't have to be mad to work here - but it helps'.

## Standard reaction

One employer which has recruited extensively among people apparently suffering from severe personality disorders is London's *Evening Standard*, part of the *Daily Mail* group of publications, printed with a new type of ink and now known as the papers you stick in the bin, not in your pocket.

*Standard* editorials are generally written by a team of maladjusted Rottweilers, and are only a fraction more sophisticated in tone or argument than their counterparts in *The Sun Says*.

So for these newshounds the announcement that West Lambeth District Health Authority had closed another 120 hospital beds was more mouthwatering than a postperson's leg. The

response to the word 'Lambeth' was instinctive and instantaneous, and a diatribe was fired off, berating 'loony' Lambeth council and its poll tax bills.

This did not go down too well with junior health minister Virginia Bottomley: not only is West Lambeth DHA completely autonomous of Lambeth council, with its cash limits fixed by the government, but its government-appointed chair is none other than John Gamett - Virginia's dad!

Later issues of the *Standard* appeared without the offending

editorial or any correction or apology. It is after all the paper that sticks to prejudice, not to the facts.

## Is it old bull?

Amid all the furore over British beef came the distressing revelation that barmy Bible-bashing Agriculture Minister John Selwyn Gummer got the way he is by eating an entirely meat-based diet.

For those susceptible to such arguments, Mr Gummer attempted to show from Biblical references that fundamentalist Christians must also be fanatical carnivores. Some fundamentalists disagree: well they would, wouldn't they? The doctrinal debate on this issue is only just getting under way, and could prove promising: apparently it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for it to escape Mr Gummer's carving knife after morning service.

All his religious outpourings have been insufficient to persuade the public of Mr Gummer's line that eating beef is safe: it can't be long before the postcard people have a sign for butcher's racks bearing the motto 'You don't have to be a mad cow to hang here, but it helps'.

Meanwhile there has been too little attention to the worrying, if limited, epidemic of BSB - mad satellite disease.

Symptoms include a compulsion to mount circular or square devices outside a sufferer's house, followed by bizarre ramblings by victims on such topics as American wrestling, Derek Jameson, the *New Price is Right*, or any number of long-ago deleted re-run shows from BBC or ITV.

The disease cripples intellect and kills motor neurones, leaving the victim increasingly confined to an armchair or settee, suffering agonies in attempting to turn off the television, and incapable of rational thought.

You don't have to be mad to watch it; but you soon will be if you do.

By HARRY SLOAN



# INTERNATIONAL YOUTH SUMMER CAMP

**July 21st-29th  
De Kluis, Belgium**

This year sees the seventh International Youth summer camp of the Fourth International. The camp is intended as a place where young people from all over the world can come and learn about trotskyst ideas as well as meeting and discussing with people from other countries. This year's camp is centering on the theme of Europe – East and West and will have a delegation from various countries in Eastern Europe for the first time. There will be a women only space and a Lesbian and Gay only space.

Speakers will include; Ernest Mandel, a Young Sandinista, and an FI supporter from South Africa.

The cost for the whole week inclusive of food and travel will be approximately £120 and there is a possibility of the cost dropping even further! We are hoping to take around fifty people this year and also help the delegation from Eastern Europe. Obviously this will require money. So we are asking for donations. Every little helps so please send whatever you can . Thankyou.

-----  
*I am interested in coming to this years International Youth Summer Camp*

*I would like to receive further information*

*I cannot come to the Summer Camp but would like to make a donation of £.....*

*Name*.....

*Address*.....  
.....

Please return to : International Youth Summer Camp, PO Box 1109, London N4 2UU

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