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socialist OUTLOOK



PHOTO: Andrew Ward

No ideas, no principles, no socialism ...

Time for the bosses' second eleven?

Last week's Labour conference was a sickening spectacle. Empty platitudes followed stomach-turning platitudes, as the conference was turned into one long photo-opportunity for the Shadow Cabinet.

But singing 'We Shall Overcome' or 'We are the champions of the world' couldn't hide the basic fact: Kinnockism has no answers and no policy for change: it has all the substance of the middle of a Polo mint.

Kinnock has just one idea: to repack the party into an acceptable face for the establishment, and thus get elected. Behind the the stage-sets

and double-breasted suits there is *nothing* to meet the crisis of British capitalism or the problems facing working people.

Labour conferences in future will have to assess the fate of Kinnockite new realism; that fate is either to go down to defeat or to instal the most right wing Labour government ever.

Either way, a protracted media stunt is too feeble to push socialism off the agenda for long; Kinnock's 'Opportunity Britain' will go the same way as Harold Wilson's 'white heat of the technological revolution' - into the dustbin. The the left will be back, and socialism with it.

It's Time for Labour

PHOTO: Andrew Ward



Labour Conference '91 Proving themselves to the City

by Sean Tunney

'Labour Party Conference is in Brighton this week - unless they decide to change that as well'. So read the Tory posters surrounding last week's conference.

Labour are desperate to show capitalism that it is safe. John Smith, instead of making promises on 'squeezing the rich until the pips squeak', is having more City lunches than you or I have had hot dinners. In addition, Walworth Road's purge on the left has dramatically gathered pace. The whole conference was stage managed to an unprecedented degree.

Yet as Kinnock races Major to the centre ground, so there needs to be something to separate Tweedledum from Tweedledee. What was the 'big idea' which would galvanise the party, which we all told would be unveiled in Kinnock's speech? Old style welfarism.

'Labour will modernise the Health Service. The Tories will privatise it,' said Kinnock. And it was not just the NHS that Labour pledged to defend. On Friday, Bryan Gould announced a house building programme for the homeless. And there were pledges on pensions and benefits.

At the same time we heard

the familiar refrain from Margaret Beckett on Monday that all these pledges will be met as the 'economy will allow'. The point is that the economy won't allow. Even the industries privatised since 1979 are not going to go back into public hands.

Moreover, this week saw the confirmation that Labour policy will be for full European economic union. This gives a clue as to what Labour's answer will be to the massive crisis it will face if it returns to government after the election.

It will use the structures imposed on it by full integration into Europe to impose austerity measures and wage restraint.

Clearly, the Labour leadership regards the retention of the anti-union laws as crucial.

However, even the agreed implementation of a national minimum wage will be rejected by a large proportion of employers. It will need strike action combined with secondary picketing to implement this miserly minimum wage. Where will the trade union movement stand then?

Other decisions taken at conference this week were intended to stifle opposition to this in the Labour Party. Proposals are to be voted through next year on the new Policy Forum.

They are designed to take power away from the unions and constituencies and give it to the Parliamentary Labour Party. A campaign needs to be launched to fight them. Nevertheless, it needs to be restated that although the power of the block vote has been reduced, it still remains.

Trade union dissent will find its expression in the Labour Party. The job of socialists will be to channel that dissent. So the left needs to fight both the witch-hunt and the demoralisation on the Labour left.

But equally, we should not wait for a possible Labour victory to start organising around policies which advance the left and defend workers. The newly launched campaign *Socialists for Labour* gives us an excellent chance to raise these policies in the election campaign.

Other decisions of Conference

NEC elections

The results were not the disaster for the left that the media were predicting. Although Gerald Kaufman was elected, Skinner's vote went up by 14,000, to put him third. Benn's vote went down by 9,000.

Some on the left shed crocodile tears for the loss of Jo Richardson. The truth is that her recent positions had made it untenable for the left to vote for her, while the right dropped her. But, the fact that both the CLP and the Trade Union sections elected only men was a massive argument for the need for quotas with power.

In the reserved women's seats, the three left-wing women candidates gained credible votes, considering that they had little union backing. This was especially true of Leonora Lloyd who came runner up with 506,000 votes.

Nuclear power

Arthur Scargill proposed a motion which argued for the phasing out of nuclear power in fifteen years. This was defeated. A motion supporting the use of nuclear power was also narrowly defeated.

The Pergamon strikers

A motion opposing Maxwell's sacking of 23 NUJ members was passed overwhelmingly on a show of hands. The conference also called on him to 'concede the principle of re-employment' by giving the 23 two years' back-pay.

Free trade unions

The only motion attempting to unshackle the trade unions from the Tory anti-union laws was defeated without a real discussion.

Women's representation

It was decided that only by 1995 will women need to hold at least 40% of the posts at decision-making levels of the party, although the PLP will be exempt from even this. CLPs will be required to send women to conference at least every other year.

However, the resolution that women's places on the NEC should be elected by Labour Women's conference was remitted. This makes the decisions tokenism. It ensures that the women voted onto the NEC are still not accountable to women in the Party.

Freedom of information

A Labour government would bring in a Freedom Of Information Act. There would also be a statutory right of reply to 'factual inaccuracies' in the press.

Racism

Conference moved to 'monitor' racism within Europe and to push for the liberalisation of immigration controls 'within the spirit of civil liberties'.

Disabled people

A motion was passed to introduce a bill of rights for disabled people, and to 'take measures' against discrimination against deaf and hearing impaired people.

Uncorroborated convictions and the Tottenham Three

There was unanimous conference backing for an independent inquiry into the cases of the Tottenham Three and an end to convictions based on uncorroborated confessions.

Marital rape

A motion was passed to call on a Labour government to criminalise rape within marriage.

Sara Thornton

Conference supported a 'review' of Sara Thornton's case and those of other women jailed for killing violent partners.

Regional Assemblies

Conference agreed with the proposal for Regional Assemblies, first for Scotland then for Wales and the English regions.

Local government

Conference voted down a motion to rescind surcharge and disqualification. It also opposed a motion congratulating the Anti-Poll Tax Federation, which also called for the softening of current implementation of Poll Tax.

NHS

Motions were passed asking for the next Labour government to dismantle the NHS internal markets and return opted-out hospitals to the NHS. It was also agreed to 'consider' closing down pay-beds in the NHS.

House building

A motion was agreed to give every homeless person a house, to be financed by relaxing restrictions on the £5 billion capital receipts currently held by councils.

Defence spending

Conference called for defence spending to be reduced to the average level of other European countries, for the second year running.

What they said

On Walton

Lesley Mahmood:

'Eric Heffer was elected on the programme of 47 surcharged councillors. We would have betrayed his legacy if we hadn't stood. We had absolutely no choice but to defend the policy of the 47.'

Tony Benn:

'I reject the idea that a candidate should have stood against Kilfoyle. He was fairly elected to stand. People should stay and organise in the Labour Party not leave it.'

On socialists and the Labour Party

Peter Taaffe:

'This conference is totally unrelated to the real mood in the country.'

'We are not about to engage in any ultra-left adventure. But we are not going to be held back by bureaucrats. If that means working outside the Labour Party, then so be it.'

'I'll wager that Terry Fields and Dave Nellist will stand in the election whatever happens.'

'We will not stand still above all in Scotland ... If the

leadership are not prepared to fight the SNP, then make way for those that will.'

'If every Militant supporter is expelled, then so be it.'

Tony Benn:

'We hear from the media ... An entirely new Labour Party has been born.'

'At the very moment when the socialist banners ... have been banned, you listen to the speeches - it's all reappearing. The number of speeches about the rich and poor ... we've had pledges on health...education...and housing. Where's the money coming from? ... You cannot tackle any of these problems on the basis of a market economy'

'What I am saying is the Labour Party hasn't changed at all. It is still the only representative of the interests of those who work for a living.'

'What socialists inside and outside the Labour Party have to be associated with is those policies which answer ... the biggest crisis capitalism has faced since 1945.'

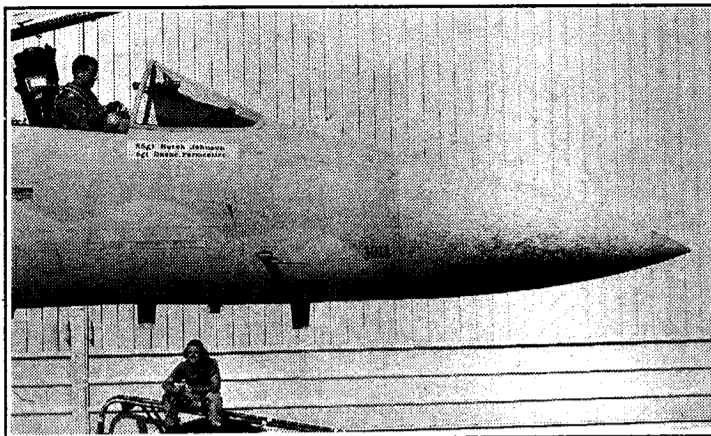
'People will ask ... what do Labour Party Socialists think. That's what going to make the Labour Party Socialists the largest group in the Labour Party.'

Where's the peace dividend?

The nuclear cuts announced by George Bush - the standing down of nuclear bombers and the scrapping of some missiles - are motivated by America's urgent need to save cash. The US budget deficit is forcing a reorganisation of US military forces worldwide.

There is no question of any unilateral nuclear disarmament on the part of the US. All the most modern and devastating US strategic weapons, especially submarine-based weapons, stay intact. This poses difficulties for the Soviet Union in matching the cuts, since its own missiles are mainly land-based, of the type being scrapped by Bush. And there is no proposal to do away with Star Wars.

Bush wants the US military to be 'leaner and fitter' - but still capable of rapid intervention in



the third world, and utterly dominant on a world scale

But that is where the difficulty lies for the US. In the battle for dominance among the imperialist powers, America has played the military card heavily. It hopes to maintain its world leadership role through military power,

even though it is declining economically compared with Germany and Japan.

The quandary is how to make the reductions in expenditure while keeping military supremacy.

In any case, this is not the dawn of a non-nuclear future. It is especially not a new dawn in Britain. The differences between Labour and the Tories on defence have narrowed to almost nothing; the 'peace dividend' is not available under a Neil Kinnock government. Both the Tories and Labour want Britain to be a small country which wields a big stick; especially having the prestige of being a nuclear power.

Socialists must seize on the new world situation to push forward the demand for massive reductions in arms spending. The campaign for an 80 per cent cut in the defence budget is a good place to start.

Paper promises are not enough

by Sam Inman

'WE'LL CONTINUE to make a bloody nuisance of ourselves', promised Peter Purton, speaking from the Labour Campaign for Lesbian and Gay Rights (LCLGR) at the campaign's fringe meeting at Labour Party conference.

He spoke of the historic opportunity that lesbians and gay men in the party now had. Good paper policy is all very well, he said, but 'we're greedy - we want full equality'.

Around eighty people turned up to the meeting, making it the best attended for some years.

Robin Cook MP, Shadow Health Secretary, spoke about the policies that Labour were offering - the repeal of Section 28 (to be part of a Local Government Bill in the first year of office), abolishing specifically gay offences such as Section 30 of the Criminal Justice Act (1991), the decriminalisation of homosexuality in the armed forces.

He went on to talk about Labour's promised Equal Opportunity Act which would outlaw discrimination of lesbians and gay men. He also promised a review into discrimination in parenting, adoption and immigration law.

Anne Gibson, National Officer of MSF and Diana Holland, South-East Regional Officer of the TGWU gave a trade union perspective on lesbian and gay rights. Both talked about tackling discrimination, education of straight trade unionists, and listening to lesbians and gay men in the unions.

The biggest controversy at the meeting, however, was around people's attitudes toward the 'Queer Power' action, organised by Brighton Area Action Against Section 28 at the beginning of Kinnock's Tuesday speech to conference. The protesters were angry at the party leadership's attempts to sweep policies on lesbian and gay equality under the carpet.

What attitude should lesbian and gay socialists have towards such actions? The meeting was passionately divided between those who thought that this was 'neither the time nor the place' for such actions, and those who believed that such action was necessary to keep lesbian and gay issues on the party's agenda.

Dani Ahrens, speaking from BAAAS28, reminded the meeting that when Clause 28 was announced, initially the Labour frontbench supported it. It was only through active pressure from the lesbian and gay movement that this policy was reversed.



Mr Kinnock's Showcase

Labour

Fighting the battle of the fringe

Clearly the current purge is more important for some than others. The Campaign for Labour Party Democracy fringe meeting traditionally signposts the way for the left to vote during the week.

This time, the platform wanted to discuss democracy without mentioning the witch-hunt. It was left to the floor, including Audrey Wise MP, to demand that this was addressed.

However, for some it seemed attacking the left was more important. In direct contrast to his speech the night before, Ken Livingstone MP made it clear who the real enemies were - the Socialist Movement (SM).

He painted a fantastical picture: 'Four years ago, the left was united around Labour Left Liaison. What split it apart was the idea that you could work with people outside the Labour Party in the Socialist Movement'. Tony Benn had left and could not reply - but then so had most of the audience.

Sunday, however, also saw the SM in a rather different light - organising to support workers struggles. 100 people went to

the SM Trade Union Committee/Labour Party Socialists (LPS) meeting, 'Unshackle the Unions'.

In a spirited speech, Dennis Skinner pledged his parliamentary vote against the Tory laws. Miners' leader Peter Heathfield exposed Thatcher for calling on Russian workers to take strike action without a ballot.

Other speakers reminded us that during the ambulance workers action, polls showed that even Tory voters supported secondary action.

Anna Wagstaff, a Pergamon striker, argued from experience on the need for international secondary action. She emphasised that the 'critical battle is in the unions themselves to oppose the laws'.

Monday saw the launch of the new left paper, socialist. Tony Benn said that the SM should provide 'a place for homeless socialists...especially after the next election'. The organisation needed a paper, he argued.

It would 'provide a framework for the left to exchange opinions'. Also, in the run up to the election it would be a forum for those who support Labour

but 'also want to see a better society and not a better managed status quo'.

He rejected the pessimists who thought it had been launched at the wrong time: 'There is definitely a space for a paper like socialist'. Indeed, he argued, 'it will not compete or damage other papers. It will help them. The more socialist literature there is, the more they will all be read'.

Tuesday saw the Militant readers fringe meeting, with Lesley Mahmood and Peter Taaffe. No more than 60 were there. The meeting showed some of the problems faced by Militant. Mahmood defended standing in Walton, but went on to describe its legacy in parts of the Liverpool left.

A positive aspect of the situation was that the Broad Left was calling on the Independent Labour Party to keep their Labour membership, she argued. However, this was on the incorrect basis that the Broad Left was 'not a separate party to the Labour Party. We are the Labour Party'.



Jimmy Knapp: not too keen even on primary strike action

Both Mahmood and Taaffe were, typically, resolutely optimistic. Said Taaffe: 'This conference is totally unrelated to the real mood in the country'. That is why he said, Militant supporters would be looking away from Labour in the future (see box).

Finally, Wednesday saw 100 at the Labour Party Socialists meeting 'The General Election and the Case For Socialism'. Tony Benn strongly defended the role of LPS.

As Steve French, speaking for the Campaign Against the Witch-hunt, said 'First the left should defend socialists' right to membership. That is crucial, but not enough. It needs then to bring those people around the 'Socialists for Labour' campaign, around demands which link those inside and outside the party.'

Photomontage: John Harris

We can fight Labour's purges

by Jon Green and Sean Tunney, Brighton LP

After an angry debate, conference voted to uphold the decision of the NEC to suspend MPs Terry Fields and Dave Nellist from holding any position in the Labour Party. Earlier, the out-going NEC had ruled Nellist out of order as a candidate for the new NEC.

Terry Fields was tried and sentenced in his absence even though doctors had informed the NEC that he should rest after his time in prison.

Dave Nellist told the Brighton Friends/Campaign Against the Witch-hunt fringe meeting, held the Saturday before conference, that he had complied with every edict from Walworth Road.

'But when the NEC asked me to name names, that was a line I was not prepared to cross'. Of course, it is not only the MPs who were refused entrance to their own conference.

At the same NEC, members

of Brighton Labour Party were added to the hundreds already suspended. Last Monday one of the present authors was also added to the list.

But the purge will not stop there. Tory chair, Chris Patten, after successfully demanding the heads of Fields and Nellist, is now calling for those of all the Socialist Campaign Group MPs.

The Brighton Friends/Campaign Against the Witch-hunt meeting showed the possibilities when the left in just one area unified around a campaign to fight the purge.

With 500 people in attendance, the meeting was one of the largest and most powerful, meetings of the week. Dennis Skinner argued 'Stop the sectarianism. We need a united campaign to stop McCarthyism in our party'.

This contrasted with the 300 strong march and rally of the



Dave Nellist and Terry Fields join Friends of Brighton Labour Party in demonstration against purges

'Defend Dave Nellist and Terry Fields Campaign'. The rally was disappointing for a number of reasons.

Democratic campaign

First, a campaign set up to fight for democracy in the Labour Party should be set up on a democratic basis. Second, as Terry Fields had stressed at the meeting the night before, the witch-hunt is not just about two individuals.

There was also a problem about what people at the rally were calling for. This included a much wider set of demands than simply defending Fields and Nellist's right to be MPs.

This tactic culminated in the

majority of the marchers chanting at conference delegates, 'You'll never take us all'. Not exactly calculated to get the most positive response.

However the most disappointing aspect of the rally was its size - especially since people had clearly come from different parts of the country.

This indicates the problems which a number of Militant supporters now have in fighting for membership of the Labour Party.

Nonetheless, the possibilities for a united campaign are there. Any campaign against the witch-hunt should have the defence of the two MPs as a number one priority. Pressure

on Campaign Group MPs makes their involvement in the campaign more likely.

The vote at conference also showed the potential to build support among the party's rank and file. Despite all Kinnock's attempts to silence opposition, the witch-hunting LCC claimed over 70 CLPs opposed the suspensions.

The National Campaign Against the Witch-hunt is a non-sectarian, independent group which does not make any prescriptions as to local tactics for campaigns.

It can be contacted c/o 56 Ashby House, Loughborough Road, Brixton, London, SW9 7SL.

The treatment for which 56% of patients have to pay!

In the third article of our 'Women in the Unions' series, LEONORA LLOYD, National Co-ordinator for the National Abortion Campaign (NAC), explains what needs to be done in campaigning around abortion rights in trade unions today.

LAST YEAR a late-night TV programme showed a film made shortly before the 1967 Abortion Act was passed. It featured interviews with a number of women. One was a working class woman with eight children who had tried to have the last one aborted. Her doctor had told her she was in good health and therefore had no grounds.

Another was the wife of a company director. She had two young children and had decided she could not manage a third just yet.

A Harley Street doctor arranged for her to be seen by two psychologists to testify as to her precarious mental condition. Her abortion cost her £100, a lot of money then - even for a company director - and her husband had had to borrow money.

This brought home to me

vividly what I had always known in theory - that the rich have always been able to get safe abortions. If they could not get them in Harley Street, they went abroad. Poorer working class women got more children, or badly-botched backstreet abortions - with death, disease and injury in their wake.

It is no coincidence therefore, that it was socialist women and labour movement organisations - the Co-operative and Labour Party women's sections - who led the campaigns for legalised abortions from the 1930s onwards.

Free of charge

When NAC was founded in 1975, trade union and Labour women quickly took its demand for abortion on demand, available free of charge on the NHS, into their organisations.

One of our proudest achievements was the 1979 demonstration, led by the TUC, against the anti-abortion Corrie Bill. This was the first pro-choice march anywhere in the world led by a trade union federation, and was the result of a lot of hard work by many hundreds of trade unionists.

Despite the clear defeat of the anti-abortionists' attempts over the last five years to attack time-limits, the fight is a long way from being over. Secondary schools have just recently

received unsolicited sets of five plastic foetuses from the Society for the Protection of the Unborn Child (SPUC) and glossy education packs from the other anti-abortion organisation, LIFE. Meanwhile, NAC can only afford to send out its school kit to those who pay for it.

The introduction of the new abortion pill, RU486, has led to a tremendous outburst of activity on the part of the anti-abortionists.

They've sent letters to the chairs of all health authorities, and also issued instructions to all their supporting doctors to boycott the French company producing RU486 - even when this means changing patients' existing prescriptions.

But NAC's income cannot keep up with its expenditure, never mind countering the current anti-abortion activity or continuing the very positive campaigning work of the past year. NAC has held two major meetings this year, both with a range of expert speakers.

One meeting was about RU486 with a speaker from Paris. The other was on 'Reproductive Rights in the 1990s', with a special guest speaker from the Polish Women's Association.

We want to increase the number and range of our meetings, and hold them around the country to ensure that women

everywhere can attend them. But these sort of activities are extremely expensive, so will involve a good deal of fund-raising.

NAC is also planning a membership-drive, especially in the trade unions. We have a number of important unions in membership at a national level, with no or few branches affiliated.

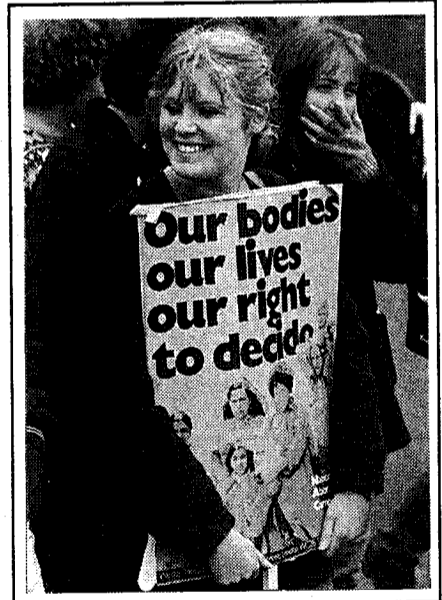
This is something that needs to be tackled urgently. It can best be done with the help of activists from the unions in question. We hope to use our conference on 26 October, and the 'Women in the Unions' national meeting on 23 November to set up a group to lead this work.

Support

Britain is now one of the few countries in Europe without abortion on demand. Opinion polls show that 81 per cent of the public support a woman's right to choose. The time is right to use the help of the trade unions and labour movement in the coming year to launch a major push and achieve at least one of our aims.

Meanwhile, on current statistics, 40 per cent of women have abortions at some time in their lives.

Around 56 per cent have to pay for them. We want to cam-



campaign for better sex education and contraception provision to bring the abortion rate down, and for improved NHS provision. For ourselves, our sisters and our daughters, the campaign must continue and must succeed.

For further information contact NAC at Wesley House, 4 Wild Court, London, WC2B 5AU. Tel: 071 405 4801.

**Women in the unions
Fighting for our rights!**

Sat 23rd Nov, 10-5
Wesley House, 4 Wild Court, London WC1

Tories grapple with NHS albatross

By John Lister

The Tory health service reforms, the last and most unpopular fruits of naked Thatcherism, are now a serious electoral liability for John Major and his government.

Despite his desperate repetition of promises that he does not intend to privatise the NHS if the Tories win a fourth term, the latest opinion poll for the *Sunday Times* shows that only 25% of voters believe him, while a massive 62% think he is lying!

Those who are already suspicious of Tory intentions are scarcely likely to be convinced by the words of one of the government's own hand-picked political appointees, NHS Chief Executive Duncan Nicholl, as he breaks the traditional 'non-party' convention of civil servants to add his two pennyworth to the Tory propaganda effort.

Voters have memories on the NHS. Many remember Thatcher in 1979 insisting that if she were elected she would not increase prescription charges. Then they were 20p: within 6

months they were 45p: now they are £3.40!

The Tories also used to deny that they would impose charges for health care: but since then we have had charges imposed on eye tests and dental check-ups, with soaring charges for dental treatment.

In 1983 and again in 1987 Thatcher cynically insisted that the NHS was 'safe in our hands': each time the election was followed by drastic cash cuts and closures of thousands of hospital beds.

The biggest-ever 1987-88 winter crisis triggered strikes by nurses – and was followed by the Thatcher 'review' that led to the wild marketisation schemes now embodied in the NHS and Community Care Act. Not one of these proposals – which include hospital opt-outs and the 'internal market' – has ever been put to the electorate.

Already the first six months of the government's unpopular NHS reforms have reduced our health service to a shambles.



PHOTO: John Harris

THE DOCTOR WILL COME ROUND TO GIVE YOU AN ESTIMATE



● Orthopaedic patients imported from Exeter jump growing waiting list queues of local people needing treatment in Riverside's hospitals.

● Consultants at St Mary's Hospital are told to wait four days for authorisation from clerical staff before promising non-emergency patients they can have the treatment they need: the delay is to check that their health authority is willing and able to pay the bill.

Refusal to pay

● Managers in Bloomsbury and Islington DHA complain that "an increasing number of purchasers [i.e. other

health authorities] are refusing to pay invoices, usually for unauthorised treatment." Yet they also reveal that in July over 50% of elective cases "were treated without prior authorisation".

● Guy's Hospital's specialist child heart surgery unit has already run through its entire contract income for local patients. This means that any local kids needing operations will have to wait until next April, while the work of the department now hangs on finding patients from elsewhere whose health authorities will pay up.

● Meanwhile more health authorities admit that their slender funds for financing residents treated in other districts outside normal contracts (Extra Contractual Referrals) are almost exhausted inside six months. Some DHAs have received less bills than they expected – suggesting big problems in invoicing: others complain of receiving far less income than planned.

Who will pay?

● Almost everywhere the numbers of patients treated under 'block' contracts are wildly different from projections – often averaging 10-20% above the level budgeted. Nobody knows who will pick up the bill for the difference.

● A handful of opted-out budget-holding GPs hold major hospitals to ransom, threatening to send patients elsewhere unless they get queue-jumping 'fast-track' treatment. Nobody explains how this could work when more GPs become fund-holders: not everyone can jump the queue at once.

● As first-wave opted out hospitals wrestle with predictable financial crises – announcing cutbacks, redundancies and desperate economy measures – a second wave of over 100 applicants presents their documents, many of them complete with deliberate omissions, fiddled figures and hopes of wafer-thin surpluses.

People know nurses care they don't believe the Tories do

● The new 'business methods' include the £200,000 plus BMW pay-off deal to ousted Guy's Finance Director Peter Burroughs, the man who warned early on of the scale of the cash crisis. Still in post is £90,000 plus two cars Chief Executive Peter Griffiths, the man who ignored the warnings, then announced cuts of £6.8m, and now seems headed towards a deficit of up to £7.5m.

As the winter looms, with its increased strain on the NHS, the full scope of the financial and organisational disaster already unleashed by the internal market will begin to become apparent.

Worse to come

But there is worse to come next April, when the second wave Trusts are launched, and when health authorities outside London should be freed from any compulsion to send patients to London hospitals.

Ministerial advisors have warned that the consequence of this could be haphazard cutbacks which axe 2,000 beds and at least one teaching hospital: nobody yet knows for sure which one!

None of this need have happened. The NHS reforms – which everyone except government ministers has condemned from the very beginning – were a half-baked attempt to evade the central issue of inadequate cash for the NHS. Instead, by diverting resources into pointless new tiers of bureaucracy, they have made the problem worse.

Will John Major survive a winter of NHS cash crises and manage to convince the punters that he really does support this one part of the public sector while dismantling and privatising everything else?

Much will depend on the effectiveness of Labour's campaigning on the issue. Enough said!

Trades Councils must exploit TUC's U-turn

by Sam Stacey

The TUC's recent U-turn on the withdrawal of recognition for Trades Councils was a victory. But we can be sure that the General Council will come forward with proposals in the forthcoming review which will hardly enhance the independence of the Trades Council movement.

They have decided to rerun the election for the Trades Council Joint Consultative Committee (TCJCC), since it was elected at the 'illegal' conference earlier this year. Once this is re-elected, it is not clear how the review will proceed or how the Trades Council input into it will be organised.

The TUC General Council was defeated as a result of its undemocratic action – avoiding a discussion at last year's Congress and denying Trades Councils an opportunity to express their viewpoint.

However, when it comes to putting forward proposals for the organisation and revival of the councils, it will not be easy to achieve as broad an agreement as before. So it is important for the left in the Trades Councils movement to be clear on their proposals.

The conference of Trades Councils clearly needs to be under the control of the councils themselves. A return to the past – where a TUC bureaucrat dictates topics for discussion, ruling out anything outside TUC policy – would be unacceptable.

Further, the conference should elect an executive committee with a mandate to carry out its decisions. By contrast, the TCJCC, on which TUC General Council members sit, is designed to prevent any initiative outside of their control.

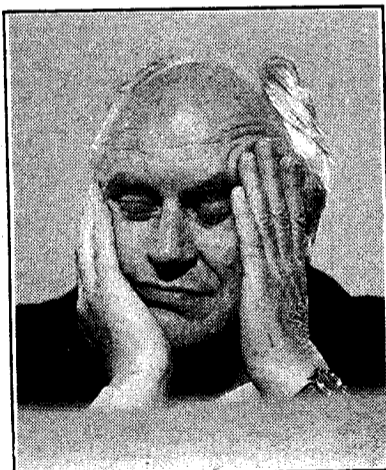
In practice, the majority of TCs operate outside the 'legal' framework laid down by the TUC. Involvement in campaigns against the Poll Tax or the Gulf war – or anything outside TUC policy – breaks the Trades Councils' rules. The only reason that there has not been a crackdown on such activity is that it is so widespread.

Trades Councils reflect the state of the labour movement in the locality. Given that many trade union branches are moribund, it is not surprising that only around one third of them are affiliated to Trades Councils. Still fewer are actively involved.

Revival

Reviving the Trades Councils is therefore linked to rebuilding the strength of the unions and developing a new layer of activists. The councils cannot substitute for the efforts of the unions themselves.

But they can strive to coordinate efforts directed at recruitment campaigns, rebuild a tradition of solidarity, and assert common class interests in opposition to the sectoralism and parochialism nourished by new realism.



Willis: u-turn

Widespread support exists for the idea of allowing representation of workplace organisations on Trades Councils. The TUC itself was preparing to carry out experiments in this area, but this was never implemented.

A direct relationship with the workplaces is important, if Trades Councils are to build a real base of support which is closer to the membership than branch representatives enable. Councils should take up this demand, while opening up their meetings to shop stewards immediately, even if they are not yet able to be formal delegates.

The development of this discussion is an urgent task – these demands must be pressed at next year's union conferences, so that unions are mandated and leaders' hands not left free to vote for any proposal put forward by the TUC.

Meanwhile, Trades Councils should call on the Joint coordinating committee to organise a conference to discuss proposals put forward by individual councils.

South African socialist comes to Britain

by Patrick Baker

The Workers Organisation for Socialist Action is sending Carl Brecker, its General Secretary, to Britain to popularise the struggle for class politics in South Africa.

WOSA, a relatively young organisation in the South African liberation movement, has grown in leaps and bounds over recent years. The organisation has stepped into the vacuum left by organisations such as the ANC for a class struggle opposition to apartheid.

While Mandela and others command massive respect among the South African working class, many question their strategy for defeating the racist regime. The keystone of the ANC's approach has been an attempt to negotiate an end to apartheid with De Klerk.

But time and again, the National Party's representatives have tried to maintain white minority

privileges, the cornerstone of apartheid. South Africa's traditional friends, such as Britain and the USA, may have been ready to accept the new 'non-racist' rhetoric. But the South African workers' movement has not been so easily won.

WOSA has now built a serious base in the black community on the basis of an anti-apartheid strategy based on class struggle. It is this message that Carl Brecker will bring to Britain in his two-week tour of meetings.

The tour will take in a dozen major cities from Southampton to Swansea to Glasgow and may visit Ireland. It will end up at the 'Socialism in the new world order' rally organised by Socialist Outlook, where Brecker will be speaking with Fourth International leader Ernest Mandel and author Janette Habel.

More details will be in the next issue of *Socialist Outlook*.

Privatisation - Irish style

by Kevin Keating,
Peoples Democracy

The biggest news story throughout September in Ireland has been the scandal revealed in 'Greencore', the first major company to be privatised by the 26 county government. The privatisation programme of the Dublin government is in disarray, as more and more shady deals and corrupt practices are revealed.

So far it is known that the chief executive of Greencore (formerly the Irish Sugar Company), Chris Comerford, and four other executives were set to pocket profits of over 7 million. The most damaging and politically embarrassing factor for the government is that the swindle occurred when the company was wholly state-owned, and they were directly responsible.

In 1988 the board of Irish Sugar, directed by Comerford, approved a loan of 1 million to four executives - Michael Tully, Charles Jaravan, Charles Lyons and Thomas Keleghan - to buy out 49% of 'Sugar Distributors', for 1.7 million.

The state, through the Irish Sugar Company, had owned 51% since 1975 and it was Irish Sugar's main marketing and distribution company. 15 months later, Irish Sugar bought these same shares for 9.5 million.

Thieves fall out

The Irish public might never have found out about this scam, except that Comerford et al fell

This article is the first of a regular series to be contributed to Socialist Outlook from comrades in Peoples Democracy, the Irish section of the Fourth International.

out over dividing the loot. The 49% share had been bought by a company, 'Gladebrook', whose ownership is hidden behind a string of at least eight companies registered in Jersey. It was only when Comerford went to the High Court in Dublin, claiming against his former cronies' ownership of one of these companies, that the scandal began to unravel.

A week later, Comerford was forced to resign from Greencore. But not before the board granted him a golden handshake in cash, plus pension rights worth over 2 million. A few days later, Greencore's general manager, Michael Tully, also resigned.

A culture of corruption

For Irish workers, the Greencore affair seems not just the unacceptable face of capitalism, but it's only face. There has been a plethora of scandals in recent years and the general attitude to the current inquiry is cynical.

There has been the collapse of the 'Larry Goodman Group' of beef exporters, in which hundreds of millions in public funds was lost in export in-

surance and other scams. Then the 'Gallagher Group' collapsed, following a swindle involving millions in small investors' savings. Both Gallagher and Goodman were prominently linked with Fianna Fail and Prime minister Charles Haughey.

Fianna Fail government ministers and deputies have been involved for years in county planning decisions and land sales. These have netted untold fortunes for private speculators. In fact, Dublin county council had no time for other business during its last six year tenure.

In a month in which a rooftop protest at Dublin's Mountjoy jail was brutally suppressed, Irish workers will not hold their

breath to see if Greencore's board join the inmates in their squalid conditions.

The likelihood of the inquiry netting the entire web of Greencore accomplices seems remote. To disclose ownership of the offshore companies would need a court order in Jersey. This could only be granted if criminal proceedings are underway.

Given the government's direct stake in overseeing the sugar company and distributors and that the consultants responsible for overseeing the sale of Greencore found nothing amiss, it would seem that dubious dealings with offshore companies are common. So it probably came to light purely

by chance and Comerford's greed.

The trade unions

The unions have played a sorry role in the affair. There has been complete silence from the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU). This is no surprise, given that the ICTU is locked into a ten year joint economic programme (The Programme for Economic and Social Progress) with the government. This involves a minimal three year pay deal that the government wants to renege on.

The ICTU has also quietly dropped its opposition to privatisation without any conference agreement. Another factor in their silence is that Billy Atlee, the general secretary of the country's biggest union and an ICTU leader, is also a Greencore director.

The working class had been reeling under the government's austerity offensive and the breakneck restructuring of the public sector for the IMF/EC single market. The one positive result of these scandals is that they have now lost any tolerance of crooked politicians and their business friends.

In the June local government elections, the two main bourgeois parties lost heavily to left and 'protest' candidates. The political crisis is so deep that neither Fianna Fail nor Fine Gael could form a stable government if a general election were held.

Latest revelations

The privatisation policy was dealt a further blow when it emerged that the chairman of Telecom Eireann, Michael Smurfit, was involved in the sale of land to the company. Double the value of the site was paid to a company in which he was involved.

This latest scandal also involves the consultancy firm National City Brokers (NCB). They won a consultancy contract for all the previous privatisations, including Greencore. They were then offered the contract to investigate the privatisation of Telecom, the biggest and most profitable of all. Both Smurfit and NCB have interests in the companies which sold the site to Telecom.



Irish PM, Charles Haughey: would you buy a used industry from this man?

Clashes in Georgia

by Colin Meade

RENEWED fighting between supporters and opponents of Georgian president Zvlad Gamsakhurdia has broken out in the capital Tbilisi.

Two and a half years after a murderous attack by Soviet troops on pro-independence demonstrators in the Caucasian republic, it was the turn of the police of the nationalist president to open fire of opponents on September 2, 1991.

Gamsakhurdia's opponents stepped up demonstrations after the killings, demanding his resignation, access to the media and parliamentary elections.

Moscow coup

They accuse the president of a record of anti-democratic practices, as well as or political incompetence and indecision, expressed by his decision to disband the Georgian National Guard at the behest of the

leaders of the Moscow coup attempt.

There is plenty of evidence of Gamsakhurdia's anti-democratic instincts; the victory of his 'Round Table' coalition in the Supreme Soviet elections in October was followed by a takeover of the media, while opponents from the rival 'National Congress' bloc have faced physical harassment.

On September 18 opposition leader Giorgi Chanturia was arrested for 'organising anti-social actions' supposedly in collusion with former Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze.

In an inept response to central attempts to manipulate non-Georgian minorities in the Republic, in which Georgians make up around 70% of the population, the Gamsakhurdia government formally abolished the South Ossetian and Abkhazian autonomous regions, thus ensuring the firm hostility of the non-Georgian peoples of these regions to the fledgling independent state.



Soviet tanks intervene into the Caucasus

The president is a nationalist of the mystical romantic variety, keen to underline the Christian character of his country on the borders of the House of Islam, which creates additional tensions vis-a-vis the Muslim Abkhazians and the Azerbaijani minority.

The independence of the three Caucasian republics of Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan is not yet assured, despite all the shocks the Soviet system has suffered in recent years.

Nationalism

Central government troops continue to roam around areas of conflict such as South Ossetia and the Armenian enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh in Azerbaijan.

Fighting for class politics in Egypt

A crucial factor in the success of America's Gulf war was the lack of active mass opposition in the Arab world. *Socialist Outlook* talked to MOHAMMED, an Egyptian marxist about the struggle for working class politics in his country.

Q. What was the response in Egypt to the Gulf war?

A. Egyptian president Mubarak gave strong support to the war, and this was very important to the war, and without his support - the basis of the 'Arab umbrella' - imperialism's intervention would have been much more politically difficult. Mubarak was key to giving an Arab face to this intervention.

Among the Egyptian people expressions of opposition to the war were difficult. Communist or socialist parties are illegal which creates difficulties in their organising open anti-imperialist protests.

Q. These anti-opposition laws, are they just against socialists and communists?

A. These anti-socialist laws have existed since 1939 - neither Nasser nor his successor abandoned them. Nasser, a petty-bourgeois nationalist figure, himself ruthlessly suppressed communist and socialist dissent.

The situation is different for the Islamic fundamentalists. The Muslim Brotherhood, the founders of fundamentalism in Egypt, are now semi-legal. They are in alliance with an organisation which calls itself, demagogically, the 'Labour Party'. In reality it is a right wing, semi-fascist party.

In fact, it was Sadat, president after the death of Nasser who began to reduce repression against the fundamentalists as a counter-weight to the left.



Egyptian president: Hosni Mubarak

The Islamic fundamentalists opposed the war, but at the same time Mubarak used a lot of 'Islamic' rhetoric, claiming our Islamic brothers in Kuwait were being repressed.

Q. But what about the opposition to the war among the people?

A. The masses were divided, and this was a big miscalculation by Saddam who seemed to have thought there would be an Arab uprising in his support. The government and the mass media successfully used the repressive nature of the Saddam regime. In particular they used the fact that Egyptian workers in Iraq had been killed by the regime - something which Mubarak had kept quiet about until then.

The demonstrations against the war were not very big. They were concentrated particularly among the students in the big centres like Cairo and Alexandria. The demonstrations were divided - some organised by the fun-



Gulf War: no mass opposition emerged in Egypt as US tanks rolled through deserts

damentalists, some by leftists, including Nasserists, communists, and of course the Trotskyists.

Q. What is your estimate of the strength of the Islamic fundamentalists?

A. The Islamic movements were at their height at the beginning of the 1980s, when you will remember they assassinated president Anwar Sadat, and could mobilise a lot of people.

After Sadat's assassination, the regime made a huge offensive against them utilising every form of repression. This took not only the form of a state of emergency and mass imprisonment, but also the regular assassination of Islamic militants by government troops. The state of emergency has never been lifted.

Recently the fundamentalists assassinated the Speaker of the Egyptian parliament. They can still pull off this kind of operation but they do not have the mass following they had 10 years ago.

The Islamic forces have become more isolated from the masses. Egypt is a country with a long secular history, and despite the early gains of the fundamentalists among young people, see they have no practical solutions to the daily problems of the vast numbers of desperately poor people in the country.

It is not like Algeria; the fundamentalists are declining in strength.

Q. Nasserism was a very important phenomenon - the high point of Arab nationalism. Does this Nasserist tradition still exist?

A. Nasser had a huge mass following. But in the twenty years since his death the memory has begun to fade. Of course there is a Nasserist party, but its mass influence is weak. Nasser left the memory of a great individual leader, but not much in terms of concrete gains for the masses or an ideology which could subsist for a long period in a very different world situation.

Q. What is the situation inside the Egyptian workers movement?

A. There are no independent unions in Egypt. There is one state-controlled union, the Union of Egyptian Workers. It is possible for revolutionary workers to belong to this union and to do useful work, as do the Egyptian Trotskyists, but it is extremely difficult to take leadership positions - even at a local level.

And repression against workers struggles is strong; last year the regime smashed a strike in the steel plant just outside Cairo by machine-gunning the strikers.

Q. What about the left?

A. Nasser completely crushed the communists during the 1950s and '60s, they were nearly all murdered or in prison. But after the defeat in the 1967

war with Israel, a new left began to arise. In 1977 there was a huge mass movement against price rises, and Sadat began to repress the left viciously. For five years the left was in and out of prison. In particular the regime tried to break links between the left and the workers.

At the same time the left faced the rise of the Islamic fundamentalist movement. The left hasn't really recovered from this situation.

The communists are still not legal, and have suffered a series of splits over the last couple of years. Now there are two or three contending communist organisations, not totalling more than 1000 people. The main party to have come from the CP is the Democratic Peoples Party, which has not more than a few hundred members. There is also the Communist Workers Party, which is of Maoist origin, and the Communist Party 8th January, which is quite right wing.

This movement is in very great crisis, with various positions being put forward on the Soviet Union and the crisis of Stalinism. It is clear that this will lead to a regroupment; and the Trotskyist movement is participating in this debate - various communist organisations even asked us to help clarify their positions!

Intervening in this crisis of the Stalinist and ex-Stalinist parties is, together with the trade union work, our main perspective for building a revolutionary marxist party.

'Post-apartheid' constitution Safeguarding white privileges

by Charlie van Gelderen

"WE MUST have a democracy which protects minorities."

So said Stoffel van der Merwe, the new Secretary General of the ruling National Party, speaking about the government's proposals for a new constitution for post-apartheid (sic) South Africa.

"The overriding principle (is) to create a true democracy where the will of the majority will prevail, but not at the expense of the minority."

In a masterpiece of Orwellian double-talk, Mr van der Merwe said that the proposals are based on some fundamental principles - the participation not of minorities, but minority parties, at every level of government; a manifesto on human rights; an independent judiciary; and investing the constitution with the greatest measure of legitimacy.

How will legitimacy be established? Van der Merwe is quite clear about this.

The legitimacy of the new constitution is of cardinal im-

portance. We have said openly that there is a white referendum. There must be a valid testing of the will and wishes of the whites.

Voting in the referendum will be on separate (racial) rolls because 'to ensure the legitimacy of the constitution, it must be shown that it is supported by all groups and minorities. But if you can't show that a majority of whites support it, how can you live under the same roof as the right wing?'

Superficial break

Superficially, the proposed constitution appears to make a complete break with the apartheid past. The word 'race' does not appear once in the entire document.

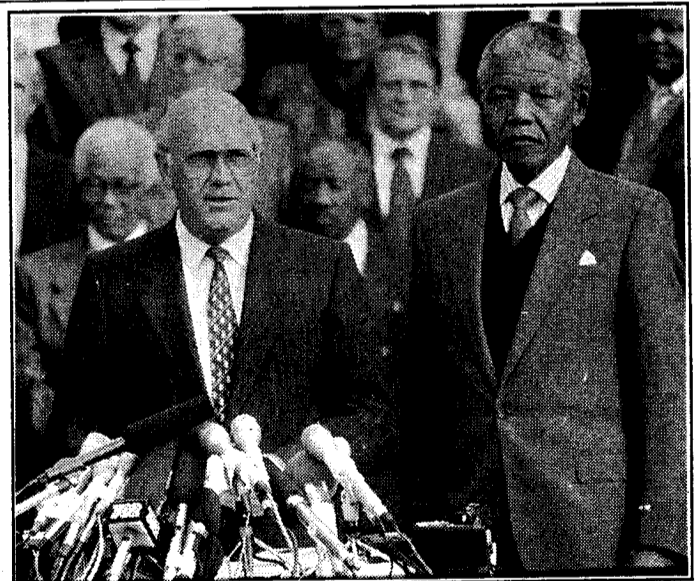
The concept of 'homelands' as a principle is abandoned. But those territories like the Transkei, Ciskei and Bophutswana, which have been recognised as 'independent' by Pretoria if no-one else, would have to agree to be re-incorporated in a unified South Africa.

But apartheid was not only about race. It was a society which established the unequal division of wealth. As Allister Sparks put it in the *Observer*, 'Apartheid has produced the most unequal society on earth and this constitution would set those inequalities in concrete.'

The government's constitutional lawyers have drafted an ingenious document, whose main design is preventing the ANC from coming to power.

It consists of a maze of 'checks and balances' with some powers devolved from central authority to the regions. This will ensure that in areas with a predominantly white population, they will be able to retain their privileged way of life.

But the key to the proposed constitution is the proposal for a two-chamber government. One chamber, the 'lower' house, will be elected by universal franchise. The second chamber would have equal representation from all constitutionally acceptable parties, with the power of veto over legislation from the lower house.



De Klerk and Mandela: ANC react strongly to 'post-apartheid' constitution

The government will consist of a multi-party cabinet, and the executive presidency will be replaced with a three person executive council. This could mean, for example, an executive troika consisting of Mandela, De Klerk and Buthelezi. Constitutional Affairs Minister, Gerrit Viljoen, was quite frank about what this could mean when addressing a press conference in September.

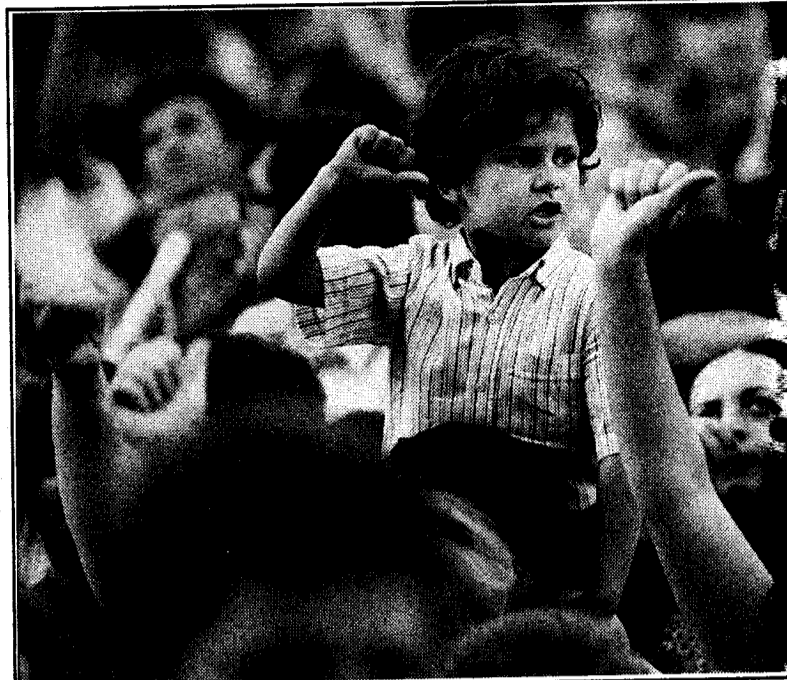
He said that the ANC could conceivably win an election with an 80% majority and still find itself outnumbered two to one in the troika presidency and the multi-party cabinet.

Mandela and the ANC have reacted strongly. Speaking at a

graduation ceremony at the University of Witwatersrand, Mandela characterised the government's proposals as a 'scheme to prevent the will of the people being realised through democratic government - a system that will entrench minority privileges by ensuring that any majority party is powerless to make any significant changes, powerless to remove minority privileges and, in many ways, powerless to rule.'

The ANC has renewed its demand for a multi-party conference and for an interim government to 'oversee' the transition period.

Romanian miners rebel against marketisation



PHOTOS: David Stewart-Smith, Insight

Anti-communist sentiment rides high in Bucharest

TEN DAYS ago thousands of miners from the Jiu Valley poured into Bucharest to besiege the government of president Iliescu and prime minister Petre Roman, who has since resigned. PATRICK CAMILLER, a member of the New Left Review editorial board was in Romania last year. Paul Clarke and Sam Inman talked to him.



Troops prop up regime

Q. Just over a year ago the Romanian miners were defending the National Salvation front government, then under attack. Last week they came to demand the overthrow of that government. What has changed?

A. In June 1990 the miners came to Bucharest, a short time after the election were held giving the Salvation Front a two-thirds majority, and Iliescu a huge majority in presidential elections. They came to Bucharest because the results of these elections were not accepted by the right wing opposition, the National Liberal Party and the National Peasants Party - nor by some radical students.

The opposition occupied University Square, the central crossroads in the centre of Bucharest for two months after the election. When it was wound down and cleared by the police, there was a semi-insurrectionary attack on the government by the right-wing opposition - attacks on government buildings and the TV station, a key symbol of the anti-Ceausescu revolution.

At that time the miners from the Jiu valley saw a threat to their government by the parties of the Romanian right wing - a government which was promising to defend their social interests, and to some extent actually doing so -

against the rising bourgeois elites and their international allies.

What has changed since then is the government has itself adopted much of the social and economic programme of the opposition - a radical marketisation.

Subsidies on a wide range of goods and social services have been wound up. A big privatisation programme has begun.

This has seriously worsened working class living standards - they have fallen 40 per cent this year alone, as a result of inflation and lack of adequate compensation in workers wages.

This is what has undermined the support of miners, and other sectors of workers, for the government. No systematic attempt to explain this programme and consult workers was made.

I don't see the evolution of the miners as a great mystery. The miners, like other sections of the masses, had great hopes in this government.

These expectations have been cruelly disappointed, in a very difficult domestic and international political situation. The miners have attempted to stamp their mark on government policy again, but in a desperate and one-off way; they have not achieved very much.

Q. Is the Salvation Front government just the old Ceausescu

regime with a 'human face'?

A. The project of Iliescu and the National Salvation Front is best seen not as a continuation of the Ceausescu regime, but as an attempt to repeat the initial Gorbachev project in the Soviet Union. In other words attempting to unite elements of the old state apparatus, together with a project of political reform and reform of the economic system - in the wake of the devastating legacy of Ceausescu.

Q. How do you analyse the National Peasants Party and the National Liberal Party?

A. These two parties are the historic right wing parties, which continued to exist in emigration during the Ceausescu years. For many people they had become just a faint memory, but of course their leaders returned from emigration with the December 1989 revolution.

The National Peasants Party, as its name suggests, sees its main base among the peasantry; and although it did get a lot of peasant votes during the last elections, in the main the peasants have given short shrift to its programme of de-collectivisation.

National peasant party supporters trying to regain rights to ancestral land, now collectivised, have been seen off by local peasants.

Poland: will it be capitalism or democracy?

In Poland today, even Jacek Kuron, former Solidarity leader and minister of labour, is no longer repeating his usual motto - 'democracy is impossible without a free market'. More and more leading political figures are discussing the difficulty of introducing capitalism while workers have extensive rights to organise and fight back against privatisation. Here ZBIGNIEW KOWALEWSKI discusses the threat of dictatorship in Poland.

JACEK KURON recognises that there is a real contradiction between the maintenance of democracy and the introduction of capitalism. His opinion, and his party's, the Democratic Union (DU) led by former prime minister Mazowiecki, is that it is nonetheless necessary to ensure that these opposites are united.

The main party of the right, which belongs to the 'Belvedere camp' (the name of the presidential palace), and at least some leading sectors of the liberal democratic Congress, are much more practical.

According to them, if it seems that society does not support capitalist restoration and that it is not possible

"During his visit to the USA, Walesa asked the authorities what their reaction would be if a state of siege were installed in Poland"

through democratic means, a dictatorship will have to be installed. And that is precisely what appears to be increasingly the case.

It would be an exaggeration to say (as does the paper *Wprost*), that recently 'public meetings in the factories resemble those on the eve of the Bolshevik revolution'.

But Aleksander Hall, a leader of the DU, is right when he says:

'We must look truth in the face: in Poland, socialism can still count on a real social base... socialist views are clearly part of the Solidarity movement, particularly the trade union... The danger of a return to socialism will grow as property relations change, social inequality deepens, business failures increase unemployment and the state reduces its role as a protector... The dynamic of this conflict will develop inexorably.'

The process of capitalist restoration has not yet got beyond the phase of the primitive accumulation of capital, on the basis of the decomposition of the command economy. The dynamic and legitimacy of this process is running out of steam more rapidly than it establishes new relations of production.

The capitalist class is still very weak and essentially based on small business. Its political representatives are still not well organised, but are already engaged in fratricidal struggles which are tearing it apart.

In July, a political scandal blew up. During his visit to the USA, Walesa

asked the authorities what their reaction would be if a state of siege were installed in Poland and power was taken over by a Council of National Security, before the economy and state institutions disintegrated.

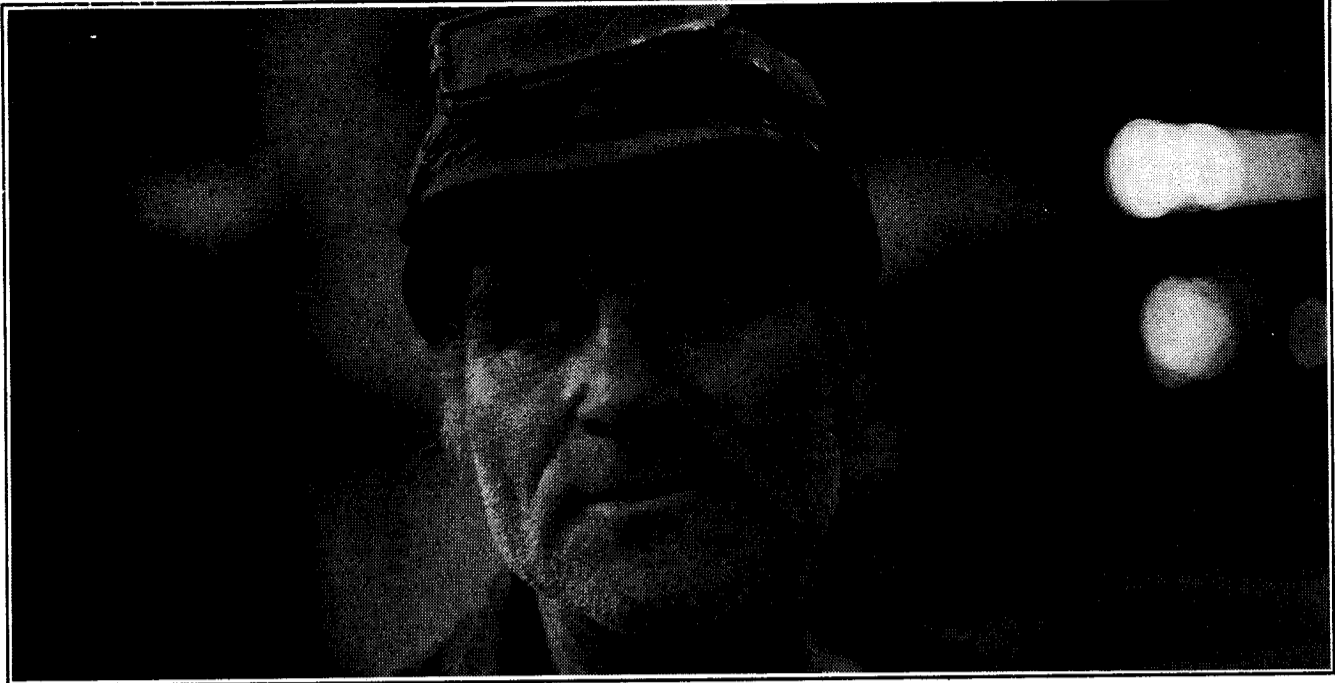
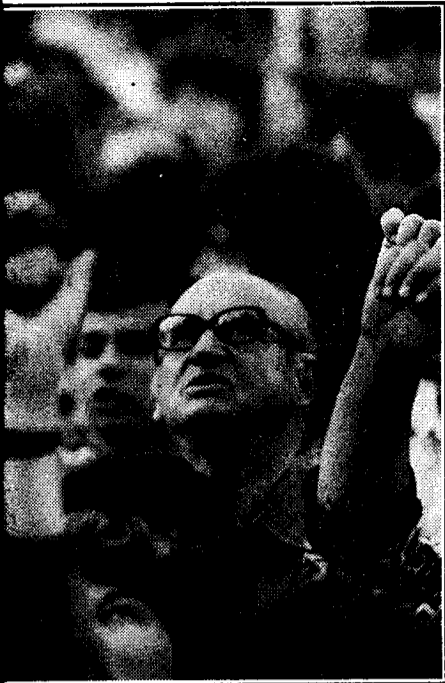
Questioned on this subject, president Walesa confirmed that he would have to use force if social and political tension escalated into anarchy and major strikes.

Addressing the workers and trades unionists of Solidarity, Walesa said that in Poland nothing was working any more because of the evil influence of the communist nomenklatura, because of hopeless parliamentarianism, and because of the arrogance and irresponsibility of the new elite.

Impasse

'The people are suffering and risk an explosion. How do we get out of this impasse? Through democracy or dictatorship? Let the people decide. I am president to carry out their will.' *Trybuna Solidarnosc* reports

If necessary, Walesa has decided to use drastic solutions. He has some army divisions at his disposal.



Romanian workers need independent unions

The National Liberal Party, its traditional base has been in the intelligentsia, particularly in Transylvania. The Liberal Party has entered a protracted period of crisis, with a section of its youth trying to push aside the old guard, and adopt a programme like that of European Christian Democracy, instead of the inward-looking nationalism of the old guard.

Q. Does the privatisation programme push towards the restoration of capitalism? Is there an alternative?

A. As I already said, the Salvation Front's original idea was that of 'market socialism', a system of national planning with state industry, co-operatives and a significant private sector. Soon after their election victory, it was made pretty clear by the IMF, the West European governments and especially by the Americans that this was unacceptable.

They insisted instead on a rapid process of privatisation and marketisation, and lock, stock and barrel abandonment of a socialised economy. It was made clear that no opening to the world economy was possible otherwise. These pressures led to the programme of ending public subsidies.

The IMF promised in return \$1 billion in aid. But this money has not been

forthcoming, primarily because of the pressure of the USA.

The spontaneous direction of the programme now adopted is towards the creation of a new capitalist order. But Romania has remained starved of foreign capital. In the context of the catastrophic economic legacy of the Ceausescu dictatorship, one possible line of development was consolidating and extending its links with the Soviet Union, as a counter-balance to an opening to international capital. But this is becoming less viable because of the crisis in the USSR.

Because of this some sort of 'historic compromise' with international capital, on the lines of the New Economic Policy in the Soviet Union after the revolution - but in a much less favourable international context - was indeed the only viable option.

But because of the blockade of Romania and the refusal of international capital to accept the National Salvation Front, such a compromise is no longer possible. The US is prepared to let Romania stew in its own juice until the National Salvation Front is broken.

The experience of Romania, like that of other east European countries, is that the greatest compromises with international capitalism are no guarantee of getting aid, and a rational integration into the world economy.

Q. Is there an independent union movement in Romania?

A. Details are difficult to come by. During the initial months after the overthrow of Ceausescu, small independent unions did emerge, but they were mainly regionally rather than nationally based. Apparently some independent unionist participated in the miners' demonstrations against the government.

Q. If there were organised revolutionary socialists in Romania how should they relate to the National Salvation Front? What programme would they advocate?

A. You can't answer a hypothetical question like that without knowing the circumstances of the emergence of such a grouping. It is impossible to imagine this kind of development without similar moves in the rest of eastern Europe, and probably the revival of the left in Europe as a whole.

A real change in the objective situation facing Romania could only come from a socialist left internationally which had state power in one or several countries, or could exert sufficient pressure on international capital to ease the enormous pressure on Romania. So it's very difficult to advance a 'Romanian' socialist programme in isolation.

But in my view in the initial period the only possible attitude would have been one of critical support for the National Salvation Front government.

Even today, if the National Salvation front came under the kind of insurrectionary attack which it faced last June, when the miners intervened to defend it, it would be the responsibility of independent socialists to defend it.

The Romanian working class remains strong, based on mining and other extractive industries. This core of the working class were the first to fight back against the Ceausescu dictatorship, in 1977. Whatever the restructuring of the economy, these industries and this working class will survive. There is a long struggle ahead.

Q. So what are the prospects for such a renewal of the European left?

A. The way East Germany was absorbed into the Federal Republic, with the subsequent drive to destroy the traditions of the GDR, was a major blow - not only to the living standards of the GDR masses, but also to the left in Europe and internationally. Two or three years ago it seemed that the USSR might be able to intervene in world politics as a much more powerful and independent actor than has since been shown to be the case. The possibility of a German-Soviet core to the recomposition of world politics no longer exists.

In my opinion the form of the demise of the old system in the USSR and eastern Europe represents a major defeat for European socialism; this defeat exists as an objective fact, irrespective of your attitude towards it.

It is now a question of working out the premises for a new beginning for socialist politics on a European scale, preparing a refoundation. We can see in such forces as the Movement for Communist Refoundation in Italy, and in the similar types of division in Spanish Communist movement. Revolutionary socialist forces have to participate in that refoundation process in a non-sectarian and non-dogmatic way, while keeping their fundamental principles.



Thatcher: Walesa's role model

doesn't want to break the law, but he will if there is no other way out and the masses authorise it. Stop, gentlemen, because if you don't, it's Walesa and the people who'll take you on.'

Meanwhile, the Centre Pact is putting forward its programme as that of 'an unfinished social revolution' threatened by an 'offensive on every front by the post-communist forces' and led astray by the 'nameless nomenklaturist societies', by the old bureaucracy which is embedded in the state apparatus and is supposed allies in the DU.

Walesa didn't condemn the coup in the USSR until the day it was defeated. The establishment of a restorationist dictatorship in the USSR would have made the task easier, particularly given that it

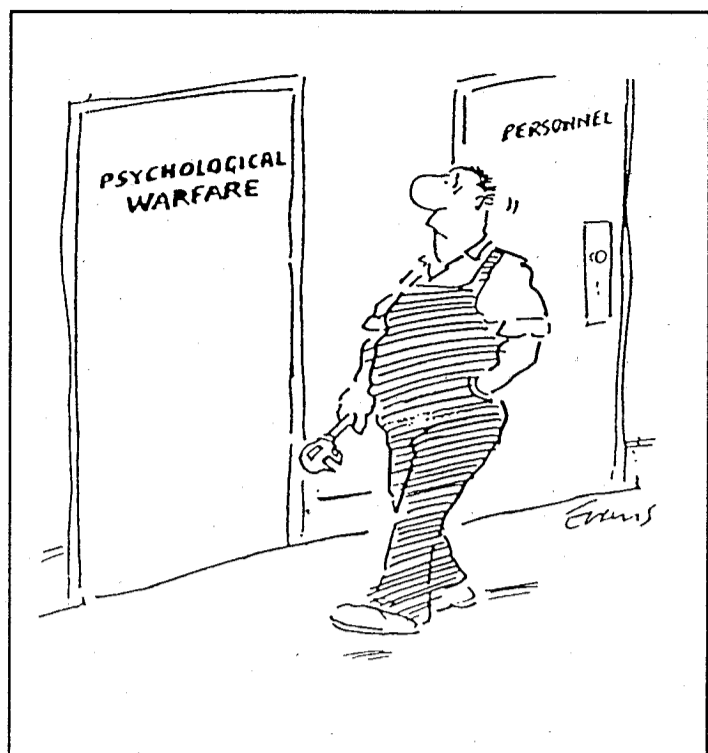
would have given credence to the idea, outside the country if not inside, that the Russian empire had experienced an 'offensive by post-communist forces'.

The fiasco of the Moscow coup does not eliminate the danger of a coup in Warsaw. Political democracy is a powerful brake on capitalist restoration, and the restorationist policy is a powerful factor in the destruction of the young, fragile democracies in eastern Europe.

The working class needs democracy, while the phrase increasingly sticks in the throat of restorationists of all shades. The defence and broadening of democratic gains is vital for the defence of workers' immediate interests and for the construction of a socialist alternative.



President Ilescu, besieged by workers



British bosses, Japanese methods

JAPANISATION is now taking British industry by storm.

Spurred on by the hope of emulating the profitability of Japanese manufacturing giants, and longing for their submissive company unions, British employers are aping their management methods.

But despite the rhetoric of 'jobs for life' and 'equality between management and shopfloor', the reality is clear enough. Japanisation means no unions, speed-up and massive job cuts.

The japanisation offensive now hitting the British car industry has come not just from Japan (via Nissan, Toyota, Honda and others), but also via the USA. American car giants such as Ford and Chrysler introduced what has been dubbed 'management by stress' during the 1980s.

Their workforce were given a simple choice – accept japanisation or face closure. Most accepted. And the proposals had a sugar coating – workers were promised respect, long term jobs, a say in their work. This won the active support of union leaders.

But workers soon found out what really lay at the centre of the Japanese management tech-

niques. Workers have to take part in 'constant improvement' – where the workers themselves participate in suggesting how jobs can be cut by loading more work on to each employee. And genuine trade unions have no place in such plans.

Negotiations between management and unions are replaced by either a single union deal or by a 'council', where non-union workers have as much influence as union representatives.

Sunderland

In the Nissan plant in Sunderland, where the engineering union AEU has agreed to a single union deal, the role of the unions has almost been wiped out. And, as Tony Johnson explains below, Rover's proposals for its Cowley plant will massively weaken the traditionally strong manual workers' unions with their network of shop stewards.

If these new threats are not understood and countered by the left, japanisation could begin to deal massive blows to the British labour movement, inflicting the kind of structural defeat that Thatcherism failed to impose in the 1980s.

New japanisation offensive at Austin Rover

by Tony Johnson

A RADICAL plan for japanisation has been launched by Austin Rover, with the new demand for 'greenfield site conditions on a brownfield site'. On July 16 Rover announced to the unions' Joint Negotiating Committee (JNC) that a complete change in working practices was needed.

Only such 'greenfield' working practices would allow them to compete with developing Japanese plants and deal with their economic problems, Rover declared.

If the union officials who dominate the JNC were prepared to offer such conditions to Toyota, Nissan and Honda, then Austin Rover wanted the same. The company then produced a document 'Rover Tomorrow – The New Deal', made a presentation, and adjourned to an unspecified date.

This is the way that the Rover machine works – first they partially convince union officials and senior stewards that the economic situation is so poor that something must be done. Then they present a distorted picture of the situation to the media before the unions are

"both the local and national media had headlined 'Jobs for Life', 'No clocking on', and so on. The reality is, as the management have admitted, that the 'package' will cost around 10,000 jobs"

able to report back.

So at Rover's plant at Cowley in Oxford, for example, while the Shop Stewards Committee met, both the local and national media had headlined 'Jobs for Life', 'No clocking on', and so on. The reality is, as the management have admitted, that the 'package' will cost around 10,000 jobs.

These attacks on working conditions are so severe that the

management at Ford immediately said that they would have to implement the same conditions to remain competitive.

The proposals centre on weakening the trade unions' base and their powers, as well as developing the 'team' concept. 'Progressive' measures – such as the ending of 'clocking on' – are in fact designed to give the impression that both the staff and the shop-floor are 'all in the same boat'.

The company has also demanded not a single union deal, but a single negotiating body, a 'Company Council'. This will negotiate on behalf of both staff and manual workers, weakening the traditionally stronger manual unions in the process.

It has also been announced that the Council will represent trade unions 'and employees' – implying that non-union members will be included.

"The procedure also includes an 'optional' binding arbitration clause – an option that right-wing union officials are likely to jump at"

The procedure also includes an 'optional' binding arbitration clause – an option that right-wing union officials are likely to jump at. But as well as attempts to weaken the trade unions' base, there are clauses stressing the 'team' and 'continuous improvement' concepts essential to Japanese management methods.

'All of us will be expected to participate in Discussion Groups, Quality Action Teams, Suggestion Schemes, and all other activities to continuously improve processes and company performance' the document states.

'Continuous improvement will be a requirement for everyone... Teams will consider all alternative ways of satisfying customer demand', it goes on.

Full flexibility of labour is a theme running through the entire document. It makes clear that 'Full flexibility related to work procedure and between jobs, areas and all categories of employee will be the norm'.

Absolute control

So the company will have absolute control of which employee does what job – destroying one of the crucial powers of shop stewards in the process – and 'length of service will not be a prime determinant'.

Other ideas have clearly been imported from Toyota and Nissan. Overtime will now be controlled by the company; in Nissan workers are bound to finish their schedule, regardless of whether a breakdown occurs.

'Temporary employees' can now be hired at will; in Toyota's Japanese plants, a core workforce is employed and temporary workers are hired for peak periods.

Such 'temporary workers' will have no holiday rights, undermining working conditions, and would be a useful reserve army for Rover management in the event of disputes.

"Early this year, 350 manual workers were forced to go. Just as the New Deal was announced, another group of staff were made compulsorily redundant. So much for Jobs for Life"

But what of the much-trumpeted 'progressive measures', such as the guaranteed job? It will be our objective that employees who want to work for Rover should stay with Rover', the company say.

There is in fact no guarantee; the company will, no doubt, be heartbroken when they fail in their 'objective' and be forced into compulsory redundancies.

Workers at Rover's Cowley plant know what such objectives mean in reality.

Promise of jobs

When the closure of the South Works at the plant was announced in 1988, workers were told, in similar words to those used in the New Deal, that there would be a job for those that wanted one.

Early this year, 350 manual workers were forced to go. Just as the New Deal was announced, another group of staff were made compulsorily redundant. So much for Jobs for Life.

And the unions' response? Some leaders have agreed that Rover's finances are in such a poor state, there is no alternative but to negotiate on the deal. They go on to concede defeat before the battle has started, arguing that unless the unions negotiate, the deal will be imposed.

But there is an alternative – a united fightback by car workers. Rather than negotiating, the deal should be rejected, and the TGWU and other unions should organise a conference of stewards from Rover, Ford, Vauxhall, Peugeot and other companies to resist the employers' offensive.

A fighting opposition, linking up unions on a national and international level, offers the best chance of a successful counter-offensive to defend workers' rights and conditions.

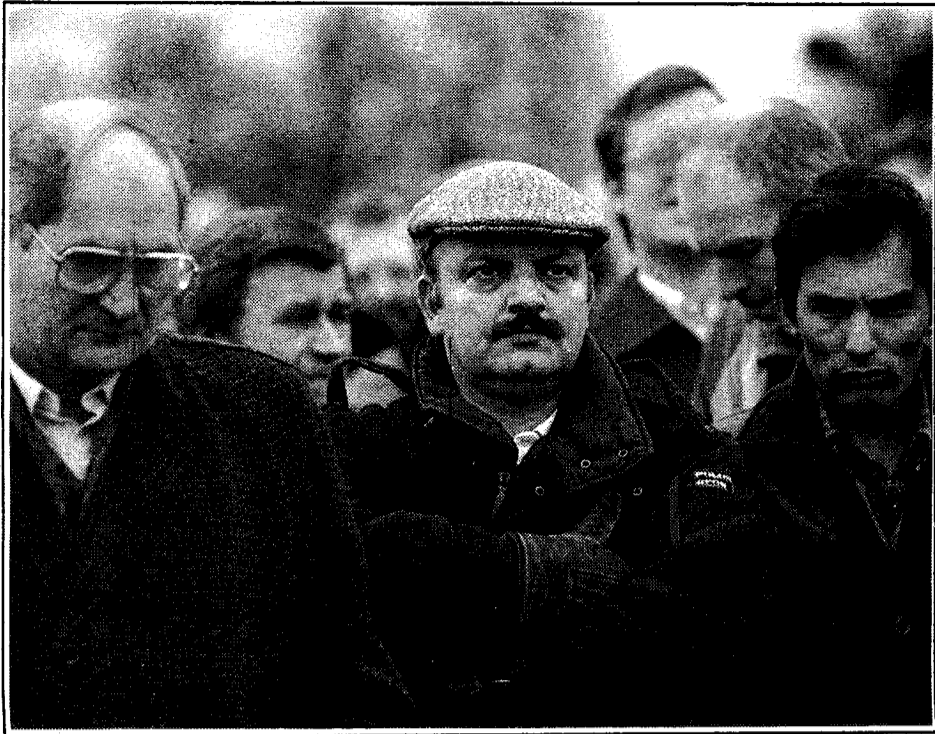


PHOTO: John Harris

British Aerospace workers hear of redundancies: how many are now for the chop?

USA - collective action can beat japanisation

By PATRICK BAKER

THE US LABOUR MOVEMENT now faces the biggest ideological threat in 50 years. Not since the 1930s have the employers so successfully challenged the role of the American union movement.

Then, employers such as John D. Rockefeller and Charles Schwab championed such concepts as 'constructive collaboration' and the 'representation of employees'.

In reality, this meant that workers in each plant were pitted against others, rather than united in a national union. But these attacks were defeated by the United Auto Workers union (UAW) in 1937.

But workers in the USA have faced a new, similar threat with japanisation - an attempt to pit worker against worker. The effects of the 'team concept' central to these methods are all too clear from experience in Japan.

A study by the Sohyo union federation in 1986 showed that by then, only 7% of workers would look to their union representative to help with any problem.

Easy prey

And the American unions were in no condition to organise their members to fight back when Japanese 'management by stress' began. Bureaucratised and centralised, the UAW and others were easy prey for employers hungry for increased profit margins.

By 1988, the 'team concept' had been introduced in every Japanese plant in the USA, as well as large numbers of plants run by General Motors (GM), Chrysler, Ford and others. The system had been accepted without a fight by the UAW in the 1987 round of national union contracts.

The agreements stressed a number of key concepts. First, that workers were to be interchangeable - most job classifications were dropped. Second, any idea of 'seniority' was either to be given less im-

portance or dropped altogether. Third, each job and how it should be carried out would be detailed precisely. Fourth, workers would be involved in 'continuous improvement' and compete with other departments. And finally, numerous responsibilities were to be transferred from the management to the workforce.

The system was supposed to mean a 'more human' system - where workers would have a real stake in their job. But when asked what role collective decision making by their team

Bureaucratised and centralised, the UAW was easy prey for employers hungry for increased profit

played, workers at GM replied 'Well, the team leaders are appointed by management, then they share out the jobs and responsibilities'.

The precise definition of jobs had two aims - that all 'wasted time' should be eliminated; and that any change in methods must never lead to any worker slowing their pace. Any such change must be agreed by a supervisor.

Thus the director of Mazda, when asked what room for flexibility existed, replied 'We make allowances for people who are left-handed'.

Absolute control

This inflexible system, where each job is precisely defined and is organised to require the minimum amount of training possible, had one principal aim: absolute management control. And this control means that not only can 'troublesome' workers be rapidly moved, but also that production can be immediately reorganised.

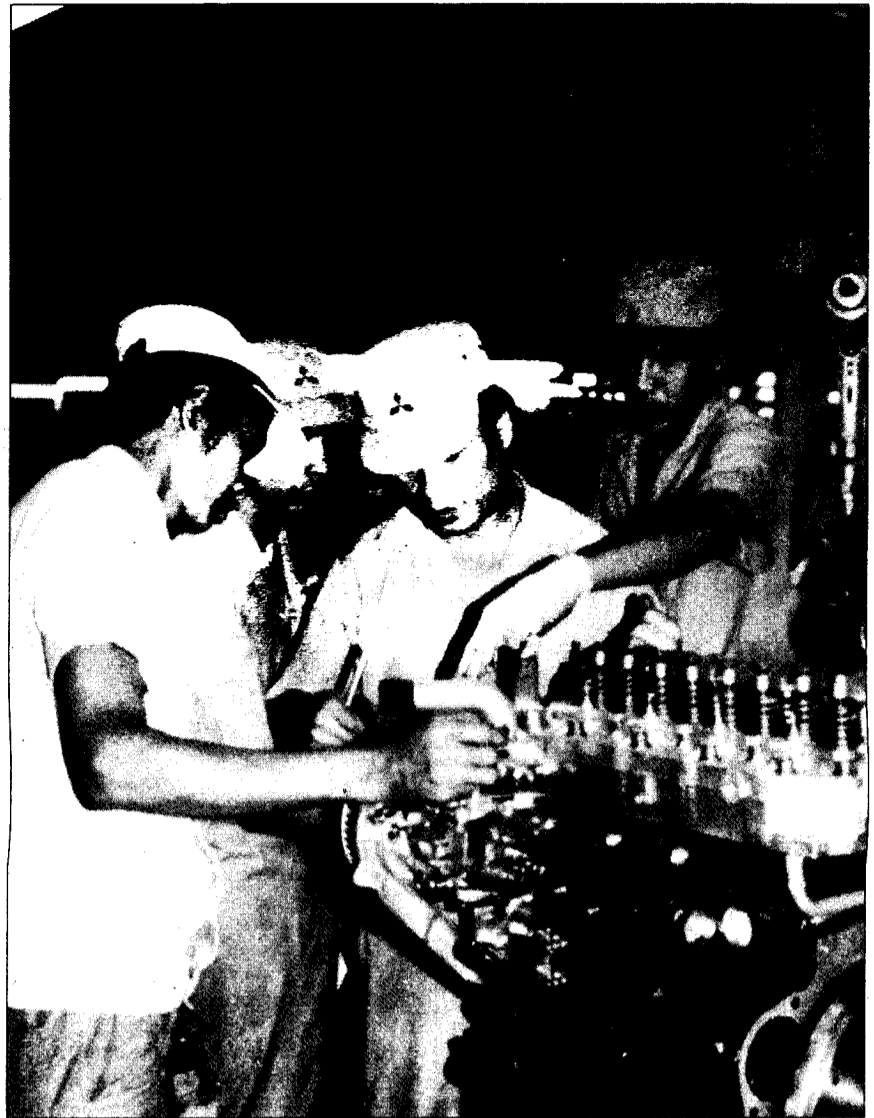
When referees are interviewed, they are not asked about the qualifications of

potential workers for 'team' factories. Rather, they are questioned as to their attendance record; their readiness to follow orders; and their attitude to management. There is no incentive for workers to study for qualifications; only to practice, so that the job can be done at maximum speed.

Another key concession made by the United Auto Workers was to agree to the use of sub-contractors, as long as the core workforce had a 'guaranteed job'. In principle, this sounded like a reasonable deal - a concession in return for job security.

But the result in reality was the reverse. Workers were divided into two categories - the regular workforce and the sub-contract workforce. The latter, which grew in size, was generally non-unionised and had no protection and less entitlement to state benefits.

And the workers, who finished with a lower level of unionisation and protection, had gained nothing in terms of control of the job. While their responsibilities had increased,



Japanising Thailand: Mitsubishi car workers

the responsibility for judging whether the work was acceptable never went below 'team leader'.

Work to rule

This absolute control by supervisors and team leaders meant that the role of unions in controlling working conditions disappeared.

The possibility of having a 'work to rule' no longer existed - since the rules were determined by the supervisor. And given the tension on which the system was based, any worker slowing down could be spotted immediately.

As a manager of Toyota said 'the control of anomalies becomes easy. It is enough to introduce improvements, concentrating on the line which is stopped and the workers who have stopped it.'

Achilles heel

But the interconnection of the system and the tension on

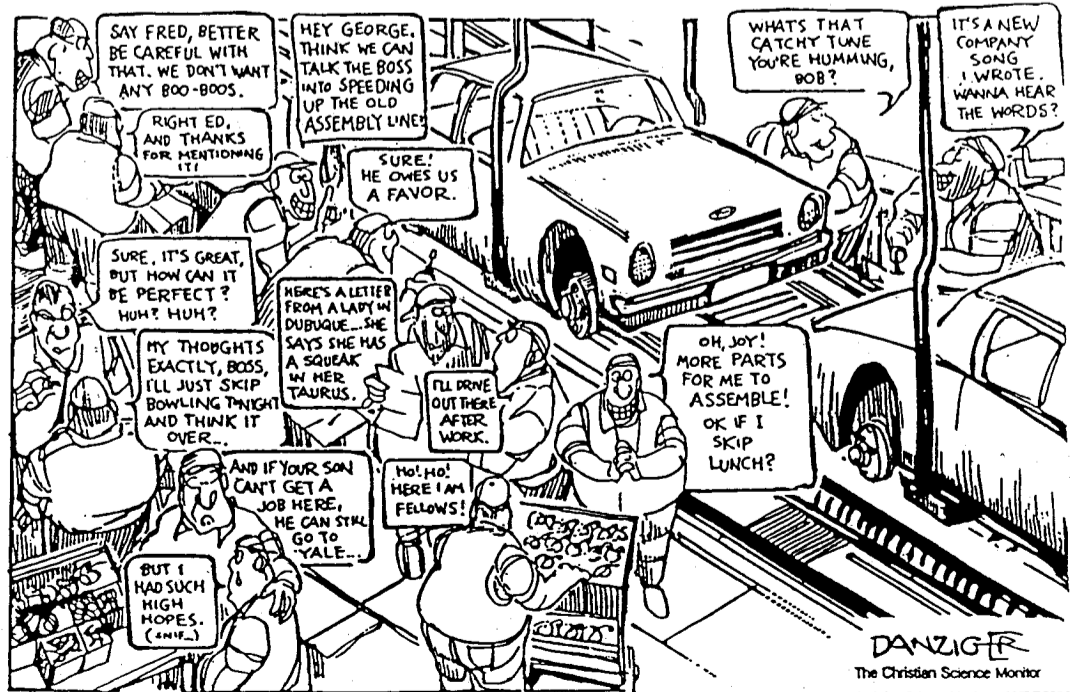
which it is based are also the achilles heel of the 'team' plants. While they can mean greater management control if there is no union, or a very compliant union, they also make the system extremely vulnerable to collective action.

Individuals who refuse to carry out orders can be rapidly removed. But if a one whole sector stops, they can quickly halt the whole factory.

Or if whole teams refuse to obey the team leader, they can force management to accept a new one. *Manufacturing Week* had a point when they commented 'Unions have more power than before'.

But the precondition is union organisation. This is why the companies implementing japanisation insist on 'sweetheart deals' with compliant unions or set up 'company unions'. And it is why the cornerstone of the labour movements response must be to strengthen union organisation and solidarity between workers in different companies.

Happy Days at the Ford Factory Have you seen a Ford contract ... lately?



Miles ahead!

Miles Davis (1936-91)

By Paul Clarke

TWO trumpeters towered over the post-war jazz scene – Miles Davis, who died on 27 September, and Dizzy Gillespie.

Dizzy has always been the musicians' favourite; the 'complete' trumpeter of astonishing range and virtuosity. But for impact on the direction of jazz and on the public imagination, Miles was way ahead.

Miles pioneered a unique style which is instantly recognisable; clipped, haunting, almost desolate phrasing of intense emotional power.

A mite pretentiously, the theatre critic Kenneth Tynan used the Spanish adjective *duende* about him. It means the ability to transmit powerfully felt emotion with the minimum of fuss and the maximum of restraint.

Improvisation

The facts about Miles Davis' musical career are well known. His formative period was several years in the late 'forties and early 'fifties with Charlie Parker; the period of the 'be-bop' revolution which stressed small-group improvisation against the formal predictability of Swing.

His emergence as a leading jazz innovator was marked by the series of nonet recordings *Birth of the Cool* (1953).

Probably his establishment as the leading jazz figure of the period was his band of the late 'fifties and early 'sixties, and

his record *Kind of Blue* (1959).

Around this time he made a series of recordings with a Gil Evans orchestra which are classics, most notably *Sketches of Spain* and *Miles Ahead*.

His bands of this period are a roll-call of jazz greats – Bill Evans, Philly Joe Jones, Cannonball Adderley, Ron Carter and above all tenor saxophonist John Coltrane.

It was under Davis' tutelage that Coltrane began to assume the mantle of the most innovative and important jazz saxophonist since the war. Coltrane's experience with Miles led directly to his legendary recording *A Love Supreme* (1964).

Image

Miles was always concerned, compulsively, about his image. Like a famous woman singer sometimes mentioned on these pages, he periodically re-invented himself. His music and image of the 'fifties and early sixties captured the 'spirit of the times', at least for the transatlantic middle classes – confidence, sophistication, affluence.

Thus his music reflects the high point of the post-war capitalist boom. Unlike the consciously 'black power' musicians of the early 1960s led by Archie Shepp, the nearest he got to politics was a concert for the conservative National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People in 1964 (recorded as *My Funny Valentine*).

Wealth and fame didn't save Miles from a period of heroin addiction, an



epidemic amongst jazz musicians. Heroin led directly to Coltrane's death in his forties, and led to periodic bouts of ill-health for Miles.

In the late 'sixties he re-invented his music in a way that infuriated many critics, moving on to jazz-rock fusions and electronic backing groups with *In a Silent Way* (1969). He went on to play with a host of rock musicians, further infuriating jazz traditionalists.

The truth is many traditionalists, brought up in the era of Swing, never liked him. He was too 'introspective', and just relentlessly *modern*.

All worthwhile human effort, in music, art, science or whatever, is collective. Innovators can only innovate by

reference to what has gone before; they stand on the shoulders of the previous generations.

But just occasionally someone turns up who can suddenly synthesise what has gone before and turn it into something truly new and revolutionary. Such a person was Miles Davis.

For those brought up on the Clash and Sex Pistols (or worse still new Kids on the Block) who never had the opportunity to listen to his music, try the album *Kind of Blue* for the classic Miles Davis, and *Bitches Brew* or *Jack Johnson* for the modern period. For a three-track sampler try *So What?* (on *Kind of Blue*), *Blues for Pablo* (*Miles Ahead*) and *Human Nature* (*You're Under Arrest*).

Postmodernism: the cultural logic of capitalist crisis?

In SO6 Paul Clarke wrote an article attacking 'postmodernism', arguing that it was 'modernism gone rotten'. In reply Terry Murphy insisted that the key to understanding postmodernism is to be found in Frederic Jameson's 'The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism', and that this is based on a periodisation of capitalism which marxists should agree with. Here PAUL CLARKE replies to Terry Murphy. In our next issue we publish a substantial article by Murphy explaining his views.

TERRY Murphy's reply poses the question of whether there are definite periods of capitalist development and whether there are cultural trends which, in however a refracted way, 'correspond' with these phases.

My answer is yes, indeed my article was based on this very notion. The question is not whether there postmodernism exists as a philosophical and cultural trend, but what our *assessment* of it should be.

Terry's fundamental points seem to that a) postmodernism is a useful analytical category, corresponding to the 'cultural logic' of a definite phase of capitalism b) that I have misassessed this trend, conflating it with *post-structuralism*

"the irrationalism of postmodernism ... corresponds with this new period of capitalist crisis, restructuring and reaction"

and drawing too sharp a distinction between 'optimistic' modernism and 'pessimistic', irrationalist postmodernism.

I accept the argument that there has been a transformation in capitalism, but I differ with Terry's (and Jameson's) periodisation.

Surely the vogue for postmodernism corresponds not with the postwar boom and the 'third technological revolution' but with the *end of the boom*, the period starting at the beginning of the 1970s. It is the end of the boom which has set in train the substantial restructuring of capitalist production, often called 'post-fordism'.

Therefore I would want to argue that postmodernism is not simply 'the cultural logic of late capitalism', but rather the cultural logic of late capitalism *in crisis*. Of course the post-structuralist thinkers who prefigured postmodernism started their work before the full onset of the crisis; the question is why postmodernism took the 1980s by storm – and not the 1970s?

My contention is that the irrationalism of postmodernism, and its hostility to

the 'grand narratives' of human liberation and to any rational discourse on society corresponds with this new period of capitalist crisis, restructuring and reaction.

It surely not true that the 'bourgeois ideology' which the 1968 students rebelled against had much echo of post-structuralist or postmodernist thought.

For example, the American sociologist Talcott Parsons, a key target of the insurgent academe, was the doyen of structural functionalism. Politically he was light years away from a structural-marxist like Althusser; but were there no theoretical parallels?

Did I falsely attribute the views of people like Lyotard and Foucault, with their rejection of the 'grand narratives' of the Enlightenment (like liberalism, socialism, the struggle for human freedom) to the postmodernists proper?

These thinkers were certainly post-structuralists; but it is surely usually accepted that they were forerunners of postmodernism? In any case, exactly which postmodernist thinker resurmers a confident, optimistic discourse about the possibilities of the rational transformation of society?

Murphy's strictures against my contrast between 'pre-postmodernist' bourgeois thought (confident, rational etc) and 'rotten' postmodernism has perhaps more weight.

Of course throughout 20th century



Yuppies: a symptom of the post-modern age?

bourgeois culture there are irrationalist and pessimistic trends. I accept Terry's correction on this point. But then it is surely a legitimate marxist concern to identify what are the *dominant* trends in bourgeois culture, and to try to relate these to the political trends in society.

I find quite puzzling Terry's assertion that the heart of the debate about postmodernism is whether capitalism has distinct phases. I don't know any marxist who doubts this proposition. But in all the debates with the postmodernists, post-marxists and ideologues of post-fordism there are common traits.

At the heart of these is the interpretation of the latest phase of capitalism; and that is not 'late capitalism' in general, but the crisis and restructuring of capitalism in the 1980s in particular.

My contention is that the restructuring of capitalist, the worldwide offensive of capital, and the dominance of reactionary trends in philosophy and culture are linked. They all tell us something about the reactionary times in which we live.

BOOKS

Still getting in the last word!

NEVER A YES MAN

The life and politics of an adopted Liverpudlian.

by Eric Heffer.

Published by Verso.

Reviewed by Steve Smith

MANY socialists inspired by Eric Heffer's exemplary fight against the New Realist tide would have puzzled over the fawning obituaries from the Ian Aitken/Alan Watkins coterie of Grub Street hacks.

But this clearly underlines the universally recognised personal qualities of the man, which shine through in his posthumous autobiography and last political testament.

The book takes us through his trade union militancy in Liverpool, his record as a leading left-wing parliamentarian and even his short-lived experience as a member of Her Majesty's government.

One of the most revealing and original parts of the book is his account of the post-war birth of Liverpool's heretical political culture. His devoted work in the Liverpool labour movement saw him rise to prominence, from where he saw newer activists such as Tony Mulhearn, Terry Harrison and Pat Wall cut their political teeth.

After expulsion from the CP ('one of the best things that ever happened to me') he was active in the Labour left *Socialist Fellowship*, selling its newspaper, the original *Socialist Outlook*. Both the organisation and the newspaper were proscribed.

After this he had a flirtation with a short-lived group, the propagandist 'Socialist

Worker's Federation'. But he rejoined the Labour Party in 1957, this fateful step leading to his 27-year-long membership of the House of Commons.

Harold Wilson offered the rising parliamentary star a job in the 1964-70 government, but Eric preferred to side with his class in struggles such as the seafarer's and the docker's strikes.

He later took up Wilson's offer as Tony Benn's deputy in the Industry Department in 1974, but was predictably sacked for speaking out on the Common Market. Benn survived in the Cabinet and Eric accused him at the time of having "grovelled" to Wilson.

His changing relationship with Tony Benn, with whom Eric is destined to be compared by historians, is one of the book's many insights. Their comradeship was frequently strained right up to the 1981 Deputy Leadership campaign, which Eric at first hesitated, wrongly, to support. But once convinced of Benn's principled fight in the party, their relationship became far warmer and Benn accordingly provides the foreword to the book.

Eric's comments on the feud between Benn and Michael Foot are a delight, as is his pen portrait of Neil Kinnock as an opportunistic and petty-minded tyrant, ('At times he thrusts out his chin like Mussolini').

Nonetheless, Eric Heffer had his fair share of faults - he was in his own way a traditionalist with some conservative views - which may explain his relatively slow response to the demands of the newer social movements.

In another era of working class politics, his beloved wife Doris, who shared his militant outlook, may have possibly played more than just a supporting role recorded in the book.

But Eric was also a pioneer - he opposed troops in Ireland and supported the anti-Stalinist struggles of East European workers long before they became a fashion among the left. As someone who voluntarily left the party in the wake of a previous witch-hunt of Bevanites and trotskyites, Eric lays down clear advice for today's militants.

Thus Peter Taaffe and Lesley Mahmood, who claimed her recent candidature was to preserve the tradition of Eric Heffer, would do well to ponder his words.

'Some argue that the time has come to set up a new socialist party. This may at some stage be necessary but not for as long as the trade unions remain affiliated to the Labour Party and give it its working-class base.

'The argument for a new party is, to some extent, sterile. It looks for a short cut and there are no short cuts.'

Equally, Eric died as a supporter of the Socialist Move-



Natural class fighter, Eric Heffer



ment and Labour Party Socialists, whose founding conference he approvingly refers to.

This book has a clear message for all of us - to continue the struggle for the interests and unity of the working class, to which Eric Heffer so resolutely dedicated his life.



socialist
OUTLOOK

Rally

Socialism in the new world order

November 29, 7.30pm

Ernest Mandel

United Secretariat, Fourth International

Janette Habel

author 'Cuba - the revolution under siege'

Carl Brecker

General Secretary, Workers Organisation for Socialist Action (WOSA, South Africa)

Kingsway College, Sidmouth Street, off Grays Inn Road, London WC1

Feedback

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

No meaning for the United Front

Paul Lawson's article on the united front (SO7) rightly criticises the SWP and Militant for their undemocratic and sectarian approach to united action by the left.

However, in the process he removes all meaning from any united front, reducing it to left campaigns and denying any relevance towards the unions and the Labour Party.

He claims that since mass revolutionary parties do not exist, and because reformist leaders no longer claim to be fighting for socialism, demands that reformist leaders break with pro-capitalist policies serve a purely propaganda function and are not serious proposals for joint action.

Yet the united front approach developed by the early Comintern was not primarily based on the claim that reformist leaders to be fighting for socialism.

Communist parties did not simply demand that social democracy 'implement socialism'. It was based on the fact that vast numbers of workers regarded (and still do) these reformist leaders as their class representatives, whether or not they 'favoured' socialism (whatever little that meant). The Communist parties argued for joint action around concrete demands in the interests of the class.

The same basic approach applies today, even if we have to be flexible in our methods. But then so did the early Comintern.

Not all the CPs were mass parties.

Needs help?

In response to my article on the Left and GBH, Paul Clarke accepts that 'art is a highly mediated product which cannot simply be assessed in terms of political correctness'. I agree entirely with this. The problem with Clarke's response to my article is that it goes on to assess a piece of drama exactly in these terms.

I did not suggest that political criteria should be discarded when we come to discuss a work of art, rather

The British CP was far from such, and direct 'party to party' possibilities for raising the united front were limited to them.

And of course the German Trotskyists, main advocates of the united front against the Nazis, were minute in relation to the CP and social democracy.

Nor did the German Trotskyists demand the 'implementation of socialism' but concrete actions to defeat the fascists.

Lawson gives the impression that the reason we want single issue campaigns to be democratic and non-sectarian is merely so the left can work together amicably (no bad thing in itself).

But surely, if such campaigns are actually attempting to achieve their professed aims rather than existing for the good of their souls or for the purpose of recruitment to their individual components, then the united front towards reformist leaders is as relevant as ever.

If the united front is inappropriate today, then why does Socialist Outlook call for a vote for Labour in elections and place concrete demands on the labour party such as repeal of the anti-union laws? Or are these demands merely 'exposure' demands?

If Lawson is right, then the SWP is right when it says that all socialists can hope to do is recruit one by one to their revolutionary organisations.

Pete Firmin, Brent

that such criteria should be applied in a way which avoids the totalitarian approach which Clarke readily adopts in his response.

To claim, as Clarke does, a definitive interpretation of GBH is exactly what Stalinists did with all culture. I would like to thank him for supplying Socialist Outlook with such an effective example.

'The message is clear.'
'Can anyone doubt' that this man needs help?

Steven Taylor, London

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Is one really looking for a united front?

What's wrong with Harry Sloan?

Harry Sloan's 'What's wrong with the British left' (SO8) itself illustrates some of what's wrong with the British left. Take for example his dismissive reference to 'small tendencies such as Labour Briefing, which seek only to act as a pressure group within the Labour Party.'

Briefing supporters might feel justified in asking Harry whether Briefing became only 'a pressure group within the Labour Party' before, during or after Socialist Outlook worked under its aegis for several years.

More interesting is the implication that Briefing supporters, despite encompassing many people who have broken with small left groups in order

to find a wider audience and field of activity in the mass movement, are excluded from the enormous responsibility of building 'a mass revolutionary alternative to reformism'.

Harry's amnesia crops up again later when he discusses the 'siege-mentality "Leninism"', spontaneism and syndicalism inherent in the traditions of the post-war British 'far left'.

The SWP and the Militant are fairly taken to task here. But left out is any discussion of the traditions of the IMG, a tradition which clearly has major influence in Socialist Outlook itself.

When Harry asks 'what's so different about Socialist Outlook?' it would be useful to

learn what lessons he draws from its own traditions.

Does this matter? I think it does. Any tendency unable to learn from the lessons of its own traditions is doomed to repeat its mistakes.

And if you are going to (correctly) denounce sectarianism on the left, you must be prepared to practice what you preach.

On page 15, however, we see an article headed 'Greens lurch to the right' alongside a picture of Charles Windsor captioned: 'Prince Charles: friends in high places for the Greens'. Is this the kind of 'united front dialogue' that marks Socialist Outlook out as different from its sectarian competitors?

Mike Phipps, London

Errors in China review

Louise Holloway's review of my book on China (SO8) annoyed me greatly. Given our different views of China, political criticism was to be expected. But the reviews criticisms were based on a sloppy reading of the book, and an even sloppier view of Maoism.

For brevity's sake I'll only take up a couple of points.

Louise astonished me by saying that she 'can find little evidence' for my claim that 'the civil war was not fought as a guerilla war, but as a set-piece battle against two regular armies, with the mass of the population as mere spectators.' (I actually wrote 'between two regular armies').

Any decent history of China will distinguish between the anti-Japanese war (1937-45) and the Civil War (1945-49) between the CCP and the Guomindang, not as small guerilla bands.

If Louise doesn't know such a basic fact about Chinese history, why is she writing about it?

And when she says that she 'wonders whether Hore sees the revolution in a positive

light', I can only conclude that she didn't read the book.

The third chapter begins '1949 was a genuine revolution, in which a million-strong peasant army smashed forever the old ruling classes, broke the power of Western imperialism and laid the basis for a new social order.' (p.41)

I did indeed go on to say that it 'made possible the more efficient exploitation of the workers and peasants'. And there is no contradiction between the two. That is the common pattern that bourgeois nationalist revolutions in the 'Third World' have followed from the Second World War onwards.

It is one of the great strengths of the theory of bureaucratic state capitalism that it can explain what has happened in places as diverse as Algeria, India, China and Cuba in terms of the rise of a new ruling class politically independent from imperialism yet tied to the world economy and the disciplines it imposes on them.

For the rest, the review simply repeated the old Maoist myth that Mao had a coherent and successful strategy for revolution which relied on organising

peasant rebellions.

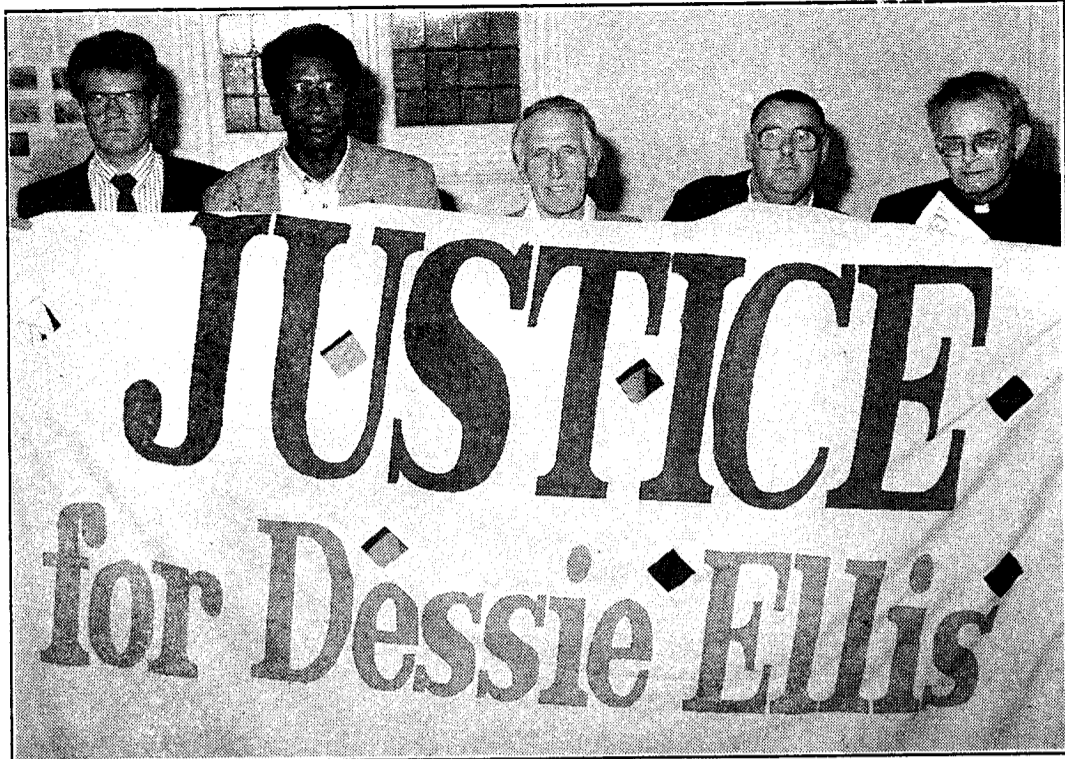
That myth was literally fatal in the 1960s and 1970s, when thousands of brave revolutionaries died in the attempt to emulate Mao, and the shattering of the myth by events in China since 1978 has played a major part in disorientating the revolutionary left internationally.

It is astonishing to see that myth repeated today in a supposedly Trotskyist paper.

Earlier this year, *October Review*, a Hong Kong Fourth Internationalist magazine, also reviewed the book. The review made a number of specific criticisms to do with emphasis and omissions, as well as arguing against the theory of state capitalism.

Yet it made none of the historical criticisms contained in Louise's review. I suggest that perhaps the *October Review* comrades understand Chinese history better than she does.

Charlie Hore
Charlie Hore's book *The Road to Tienanmen Square* is published by Bookmarks and costs £4.95. Apologies to Charlie Hore for accidentally omitting these details from the review.



Dessie Ellis's father and campaign supporters

Another judicial farce – Dessie Ellis on trial

Following the repeated exposure of the nature of British 'justice', most recently in the cases of the Birmingham Six and the Tottenham Three, the system looks set for another fall.

The trial of Dessie Ellis at the Old Bailey will reveal a long saga of abused procedures and 'reinterpretations' of the law.

Ellis, extradited to Britain from Ireland in November last year, was the first citizen of the Republic to fall foul of the 1987 Extradition Act. His 37-day hunger strike in protest was ignored by the British media.

Brought to Britain on the word of one policeman, Dessie

Ellis was originally charged with 'conspiracy and possession of explosives'.

Unfortunately for the British state, the act in question stipulates that the conspiracy must have occurred within the UK.

No evidence

It was agreed in court in February this year that no evidence existed that Ellis had ever been here. So two new charges were thought up.

But this was rather embarrassing for the Dublin government, since it breached the terms of the extradition agreement.

They insisted the original charge be reinstated.

In June this was done. And Judge Swinton Thomas – judge in the notorious Winchester Three case – 'reinterpreted' the law. The act didn't really mean the defendant had to be in the UK, he decided – just that the offence took place there!

Ellis' trial at the Old Bailey will clearly be a legal farce. British 'justice' will be exposed once again as a system where the goalposts can be moved as many times as necessary, if the British state wants a conviction.

Contact Justice for Dessie Ellis c/o Haringey IBRG, Hornsey Library, Haringey Park, Crouch End, London N8.

BBC unions weakened by ballot

By Dominic Mallard

Balloting of union members at the BBC on conditions of service has left the unions weakened. Already there are rumours of impending derecognition. As of 5 October, BBC management has imposed its conditions of service.

Members of the NUJ voted by a narrow margin of 54 to 46 per cent to reject the conditions of service on a notably low turnout.

The union's leadership is not regarding the result as a ballot for across-the-board industrial action.

Only three out of 60 NUJ chapels in the BBC unequivocally voted for action.

The three in question, NUJ Caversham (BBC Monitoring), Bush House (BBC World Service) and TV Centre, are all large chapels. Many chapels which accepted the conditions are small in membership.

Constituencies

In the main BBC union, BECTU, members were balloted in six 'constituencies',

depending on their specific working conditions. Three constituencies actually accepted the BBC's conditions.

Two rejected the conditions but did not sanction strike action, although they did vote to take solidarity action should workers be victimised for rejecting the conditions.

Only one constituency voted to reject the conditions and then went on to vote for strike action.

Demoralised

At a time when many union activists are demoralised with this picture of national gloom, it is vital that socialists in the BBC unions build on what local successes there have been.

At BBC Monitoring, management have been forced to back-down over the issue of Repetitive Strain Injury.

Tagging

They have also been forced to climb down on the question of 'tagging'. This is a categorisation of output from BBC Monitoring required by the Foreign Office.

At government instigation, management had attempted to

turn a trial period of tagging into a permanent feature of work. They backed down after NUJ members refused to cooperate.

Warrant sales blocked

SCOTTISH activists drove another nail into the coffin of the Poll Tax last week when they successfully stopped Scotland's first warrant sale.

Hundreds of protesters turned up to the sale, organised by Labour-controlled Strathclyde council in a former Glasgow police station.

They surrounded the van, containing two sheriff's officers along with items of furniture taken from non-payers Anne and Jim Brennan of Port Glasgow, and threatened to overturn it.

Fearing a pasting, the police advised the sheriff's officers to cancel the sale. Tommy Sheridan, Chair of the Scottish Anti-Poll Tax Federation, proclaimed the action as a great victory and said that the campaign would also prevent any future warrant sales from taking place.

Strathclyde is one of several

Labour councils that are fiercely campaigning to break the back of non-payment. Blaming non-payers, instead of the Tories, for the massive cuts that they have made in local jobs and services, they have spent around £200,000 on a spiteful campaign of intimidation.

Not only is this a massive betrayal of the Scottish working class, it is also electoral suicide. How can the Labour Party expect Scottish workers to vote for them in a general election at the same time as they are stabbing them in the back?

The blame lies entirely at the feet of the treacherous policy of compliance on the part of Labour's leadership.

In the months that lead up to the election, socialists in the Labour Party should be at the forefront of the campaign in defence of non-payers – in Scotland, Wales and England.

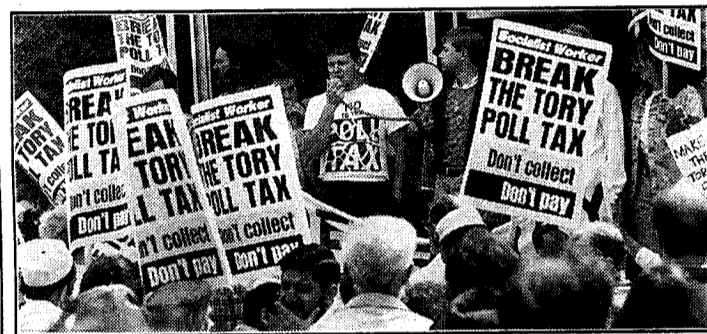


PHOTO: John Harris

New union for offshore workers

HAVING been ignored by existing unions covering North Sea workers, the rank and file offshore workers committee, OILC, last week announced that it would form a new trade union to organise offshore workers.

The decision came after an official inter-union meeting failed to involve OILC in discussions to set up a new sub-committee of the Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions.

This new sub-committee will cover all offshore unions. It will not, however, have any negotiating powers.

OILC, which has been fighting for a single unified federation for offshore workers, has been consistently ignored by the official unions.

This latest decision to further exclude OILC was described by Ronnie McDonald, Chair of OILC, as 'unacceptable'.

Meetings in Glasgow and on platforms in the Forties, Claymore and Brent fields, all called for OILC to move ahead with the new union proposal.

The new union will only organise offshore and will not be fighting a membership war with existing unions.

Women, war and resistance

Ireland and the Middle East

A day of discussion for women on campaigning for peace and self determination

Speakers include:

Bernadette McAliskey; Reem Abdelhadi; Haifa Zangana (Iraqi Women in Exile); Camilla Power (Women's Peace Vigil); Nihal Aktas (Patriotic Women's Union of Kurdistan)

at London Women's Centre, Wesley House, 4 Wild Court, off Kingsway, London WC2B
Saturday 26 October, 11am

Organised by Women against War in the Gulf and Women in the Troops Out Movement

socialist OUTLOOK

Organise for Poll Tax amnesty!

by Adrian States,
Camden Against the Poll
Tax

CAMPAIGNERS from all over the country are organising for an amnesty for all those affected by the Poll Tax. They are calling for the writing off of all debts and for freedom for 'Poll Tax prisoners', jailed for demonstrating against the tax and for not paying it.

The national demonstration and women's picket on October 19 are focusing on those still in jail for demonstrating against the tax in Trafalgar Square last year.

13 demonstrators are still inside after defending themselves against police attack and will not be released until at least next year. And there is an increasing number being jailed for non-payment, many of whom are there simply for

being poor.

In England and Wales, 5.7 million summonses for non-payment and 4 million liability orders had been issued by July. 68 people had gone to jail by September.

And Labour is outdoing the Tories in jailings - the councils allowing this include 14 Labour and seven Tory authorities. Meanwhile, around 28,000 people were having Poll Tax deducted from their income support by May. And in Scotland, the latest collection rate is just 15%!

Although the Tories have announced that the tax would be abolished from April 1993, the resistance to this attack on the working class is likely to remain. Councils are pressing ahead to bash the poor for money that they do not have. It is crucial that anti Poll Tax campaigns around the country are maintained and built for the year that lies ahead.

With this in mind, a national conference 'Finishing off the Poll Tax' has been organised. It aims to discuss and share experiences and ideas to take the movement forward. Practical and general discussion will be combined with a series of workshops.

The conference promises to be quite unlike the Militant-dominated All Britain Anti-Poll Tax Federation, which often prefers rally-style events. Activists hope that the conference will be a refreshing change, that could lead to a campaign free from bureaucracy and sectarianism.

An important issue facing the movement is the question of cuts in local authority spending. Local anti-Poll Tax groups should be linking up with resistance to the cuts.

In Camden, like many around the country, the authority is Labour controlled, starved of money from central



government and too afraid to fight for more funding.

The result has been cuts in nurseries, school and housing repairs, and the slashing of teaching and social service jobs. This forms the backdrop to £20 million worth of cuts next year, coupled with a £10 rent increase for council tenants.

It would see the closure of seven libraries, the loss of adult education and school meals and further Town Hall redundancies. These are the very council

and voluntary sector services that the poor and vulnerable rely on to survive.

With a general election in 1992, the Poll Tax and its effects are bound to play a key role in the campaign. With 17 million people not paying, despite intimidation from bailiffs, its importance cannot be overstated. The Poll Tax and the destruction it is causing must be stopped and an amnesty declared.

New Serbian attacks on Croatia

AS WE GO to press, the Serb-dominated Yugoslav federal army pressed home new attacks on Croatia, surrounding Croat capital Zagreb and threatening to destroy the historic coastal town of Dubrovnik.

These new attacks came despite an apparent agreement at the European peace conference in the Hague for a new ceasefire, and a political solution which would give Croatia and Slovenia eventual autonomy.

Agreement

This new agreement brokered by Lord Carrington is not worth the paper it is written on. Time and again Serbian

president Slobodan Milosevic has signed cease-fires which were ignored by his forces on the ground.

The Serbian attack on Croatia is no small-scale 'police' action designed to discourage Croatian independence.

Serbian forces have shot up and ransacked Croatian towns and villages, with the aim of driving Croatian westwards and creating a 'Greater Serbia'.

Towns in which Croats have lived for centuries have been in practice incorporated into Serbia.

Last week Milosevic staged a coup in the collective 'presidency', the council of republican representatives which has ruled in place of a single president.

This coup amounted to a refusal to recognise the legitimacy of decisions

of the presidency. The whole basis on which the new Yugoslavia was established after the second world war - that of representing all the nationalities - is being destroyed.

Remorselessly Bosnia-Herzegovina is also being dragged into the conflict as Serbian forces drive through the republic towards Croatia. There have been many attempts by civilians there to impede the army's progress by building barricades and obstacles against tanks.

Upper hand

In the military struggle Serbia, because of its domination of the army and airforce, has the upper hand. But in the

long term the prospects for Milosevic and his regime are dim.

The Milosevic regime has attempted for five years to keep its grip in Belgrade by whipping up nationalist fervour. This regime is a government of ex-communist bureaucrats presiding over a collapsing economy. Mass demonstrations and strikes last May mobilised mass support.

But the weak point of the opposition in Serbia was its capitulation to Serbian nationalism. There are signs this could be changing.

Large numbers of Serbians, and those from other nationalities, are deserting from the army. The movement of Serbian mothers demanding their sons not be sent to fight is a dangerous sign for Milosevic.

In the long term it is difficult to permanently repress republics that want independence by simple force of arms. And continuing economic crisis promises new revolts in Serbia itself.

Nationalism

Milosevic's Greater Serbia project has driven Croats into the arms of resurgent nationalism. Croatian nationalism, especially in the emigre community, has always been utterly reactionary.

Croatian president Tudjman is an extreme right-winger. The latest fighting has done immense damage to the cause of workers unity and socialism in Yugoslavia.

But the only way forward now is to recognise the right of Croatia and Slovenia to self-determination, and the right of the Albanian population in Kosovo to reunify with Albania if that is their wish.

Any temptation by socialists to defend the unity of Yugoslavia against 'reactionary nationalism' is today itself reactionary. Tudjman may be openly pro-capitalist; but neither will Milosevic oppose capitalism.

Amnesty for non-payers and Poll Tax prisoners! Demonstration October 19

Assemble 1pm Caledonian Park, Market Road N7 (nearest tube - Caledonian Road). March to Trafalgar Square for rally 4pm.
Womens Picket - 11.30am to 12.30pm Holloway Prison, Parkhurst Rd N7.

Finishing off the Poll Tax Conference October 26/27

Manchester Town Hall. Registration fee 5 to NW APT Forum, PO Box 9, Eccles, Salford M30 (061 707 1584). Transport from London - 8 return from Dave Morris, Tottenham APT, 72 West Green Rd, London N15 (081 802 9804).

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