Gorby: the sorcerer's apprentice?

By Phil Hearse

FOR MANY on the left the 'Gorbymania' of three or four years ago has been transformed into utter disillusion. Gorbachev seems like the person who brought the Soviet Union to its knees. Edward Pearce, the Guardian's perversely wet Tory columnist, bashed scorn on Gorbachev for surrendering everything to the American internationally and giving too much democracy away at home. But many well to Pearce's left share the same theme: Gorbachev was a disaster. Obviously Gorbachev's perestroika totally failed. To see why it is necessary to look beyond the twistings and turnings of particular Gorbachev policies over the last couple of years: failure was built into the whole project right from the start.

Radical

Perestroika, a radical renewal and restructuring, was intended at the beginning, to rein the old bureaucratic command system, not kill it off. It did not start out as a plan to bring capitalism to the Soviet Union. Perestroika was aimed at a partial democratisation of the system within the framework of the political monopoly of the Communist Party (CPSU), at a marketisation of the economy within the framework of continued national planning. Nearly seven years later it is difficult to remember these first objectives of perestroika. Why was failure written into the whole project right from the start?

The democratic opening provided by the first initial glasnost measures brought the de facto recognition of the legality of parties other than the CPSU, and a tremendous release of nationalist sentiment in the republics. Insurgencies of people who had never been able to speak out freely grabbed glasnost with both hands. Once that had happened an irreversible momentum towards elections with alternative parties and platforms developed.

But the ability of the CPSU to put the brake on democratisation movement was constrained by the visible failure of its economic policy. Attempts at marketisation of the command economy produced an unworkable hybrid. Most industries remained nationalised, but central planning began to break down as local factory managers, and bosses in the republics, used the greater freedom to try to bolster their own position.

More economic freedom with a command economy was greater freedom for boardroom speculators and the black market. The whole economy was 'malaise capitalist'. No alternative democratic national planning was proposed; the result was growing chaos.

At first the bureaucracy at regional and local level attempted to obstruct perestroika which they often saw as a threat to their positions, but when it was rammed through they sought the profitable openings that their control of goods and a growing black market gave them.

Three factors combined to drastically increase the weight of pro-capitalist, pro-market liberal forces inside the bureaucracy and the CPSU. The trajectory of Yeltsin is eloquent here.

Reputation

Yeltsin, former CPSU boss in Moscow, made his reputation as a champion of anti-bureaucratic demands - against corruption and privilege.

But by the time he became de facto leader of the Inter-Regional Group in the Congress of People's Deputies and the Supreme Soviet he was in effect the leader of the right.

Gorbachev had no answer to the national question. He oscillated between repression of national movements and concessions. But the possibility of any kind of future federation on a non-capitalist basis was undermined by his refusal to concede the basic national right of self-determination from the very beginning.

By 1990 the pro-capitalist consensus inside the bureaucracy and the Communist Party was overwhelming.

The splits inside the bureaucracy revealed at the time of the August 1991 coup were essentially over the preservation of the status quo, reflecting the interests of sections of the bureaucracy like the armed forces' leadership dependent on the all-union state apparatus. But neither the coup plotters nor those who rallied round them were opposed to the restoration of capitalism.

But of course the coup tremendously speeded up the whole pro-capitalist process which was in train anyway. It gave the opportunity for the most vigorously pro-market 'liberal' wing of the bureaucracy, led by Yeltsin, to come to power and push through their wilder economic plans.

But they are faced with huge restraints. They cannot rapidly marketise an economy which is still 98 per cent in public hands; that will take many years and billions of dollars, if it is ever accomplished at all.

What can be done is to viciously attack the social gains of the working class as a 'preparation' for marketisation. That is exactly what is happening now. The cheap rents, heat, food, transport and other necessities, historic gains for the Soviet workers, are being swept away.

Phenomenon

The Gorbachev phenomenon occurred because a section of the political leadership of the bureaucracy looked the reality of the Soviet Union in the face, and they saw that a general systemic stagnation had overtaken the rapid economic gains of the post-war period.

The need for an overhaul of the system was first recognised by Gorbachev's former patron, Andropov. Andropov, former head of the KGB, knew better than anyone else the real details of the Soviet Union's stagnation and decline.

What some of Gorbachev's 'campus' critics don't see is that the Soviet Union was on the road to disaster and collapse anyway. If Gorbachev and the perestroika process had not intervened, then economic collapse and mass protest movements like Poland's Solidarnosc would have emerged.

Dilemmas

Perestroika just precipitated a world-historical crisis which was waiting to happen. Whatever the way in which the crisis emerged, the same basic dilemmas would have been there.

Gorbachev's fate just highlights the fact that the bureaucratic command system is one which cannot be reformed. It can only be overthrown and replaced. The question is - by what?

And here we come back to the crux of the matter. Anyone who thinks that without Gorbachev and perestroika we would be coasting along with some new form of Brezhnevism in day dreaming.

For a transformation of the Soviet Union towards democratic socialism, the only way to avoid the horrid historical price which will be paid for capitalist restoration, is for a mass labour and socialist movement to emerge and take power. It is a huge task which is just beginning.

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The bitter fruits of marketisation

By Patrick Baker

NOT MANY Muscovites cheered in the New Year in Red Square this year, for their leaders have been put in a difficult position. The cold war is over - and there are no more enemies to fight. The economy is in a state of disarray, and the people have little hope for the future. The once-proud Soviet Union is now struggling to survive in a world of new challenges.

The legacy of six decades of communism is a melting pot of nationalities, some eager to embrace marketisation, while others cling to the old ways. The economy is in shambles, with factories idle and people jobless. The threat of violence and tension is high, and the country is on the brink of economic collapse.

As for the economy, attacks on workers' living standards are nothing new - they have been producing goods and services at a loss for years. Workers are being hit hard by the price increases, and wages are not enough to cover their expenses. The government is under pressure to find a solution, but the situation is worsening by the day.

The potential for destruction arising out of national conflict and within the republics is almost limitless, with one of largest armies and stockpiles of nuclear weapons in the world. The signs of any potential for peaceful settlement are barely encouraging, with conflict in Georgia, Ukraine, and Moldova threatening to escalate. The economy is in a state of disarray, and the fate of the Soviet Union is uncertain.

There are two main reasons why the collapse has occurred: first, the old economic system is in crisis, and second, there is an absence of leadership to guide the country forward. The Soviet Union is a complex and diverse nation, and the task of reunification is daunting.

But the task has been set: the country must find a way to emerge from the economic and political crisis. The leadership must be resolute and determined, and the people must be willing to work together to build a better future.

The legacy of communism is a difficult one to overcome, but with determination and hard work, a new future can be achieved.

Yeltsin pulls the plug on Cuba

Boris Yeltsin had a New Year's gift for the Cuban people: the export of all subsidised trade and aid. Now Cuba will have to pay for everything in hard currency at world prices.

The same applies to other Third World countries like Vietnam, Angola and Mozambique.

The decision will have catastrophic consequences for Cuba. Since the Declaration of Havana in late 1960, when Fidel Castro announced the new socialist direction of the revolution, Cuba has been massively subsidised by the Soviet Union.

More than that, since Nikita Khrushchev's pledge that Cuba was an 'integral part of socialist territory', the USSR acted as the guarantor against US invasion.

The result of the new law is bound to be a massive austerity for the Cuban people. The first problem is oil. Even after the collapse of the economies of oil-rich states like Iraq and Libya in 1990, Cuba was forced to buy oil from Mexico and Venezuela.

But ill sources are subject to the threats of the US, which cannot be trusted. The threat that oil is compounded by the lack of spare parts for buses from Eastern Europe. The transport crisis has led to the closure of large numbers of factories and sessions from China, as well as the widespread reappearance of home-drawn carts.

For the US, the situation in the USSR is a golden opportunity to deal with a fatal blow to the Cuban regime, of all governments worldwide. The one that it lacks the most.

If the Cuban leadership faces difficult decisions, it also has to deal with the demands for increased democracy.

Stark austerity policies need the maximum discussion and decision making among the masses. Impoverished austerity was a fatal flaw in the strategy of the Nicaraguan Sandinistas, until they set their face against any demands for more democracy.

This is a fatal strategy. Authoritarianism plus austerity is a sure-fire formula for creating mass disillusionment and rebellion.
Tories struggle with legacy of Thatcherism

By Harry Sloan

'SQUIRMING' Norman Lamont, John Major's charmless Chancellor, has become an easy target for the frustration of increasingly nervous Tory MPs as time runs out for the calling of the General Election.

Lamont's endless and progressively less convincing claims that an upturn in the economy is just round the corner have made him a laughing stock on all sides.

His well-timed getaway out of the current situation, that would give the more naive of the electorate the illusion that things are improving — or at least that they persist with the same old policies before the election has proved fruitless.

The Tories have indeed spent the last 12 years painting themselves into a corner from which they have no obvious escape.

Global

The most stubborn aspect of the economic bind is that the British recession is not an isolated phenomenon, but part of a global recession hitting all the most powerful imperialist economies. The USA, Japan and even the apparently unstoppable Germany have each run into a period of simultaneous slowdown or recession.

In Japan, economic growth this year is expected to halve to just 0.2%. In Germany, predicting outright recession (negative growth) in 1992 for the first time since the 1970s. Inflated real estate values (which recently put the Japanese Imperial Palace at the same price as the whole of California) are collapsing, putting a squeeze on banks whose assets include property portfolios.

In Germany, orders for manufactured goods have fallen 5.9%, while the costs and pressures of reunification have helped push up unemployability. This has squeezed all the other European currencies, leaving the pound on the floor at the bottom of the league of the EC's Exchange Rate Mechanism.

In the UK, a gathering economic recession shares many parallels with the problems facing Squirming Norman. There have been wholesale shop closures, and plant closures in the manufacturing sector (most spectacularly in the motor industry, where General Motors is to sack 74,000 workers and close 37 follow- ing catastrophic losses of $9 billion in North America but jobs have also been axed in the service sector, notably banking where 100,000 more jobs are predicted to go in 1992.

Estimates suggest that 25 million US workers, 20% of the workforce, were unemployed at some time in 1991.

Depression

Also key in the US crisis is the collapse of property prices, described by the head of the Mortgage Bankers Association as worse than anything since the Great Depression.

This is downhill from the disastrous collapse of many US Savings and Loan corporations — the equivalent of building societies; these have had to be rescued by the Government. The huge steel crisis, largely focused in the Tory-voting south east, which cost the U.S. $2 billion to bail out every tenth of a billion dollars of the industry, added to the stability of 4,000,000 steel workers.

On the US Federal deficit for 1991 is estimated at $362 billion, on top of a cumulative deficit of $2.6 trillion, which brings with it an annual $210 billion in interest payments. The illusory prosperity of Reaganomics has bitten the dust more heavily as Thatcherism is gathering force in Britain. As one senator told Newsweek magazine: "In the Reagan era, the $10 billion we borrowed $1 trillion from foreigners and used it to throw a party."

This is the sort of government that is now: more than conditions prevalent internationally, there is little chance to alter the nature of the British economy.

The extent of Thatcherism's failure can be measured by a wide range of indicators, the key to which is the decline of manufacturing industry. Manufacturing output is now just 5% above its 1979 level, while engineering output last year fell 15% compared with 1990.

North Sea oil

Government hopes of economic growth for the financial year have been pinned on an expansion of North Sea Oil output, which is now actually in decline.

At the sharp end is the motor industry, with car sales down 15% in 1991, and commercial vehicles 30% below 1990 levels. Even the luxury car sector is in the doldrums, with Jaguar and Rover both having 50% of sales in the USA and facing a slump in demand at home. Rolls Royce has closed one plant and sacked 1,300 workers; the whole industry may now be flushed out of BHM.

Meanwhile the magazine director of British Aerospace has warned that over 20% of the industry's 194,000 workforce who fear the worst in 1992, that the recession has hit deep into basic industry with the collapse of the Rayneswark steel mill.

As in the USA, service sector jobs have inevitably been slashed as part of the slump; it is a multiple hit, largely focused in the Tory-voting south east, which has seen over every tenth of a billion dollars of the last ten years' service sector jobs being lost in the south east, where unemployment levels have doubled to 7.2% — equal with most other regions.

Many of the record 48,000 firms that went bust in 1991 were in the south east, as is the new phenomenon created by Thatcherism — the epidemic of houses repossessed by building societies and a flood of mortgage arrears.

Tories hit

No less than 80% of repossessions — expected to reach 80,000 in 1991 — were concentrated in just 100 Tory-held constituencies.

Squirming, that egged on by a campaign from the 'quality press', keen to attract advertising and to attract class interests, the government resorted before Christmas to panic measures to stave off this embarrassing tide of repossessions, while ignoring the dire poverty faced by millions of tenants, claimants, pensioners, families with mortgaged homes, their mortgages, and the 14 million part-time or low-paid workers who only dream of a mortgage.

The Tory objectives were threefold: to conceal this symptom of their economic failure; to prop up house prices at their inflated level and thus prevent a further lurch into recession; to deal with this without spending any new money.

This was achieved by the deal negotiated with the building societies, under which they will underwrite housing associations buying up and renting out repossessed homes, in exchange for a government pledge to funnel a share of income support payments directly to the building societies — bringing then at least an extra £500 million a year.

As a result, dispossessed homeowners could wind up having to pay up to £140 per week to rent back their own homes from housing associations. As the Guardian summed up:

"Rushing turnover in the housing market has become the key to economic recovery, for falling house sales and prices both depress consumer confidence and the myriad of industries that directly serve the market!"}

Hesselline

Meanwhile Michael Heselton was doing his best to force up house prices and worsen the shortages by announcing the virtual cessation of council house building. A mere 11,000 houses for rent are to be built by housing associations in 1992; this in turn will deal a death blow to thousands of commercial incentives and encouragement to employers, real danger to the right to work in the world. It is the system itself which is at the root of the depression, and some way to treat the symptoms alone will result in failure.

Charisma bypass

Once more we find that the main asset of Major and Lamont, both of whom face additional perils after undergoing successful charisma by-pass operation, is the weakness of the Labour opposition.

That is why the Tories launched their New Media onslaught aimed at branding Labour in the eyes of the middle class as a dead weight on the party that wants to jack up tax.

Kinnock's master-plan revolved with a fanfare last week around a revival of nationalising incentives and encouragement to employers, real danger to the right to work in the world. It is the system itself which is at the root of the depression, and some way to treat the symptoms alone will result in failure.

As the election draws nearer, the real danger is that voters might prefer to chuck their teeth away, and put up with recession in the faint hopes of a renewed Tory boom, rather than risk the tried and failed remedies of Kinnock's timid package.
On the verge of a Labour government?

John Major’s government faces a bleak new year. With the election just months away, it is certain that the economy cannot be turned around before polling day. The wave of redundancies and bankruptcies is hitting sections of the Tories’ middle class supporters.

Now the recession, combined with British membership of the Exchange Rate Mechanism, threatens to deliver interest rates rises, triggering higher mortgage payments. And the duration of the world economic recession means that there is no reprieve in sight. A last desperate hope is that Lamont can deliver tax cuts in the Budget.

In the light of all this, the wonder is not that the Tories are behind in the opinion polls but that they are still in contention. Confidence in the Tories may be rock bottom, but there are few expectations that a Kinnock government will solve the economic crisis or deliver higher living standards; indeed, since Labour makes no promises on this score, this is hardly surprising.

Despite the lack of widespread enthusiasm for Labour, the odds must now be that the game is up for John Major’s team. Whatever the potential hopelessness of Labour’s non-alternative policies, a Labour victory in the general election is vital. There are two aspects to this. First, a Labour government would create a new mood in the working class - not a mood of widespread expectation of major reforms, but at least that the worst years of anti-working class attacks are over.

A further five-year term of Tory rule would deepen the already rock bottom level of industrial struggle and pessimism.

If Labour were to be defeated again it would mean a near two-decade period with Labour out of office, the best part of a generation.

In such a situation the credibility of Labour as a party of government would plummet. The usefulness of Labour to the trade union bureaucracy would sharply decline.

The opportunity would then be created for the Liberal Democrats to try to establish them-

No laughing matter: Major faces defeat

selves as the ‘second’ party, trying to marginalise Labour as a ‘party of the past’, and perhaps creating stronger relations with right-wing union leaders.

Of course, given the relative strength of the two parties a Labour government would not automatically lead to its replacement as the second party. But the danger would be there.

Paddy Ashdown is already staking out a claim to the political space to Labour’s right. His rejection of the ‘social chapter’ in the Maastricht agreement was very significant on this score. He doesn’t want to do anything to help Labour in this situation, and indeed is clearly prepared for a coalition with either the Tories or Labour.

In the event of a ‘hung’ parliament a Tory-Liberal government is very unlikely however. The price would be electoral reform and some sort of proportional representation.

This the Tories, who see every chance of coming back as the majority party even if they lose this election, would never accept. Labour might, given their desperation to get a toe-hold in government.

The conclusions for socialists are stark. In a few months there will be a general election, and everything possible has to be done to ensure Labour wins. But socialists will have to point out the reality of what a Labour government would mean.

A new Labour government led by Kinnock would add to the litany of Wilson-Callaghan-type right wing failures, but in conditions of much greater capitalist crisis than Wilson or Callaghan faced.

The scene could then be set for further demoralisation and an alarming polarisation of British politics to the right. Discussion needs to take place now about how the left would respond to a Kinnock government. This must be a central concern of the Socialist Movement AM in June.

The building of a broad alliance to fight for key working class interests, such as the abolition of the anti-union laws, a massive reduction in defence expenditure and British withdrawal from Ireland, would be on the order of the day.

As Tories seek to privatise BR

Is Labour on the right track?

By an RMT member

‘BACK to the Golden Age of Trains’ was the headline in the Daily Mail, reporting that the government is planning a rebirth of the fiercely proud and independent Victorian railway companies’.

According to this report the government is planning to privatise British Rail on the basis of regional firms. Just like the ‘good old days’!

This will do no good for BR management which has introduced the new business structure (inter City, Network South East, Regional Railways, Freight etc.) in preparation for privatisation on the basis of the different services rather than regional areas.

The differences the government have with Bob Crow (RMT) are not over the question of whether to privatise, but how to do it.

Cutbacks

Although the cabinet has yet to reach a final decision on the exact nature of the proposals, one thing is certain, there will be big cutbacks in provincial services. Indeed a leaked BR report indicates that there are already proposals for which services would be shut off the list of inter City routes should it be privatised.

The difference over how to privatise is a result of the sheer complexities which will result from breaking up the system. Already the changes from adjustments to the business structure have created chaos, with arguments between different management levels over who pays for what.

How much resistance, would inter City have to pay to any ‘backbock’ or regional railway for travelling over their tracks?

On the other hand, divesting the system on a regional basis could lead to just as many problems. Will a passenger travelling from Brighton to Glasgow be forced to buy a separate ticket for each of the areas she passes through?

It’s clear from the changes already in place that breaking up BR will not provide a better service for travellers. Network South East — the ‘flagship’ of the new business structure — is come under intense criticism, even from Tory stalwarts.

Labour government

The union leaders tell us that we shall be OK with the return of a Labour government. The privatisation plans will of course be scrapped if the Tories lose the election.

Waiting for Labour? RMT chief Jimmy Knapp

However, the Labour Party isn’t exactly blinking over with ideas to improve the lot of rail workers or commuters.

To make things even worse, the European Community has passed a directive, due for implementation in 1993, whereby the rail networks of member countries are supposed to be opened up to competition.

Open access

Operators, other than the national networks are to have ‘open access’ to run services over any track. Would a Labour government accede to this directive? Clearly the rail unions should demand that they do not allow the implementation of this directive.

More than this, however, the RMT should take the initiative in drawing together the European rail unions in a struggle against the privatisation of our railways.
After last term's explosion of militancy
Students on standby for national wave of occupations

By Andrew Berry
City of London Polytechnic
Occupation Committee and
Communications Officer,
NUS London

THOUSANDS OF students will return to college after the holiday break eager to turn last term's wave of occupations into a militant national movement against student poverty.

Morale was certainly high in many colleges before the holidays and it is vital that this is both maintained and extended to students who have not yet been involved in occupation.

The current volatility in the student movement is tremendously significant. The situation could well develop extremely positively and a highly combative mass national student movement could emerge.

Mapping out strategy and tactics for the positive development of the movement is therefore crucially important.

There is no doubt that the new realist National Organisation of Labour Students (NOLS) leadership of the National Union of Students (NUS) is a considerable obstacle to be overcome. NUS has consistently opposed the occupations, preferring to concentrate on an electoral campaign on marginal constituencies in the General Election called 'Tar- get 25'.

There is a deep and perfectly understandable bitterness towards NUS among occupation activists because of the national union's hostile response to their willingness to fight back. But it is important that this is not translated into an ultra-left, knee-jerk dismissal of all NUS structures - something that the Revolutionary Communist Party activists seem to whisper unashamedly.

London Region NUS and the NUS Women's Campaign, for example, have consistently and practically supported the occupations in defiance of the national union.

Even at December's NUS Conference when a motion urging the executive to lead a national movement of occupations fell, the card vote was exactly what the nation needed - a bitter debate, in which the right-wing used every trick in the book, the vote was 370,000 to 390,000 - a difference of two large universities.

The decision of NUS London to call an activists' conference on 23 January is very important. This will be the place where strategy and tactics can be discussed. In the absence of NUS support, it is vital that there is a national coordination of occupations, one that is elected by and accountable to students in occupation.

It is likely that this conference will be addressed by a Greek student activist who was in the leadership of the mass occupations in Greece last year. College occupations have been seen on a much higher level in Greece, where the government was forced to concede their demands. Their experience will not only inspire activists in Britain but also provide useful lessons.

NUS London has called for a 24-hour occupation of all London colleges in the run-up to the 'End Student Hardship' national NUS demonstration on 12 February. The march is anticipated to be very large and a strong appeal for further action will help develop a national occupation movement.

Going into occupation entails confrontation with both college management and, certainly if a national movement develops, with the Tory government. Fighting victimisation will obviously be a central task of occupation activists. That task already confronts those students who were in occupation last term. Defending occupation activists will be made very much easier as more colleges fall under occupation.

It is also vital that students in occupation get support from workers in education, and from local labour movement bodies. You don't have to be a student to raise support for them.

Given Kenneth Clarke's blistering attack on student teachers and on teacher training colleges, any campaign on higher and further education must obviously try to forge links with these students, who may well be inactive themselves. Getting support from branches of the NUT and of NATFHE is also a priority.

A change in mood looks likely in the student movement. Driven by the Tories into dire poverty with the removal of benefits, frozen grants and top-up loans, lack of housing and expensive rents, students have begun to wake up after a period of passivity.

New battle for Ravenscraig

By Sam Imnan
LABOUR'S RESPONSE to the closure of the Ravenscraig steel works in Scotland, voiced through the mouthpiece of spokesperson for Trade and Industry Gordon Brown on TV AM, epitomed Labour's scabbing on Scottish workers. In the event of Labour winning the general election, he said, the new government would not intervene to save the works from closure.

British Steel's decision to shut down Ravenscraig steel mill will lose 1,200 jobs by September, but it is estimated to indirectly result in the loss of some 13,000 jobs. Even the Tories are privately fearful that BS has reneged on its promise to keep Ravenscraig open until 1994.

The immediate political effect of this decision is to drive the Tories into yet another crisis. Ian Lang, the Scottish Secretary, is under pressure to resign from Labour, the Scottish National Party and the Liberal Democrats. The new Labour leader in Scotland's 75 must also be sweating over the political aftershocks. Indeed, he has been made to do this by the BBC's political editor, John Curtice.

Major's response has been to demand BS's right to take decisions based on market conditions. To defend the beleaguered Ian Lang, and to offer workers in Llanwern a £50 million producer like South Korea.

Within a capitalist framework this can only be solved by shedding tens of thousands of jobs across the whole European industry. The decimation of the British steel industry is a byproduct of this process. When the Tories came to power in 1979 there were some 184,000 workers in steel. The Ravenscraig closure will bring this to less than 46,000, a 75 per cent cut in the workforce in 12 years.

The Scottish dimension is obviously most pertinent to Ravenscraig. With its centrally controlled anti-trade unionism, it is often the case that the whole of the steel industry is a corporate version of what is happening in the steel industry in the USA.

The European dimension to the crisis in the steel industry is particularly important, in the classical Marxist sense it is a crisis of overproduction. The European steel industry is estimated to face an overcapacity of some 20 per cent. It faces intense competition from low cost producers like South Korea.

Despite the fact that British Steel is one of the largest companies in the world, its European competitors are making greater profits. With a 20 per cent overcapacity, the British are in a virtually impossible position to compete with European steel companies.

It has been argued recently by Labour's Scottish leader, Donald Dewar, in his recent book, 'Scotland and the Future', that the closure of Ravenscraig will result in the loss of more than 12,000 jobs. Dewar argues that the closure of Ravenscraig is inevitable because of the closure of the steel industry in the USA.

Indeed, the SNP's view of independence with Europe is more likely to gain as Scottish nationalism is further fuelled by the closure of Ravenscraig.

But tying Scotland to the Brussels bureaucrats will not address Scottish steelworkers one iota. Like the oil industry, the Scottish steel industry should be controlled by Scottish workers, as should the whole of the country's economy.

Forcing the Tories out of office and fighting the Ravenscraig closure will be one step towards this goal.
Asylum Bill: a gift to the ultra-right

EUROPE today is awash with racism. Immigrant workers have been murdered in Germany, France and Britain. Fascist and semi-fascist parties are winning millions of votes. There are four elements of the present poisonous situation.

First, a general rise of racist sentiment in sections of the white middle and working class; a rise in state racism, threatening the right to asylum and other immigrant rights; the growth of the fascist organisations; and an intensification of racist attacks as a result of all these things.

At the core of these developments is the new, intensified, stage of the capitalist crisis. Growing unemployment, bankruptcies and austerity create a fertile climate for racism.

Deepening inter-imperialist competition reinforces various forms of nationalism, especially in the EC countries.

And the failure of the mainstream labour movement to put forward realistic solutions to the crisis creates an opening for the racists and fascists.

Fortress Europe

While European monetary and political union may be some way off, the Europeans have got their act together to impose tough new immigration controls and restrict asylum rights.

The Schengen agreement, signed in 1985 and due to come into force at the end of this year creates a Europe-wide visa, and has drawn up a list of 104 countries whose citizens will now have to have a visa for any European country.

A huge computer system has been created to keep track of 'undesirable'. 'Foreigners' resident in any EC country will now have to register with the police when they visit another.

Anyone designated 'persona non grata' in the joint computer files will not be allowed entry into any EC country. French people from outside metropolitan France will now be considered 'foreigners'. And, crucially, any asylum seeker refused entry into one EC country will not be allowed to seek asylum in another.
Asylum Bill
(Continued from previous page)

As the neo-fascist parties have grown, the mainstream right-wing parties have increasingly capitulated to fascist ideas. In France, the two main right-wing leaders, Jean-Marie Le Pen and Edouard Fornier, have both made violence and anti-immigration rhetoric a cornerstone of their campaign. Jean-Marie Le Pen has promised to 'get tough' against illegal immigration.

Recession

But the growing strength of the neo-fascist parties has not been without cost. Since 1989, European countries have witnessed an economic downturn, with many small businesses and middle-class professionals losing their jobs. Many workers have been laid off, leading to an increase in the number of homeless and unemployed. The working class faces unemployment and new forms of exploitation in their daily lives.

France and Germany

While the rise of fascism has been most apparent in France and Germany, fascism has also spread to other countries in Europe. In France, the far-right Front National has capitalized on the economic downturn and the perception of a decline in French influence. In Germany, the AfD has gained support, particularly in the east.

But opposition polls showed a clear majority for the establishment parties in France and Germany, with the facists failing to gain significant support. In France, the Socialist Party, led by Jean-Luc Mélenchon, and the Communist Party, led by Jean-Luc Mélenchon, and the Communist Party, led by Jean-Luc Mélenchon, were the main opposition parties. In Germany, the Social Democrats, led by Olaf Scholz, and the Greens, led by Robert Habeck, were the main opposition parties.

The real significance of the Asylum Bill is often missed. Unmess Desai of the Newham Monitoring Project explains:

Asylum Bill fits into a strategy for Common Market Europe post-1992. It represents not an isolated criminalization of the black community in Britain, but a homogenization of immigration controls throughout Europe which will leave black people at the bottom of the pile.

"It is therefore a very specific product of 1992 showing that immigrants' status will be reduced to the lowest common denominator and it will mean the same for working class living standards as a whole in the long run."

State racism

Home Secretary Kenneth Baker implies that the purpose of the Bill is to prevent racial conflict, but its effect will be the opposite, given the interplay of state racism at street level.

The Asylum Bill is based on two obvious myths, first that the British 'race' (whatever that may be) is being 'swamped by immigrants'; second that asylum seekers are bogs. Since the 1960s more people have settled here than ever before. Britain could not become overcrowded as a result of the 2400 arrivals between 1989-90. The Bill introduces a 'fast-track' procedure with no automatic right to appeal.

The legal requirement to rehouse homeless families will be scrapped, with no right to council housing while families are waiting for decisions. Finally there will be the fingerprinting of refugees. This part of the Bill clearly works to criminalise the entire black community by implying that the mere presence of black people in Britain is a cause of crime.

Fighting racism and fascism

By Ian McLarty and Charlie Langford

The facts are clear. The main countries from which people are coming - India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Somalia - all have appalling human rights records or civil war. The Asylum Bill will sap the last hope those whose lives are threatened and by implication all black people in Britain for the failure of the economy, the lack of housing and unemployment.

The implications of the Bill are draconian. Refugees will have only 48 hours to lodge an application and they will lose their right to legal aid. Both immigration forms and immigration law are thoroughly complicated. Airlines can fine up to £200 to anyone without the correct travel documents. This will encourage airlines to remove anyone from a plane, back even to states with records of torture, rather than pay a fine.

The Bill introduces a 'fast-track' procedure with no automatic right to appeal. The legal requirement to rehouse homeless families will be scrapped, with no right to council housing while families are waiting for decisions. Finally there will be the fingerprinting of refugees. This part of the Bill clearly works to criminalise the entire black community by implying that the mere presence of black people in Britain is a cause of crime.

Refugees are the most vulnerable to this type of treatment, given that it is not a usual state action from which they are fleeing.

The Asylum Bill cannot be seen in isolation. The way to defeat racism and fascism is through mass action of the working class and its allies, anti-fascists and the left.

Probably the best example of how to go about this was the Anti-Nazi League's meeting at the 1992's Carnival of the street.

The first Carnival in particular attracted 80,000 people - the organisers (essentially the SWP) anticipated 10,000 - and most of these were young workers and students.

The main attraction for many would have been free music, the assembly at Trafalgar Square and the demonstration to Victoria Park via Brick Lane, and the statements of the bands, taking part, will have moved many people's lives.

Youth

The link with youth and black culture and the very up-and-coming of Tom Robinson also highlighted the role of the oppressed in the fight against fascism. This is not to say, of course, that the 'Carnival' method should be followed slavishly. The music of that time was highly political and thus more directly useful to anti-fascists.

While we were then coming to the end of the most right wing Labour government known up to that time, the subsequent years of Thatcherism has moved people, particularly youth, a long way further right.

This is why we cannot guarantee spec-
**CISM**

**Divisive**

This, combined with the limited gains available, has a strongly divisive dynamic.

Socialist Outlook’s view is that there is no need for three separate campaigns covering largely the same area and that local groups should be relating to all credible initiatives called by whichever campaign.

Of course AFA, ARA and the ANL, coming from different traditions, will have their differences, and there will also be independent activists putting forward further views. What is necessary is that in activity all anti-fascists work together.

Therefore, it is essential that there is full discussion of activities where all shades of opinion have the opportunity to speak and the decisions are taken democratically. Once made they should be respected by all. Daunting in the face of the fascists is bound seriously to weaken the appeal of any anti-fascist campaign.

What is needed is a long-term activist campaign which recognizes the link between state racism and fascism. The two are not mutually exclusive and they feed off each other.

Methods of campaigning need to be varied – carnivals, rallies, demonstrations (not confined to streets where no-one will see them), lobbies and mobilizations to prevent fascists marching and meeting.

The united front must be employed to guarantee the maximum mobilization of the black community and the labour movement. This means the coming together of activists around a principled set of demands.

It is important for socialists that there are no preconditions set for any umbrella group which would in any way restrict debate or freedom of criticism. There must be a fight against those who would wish politics, especially those of the class struggle, to be ‘toned down’ in the hope to appease a ‘middle ground’.

Anyone who insists on restriction of debate and views before participating in a campaign against racism or fascism will only ever be a fair-weather friend. It is not the left who are sectarian in such situations, but those who assume their actions are beyond criticism.

**United Front**

A united front tactic recognizes the importance of class politics and does not allow the subordination of those ideas for the sake of the peace of mind of any bureaucrat. We are obviously in favour of the famous supporting initiatives – indeed this is vital in publicising campaigns – but as Trotsky observed in 1934, abandonment of mass politics for the pursuit of individuals with big names is the worst kind of adventurism and political charlatanism.

On the other hand, it is infantile ultra-leftism to use the presence of a broad-based list of sponsors as an excuse for not participating. If pressure is not put on the bureaucrats and the ‘great and the good’, they are left free to sell out those who face the sharp end of the attacks.

Ideally there should be a national cam-
Socialist Outlook

Special Feature

Fighting racism and fascism

(from previous page)

paigen which brings together all those threatened by fascism and racism, that means the black community, women, lesbians and gay men, and the trade unions.

Such a campaign must respect the autonomy of oppressed groups. It is unlike that a campaign that patronises black people with regard to their demands — the black agenda — will be able to win the fight.

What is clearly needed today, with an increasing number of racist attacks — now running at one every 29 minutes — is a credible campaign that can deliver committed activists onto the streets, not pressure-group politics.

Working class

The force that in the final analysis will defeat — or be defeated by — fascism and racism is the working class through its organisations. None of the anti-fas-
cist/anti-racist organisations have yet the active support of anything more than very minor sections of the organised working class.

This is now the greatest weakness of the movement. The trade unions, trades councils and Labour Party local branches must be drawn into the local groups, not just as sponsors or delegates but as bodies that will mobilise their members in activity. We need unions in particular — because they are frequently seen by their members as 'non-political' in comparison to trade councils and Labour Parties — to raise and campaign among their members against racism and fascism.

There are plenty of opportunities to mobilise, around equal opportunities statements, for example. Fascism will display itself among workers first as racism, anti-semitism, homophobia, and gross sexism, playing on the Nazi attitude of women’s roles as ‘Kinder, Kir-
che, Kuche’.

Several levels

Any serious campaign that is going to defeat the fascists and the rise of racism is going to have to mount an assault at several levels, utilising the broadest forces and mobilising the largest number of people in a variety of actions.

The fascists do not operate in a vacuum: and we must not let them win the ideological battle. We must be holding meetings on the estates, attempting to win those for whom fascism will be most attractive to — white working class youth.

We also need to try to prevent the fascists doing likewise: fascist meetings are almost always accompanied by violent attacks in the communities where they take place, fire-bombings, stabbings, etc.

Anti-fascists need to take part in, and instigate where possible, community fights back to ensure that the fascists are made unwelcome and are unable put their ideas over.

‘Free speech’

The left should not be misguided by liberal notions of ‘free speech’ — the idea that would grant platforms to those who wish to deprive the right of others to speak or even live.

The fascists don’t respect any ideals of participation and equality — they in-
crease racial hatred, perpetrate fire-bomb-
ings and commit racist murders.

We support the right of the black community to defend itself and are un-
equivocal in support for the slogan ‘self
defence is no offence’.

The British state will not stop fascism (rather, in a final resort it could turn to fascism as its own weapon). Ultimately only the working class has the power to be able to smash fascism — not through the law or parliament or our current media but through its collective power.

Given the general election this year, there must be a concerted campaign against any fascists or neo-Nazis standing is clear. It is important that they do not get a free ride at the election and that the question of opposition to racism is not dropped.

The fascists are repeatedly attempting to get sufficient finance together to stand in 60 seats at the election. This will entitle them to access to TV etc. There must be campaigns against them in every seat that they stand. Such campa-
igns offer the opportunity to unite activists across the country. The cam-
aign could and should continue after the election to counter both racism and fascism. There has never been an acceptable level of either and such a fight therefore is not a short term issue.

Who are the new fascists?

By Paul Clarke

LAST AUTUMN, the new European fascists made important electoral gains. The Lomb-
ardy League won around 10 per cent in a by-election in the northern Italian town of Brescia.

In Austria, the Haas Blok (‘Finnish Bloc’) won a staggering 25 per cent of the vote. The far-right Austrian Peoples Party won more votes than the mainstream Torres of the Freedom Party. And Jean-Marie Le Pen’s party is consid-
ered to have won over 20 per cent in opinion polls. Dramatic images of German skinheads giving the Hitler salute do not give an fully accurate impression of the reality of European fascism. The serious far-right forces are very different types of organisations to the German Nazis and Mussolini’s fascists in the 1930s and 30s.

Classical fascism was built in the aftermath of World War I as a head-on battle with the labour movement, in particular the Nazi Communist parties. Mussolini and Hitler fought to win the allegiance of ruined sections of the middle class, and especially the unemployed, away from the alternative of socialism. This affected the form of the movement.

Fascism of course is a form of extreme reac-
tionary capitalist dictatorship. But the fascists had the ideology and appearance of a ‘revolutionary’ movement, employing an anti-
capitalist as well as anti-Bolshevik rhetoric.

For fascists makes the Nazis supported strikes, especially those against the Social Democratic government in Poznan. The Nazis were thus a movement for the revolutionary overthrow of liberal democracy, utilising the methods of terror and storm in the streets.

How does this compare with the new fascists? By far the biggest far-right organisations are those who disavow the old-style methods. The French Front National, the German Republican Party and the German Peoples Party, the Austrian Freedom Party, the northern Italian leagues and the Finnish Viipuri Blok present themselves as parties within the framework of liberal democracy.

It is true that all these parties use strong arm methods and have their own goons squad. But there is nothing remotely resembling the Nazi storm-troopers or the Italian squadristi. Anti-
capitalist themes are totally absent form their propaganda.

Traditional fascism constructed a ‘corporate state’ and politically enfranchised the capitalist class, replacing its parliamentary role with a gangster-fascist bureaucracy. For the ruling European ruling class, not least that part in Ger-
many and Italy, it had disastrous consequences. The Fascists experiment. The Front National is recruiting heavily among young technocrats and high-
ly flying civil servants, something the Nazis didn’t do until they were on the verge of taking power.

Of course their policies are anything but ‘liberal’, the coming to power of these parties would mean massive repression against im-
migrant workers, black people, women, lesbians and gay men — and of course the labour move-
ment. And it is true that these parties are evolv-
ing: at a future and more intense stage of the class struggle they could take on characteristics of the old fascist parties.

Knowing the new fascists are different from their old-style parents shouldn’t lead us into com-
placency — they are no less dangerous. But old-style fascists had different opponents and different tasks. Most importantly the HItlerites confronted a labour movement with a strong revolutionary component, which is not there today.

To deal with strikers and other ‘disorderly’ elements the ruling class in Europe has con-
ducted a reign of terrorism and repression units. Storm-troopers are unnecessary and potentially dangerous.

Nowhere in Europe are the new fascists on the verge of taking power. But they act as a permanent pressure, dragging the spectrum to the right, most spectacularly in France. Exposing and defeating them is an in-
tegral part of the fight against racism.

So, what’s new? Police arrest anti-fascists in Cable Street, 1938. And their latter-day colleagues carry on the same way.
Gulf War – one year on

Death toll still rising

A year after the US-led massacre in the Gulf, GEOFF RYAN reviews the harsh realities of what the Gulf war meant for the peoples of the Middle East. He goes on to look at the aftermath of the war – the fate of the peoples of Iraq and Yemen, and the ongoing struggle of the Kurdish nation.

In our next issue, the second part of this article will look at the Middle East peace conference, particularly in relation to the Palestinians’ fight for independence, and conclude with an assessment of the future for the peoples of the region.

ON THE night of 16-17 January the US airforce launched the most savage aerial bombardment in the history of humanity. For 40 days the people of Iraq were subject to over 200,000 violent attacks.

Despite all the talk of ‘surgical strikes’ only 7 percent of raids used so-called ‘smart’ bombs. So 93 percent of bombs killed civilians. And 90 percent of the dead – 150,000 military dead and 200,000 civilians killed.

‘Military death’

Since the Pentagon constantly stressed the ‘military’ nature of its targets, 200,000 civilian deaths is – if anything – an underestimate. The vast majority of the ‘military’ dead were young conscripts forced to pay the price for Saddam’s adventure in Kuwait.

These figures only relate to those killed in the war to ‘liberate’ Kuwait. Perhaps another 100,000 died during the uprisings against Saddam in the South of Iraq and Kurdistan. And a similar number of children will die due to illnesses related to lack of food, sanitation and unclean water – a direct result of the destruction of Iraq.

In the West the war has been claimed as a total success with few victims – over half a million dead Iraqis or Kurds apparently do not count. This gives the lie to the claim that the war was against Saddam, not the Iraqi people.

 posed to Saddam’s invasion of Kuwait. And again it is not simply the government but the whole population who are being punished. A million Yemenis were expelled from Saudi Arabia, increasing the population of Yemen by one-twelfth a night. Not only have the Yemenis had to absorb such a massive increase in population, but they have had to do so on drastically reduced incomes. The millions of Yemenis in Saudi Arabia sent large amounts of money home to their families.

New Hitler

Despite all the rhetoric about Saddam being ‘the New Hitler’, the new Bush and Major preferred a weakened – but stable – Iraq under Saddam to the threat any successful rebellion would pose to imperialism. The Saddam regime certainly would not support any opposition which included radical Shia currents. And President O’Malley of Turkey recognised the inspiration a successful uprising in Iraqi-held Kurdistan would be for Kurds in the Turkish state.

The result of these policies is that Saddam is now stronger than ever inside Iraq, however much he may have been weakened as a regional power. Any opposition is hopelessly divided by political and religious differences and by the machinations of other states – particularly Saudi Arabia, Iran and Turkey. They back whichever organisation happens to best serve their own interests.

And not just the people of Iraq and Kurdistan who have been made to pay for Bush’s war. Yemen has suffered for daring to vote against the war in the UN Security Council – even though they were clearly op-
Slaughter that focused a nation's anger

By David Coen

SUNDAY, January 30th 1972. The day British Paratroops shot dead thirteen unarmed demonstrators on the streets of Derry. Thirteen more were injured, one of whom died later. Seven of the dead were teenagers.

High Court judge, Lord Widgery produced his official report. His conclusion was that there had been shooting by the IRA. The British Army were merely returning fire. He could produce no evidence for this. None of the dead were carrying arms or throwing petrol bombs. Five had been shot in the back.

In December 1974 the British Government announced it would pay £41,500 to the families of those killed as a gesture of conciliation and goodwill.

The report of the Derry city coroner into the shootings was more forthright in assigning blame.

"To strike me that the army ran amok that day and they shot without thinking of what they were doing. They were shooting innocent people. People may have been taking part in a parade that was banned but I don’t think that justifies the firing of live rounds indiscriminately. I say it without reservation, it was sheer unadulterated murder."

But the British Army were certainly thinking about what they were doing when they opened fire. The youth of Bogside and Creggan, who were at the forefront of the many demonstrations against internment, were going to be taught a lesson in blood.

Colonel Derek Willford, the commanding officer of the Parachute Regiment on Bloody Sunday, was awarded an OBE in 1973.

Reaction was swift and furious. In Dublin a crowd of 30,000 burned the British Embassy. Taoiseach Jack Lynch declared a national day of mourning and thousands of workers went on strike. The following day in the House of Commons, Bernadette Devlin physically attacked Home Secretary Reginald Maudling. Thousands of Irish workers downed tools and joined protests in London and other cities. There was a flood of international condemnation.

In contrast there was no collective condemnation from the Labour Party. Those tragic events belong in the past. No one talks about Bloody Sunday any more (but still secret) policy - the suspension of the Stormont Government and the imposition of direct rule. Bloody Sunday effectively meant the end of Unionist government in the Six Counties, ending periods in the 'search' position, denied sleep, food and drink and being subjected to 'white noise'.

Faulkner believed that internment would at least prevent the unrest growing. In fact the reaction to internment was so fierce that on 12 August 1971 Faulkner was forced to ban all demonstrations for a year. But this had little effect on growing opposition in the streets. Barricades were built in Nationalist areas to keep out the British Army and the RUC. In these 'no go' areas the IRA was able to operate openly.

A rent and rates strike against internment, organised by women in Belfast, was so successful that the British Government passed the Payment of Debt Act allowing arrears to be taken directly from benefits. Similar legislation was later used in the collection of the Poll Tax in Britain.

Internment and Bloody Sunday finally put an end to the illusion that reforms could be achieved from the Unionist Government at Stormont by a mass movement on the streets. If internment did not succeed in pressuring the British, then it appeared as if shooting demonstrators was the next stage. It became clear to all that the sectarian state was incapable of reform. Created through partition by the British in 1921, against the democratic aspirations of the people of Ireland and under the threat of 'immediate and terrible war', any reform would undermine the Northern State's very existence.

But Bloody Sunday revealed something more important. If the move for civil rights brought down the Stormont regime and eventually grew over in a demand for the ending of partition, it would also find itself openly confronting the British State. In Derry, January 1972, it did.

The Derry march was organised by the Civil Rights Association in response to pressure from the Northern Resistance Movement, an organisation supported by the Provisionals and Peasleys' Democracy. It was the latest in a series of protests against internment held in defiance of Faulkner's ban.

Both the Provisional and Official IRA had assured the organisers that they would not engage in any armed confrontation with the British Army on the day. There is no independent evidence to support the Parachute Regiment's claim to have been fired on first, or the Widgery Report's acceptance of this fact.

Heath and Whitelaw obviously decided that the time had come to bring matters into their own hands. They suspended Stormont for one year, but it never returned. Nationalists were overjoyed to see the end of the sectarian Government at Stormont.

But any hope that direct rule would lead to an improvement in the condition of the Nationalists was quickly dashed. After twenty years of rule from Westminster, unemployment among Catholics compared to Protestants is worse than it was at the time of Bloody Sunday. This is especially true of the young given the fact that more than a third of employment is in government services - within the control of the 'imperial' British Government.

Bloody Sunday represented the end of the civil rights period in the North of Ireland and revealed the true protagonists - Irish nationalists and the British state. After 20 years of war the situation is one of stalemate, militarily and politically. Both sides recognise that the other cannot be defeated by military means.

Politically, the British government have repeatedly tried 'initiatives' to drain the pools in which the IRA swims - to take political support away from them. The most promising of these has been the 1985 Anglo-Irish Agreement which tried to woo Nationalists away from Sinn Fein by giving Dublin Government some say in the affairs of the North.

The Agreement came about in response to increased support for Sinn Fein following the Hunger Strike where, for the first time in ten years, a mass movement developed in support of the prisoners and against the British regime. So far the British have been unable to take this process forward, despite the efforts of Peter Brooke. It was the Unionists, despite their divisions, who were the main opposition to Brooke.

Some of this was undoubtedly nostalgia and the desire for the return of Stormont in some form. The more far-sighted thought they could extract even stronger guarantees against Irish unity than provided in the Anglo-Irish Agreement. Hence the demand that the Twenty Six Counties' constitutional claim to the North be changed before they enter further talks with Brooke.

The Social Democratic and Labour Party (and the British Labour Party) seem quite happy to go along with Brooke, despite the fact that it pushed the question of unity into never-never land. SDLP leader John Hume's favoured solution is a Europe of the Regions within the EEC, which unfortunately for him is unlikely to appeal to the Tory Party, even post-Thatcher.

It is not hard to see that either of these developing scenarios, the political struggle, especially in the South of Ireland, will be critical for the future. Not all of the lessons of Bloody Sunday are helpful for that.
Algeria
Troops confront Islamic power bid

This article was received from CHAWKI SALH, leader of the Algerian PST, before the resignation of the Algerian President, and the cancellation of the second round of elections. None of these moves will halt the rise of the reactionary FIS. Rather, they are likely to reinforce the loyalty of FIS supporters and discredit pro-democracy forces. Whether a military government will be installed is unclear. But the FIS is likely to be strengthened. As far as points out, the only way to resist the rise of fundamentalism is through a united mobilisation in defence of democracy.

IT WAS LATE in the evening of 26 December 1991 that Algerian troops surrounded the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) was the main victor in a general election which involved only 6.5 million people out of 13 million registered voters.

The results show that in the absence of a mass workers' party, the unemployed and the young chose a reactionary banner to express their protest, because the FIS gave the illusion of being a radical, powerful and effective opposition. The electoral system pushed people to cast a 'useful vote' and reinforced the FIS.

Islamic majority

In the first round FIS took 188 seats out of 430 and in on course to win almost all the 199 seats up for election. It got 3.26 million votes out of the 6.8 million cast. With the 518,000 votes for similar parties, the Islamic vote took an overall majority. 28 seats will be enough in the second round for the FIS to take the majority by itself.

The Front of Socialist Forces (FIS) expressed the consensus among the masses around their right to speak Tamazight (the Berber language). But with its 310,000 votes and 26 deputies, it is hardly on course for power. With 1.65 million votes and only 15 deputies, the vote of the ruling party, the FLN, was split between the various areas and those worried by the rise of the FIS - it is this factor that boosted its vote.

The intellectual and social elites voted for the 30-plus liberal parties, but their 635,000 votes were rendered useless by the 'first past the post' electoral system.

The Socialist Workers Party (PST) has always challenged the legitimacy of these elections. It participated to ensure that there was a socialist alternative on offer.

The elections were clearly anti-democratic - there was no comparison between the parties in either funding or organisational ability, the electoral system increased the vote of the biggest parties; and there was a biased media campaign. The complexity of the voting procedure and the political consolidation led to more than 10 million abstentions or invalid votes.

The voting procedure was complicated so as to exclude the illiterate, and only the FIS organised courses to train illiterate supporters to tick the right number on the ballot. The 924,000 invalid votes represented such votes, lost by the FIS opponents who had made no such preparations.

In numerous women's voting booths the FIS won a majority - the 'democratic' parties failed to mobilise their women supporters. The right to vote for women, just won in the face of opposition from the fundamentalists, was turned to the advantage of enemies of women's rights.

The government, who had promised free and honest elections, clearly had expected neither the FIS victory nor the high level of abstention. Then, faced by the scale of the defeat, it seemed there was a possibility of a coup. The FIS lead was so large that there could no longer be any doubt as to the result.

Panic

The panic which particularly hit the middle classes has been used in a crazy campaign for the annulment of the results, led by the 'Committee to Save Algeria', created by the General Union of Algerian Workers (UGTA) and bosses' organisations.

But this campaign discredits democracy and will only enlarge the FIS. The massive demonstration on January 2 is the only positive element in this disastrous situation, with up to 300,000 people taking part.

Now the government is aiming to return the vote in some of the FIS' seats where there have been claims of fraud. They are obviously heading for a protracted period, which improves the FLN's chances, but also lets them prepare for an FIS victory.

It seems very unlikely that the FLN can recover its losses, but not everything is yet decided. Imperialism is hesitating between the real possibilities offered by an authoritarian regime to smash people's pursuing power, close down the public sector and open up the economy to the world market - and its fear of destabilising its domination over the region.

But to defeat the fundamentalists, the working class youth needs to be won back from them. The fight against the right and resistance to the IMF's plans must continue. And the revolt of the marginalised youth needs to be the driving force of the struggle.

This is the challenge before us. The workers' movement has already waited for too long, but it is the only way forward.

El Salvador negotiations
A tactical retreat

PEREZ DE CUELLAR was all smiles. At the last minute the UN secretary had achieved a compromise where none seemed possible.

But will the agreements signed between the Salvadorean government and the revolutionary FMLN for the same day be for the benefit of El Salvador?

The agreements mark the end of more than a decade of armed struggle between the FMLN's guerrillas and government death squads, backed up by billions of dollars in US aid. It is a mark of the power that enjoyed by the guerrilla that they were able to sign such an agreement for so long.

And there is no doubt that the terrible destruction wrought by the war played a big part in bringing the FMLN to the negotiating table. With the resumption of Soviet aid as the US cut and the electoral defeat of their allies - the FSLN in neighbour Nicaragua, the FMLN's room for manoeuvre declined dramatically. These factors largely explain what brought the rebels to the negotiations - they felt that it was now or never for a negotiated solution. But as for the FMLN's basic aims of Democracy, Freedom and Social Justice, the outlook is not good.

At best the agreements amount to a formula for moving El Salvador from military dictatorship towards liberal democracy. This is clearly the aim - as the FMLN puts it it continues the struggle on a new level.

The agreements contain formulas that aim at cutting the worst excesses of the death squads and the worst excesses of obscene wealth. They also attempt to depoliticise the armed forces and police, removing those responsible for atrocities and, to some extent, integrating them into the FMLN.

Whether these agreements will be implemented is to, say the least, doubtful. The apparatus of the government, the army and the police are so riddled with death squads points that it is hard to imagine UN observers having much effect.

But this is not the main point. Rather it is that the USA will be bound to continue to operate the 'hijacking' principle (Not In My Back Yard) and the amount of room available to make concessions to the workers and peasants - the bedrock of liberal democracy - is close to nil.

The FMLN guerrillas have survived only because of their popular support and the FSLN's room for manoeuvre declined dramatically. As long as El Salvador remains in the pocket of the USA, poverty, subjection semi-colonial nation, is only through revolutionary struggle that the state can be forced to implement anything approaching 'social justice'.

The FMLN have been forced into a comer and have won agreements that may curb some of the worst excesses of the past. As a tactical retreat it is understandable.

What is essential is that the rebels continue their political struggle, in the knowledge that the accounts have not resolved any of the fundamental problems facing Latin America's poor. That struggle will not be resolved by negotiation, nor be solved within El Salvador's borders.
The dictatorship of the grassroots Raven

By Major Unrest

SO WHAT'S THE raving about Rave music? Several people who know me to be a musician ask me this question, incredulous that I could ever listen to Rave music, let alone be well into it.

But...it's incredibly loud, monotonous and repetitive...it's nothing but a load of bleeps and buzzes...it's controlled by big business...it's escapist..." These are all common arguments thrown at me by those who claim to be into 'Real Music'.

Ever heard these arguments before, about other kinds of youth sub-cultural music? Remember your dad poking his head round the door to comment on the Sex Pistols single you'd just rushed out to buy? If you're a little older, this would be the new Pink Floyd LP you'd be listening to, lying on the floor, two feet from the speakers.

I'm not saying that people should not make judgments or express opinions about different musical forms. But these should be considered opinions, not prejudiced impressions, with the acknowledgment that individual taste will always vary greatly.

Yes, Rave is loud, monotonous and repetitive. But so is most dance music. Repetition and variation of rhythm patterns are used to induce the semi-trance like state of mind that allows you to relax your body and dance. And I, like millions of others, love dancing.

Yes, Rave is full of bleeps and buzzes and countless other new music noises. But I would say that this is one of its creative points. At least it's not another guitar-based indie revue of what the Velvet Underground and Iggy and the Stooges were doing a couple of years ago - oohh, my musical predecessors crept in there! As for the accusation that Rave is controlled by big business; it is simply not the case. Most Rave is released through small independent labels or artist self-financed white labels. Of course, there are much dominant within the Rave scene as a whole, especially in the underground.

The scene is generated from the making of the music itself, through the setting up of illegal free Raves by local, informal collective - called crew or posses - of DJs, sound and light technicians, MCs and general organisers, and of pirate radio stations.

Yes, Rave is escapism. But this is an escape into all philosophy of unity and "Yes, Rave is loud, monotonous and repetitive. But so is most dance music. Repetition and variation of rhythm patterns are used to induce the semi-trance like state of mind that allows you to relax your body and dance. And I, like millions of others, love dancing."

positive vibes. For example, a statement of intent from Nottingham Massive DIY Sound Crew reads: "From the start, DIY has promoted unity and cooperation, challenging prejudices and ego orientation. And now we want to see the realisation of the whole entity of black culture sub-culture on the Rave scene."

The big labels are doing their usual 'smash and grab' raids into the Rave scene, picking up styles that have been popular in the underground for a year or more and mass promoting them into the charts. But the independent Do It Yourself philosophy, inherited from punk and dance music, remains very pressures to conform to popular styles within Rave and House. But these styles are dictated not by big music business moguls but by what kicks on the dancefloor. That is, by what grassroots Ravers go for.

It is more than anything else that gives the Rave scene its positive dynamic. For no-one, except perhaps your hardware Kraftwerk fan, would fail to acknowledge the immense influence of black youth sub-culture on the Rave scene.

Mayor in burning ghetto shocker!

City of Hope

Directed by John Sayles
Reviewed by Valmav Young

DESCRIPTION By Time Out as 'the finest movie by a US independent in years', City of Hope is a film both true and ironic. Sayles' film portrays a sophisticated and underdogmatic account of a brutal life. Where the issues of right and wrong are as interwoven as the plot. Despite the complexities of a multi-character work, Sayles manages to excel. Most other directors would be hard pressed to think of more than three central figures.

The large number of players makes it difficult to distinguish the main characters. The film's highlights are Nick Renaud (Vincent Spiso) and a young black man, given his father's (Tony la Bianca) building site, in a life of crime. With him and his father are drawn into a web of confusion with the town's mayor and police, involving arson, robbery and murder.

Next, interwoven with Bill, is the story of two young black, Desmon (Jop Simont) and Trd (Edward Taylors). They have to live in a public housing scheme which becomes an issue of racism.

Also, this situation brings in other characters including Joe Wynn (Joe Morton). Wynn is a picaresque black outsider, intent on exploiting the confrontation as much for himself, as the community he represents.

While Sayles' style is this, as in other movies of his, he is one a political backdrop in order to describe personal relationships, a number of issues emerge. For example, do we have a story of black on white, or white on black? Another issue is that of education where it is necessary for politicians to see the need to have the support of the main characters. In the film, we see this in a situation where it is necessary for politicians to see the need to support the main characters. Another issue is that of education, where it is necessary for politicians to see the need to support the main characters. The film progresses, from a trailer, to a more interpersonal, and then to the final courtroom scene.

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Tory threat to teacher training

By Pete Firmin

IT SEEMS certain that the Socialist Campaign Group of MPs, together with the Labour Party, will be calling a conference of the Labour Left in Leeds on 29 February.

It has come about, primarily from the disagreements within the Labour Left over last year's slide for the NEC elections. Disagreement came after the Campaign Group failed to consult outside of its own ranks in seeking women and black candidates for the constituency section in the elections. It resulted in different slates being supported by different parts of the left.

Negotiations between One Member One Vote, and at a time when the Labour Left in weak, this was a division the left could have done without.

Several meetings between the Campaign Group and left organisations, both in the party and the unions, have taken place in the meantime to discuss how to prevent this from happening again.

Unfortunately, a section of the left, around Labour Left Liaison and the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy, has stood out in favour of more 'consultation' among the leaderships of left organisations in London. Decision-making has been supposed to emerge in some miraculous process of 'consensus'.

The tooth and nail proposal from Labour Party Socialists, Labour Briefing and others, that the whole process should conference in February to try to generate the action. But they faced a tough fight in the face of undertaker manoeuvres from the union leadership. As usual Doug McAvoy, NUT General Secretary, has been only too pleased to respond to demands from Labour Education spokesperson Jack Dromey not to make the sort of denials he sometimes does. But the union leadership has had resort to bureaucratic manoeuvres to get its way, having lost much of its support to the left over the last five years.

They have tried to marginalise calls for industrial action at the coming union conference by making it a separate agenda item, cut out from all policy debates. The item is likely to be a closed session, hidden away from the public eye. Such moves mean that preparation by activists to back on McAvoy and his cronies is at a premium.

Television's Conference

For nationwide action against budget cuts called by Oxfordshire NUT

February 8, Oxford Town Hall

MPs to call conference of Labour Left

By Pete Firmin

AMID grim warnings of a new flu epidemic that could put huge strains on hospital services, health union COHSE is warning that the Tory government are planning drastic cuts to London's NHS.

A report, Under Pressure, released by the union today, shows that the numbers of acute patients who have died on waiting lists rose by almost 19% last year and that waiting times have increased by over 40% since 1982.

Far from being over-resourced, London has faced a decline in resources in relation to inflation and demand for health care: the capital's health budget has fallen over £600 million below the level required to match 1985 spending.

Despite the concentration of costly teaching hospitals in London, and the costs of London weighting, health spending per head in the South East is only 11% above the national average, and almost 20% below per capita spending in Scotland.

The COHSE report, submitted as evidence to the Tomlinson inquiry, allows hospital closures and the Tories' chaotic market reforms. It calls instead for increased resources and for a new strategic planning body — a London Regional Health Authority — to take long-term responsibility for health care in the capital.

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20 years after Bloody Sunday

Get British gunmen out of Ireland!

 Demon January 25th
 12 noon
 Assemble Hyde Park
 March to Quex Road, Kilburn

TWENTY years ago, on Bloody Sunday 1972, British paratroops cold-bloodedly opened fire on a demonstration of unarmed civilians in Derry. 13 died, and the long struggle for Irish liberation lurched into a new, more violent phase.

20 years later, British imperialism has learned nothing and forgotten nothing. The nationalist people and republican movement have not been crushed by the one-sided ‘official’ repression meted out by British troops and the orange-led RUC and Ulster Defence Regiment; nor have they given way to the freelance sectarian killings of the Loyalist paramilitary gangs.

A new republican offensive, striking at economic targets in Ireland and Britain is again being met by repression, with the dispatch of yet more troops and the call-up of more UDR part-timers.

The repression will fail now, as it did in 1972, to stem the tide of nationalist revolt.

The only answer is to rid Ireland of its British problem, by the withdrawal of British troops to allow Ireland the same right of national self-determination that John Major’s government now cynically claims to endorse in Eastern Europe.

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