Where have all the workers gone?

Half of the former British Leyland Cowley car complex is to be demolished next year. A site that once employed up to 10,000 unionised staff will be turned into a ‘business park’ of small units, a hotel and a giant Tesco, employing a handful of low-paid, mainly part-time staff.

In the 1960s under left-wing leadership the Cowley Assembly Plant unions were nationally known pace-setters in the fight for pay and conditions.

Now, under the thumb of hardline right wingers, the TGWU has opposed any fight to defend the plant or the jobs being axed.

The story is depressingly familiar. Ten miles down the road the former MG car plant in Abingdon now houses part of the European grain mountain. In Cowley itself, the old Grove Cranes plant is now a B&Q.

The same is true all over the country. Productive industry has closed down to make way for a low-paid casualised service sector that is largely responsible for the fact that 46% of British workers earn less than the EC’s ‘decency threshold’ of £190 per week.

Thatcherism has seen mining communities devastated, steel towns gutted, docks and shipyards flattened and the engineering heartlands demolished to make way for carpet warehouses, DIY stores and shopping malls.

The latest slump shows yet again that the economy cannot survive on the service sector alone, and that once manufacturing jobs – and the pay and conditions won by workers – have been surrendered they will not return.

In place of John Major’s rickety chipboard furniture economy, workers need a socialist plan of production. The industries that capitalism is so ready to dismantle for short-term gain, and the banks and service sector, should be nationalised, under workers’ control and without compensation to prevent the whole country turning into a giant burger bar.

A start along this alternative road would be the ousting of the Tories coupled with a redoubled fight for socialist policies in the labour movement.
Who's afraid of Jean-Marie Le Pen?

By Paul Clarke

The news that the two rival leaders of French Toryism, Jacques Chirac and Valerie Giscard D'Estaing, are to make common cause against the Socialists in the upcoming French elections is no surprise. Their alliance is as much about fending off the challenge of the far right as making common cause against Mitterrand's Socialist Party.

Given its very high opinion poll scores, all the major political parties are running scared of Jean-Marie Le Pen's Front National. Ever since the Le Pen got his electoral breakthrough at the 1984 European elections, the issue of the precise political character of the FN has been hotly debated. Is it really a fascistic party? Or is it simply a re-run of the 1950s 'Poujadia' movement, which relied on sections of the rural petty bourgeoisie against big capital and modernisation?

The Front National is not a 'new' party - it was founded in 1973. Its foundation it fused two different trends - an ultra-right alliance of 'national conservatives' around Le Pen, with strong links to the Poujadian tradition, and the hard-core fascist street fighters who had been in organisations like Occident and Oder Nouveau.

Key themes of Le Pen's were the virtues of the French people and opposition to the flourishing French colonies like Algeria. Occident and Oder Nouveau stressed the danger of 'Bolshevisms' and the Jews.

The Front National has seen permanent internal struggles between the two currents. Anarcho-syndicalism was originally not a key theme of Le Pen's coalition government, despite Le Pen's personal outbursts about the Holocaust, of which he claims he has 'no knowledge'.

In the late 1970s the movement was strengthened by a third trend, the Union Solidarniste led by the late Jean Pierre Stibois. This included a strong Catholic fundamentalist current, the Committees of Christian Solidarity, for whom anti-semitism was an important question. Another important aspect of the influence of the Catholic fundamentalist is of course the championing of family values and hostility to abortion.

At the beginning of the 1980s the movement was further strengthened by right-wing Gaullists, who were admirers of Roger Martin-Du Gard. This was brand of economic liberalism. Le Pen's formidable political achievement has been to weld the different currents into a stable and viable organisation, around a common ideology and an uncontested leader.

The ideology of the FN is composed of three major elements - economic liberalism, racism and an authoritarian model of 'democracy'. On the economy the FN has broken with the old anchorman corporatist state, in favour of ultra-Thatcherite liberalism and hostility to the welfare state. This is a typical petty bourgeois economic ideology.

Its political model is what it calls 'direct democracy', a direct relationship that links the people and the president based on referenda. The FN demands a political, trade union and bureaucratic oligarchies which disrupt the sacred relationship between the people and the leader. This points strongly to the abolition of the National Assembly if the FN came to power, or at least a dramatic retrenchment of its powers in favour of presidential prerogatives.

Front National racism is primarily anti-immigrant, with a strong flourish anti-US and anti-Israel line. But this was contested by many rank-and-file members, and acted as a strong anti-Arab line.

The FN line on the Gulf war was not just determined by its anti-Israel impulses but by its nationalism. The FN was the only party to condone the US-Imperial strike in its entirety. The FN was the political arm of ultra-nationalism and defence of French capitalism.
Anti-racists stop the mud slinging

By Patrick Baker

THE LAST few weeks have seen larger numbers mobilise against racism and fascism than since the late 1970s. But they have also seen open conflict break out between rival anti-racist and anti-fascist coalitions.

The conflict centres on the recent relaunch of the Anti-Nazi League (ANL). The League has attracted an impressive list of political and media sponsors, but its relaunch has been attack-
ded as a sectarian stunt by the Anti-Racist Alliance (ARA). Several black and trade union groups have called for a boycott of the League, claiming that it is a front for the Socialist Workers Party (SWP).

The ANL, which played an important role in the movement against the National Front in the 1970s, has reverted to its past role with the ARA, but wants to complement its work with an organisation specifically dedicated to fighting fascism.

The quarrelling — the last thing needed by the budding anti-racist movement is an internal power struggle. The Guardian letters page is a bad enough place for washing dirty laundry, but when it comes to public scuffles on demonstration, things are getting ridiculous. But is there any substance to the allegations coming out?

Unfortunately, the answer is yes. Despite the important role played by the League in the late 1970s and the broad support it had, the real decisions were always taken by the SWP. And the League failed to take on one of the most important forms of racism faced by black people — state racism. But this neither justifies the split, nor does it mean that the records on democracy of those running the Alliance are exactly spotless. A good few activists can remember the past antics of Ken Livingstone and his cronies.

The attitude of anti-racists to the conflict should be determined by two principles: for unity against racism and fascism; and for the maximum unity on the ground.

For the moment it seems unlikely that the two organisations will unite. While this is the case, activists should support both, but demand that the public mud slinging should stop, as that helps no-one and背 the opposition.

And we should demand the maximum unity in action, with a single, united movement against racism and fascism.

Austrian fascists grow despite arrests

Joerg Haider, populist leader of the far right Freedom Party in Austria, has dismissed fears of the rise of neo-nazis as an "artificial fuss".

Not surprising, given that Haider is the figurehead of several significant right-wing forces in Hitler's birthplace. But the ugly face of the Nazi groups now appearing in Germany and eastern Europe was also brought out into the open with a clampdown on neo-nazis.

The sacrificial lamb was Gottfried Kueessel, a leading figure on central European fascist scene. Within a couple of weeks, Kueessel was linked to a substantial arms cache found near the Austrian border, in the Hungarian town of Gyos. Meanwhile, other neo-nazis were hauled in after firebombing a refugee centre.

But there has to be some doubt as to whether this spate of arrests is the result of a new-found enthusiasm on the part of Austrian President Kurt Waldheim for harassing the rightists.

Waldheim's personal record, as well as his record in office, do not inspire much confidence. Kueessel's profile, including a well-publicised broadcast on American TV explaining the use of which the Jewish community in Austria should be bedevilled with, made him an easy target.

Psychopaths

In addition, while the arrest of psychopaths such as Kueessel can only be welcomed by anti-racists, they do not begin to deal with the real problem. The racist Freedom Party has gained substantial support in recent years and this is the real threat to Austria's immigrant and Jewish communities.

A substantial mobilisation of those communities, in tandem with the labour movement and other anti-racists, would deal a more serious blow to the rising tide of racism.
Last chance for Labour in Scotland?

By Gordon Eastwood

The post-election campaign began in earnest on January 17 with a speech at the TUC centrepiece, which was attended by the four main parties on the constitutional future of Scotland. Although only 2,500 attended, predominantly nationalists, are around 500,000 watched a one-hour-long TV summary. The Scottish National Party (SNP) won the debate and Labour lost, while the Tories were battered but unharmed and the Liberals, as usual, pleasant but irrelevant.

I stress post-election campaign, because barring a total collapse of the Labour vote, the outcome of the Scottish election is certain. Ladbroke's are quoting odds for the number of Tory seats after the election last week: 14 to 1 for none, 5 to 2 for 4 (joint favourites), for 3 or 4 seats, and 66 to 1 for them retaining the present 5. The Tory seats will be split between the other three parties, and the SNP are likely to be able to change the balance between Liberal, Labour and SNP. The SNP needs a swing of 20 per cent in Labour's most marginal two seats.

Superficially, this appears a low-key campaign, but it is likely to be like the last ever in the current constitutional framework. Quite simply, a Scottish parliament of some sort will be set up within the month of the next Westminster government. This will alter the shape of British politics.

This election will determine the options and strategies open in the post-election period. It is highly likely to be less important than votes and issues won.

The SNP and independence are the keys to the total election. The Nationalists are currently polling 23 per cent against Labour's 45 and the Tories' 22. But in council by-elections they have scored 31 per cent of the vote.

Because of the distribution of seats, it is quite possible for the SNP to get 36 per cent of the poll, but no seats. However, the clear dynamic is that the Nationalists are taking Labour votes, while the Tories remain unchanged.

This reflects the shift in attitudes towards independence. While 85 per cent of Scots want constitutional change, this is only three per cent higher than at the last election. Basically, some Tories are changing their minds.

But within that, the proportion favouring independence as against devolution has increased from around 25 per cent to 40 per cent. When asked to choose between the status quo and independence, 55 per cent of voters favours devolution. Polls also show that about half of Labour voters favour independence; they are being targeted by the SNP.

Thus it is no accident that Labour's main campaign poster is 'A Scottish Parliament... Now.' Nor do Scottish Labour leaders hide their disapproval of the Walworth Road morons who put up 'Made in Britain' posters around Scotland - the SNP couldn't have afforded it.

Labour knows that there is a sea-change in opinion, and are raising the profile of their pro-devolution assembly. They are saying that only they can deliver a Scottish parliament. That may be true for this election, but the Tories are beginning to publicly debate devolution, it may not be for long.

The 'Only Labour can deliver devolution' strategy attempts to marginalise independence as an option. But with increasing support for independence and increasing scepticism about the prospects of a Labour government, this can only partly stem the tide.

A further measure of the swing to the SNP is the SNP's conversion to nationalism. It recently devoted nine pages to promoting the SNP, including a front page call to 'Rise now and be a nation again!'

Clearly Moraroch has switched sides for commercial reasons, as part of an attack on the Daily Record's circulation, hoping that more readers will identify with them than with Koen's 'Kinnockite' line. Whether the SNP will directly gain from it is questionable, but it is their first endorsement from the establishment, albeit gutter press.

They have targeted Labour's social policy, fighting the election around a 'Nationalise Ravenscrag - Scrap Trident!'. Their official slogan, 'Scotland free in '93, is not mentioned. Their leaders describe themselves as Left-Wingers, and the SNP as social democratic.

I would dispute this, but most trade unionists see them as an alternative with policies to Labour's left. Certainly few would see it as a betrayal of socialism to vote SNP.

Labour in Scotland is hamstrung by its national policies and London dominance reduces its flexibility. The major issue at Labour's conference will be party devolution, or how to transform themselves into a Scottish Labour party.

Although we support the return of a Labour government and by implication a Labour vote in Scotland, there is a widespread feeling that this is Labour's last chance - in future independence will be the only option. Many believe the last chance has already been missed.
Can Labour's leaders fight and win?

THE TORY press has already launched its pre-election blitz against Labour, obediently repeating the Conservative Central Office briefings that Labour is the party of high indirect taxes. With the economy in endless recession, with unemployment rocketing, and after thirteen years of Tory government, Labour ought to be able to make an effective reply. Yet not only is Kinnock incapable of pulling ahead in the opinion polls, but Labour has been put on the defensive in the debate over taxes. Why?

Newpeers' policies have caught Kinnock in a double bind. On the one hand Labour denounces income tax cuts on the grounds that money is needed for social welfare and investment, on the other Labour is rigorously guarding all promises other than that of a national minimum wage. The refusal to make any promises or commitments gives Labour a tremendous credibility problem.

Take the NHS. This is above all Labour's strong issue in terms of public perception. But will Labour devote real new resources to the NHS? Robin Cook's pronouncements it is quite impossible to tell. Like everything else, apparently it all depends on 'growth'.

All opinion polls have shown that there is a big majority in favour of more public welfare spending rather than further tax cuts. But most workers, hard pressed by inflation are understandably not too keen on higher national in-

Tories turn back clock on community care

By Harry Sloan

CAUGHT in a tangled web of non-

Tory policies, John Major's government is rushing around attempting to neutralise pro-

tional potential electoral embarrass-

ments.

This is the reason why Environment Secretary Michael Heseltine made his unexpected intervention, announcing plans to reverse the policy of commu-

nity care for people with mental ill-

nesses.

Heseltine is of course not the last concerned about the plight of mental illness sufferers, who have been shamefully neglected by successive governments, with thousands cast adrift in the 1980s. He is alarmed by the aggravation suffered by growing numbers of well-heeled Tory voters who stumble over victims of community care policies in the streets and shop doorways of London.

Two-faced

Heseltine's two-faced attitude is shared by the Mail on Sunday, which was the unlikely bearer of the frontpage news of Heseltine's unexpected initiative, under the headline 'U-turn on Homelessness'. The negative result of the policy was blamed on 'Mrs Thatcher's very office' - in fact if a completely new government were now in Downing Street.

In fact Heseltine himself was a prominent member of Thatcher's government, and the Mail's most ser-

vile apologists in the 1980s when the council services cutbacks consisted in paying lip-service to community care while closing psychiatric beds and capping the spending of health authorities and local councils to prevent them from providing actual care and support in the community.

Heseltine himself is even now imposing even stricter spending cuts on local councils that have triggered a wave of brutal cuts in social services including the closure of homes for the elderly and facilities for mental illness sufferers.

The cosmetic character of the latest Tory initiative on community care is demonstrated by the fact that the pitiful increases in cash they are allocating to local councils are targeted soley at the most vulnerable - the homeless mentally ill - ignoring the vast majority of the 3.7 million severe sufferers, 95 percent of whom live in the community, few of whom are receiving any specialised help. Only 350,000 attend psychiatric out-

patient departments.

A mere 60,000 are in patients at any one time, and hospital psychiatric beds have been drastically cut back from 89,000 in 1979 to just 50,000 in 1989.

The public have been hoodwinked into thinking the Mental Health Bill in the big psychiatric hospitals have closed down since 1984.

77 percent of the NHS E2 billion mental health budget is spent on hospi-

tals. The number of mental health patients, while community-based services to another 25,000 costs just £200 million.

The Government Social Services Commission argues that it is only providing care in the community costs £2,750 per person per year. This would indicate that care for the 3.7 million severely disabled would cost £9.3 billion - four times the total NHS spend on mental health.

The same committee argues that it is eight times more expensive to provide proper residential and day care to people discharged from psychiatric hospitals - £21,366 a year. No wonder the government is reluctant to face up to the full costs of community care!

Propositions to dump mentally ill back in bins: Heseltine

Plutonite

In 1990-91 the government's new Mental Health Specific Grant added up to just £4.9 million across the whole of London an average of only £190,000 per borough. Meanwhile local councils in the capital were offering fewer places in day centres in 1989 than they had in 1981, with council residential places for people with mental illness expanding unevenly at a rate of just 21 new places per year in Greater Lon-

don.

Refusing to face these facts, Hesel-
tine has begun uttering ominous threats to the homeless mentally ill.

"We are coming to the conclusion that we have a shortage of people who won't accept any of the offers [of accom-

modation] ... We have all got to tackle this problem. All of us are faced and feel a deep concern for the condition of these people."

The tactic threat is that those who will not voluntarily take up the 'Tories' offers will be rounded up and forced back into institutional care.

"All of us are faced with a deep concern for the condition of these people."

The crying need is for a big injection of capital and revenue funding into health authorities and local coun-

aids to enable them to put in place a system of sheltered housing, work, day centres and trained community-based support for discharged patients and sufferers who have never been in hospital.

People with mental illness must be given the legal right to care and sup-

port, and the existing legislation which theoretically obliges health authorities and councils to provide services must be enforced, with resources for com-

munity care ring-fenced, and super-

vised by a minister for community care.

Such a commitment involves far greater resources than any Tory government will provide to win it will also require a political fight under a future Labour government.
How Greek students won

PANOS VOVOS is a Graphic Arts student at Athens Technological Institute. Last year he was a leading activist in the wave of student demonstrations and occupations that swept Greece. London NUS invited Panos to Britain to speak at the National Student Activists' Conference on 22 January. Socialist Outlook spoke to him about the lessons of the Greek student action.

Socialist Outlook: What sparked off the student action last year?

PANOS VOVOS: The Socialist Party government introduced a new bill, the Multi-Bill, into parliament. It affected all parts of education. High school students were threatened by a separate bill which tried to impose new disciplinary procedures. So you had two movements - one of high school students, and one of further and higher education students.

You have to look at what the government was trying to do with education. It was trying to harmonise its policy in line with that of the EC. Following the economic dictat of the IMF and the EC, the Greek government is trying to cut back what it spends on education.

The restructuring of education is designed to provide low-level, over-specialised training to meet the workforce requirements of industry. They are trying to make education an organic part of production. Market forces will determine which schools and courses stay open.

SO: Were the politics of these changes understood by those students taking action?

PV: It depends on what you mean by 'political'. Compared with the occupations here, it was more political. But, compared with ten years ago in Greece, it was less political.

Within the movement we had big discussions on what the government was doing and why, what they were going to do, and why we cannot wait for a new bill on education but must have an uprising. These discussions affected many people, but most supported the occupations on a gut level.

SO: How widespread was the student action?

PV: Around 80 per cent of further and higher education colleges were affected and about 2,500 high schools. It was the biggest movement since 1974 and the collapse of the dictatorship.

After the movement declined we realised there would be similar social explosions in the future. Such explosions do not automatically have any direction. It is important to seize the opportunity from these situations to give the movement a socialist orientation.

In Greece we also have our own NUS. At first they were against the occupations, but as the action spread they changed to not saying anything at all.

The police also made the mistakes of killing a teacher which brought about other teachers and the General Union of Workers onto the demonstrations.

This allowed us to build a huge movement very quickly. I don't think the British government will make these sorts of mistakes, they seem more serious and pay more attention to their own interests.

Students must look at the facts of the situation in every college, to counter the misinformation from the government and from college management. They also have to look at the class composition of students at different colleges - whether they are mostly middle-class, mostly working-class or mostly working class. And you have to look at student unions aiming to build these and orientate them in the right direction.

Before the student action the government had attacked the right to strike, social security and civil rights. As there had been very little response to these attacks, we did not expect the student occupation movement to be so big. We were surprised.

In Greece we also have our own NUS. At first they were against the occupations, but as the action spread they changed to not saying anything at all. Because they were supporting actions, we had to build our own committees of struggle on the ground. Where there was no col-lege these committees were elected by general meetings.

But even if the NUS had supported the occupations we would have had to build such committees. Each movement must be controlled by the activists within the movement. Nevertheless, things would have been much easier had the NUS supported us.

SO: Did the conduct of the Greek NUS weaken its support within the student movement?

PV: For many years now, the standing of NUS among students has got progressively worse. It has not lost support from students, but it has lost their respect. It is important to challenge the leadership of the official union, in elections and so on. But while it is very important to work within the framework of the union, you cannot afford to have any illusions in this. Where there is lack of movement in any organisation, the danger of bureaucracy will appear. We argue that we need the NUS, but we also need the self-organisation of students.

SO: If you could go through the experience again, would you attach more importance to building a left-wing within the movement?

PV: Yes. But the big problem we had in this respect was that the movement grew so rapidly. After the murder of the teacher, the movement grew in a matter of days. In four days we had three demonstrations. The first had 40,000, the second 100,000, and the third about 70,000.

Throughout these days there was a big rise in consciousness of the movement, but there was no time to develop the discussion. An excuse perhaps, but the time was crucial. It is obviously important to take political and ideological discussions into such movements - in action people are very open to new ideas. This is necessary so that a left-wing base can be built.

You cannot just shout slogans about student poverty. Within a capitalistic framework, the changes in education are necessary for the functioning of the capitalist economy. We have to work out an alternative framework - showing that economics and education are related.

You can fight and win on the issue of student poverty alone. Things may get better for a few years. But without solving the underlying crisis the problems experienced today will keep repeating themselves. It's no solution.
The irresistible decline of Mikhail
Gorbachev

By ERNEST MANDEL

The putschists of August 1991 wanted to severely limit, if not suppress, these rights. They aimed specifically to withdraw the right to strike and suppress independent workers’ organisations.

This is why they had to be opposed by any means available. And it’s why the coup’s defeat was welcome.

The workers of the ex-SSSR now need to conduct a struggle on two fronts: to defend and extend democratic rights; and against privatisation. To abandon either of these would be to sacrifice the fundamental interests of the working class.

There is no chance of developing, or winning, the political revolution in the USSR without the working-class regaining its organisational autonomy and class political independence. It is possible to realise these aims without a long period of developing struggles and the emergence of a new vanguard.

Without real democratic freedoms, this would take much longer, much more difficult, and have much less chance of success.

Gorbachev was overthrown by a wing of the bureaucracy led by Boris Yeltsin, who represents a wing of the top nomenklatura. Due to his past and his training, Yeltsin is a man of the apparatus. If one thing distinguishes him from Gorbachev, it is that he is less evasive, more authoritarian and so more dangerous for the masses.

By contrast with Gorbachev, Yeltsin still vaguely supports socialism. Yeltsin openly supports the restoration of capitalism.

But when judging politicians, what they think is not enough. The most important thing is to look at what they do in practice and the social interests they represent.

From this standpoint, Yeltsin and his allies in the liquidation of the USSR in the name of the ‘Confederation of Independent States’ represent a fraction of the nomenklatura. This is quite distinct from those who went before (such as the nouveaux milionnaires), even if the two intersect.

The classic case is that of the Presidents of Kazakhstan and the Ukraine, who, with Yeltsin ‘betrayed’ Gorbachev at the last minute (his words) to liquidate the USSR. Both have been regional leaders of the Stalinist apparatus since Gorbachev’s early days. Both rely on the ‘local’ KGB, which has hardly changed.

At the start of the coup, Soviet intellectuals took an exasperated, if not favourable, attitude to it. Both knowingly used the popular feeling of revolt against national oppression to convert themselves into ‘nationalist leaders’.

And their cynicism was particularly highlighted by the fact that they did not hesitate to associate themselves with Yeltsin, a genuine Great Russian chauvinist — how long for is a different question.

The only conclusion is that there is still a three-cornered struggle. Fractions of the top leadership — these forces are for the restoration of capitalism — bourgeois in the socialdemocratic sense. These forces are three distinct forces with their own interests.

A new putch?

Now putches are possible. Yeltsin risks rapidly losing his popularity, given the anti-working-class policies that he is implementing.

Behind him there is already the minister figure of Vladimir Shrunovskiy, the Soviet Le Pen, who associates himself with the Teror and Pirogov. He has the support of some of the army and is openly Great Russian, anti-Semitic and racist. His populism should not be underestimated.

This adds up to a situation which is neither revolutionary nor pre-revolutionary. As a social force, the working class is infinitely stronger than its opponents, and infinitely stronger than in 1917 or 1917.

But, for Stalinism to be overthrown by a revolution, the working class has to act as an independent social force. This is not happening.

Stalinism discredited the very idea of communism, marxism, and socialism. As a result the vacuum created by the deep ideological and moral crisis of Soviet society is not about to be filled by the working class.

The workers are acting, but around immediate, short term aims, in a fragmented way. Right wing forces have the political initiative, carrying the hopes that one could have had up until 1980-81 (the first rise of Solidarnosc).

Does this mean the stabilisation of the nomenklatura or a restoration of capitalism are more likely? It means nothing of the kind. They are just as improbable as a breakthrough for the political revolution.

Yeltsin’s pro-bourgeois government has made a start on capitalist restoration. But there is an enormous distance between the beginning and the end.

For there to be a real restoration of capitalism, an extension of the market economy — which is much less widespread today than it was under the NEP — is not enough. The major means of production and exchange would also have to become capitalist.

That means at least a thousand billion dollars, which is an astronomical sum in the West as in the USSR itself.

The labour force would have to submit to the laws of the ‘labor market’.

That means tens of millions of unemployed and a drop in the standard of living of 30 to 50 per cent. That would meet with strong resistance.

So the most likely outcome is a long period of decomposition and chaos. But that is a modest but real hope that during this period the working class will slowly reconquer its class independence.

The main task of the small socialist forces consists of linking up with this process to aid the workers in overcoming the obstacles.
By Paul Clarke

As we enter an election year, the landscape of the British left is changing. The prospect of a new government, combined with the decades-long shift to the right in the Labour Party, is causing many socialists to rethink their strategy. At the heart of these debates are the prospects for the socialist force with infinitely the most social weight – the Labour left.

Debates on the future of the left in parliament have been signalled by a series of articles in the soft Labour left Tribune. According to Paul Anderson (11 January) moves are afoot to reorganise the parliamentary left to overcome the divide between the Tribune Group and the Socialist Campaign Group.

It is no secret that Ken Livingstone is the champion of this project. Anderson quotes anonymous Labour MPs as saying that the Tribune group has become inactive and too close to Kinnoch, while the Campaign Group has dug itself into a "pursuit" bunker. The solution is a realignment, which would be especially important if Labour came into government. But if Labour is defeated the new alignment could act as a springboard for a leadership challenge by Ken Livingstone.

The movers of this project would try to drag in the Morning Star to give it more weight in the labour movement.

There should be no illusions about what this would mean. Effectively it is a project to split off a section of the Campaign Group and create a new socialist force in parliament. It is a project to recreate old-style Tribune group, which so spectacularly failed to create effective opposition to the pro-capitalist policies of Wilson and Callaghan in the 1960s and 70s.

The Campaign Group may be small in terms of numbers but it is a vital factor in the maintenance of socialist opposition. Last year's Gulf war, and especially the role of Tony Benn and the late Eric Heffer in parliamentary debates showed clearly the importance of the Campaign Group.

The realignment proposed for the parliamentary left involves a big policy shift, especially in relation to Europe. Ken Livingstone openly advocates that the Labour left drop its oppositional stance towards the capitalist 'Fortress Europe'.

If the project to create a new soft left was successful it would be the culmination of the defeat suffered by the class struggle left in the 1980s, in particular the defeat of the miners strike and the defeat of the rail rights struggle. These defeats swing a whole swath of the 'Bennite' left to the right, especially in local government.

Far from being essential if Kinnoch won the election, the decapitation of personalised socialist opposition would be a disaster. Under Labour, the left needs to be organizing a fight to repeal the trade union laws, drastically cut defence spending to rescue the NHS and other services, re-nationalise privatised industries and defend the rights of the oppressed.

'Tribunism' has never been able to deal with the power in the movement, the pressure to sustain and support a Labour government against all opposition has always proved too great – as has the lure of office.

The crisis and semi-collapse of the Communist Party has spawned a series of new projects. Those most loyal to the ideas of Marxism Today are hardly part of the left at all. Others who retain...
Looking at the Left

The first of an occasional series which will look at what other socialist papers have to say.

"THE CENTRE of the ANL is the SWP. In the middle of the ARA is the Socialist Action Group. It's not just the militancy that is different. The SWP has a clear strategy of economic struggle. The ARA is more about direct action."

-- Socialists Organiser

"ACCORDING to those who split however, Marxists must have themselves entirely on the 'regression workers'. Until these sections move into action in the trade unions and the Labour Party there is, in their view, little scope for activity by Marxists... Movements like the mass anti-poll tax campaign are dismissed as minor episodes.

Through clinging to old formulae and increasingly turning them into misty dogma, I find Grant crested capable of correctly analysing this new situation. I've never heard anyone say anything like this before."

-- Militant

"DAVID Mellor is a museum Tory go!"

-- Socialist Worker

"THOSE who saw themselves as the protagonists of a single universal class (the working class - Ed) that could do all things needed to change the world had to turn the fact that such an approach was now definitely dead."

-- New Times, paper of the ex-CP Democrat: Left

"JUST AS we say neither Washington nor Moscow but international socialism, so we say neither private nor state capital but working people."

-- Socialist Worker

"BUREAURATISTIC collectivism is a world-wide phenomenon."-- Laurent Bera in Socialist Organiser

"IN AUGUST 1990 the Iraqi regime occupied Kuwait. From the start intervention by US imperialism was very probable, there was no disagreement about keeping US imperialism. However, US Grant immediately assured the war would last from six months to (more likely) two years."

-- Militant

"WITH THE BANNER of Marxism held high we will attract to our ranks the best fighters of a new generation to fight against imperialism in Britain and throughout the world."

-- Militant

"LAST WEEK the Anti-Racist Alliance (ARA) and the Anti-Nazi League (ANL) fought each other on the leftemous pages of the Guardian."

-- Socialist Worker

"AIDS has now spread to the gay community and the only way to fight it is to demand a national policy."

-- Socialists Organiser

The first of an occasional series which will look at what other socialist papers have to say.

"THE CENTRE of the ANL is the SWP. In the middle of the ARA is the Socialist Action Group. It's not just the militancy that is different. The SWP has a clear strategy of economic struggle. The ARA is more about direct action."

-- Socialists Organiser

"ACCORDING to those who split however, Marxists must have themselves entirely on the 'regression workers'. Until these sections move into action in the trade unions and the Labour Party there is, in their view, little scope for activity by Marxists... Movements like the mass anti-poll tax campaign are dismissed as minor episodes.

Through clinging to old formulae and increasingly turning them into misty dogma, I find Grant crested capable of correctly analysing this new situation. I've never heard anyone say anything like this before."

-- Militant

"DAVID Mellor is a museum Tory go!"

-- Socialist Worker

"THOSE who saw themselves as the protagonists of a single universal class (the working class - Ed) that could do all things needed to change the world had to turn the fact that such an approach was now definitely dead."

-- New Times, paper of the ex-CP Democrat: Left

"JUST AS we say neither Washington nor Moscow but international socialism, so we say neither private nor state capital but working people."

-- Socialist Worker

"BUREAURATISTIC collectivism is a world-wide phenomenon."-- Laurent Bera in Socialist Organiser

"IN AUGUST 1990 the Iraqi regime occupied Kuwait. From the start intervention by US imperialism was very probable, there was no disagreement about keeping US imperialism. However, US Grant immediately assured the war would last from six months to (more likely) two years."

-- Militant

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Invisible comrades: Gays and lesbians in the struggle

This article by Long Kesh prisoner BRENDÍ MCCLENAHAN was first published in An Glór Gafa, the Republican POWs’ magazine. We received it from Peoples’ Democracy, Irish section of the Fourth International, with a message from the author inviting comments and discussion.

GAY MEN and lesbian women have been involved in the struggle for national liberation and independence as long as any other section of our people.

You might claim that you have never known nor met a gay man or a lesbian woman but you have met them today, last week, last year, 22 years ago – for they have been there in the struggle alongside you.

The reason you have not noticed them is that our society's culture is a response to sexuality, and to homosexuality in particular, compels gays and lesbians to conform, and their sexuality becomes invisible.

Women were once virtually invisible in the national struggle. In recent years, however, they have argued forcefully that women's liberation must be an integral part of the struggle. In order that women's liberation be recognized and accepted as equal and valid, women comrades confronted their male counterparts with the contradictions of sexist words and actions. While there is still a long way to go to overcome male chauvinism and sexism, women have succeeded in putting feminist issues on the anti-imperialist agenda.

It is now long past time to open debate among republicans on the issue of gays and lesbians, our oppression and its causes, and on our right to be visible equals.

I believe that national liberation by its very nature incorporates gay/lesbian liberation, and it is only through open debate leading to an understanding of the lesbian and gay experience that our equality can be made a reality.

Social and economic oppression is something the people in the whole of Ireland have suffered, and in the North the weight of British occupation is an added burden.

As lesbians and gays we are doubly oppressed, for we have to endure further oppression within our own communities, local communities and within the Republican Movement because of our sexuality. This affects every part of our lives.

The state's laws deny equality in marriage, education, social welfare, employment, adoption, life insurance… the list is endless. The state deniers gay and lesbian relationships the same recognition as heterosexual relationships.

While British law allows for consensual relationships between men over 21, in the 26 Counties gay men of any age are liable to imprisonment.

This is in spite of the fact that the Dublin government has accepted, in theory, the ruling by the European Court of Human Rights that present legislation is in breach of the rights of gay men.

Both the British and Irish states have appalling records in the area of lesbian and gay rights, especially when compared to other countries in Europe. The age of consent, for example, is 16 in Portugal, Switzerland and Holland.

The legal status of gay/lesbian relationships reflects wider attitudes. All the Churches promote traditional stereotypical views in relation to contraception, abortion, sex education for young people and the rights of married women.

The Catholic Church in particular seeks to control our lives and our sexuality, and organizations such as Family Solidarity have views on homosexuality range from the patronising and arrogant to the downright chilling.

If homosexual acts are legalised, the likelihood is that this will be interpreted as a major reversal in social policy, and as recognition by society that for those who are so inclined, engaging in these unnatural, unhealthy acts is now to be seen as a right.

[Legislative reform] would send shock waves through every part of society, the structure of marriage and the family would be interfered with, the rights of children and their parents violated, and the freedom and autonomy of schools would be completely destroyed. (Family Solidarity News, Spring 1991)

In short, the end of civilisation as we know it because of men loving men and women loving women! Such attitudes based on intolerance, misinform and fear, serve only to demonise gays and lesbians in peoples’ minds, evoking images of depraved men and women wrecking havoc throughout society.

While state oppression adversely affects the quality of life for gays/lesbians, but we also face oppression daily from family, comrades, neighbours and friends due to the irrational fear of and deep prejudice against homosexuality.

The most direct expressions of such homophobia are insults, derision and appalling acts of violence or actual violence. Indirect expressions are sometimes harder to pin down but are nonetheless as offensive: the pressures to ‘be what you are’ but keep it secret and don’t rock the boat.

This is nothing short of moral blackmail as it is usually accompanied by comments like, ‘What will the family think?’, or, ‘It will harm the Movement/struggle.’ Thus gays/lesbians are forced into invisibility within both the community and the Republican Movement, and consequently within the struggle.

This is a situation which must be confronted not only by gays and lesbians but by all republicans and those who desire our country to be ruled in accordance with the principles of liberty, equality and justice for all the states of the 1919 Democratic Programme of Dáil Éirinn.

Republicans who have always been true to the fore on issues of justice and equality must recognise the oppression of gays/lesbians and identify with them and resolve the contradictions in their attitude and belief which add to that oppression.

Our participation in the national liberation struggle does not detract from it but reinforces a struggle that is indeed about the freedom and equality of all the oppressed.

Nothing should be excused. Gay men and lesbian women, especially within the Republican Movement, must begin the process of full integration and acceptability into the struggle by becoming more visible and making our voices heard.

The prejudices of others can be resolved only by confronting them and by exposing the oppression they cause, with the resultant fear, isolation and violence. This experience is not imaginary; they are a daily reality for gay men and lesbians in the Bóisgáid, Falls, Manorham, Dungannon, Annslayne, Ballinlough, Crossmaglen and every town and village in Ireland.

The key to gay/lesbian liberation lies in the success of the national liberation struggle. The necessity of lesbian and gay participation is stressed by those involved in other wars of liberation. Simon Nkoli, a gay activist involved in the Délmas treason trial in South Africa in 1986, says:

There are lots of gay activists involved in politics, but because of the pressure put upon the gay and lesbian community we are afraid to come out.

“What will people think if they know I’m gay? I’d better fight against apartheid in a hidden way.”

The danger is that when South Africa is liberated, gay people will seem never to have taken part in liberating our people. What will we say if people ask, “What did you do to bring about a change in this country, where were you during the battle?”

We’d have to come back to them and say, “We were with you but we didn’t want you to know we were there.” That would be independence.

Gays and lesbians need to seek each other’s strength and support and those around us who support our liberation. There is a need for gay/lesbian comrades to be a voice in social issues which affect our lives and which retard participation in the struggle.

In isolation we stand alone and invisible, continuing to be oppressed not only by the state, but within our own communities. Through mutual reinforcement and support we can break down the isolation and discard the cloak of invisibility that has for too long made a misery of, and destroyed, the lives of gays and lesbians.

Together we can articulate the relevance of gay/lesbian oppression and confront the homophobia that faces us and attempt to resolve it through dialogue and discussion. This can only be based on logic and facts, not on the myths and mistruths deliberately fed to us by those who seek to exploit the sensitive aspect of our lives: social, political, cultural, economic and sexual.

Everyone has a role to play in the struggle against oppression. Those who are oppressed have the primary obligation not to contribute in any way to the oppression of others. To do otherwise is to deny the struggle for the right of all people to struggle for ‘liberty, equality and justice for all.’

To contact the author, write to: B. McClenagh, A1059, A Wing, H Block 8, The Maze, Lisburn, Co. Antrim, Ireland.
Algeria

**Junta clamps down on Islamic Front**

By Patrick Baker

ALGERIA has moved a step closer to open confrontation with the arrest of Abdul Kadir Hachani, leader of the fundamentalist Islamic Salvation Front (FIS), and a mobilisation of troops and heavily armed riot police.

In a move aimed at destabilising the fundamentalist forces, Hachani was arrested on the grounds of calling for desertion from the army. The junta now running Algeria produced no evidence for the claim, asserting that it was based on a "reliable source".

The army-backed regime also attempted to close down the FIS main political platform, the four or five thousand mosques that their supporters control, with rings of troops and riot cops.

But despite widespread sympathy among women and pro-democracy forces for attempts to beat the fundamentalists, the moves are doomed to failure.

**Consequences**

The consequences of the clampdown are not yet clear; but democracy is one of the least likely. Since the overwhelming victory for the FIS in Algeria's recent elections, the government and army have not mentioned popular broad support for democracy.

Instead, they have preempted the fundamentalists' almost certain victory in the second round of elections by cancelling them and imposing an unconstitutional five-man junta.

In a two-faced declaration this was subsequently condemned by the National Liberation Front (FLN), though as the ruling party it was in fact behind these moves. These were certain to strengthen support for the FIS among the population, many of whom voted for the fundamentalists as a protest against poverty and government corruption.

The latest moves against the FIS up the ante considerably. A wave of popular protest is likely and the FIS has called on its supporters in the army to ignore orders to fire on protesters.

**Army**

The junta may be able to use its control of the army to hold this down by force for a while, but this risks moving the crisis towards the kind of violent conflict that the regime has used before. It will do nothing to promote democracy.

The same applies to a similar clampdown threatened by the neighbouring Tunisian authorities. But there is an alternative to both the FIS' reactionary policies and the conflict threatened by the junta:

Forces supporting democracy in Algeria command considerable support; and many women are none too keen on empres of the OVF public law.

If they were to unite in a popular mobilisation in defence of democratic rights, this would be the best answer to both Islamic reaction and the corrupt bureaucracy that has controlled Algeria's government for many years.

Yugoslavia

**End of the road for gunpoint federation**

As the first detachments of the UN peacekeeping force arrived, it led as if the Yugoslav civil war was dying down. Probably 10,000 people have been killed.

Horrific evidence of febrile massacres of Croatian civilians has been discovered. And now the EC, led by Germany, has recognised Croatia and Slovenia as independent states.

Why has this war been fought, and what is its outcome? It is likely that the independence of Croatia and Slovenia will stick, at least in the long run.

The Serbian leadership in Belgrade, and the generals of the Serbian-dominated federal army, in all likelihood never thought they could prevent this. The outcome now will almost certainly be an independent Croatia and Slovenia.

It is completely false to imagine that Serbia and the Yugoslav federal army are the force defending a socialised economy. Over time, all of Yugoslavia is headed towards capitalism.

Once the civil war started Milosevic and his forces sought to maximise the territory under their control, and especially to seize territory from Croatia.

The outcome now will almost certainly be an independent Croatia and Slovenia. Inside the rump Serb-dominated Yugoslavia, the socialist federation will be torn by ethnic conflict. Half a dozen small states in transition to capitalism could be the result.

Socialists who argued that all sides were equally to blame in this war made a mistake. Croatia has the right to self-determination, especially when attacked by Serbian forces.

Of course Yugoslavia had a bureaucratic neo-Stalinist regime. But it is Milosevic's historical crime that the degenerate faction of the Serbian bureaucracy he leads unleashed ethnic strife in Yugoslavia once again.

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Yugoslavia is not Slovene or Croatian secessionism which killed the Yugoslav federation, but Milosevic's atavistic Serbian nationalism.

The first fruits of Milosevic's rule were the violent repression in the late 1980s of the ethnically Albanian population in the Serbian province of Kosovo.

He figured he could keep power in Serbia, and reinforce Serbian domination of the federation by using the nationalist card.

One of the real achievements of Yugoslavia was to provide a federal framework in which resources were distributed to the poorer republics from the richer, and in which ethnic tensions were attenuated by political, legal equality between republics, crystallised in the collective presidency.

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Features

The second of two articles by GEOFF RYAN

THE 'NEW World Order' was supposed to solve the 'problem' of the Palestinian people - thrown out of their homeland by the Zionist Israeli state.

True, there has been two conferences so far, in Madrid and Washington. But they have ended without agreement on a venue for the next round of talks, never mind a Palestinian homeland.

The US has been able to lean on Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir to get him to the conference table but Shamir does not intend to make meaningful concessions. On the contrary, attacks have been stepped up by Palestinians in Israel and the occupied territories.

Over 100,000 homes are being built on the Israeli-occupied West Bank to house the massive influx of Jews from the Soviet Union. The Soviet Jews are being forced to go to Israel, though the vast majority do not wish to settle there. Arabs have been thrown out of their houses in Jerusalem to allow Jews to move in, despite protests from Zionist mayor of Jerusalem, Teddy Kolleck.

Now 12 Palestinian activists are threatened with deportation. The US and Britain have protested more forcefully than usual and even voted to condemn Israel in the UN Security Council. But no one should expect them to show the same willingness to implement this resolution as they did with Resolution 660 the 'legal' fig leaf for the Gulf war.

The intransigence of the Israeli government was shown when Shamir decided to purge officials and diplomats in the Knesset.

They objected to any discussion of 'Palestinian autonomy', though Shamir had no intention of proposing any such thing. Defence Minister Moshe Arens stepped up their position as 'peace to Israel, but not at the costs of our right to this land.'

This may clash with immediate US interests, but they know that the Israeli state remains its only reliable ally in the region. The Zionists may serve Western interests but also have their own, sometimes conflicting, goals.

The Palestinian leadership - desperate to gain Washington's backing - have shown themselves, by contrast, willing to make more and more concessions. It is true that, in many ways, the Palestinian delegation at Madrid was extremely successful on the diplomatic front. But they still have nothing concrete to show for all their concessions.

The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine and the Democratic Popular Front have rejected the current policies of the PLO leadership but have allied themselves with the Islamic fundamentalist Hamas organisation.

Their criticisms of Arafat are now made in the language of jihad, not the Palestinian national struggle, let alone the 'Marxist' terminology of Yasser Arafat.

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Yet it is Hamas that has weakened the intifada by forcing women back into the home, by imposing Islamic morality in the areas where it is strong - particularly Gaza.

Women in Gaza are required to wear the veil and have been driven out of education. The average age of marriage for women has now been pushed down to 17 years.

If the big losers of the Gulf war were the people of Iraq and Yemen, the Kurds and the Palestinians who were the winners? Syrian President Hafez al-Assad has been 'rehabilitated' recently because of his support for the Gulf war.

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If the big losers of the Gulf war were the people of Iraq and Yemen, the Kurds and the Palestinians who were the winners? Syrian President Hafez al-Assad has been 'rehabilitated' recently because of his support for the Gulf war.

The evidence linking Syria to the Lockerbie bombing is being ignored in favour of threats against Libya. Assad's military occupation of Lebanon has been accepted as the only way to bring 'stability' to that state.

But the US knows that Assad cannot be relied upon - he cannot distance himself too far from the anti-Zionist and anti-imperialist feelings of the Syrian masses. Similar constraints act upon Egypt, the Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak. Both Syria and Egypt have huge amounts of their external debts written off as a reward for services rendered. This has benefited the ruling classes but has had no effect on the living standards of the populations.

Abject poverty

In Egypt the mass of the population continues to live in abject poverty. Any open abandonment of the Palestinians would threaten both Assad and Mubarak.

The various regimes in the Gulf oil states have all benefited. Emir Jabir has his throne back. The governments of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Kuwait have gained access to US military aid. Even the Iranian regime has been granted a certain respectability. However, Palestinians have been murdered or thrown out of Kuwait.

The Americanisation of the mass of the population in all these states are still denied even the most elementary democratic rights. In Saudi Arabia women are not even allowed to drive a car.

But the rewards for Assad, Jabir, and the Saudis are very small when we look at the real winners. The United States was able to wage its war and test out all its weapons of mass destruction without paying a cent.

Although the war supposedly cost the US $40 billion they were able to recoup this from other Western states - in particular Japan and Germany and the oil monopolies. The US has actually made a profit of $4-5 billion from 'bombing Iraq back into the Stone Age'.

But even this sum pales into insignificance when compared to the billions that they have made by the US arms manufacturers, who have established a virtual monopoly - Saudi Arabia alone has contracts worth $14 billion.

Thus the 'New World Order' has led to a massive new arms race, with vast profits for the US merchants of death. Western firms have also made huge sums from the rebuilding of Kuwait. While the damage is nowhere near as severe as was claimed during the war - primarily vandalism and pilage - there have been still rich pickings.

Political muscle

Where they have been undercut by force from the Third World they have used their political - and potential military - muscle. Their experience in Kuwait will, no doubt, ease their way into the even richer pickings to be had rebuilding Iraq, if it is ever replaced by a more acceptable government.

The 'New World Order' has been paid for by the people of the Middle East and other Third World countries. Over 40 Third World countries have seen a huge decline in their economies. There has been a dramatic rise in prices at the start of the war deprived some countries of 5% of their GNP at a stroke.

At a minimum the war caused a transfer of $8 billion from the Third World to the West. The poorest countries have lost $12 billion through transfer of investments, economic boycotts and oil price rises.

While Western governments have suppressed or understated the environmental effects of the war, Third World countries have suffered the consequences. This has affected not only the Gulf states but has resulted in black snow in India and Kashmir.

Even the faithful allies of the West - the reactionary oil monarchies - have had to pay a price. Apart from financing Washington's war they are now having to make new, very favourable contracts with the Western oil companies.

And if they get away with this, they will be in a strong position to demand the denationalisation of the oil industries in the Arab states and Iraq.

Despite the US' huge military victory for imperialism - and the huge profits made - the Gulf war has not resulted in any 'stability' for the region.

Oil war

A new oil war between Saudi Arabia - which has grabbed Kuwait's market share - and the Kuwaitis is likely, once they get production back to normal. Iraq, too, will be joining the fray, particularly since it has to pay much of its oil revenues to Kuwait in reparations.

The national problems of the Palestinians and Kurds has not been solved and in the eyes of the western powers of the Arab nation the 'New World Order' remains the 'Old Western Order'.

All the old problems of poverty, starvation, displacement, lack of even the slightest democracy remain.

For the moment the beneficiaries of this discontent have been the Islamic fundamentalists - particularly in Algeria and Palestine - but they also face problems, particularly those groups compromising with the previous reliance on the Saudi regime.

One year after the Gulf war the Middle East remains passive, popular protests can rapidly spiral into violent, frightening imperialist domination.

Despite the undoubted strengthening of US power as was shown during the war - its presence will be the cause of further revolutionary struggles which will threaten the whole 'New World Order'.
SEPTEMBER’S Spare Rib presented an extract from *Pride Against Prejudice: transforming attitudes to disability* by Jenny Morris. Morris argues that there should be constraints upon the ‘right to choose’, which relies ‘on the liberal humanist tradition within Europe and America’. In particular, she argues for restriction of choice on three grounds:

- the constraints on women’s choice because of their assessment of the situation facing them if they have to care for a disabled child;
- the rights of the fetus are denied and these begin with viability, which Morris puts at 24 weeks. After that point, she says, ‘women have no absolute right to choose whether to have a disabled child or not.’

Underlying her arguments is the contention that allowing abortion of fetuses solely on the grounds that they have disabilities prejudices against the disabled.

Many of what Morris says, and the language she uses sounds exactly the same as the anti-abortion arguments. According to this, her arguments deserve to be considered.

First though, the problem needs to be put in perspective. Morris argues that abortions should not be allowed beyond 24 weeks. She omits to mention the second case for which it is still allowed – risk to the life of the woman.

Even if all abortions after 24 weeks were banned, it would have little effect on abortions done on the grounds of fetal abnormality. In 1989, the last year for which full figures are available, 4 of out the 23 post-24 week abortions were done on the grounds of fetal abnormality.

1990 there were 61,619 abortions on the grounds of fetal abnormality – slightly down from 1,679 in 1989. They included abortions done on a mixture of grounds. It could include taking into account the effect on existing children.

The mother might already have a child with the same disability whose care would be affected by the birth of another child.

**Previous pregnancy**

It could be her own health – perhaps a previous pregnancy was ended by the stillbirth of a child with the same disability. Women having abortions on grounds of disability are more likely than average to have had previous pregnancies ending in live or stillborn children.

Some abortions are done on the grounds that abnormality may exist. For example, the woman may contract rubella, or come into contact with someone else at the relevant time in her pregnancy (well before 24 weeks) or even get immunised before she realises that she is already pregant.

She might then be advised to have an abortion as a precaution against having a baby that may have multiple disabilities, such as blindness, deafness and mental disabilities.

Other women know that they are carriers for disabilities which only affect their male children. Early tests to determine this may result in aborting all male fetuses, but in fact only half will (on average) carry the disease, such as haemophilia.

In this particular case, a further test can determine which 50 percent, but for other genetic diseases this does not apply.

The number of babies born with disabilities seems to be dropping. In 1979, the rate per 1,000 births of babies born with such disabilities as anencephaly (no brain), spina bifida, Down’s syndrome, cardiovascular malformations, and cleft palate was 210.4. By 1989, the rate was 180.3.

**Nervous system**

This reduction is not necessarily due to abortion. Abortions on grounds of central nervous system malformations (CNS) (anencephaly, spina bifida, hydrocephalus) have been dropping since accurate records have been taken. The rate of Down’s syndrome, on the other hand, has fluctuated.

In 1989, there were a total of 1,735 abortions on grounds of ‘known or suspected fetal abnormality’ affecting mothers. Of 12,462 women with disabilities in 1989, 200 were stillborn.

A number of conclusions could be drawn from this figures. Either screening for abnormalities is partial or inefficient, or a significant number of parents opt not to be screened, or do not take action on the results.

The fact that abortion is not responsible for all the decrease in CNS births is underlined by a similar decrease being reported in the Republic of Ireland, where there are no screening programmes, which makes it unlikely that women come to England specifically on this ground.

**Hard facts**

This is not designed to be either pro-choice or anti-abortion on grounds of fetal abnormality, but simply to provide some hard facts. If Ms Morris’ thesis is to be taken at face value, then on current figures her proposal would prevent some 3-4 abortions a year now done on the ground of fetal abnormality.

Another area worthy of discussion is one often raised by anti-abortionists. They frequently claim that all the ills of society are due to (legalized) abortion, and one of these is the appalling way in which people with disabilities (whom they insist on calling ‘handicapped’) are treated.

There is no doubt that individuals do not and society does not trust people with disabilities as they do those who are not disabled and are treated as they deserve. But has the situation worsened since 1967, and if it has is it because of abortion?

The answer to these questions has to be ‘No’. When I was a schoolchild in the 40s and 50s, children with disabilities did not go to mainstream schools at all and now very many do so. In fact, such children were seldom seen because they were kept behind closed curtains in their own homes.

**Inadequate funding**

We now have (woefully inadequate) recognition of the need for funding for carers. We have a growth of Labour movement support for people with disabilities. Disability is beginning to be discussed openly instead of being hidden.

Of course, things are a million miles away from perfect and in many respects (particularly in terms of financial support, employment and some aspects of medical care) things have not really got worse, but this is not due to abortion being illegal, it is due to a government which is cutting everything worthwhile it can lay its hands on.

And international experience also shows how matters can change for the better. I remember a few years ago hearing Mrs Margaret, once quoted, along with her husband, by anti-abortionists as an authority on the bad physical effects of abortion.

She spoke about the advances made in Sweden on facilities for disabled people as being miles ahead of those in Britain – but not only do they have a more liberal law on abortion on demand up to 18 weeks, plus abortion after that on medical grounds, including disability) but they have had legal abortion for much longer than we have.

**Banned**

On her arguments, so-called ‘social abortion’ should also be banned, as indeed anti-abortionists argue, at any point in the pregnancy.

I have not dealt with the concept of viability in this article, partly for reasons of space, and partly because we argued about this one endlessly during the campaigns against Alton and the proposed amendments last year.

This discussion needs to be had in the pro-choice movement, if only to arm ourselves better for arguments with the anti-abortionists.

But it also deserves attention as a method for fostering links between the women’s liberation movement and the movement for the liberation of people with disabilities.

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**Special Feature**

**Australian anti-abortionists put former Labour PM Hawke in the hot seat**

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**Join the National Abortion Campaign**

Fighting the battle for choice

Write to: The London Women’s Centre, Wesley House, 4 Wild Court, London WC2
Armageddon days are here again

By Lois Lane

USUALLY YOU have to be a particularly repressed man not to feel the importance of feelings. Yet the left as a whole is spectacularly bad on the question. Think of the stereotyped image of a Good Marxist, and nine times out of ten the person will be lavishly endowed with an intellect, unsurpassed in objectivity.

Unlike the left, the evangelical wing of the pro-Communist Christian religion claims to understand feelings. Like right-wing evangelicals of all kinds, they are remarkably adept at manipulating the very real emotional despair and alienation that people experience today.

The so-called charismatic revival of evangelism started in the mid-1960s and, with a whole wave of interest in alternative ways of looking at religion and spirituality. During the 1980s evangelical Christianity really took off and those lambtonians were heard being unashamedly bash and shaken throughout the world. Hallelujah - JC will be back soon!

Drugs

But few socialists seem interested in matters of an eclesiastical nature. After all, when the whole point of marxism is its complete and total rejection of religion - the 'opium of the masses'. This is undoubtedly true and also true of socialism, but it would be a grave mistake to ignore the ideological power of evangelism.

I am not talking here of Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormonism, the Jesus Movement and other assorted sects of especially nasty matters. Your mainstream evangelists are far more serious and, more importantly, are often overtly political in their aims.

Consider the case of Brazil, a country that has been predominantly Catholic since the Portuguese conquest. With the decline of the influence of liberation theology in the last couple of years and in the absence of a strong ideological alternative, Protestant evangelism has overtaken Catholicism as the religion of poor and rich alike.

One non-too-surprising answer is that this is to lend ideological strength to the 'American Dream' model for Brazil's future. Although Brazil is a Third World country, it has not yet been conquered publicly in the US, the political and economic cloud of evangelism is amply demonstrated by the vociferous Pro-Life lobby. While they still have not conformed publicly in the US, their influence has pushed abortion into illegality in a successful string of states recently.

In Britain, many would think that evangelism is far too loud, arrogant and offensive for the rather reserved tastes of the populace. But think again.

Readers may be inclined to be informed by the largest demonstration in London since the Trafalgar Square anti-Falkirk Tax on 1990, was not the biggest demo against the Gulf War, but a March for Jesus last September that attracted over 200,000.

Promising to 'take the world by storm', the marchers are part of a growing movement in Britain militantly committed to saving as many souls as they can - before the skin roll back in apocalyptic fashion and bring God's judgement, glory, to restore the rule of heaven on earth.

Many evangelists devoutly believe that we have now entered the last days of earthly rule prophesied in the Book of Revelation. The final historic battle between Good and Evil is about to come.

It is no hard to see why people are attracted to evangelism. Faced with the enormous horrors produced by a capitalist world in crisis, evangelism offers security, peace and eternal salvation for those that are saved.

Clout

But evangelism is not just something important for the semi-colonial world. In the country of its birth, the US, the political and economic cloud of evangelism is amply demonstrated by the vociferous Pro-Life lobby. While they still have not conformed publicly in the US, their influence has pushed abortion into illegality in a successful string of states recently.

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Adversity

Being 'born again' absolves a person of all the things they feel guilty about. It is a process of spiritual empowerment, made all the more attractive if you feel completely helpless in the face of adversity.

Perhaps this is what explains why evangelical Christianity is particularly good at surviving in the 1980s, even more so if they are young. It is a powerful emotion. When the emotion is transformed into faith, it changes content but not its form. Oppressed people are often made to feel guilty about their oppression.

Evangelists manipulate this by saying 'Jesus', the marchers are part of a growing movement in Britain militantly committed to saving as many souls as they can - before the skin roll back in apocalyptic fashion and bring God's judgement, glory, to restore the rule of heaven on earth.

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Deadline for right wing merger ballot

'Better for you, better for Britain' trumpeted Bill Jordan's pro-union
advertising. The CBI must have been chortling.

Jordan's campaign to get a 'yes' vote to create a new right wing union
has been in top gear since the
AEU executive backed merger with the
EEPU in December. And he has
no qualms, as ever, of using lies, dis-
tortion and downright blackmail to
back up his case.

First he tried to make sure that any
AEU officials opposing the move kept
their mouths shut, with a threat that a
'no' vote would endanger their jobs.
Then he came out with proof that the
vast majority of the membership sup-
ported the merger with the
- a sample poll of 3,000, faithfully
reported by The Times.

Apparently, 87 per cent had voted 'yes'. But a closer look at the figures
indicates otherwise. In fact only one
in four voted, and less than half of them
voted 'yes'. So just over 10 per cent
of the total sample said yes - so much
for Bill's overwhelming majority.

There is everything still to fight for.
In the run-up to February's ballot. And
the issues at stake are of vital import-
ance for the whole trade union move-
ment.

Jordan and Hammond's campaign
risks creating a million-strong union
covering the whole engineering indus-
try, either inside the TUC, or
threatening to split it. The creation of
a powerful bas-
tion of yellow unions, often
ignoring the bosses single-union
deals at every
turn, is a major threat to the
labour move-
mant.

Bill Jordan was not joining
in the fray when he said that the
merged union would be
the largest by far in terms of single-
union deals, the most attractive by far
to award winning companies.

It is this company's bank balan-
ces that the merger will serve, not the
interests of engineering workers. Bill
Jordan's campaign of lies has not won
yet. AEU activists need to use the next
few weeks to ensure that the 'no'
votes win and fight for a united
engineers' union inside the TUC.

British Coal
wields the
axe again

OVER ONE thousand mining
jobs are to be cut in the Selby
group of pits in North
Yorkshire - it was announced
last week.

The pits will go at Whitmoor,
Sharlston, Kellingby, Prince
of Wales and Kiveton pits. British
Coal has refused to rule out the
loss of another 2000 jobs in the
Yorkshire area. The pits thought
to be under threat include Hat-
field, Markham Main and
Bensley.

British Coal says the future of
these pits depends on the
demand for coal. Despite being
mid-winter, stocks of coal at 48
million tonnes are higher than at
any time since the start of the
1984-5 miners' strike.

The high stocks of coal are not
surprising. They are not the
product of planning by British
Coal, but of the decision of the
government to allow the
electricity industry to buy cheap
coal from South Africa, Australia,
Poland and even China. Thatchers' project
of grinding down the coal industry,
by importing cheap-labour
foreign coal is marching relent-
lessly on.

NUJ hard line wins
concessions

Journalists have stepped
their fight against both the
wave of derecognition in the
press and the victimisation
of Repetitive Strain In-
jury (RSI) sufferers.

Workers at the Rotherham
Advertiser, on strike against
derecognition, were joined by
more than 100 supporters from
the NUJ journalists' union
and the print workers' GPMU.
The strikers, who have increased
their support by publishing
'The Real Advertiser', have suf-
fered from the retaliation of both
the GPMU and the NUJ to sanc-
tion any secondary action.

So although the strikers are
solid, the GPMU refuses to
bring its members out in
solidarity, despite majority sup-
port; and the NUJ has failed to
give effective national backing.

Meanwhile, journalists at the
Financial Times (FT) have in-
creased pressure on manage-
ment to withdraw threats
against nine RSI sufferers. With
the expiry of a 30 per cent strike
vote, NUJ members forced con-
cessions from the FT manage-
ment when they produced an
even more solid mandate for ac-
tion, with more than 80% in
favour.

Threats that effectively
amounted to compulsory redundancies have now been withdrawn, and more money
has been promised for workers
taking voluntary redundancy.
The climbdown follows a vic-
tory in the courts for RSI suf-
ferers in the NCU, the British
Telecom workers' union.

These victories are a big step forward, but they show that the
only way to stop victimisation is
through a solid union response.

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Manchester GEC
packets hold firm
for jobs

UNTIL they reinstate those that
have been sacked we'll be on
this gate. We've always fought
redundancies. This sums up the
militant response of GEC Althorn
workers in Manchester to attempts
to sack nearly one third of the
workforce, on strike for over a
month.

Despite hefty profits in 1991, GEC
sacked 12 workers and have now
threatened to sack a further 225 out
of a workforce of around 700. The
workers' answer was clear - five out
of seven are on strike and maintaining
a 24-hour picket. More are joining them
each week.

The threatened sackings follow
12,000 others by GEC Althorn in the
last two years, and an announcement
last year that another 13,000 jobs
were to go. This 'productivity drive' had a lot
to do with the company's 346 million
profits up to September 1991. The
strike has united shopfloor and
office workers from the engineers' union AEU, the general GMB union,
and office workers' unions MSF and
APEX. Most of those still working are
non-union, and some are trainee
managers.

Stewards are now going out to
win support from other workers. GEC trade
unions in Crawford have started a 2
week levy to support the action, while
donations have come from plants all
over Preston and Manchester. French
GEC workers struck against sackings
last year and may take action again.

Union branches and Labour Parties
should take collections for the strikers
and send delegations to the picket line.

Write to: Dave Hughes, 23 Prince
Edward Avenue, Denton, Manchester
M4 4AF.

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London-wide 24-hour occupations
Tuesday 11 February

DEMONSTRATE!
NUS National March
Wednesday 12 February

Occupy every college!

THE CALL for London-wide 24-occupations comes from January’s National Student Activists’ Conference, organised by NUS London. The success of last term’s occupation movement, and other actions like the rent strikes at Lancaster University and Paisley College, Scotland, shows the mood to fight student poverty clearly exists in colleges right across Britain.

In calling for occupations on the eve of the NUS national demonstration against student poverty, activists hope that successful action will inspire other students on the march to go back to their colleges and build for further, indefinite action.

The ‘Don’t rock the boat – but wait for a Labour government’ policy pursued by the NOLS leadership of NUS, has manifestly failed to stop students plunging into the depths of poverty. It has failed miserably to stop college overcrowding, underfunding, and soaring college rents. From the very beginning of this cowardly policy, it was always doomed to fail.

Instead of organising an indefinite national occupation of all colleges – a sure way of stopping college managements and the Tories in their tracks – the NUS leadership is preoccupied with spending its scarce resources on birthday parties and a totally undemocratic emergency conference to push through still further undemocratic constitutional changes a month before the regular Easter conference! NUS is not even building for its own national demonstration.

Students should ensure that coaches are coming down to London for the February march. They should be building for future actions – including occupations – and they should do everything they can to build a fighting National Union of Students. Stand in your union elections to be a delegate to NUS conference.