Scrap Tory health market!

THE PLEDGE by Labour’s leadership to scrap the Tory ‘reforms’ to the National Health Service is perhaps the most radical policy commitment they will make for the election. Kinnock’s team has been forced to the conclusion that the Thatcherite reforms – which have marketised and bureaucratised the NHS, establishing unpopular opted-out Trusts and fund-raising status for GPs as it paves the way for more privatisation – cannot be amended and must be swept away.

Labour is now committed to:

- SCRAP the anarchic ‘internal market’ system, which has cost £1 billion, bringing a bonanza for accountants, a paperchase of invoices, and the growing threat of haphazard hospital closures, all at the expense of patient care;
- SCRAP fund-holding status for family doctors, through which a tiny minority of GPs have used their privileged position to ensure their patients jump queues for treatment, bringing a two-tier system into the NHS;
- SCRAP the opting out of hospitals and services, abolishing the secretive and expensive apparatus of ‘Self Governing Trusts’, and bringing them back under the control of local health authorities;

OPEN UP district health authorities, which the Tories reduced to tiny rump bodies, by bringing back local councillors and by amalgamating them with the Family Health Service Authorities which run GP services.

All this falls far short of a socialist programme for the NHS: there is no pledge to democratise the health authorities, only vague commitments on additional funding, no reference to nationalisation of the hugely profitable drug companies – and not even a pledge to abolish the prescription charge which 13 years of Tory rule has pushed up from 20p to £3.75.

However there is still a real choice on offer, between a catastrophic fourth term of Tory offensive against the NHS – which would drive further wedges of privatisation, means-testing and commercialisation into the most popular of public services, – and Labour’s commitment to halt that process. Under the Tories the battles would all be defensive, while under Labour health workers and campaigners could fight for additional demands.

If only Labour policy on the Tory anti-union laws and a host of other issues were half as bold and forthright as the new NHS policy, perhaps Kinnock’s party would be ahead instead of lying neck and neck in the polls with the Major mafia!

Defend the NHS!

VOTE LABOUR!

Fight for socialist policies!
Ecological catastrophe?

The plot of the film ‘Highlander 2’ revolves around the disappearance of the ozone layer, and the building of a global shield to keep out ultra-violet radiation. It is fast becoming clear that the science fiction lies in the building of a shield, not the possibility of the destruction of the ozone layer.

Scientists have discovered a new emerging hole in the northern hemisphere to add to the one over the South Pole. The area affected covers the northernmost parts of the US, Europe, Canada and Russia.

Previous findings had shown ozone depletion of between four and eight per cent in this area. But the new studies predict a decline which by this spring will be 40 or 50 per cent far worse than anyone could have imagined in such a short time.

The cause of this potential ozone catastrophe are not in dispute. It is the high concentrations of chlorine monoxide, a by-product of CFC chemicals, which are eating the ozone layer.

If the ozone hole emerges and remains in place, the effects will be catastrophic. A huge bombardment of ultra-violet (UV) radiation will hit the earth, causing a vast increase in cancer, damaging human immune systems, wrecking agriculture and harming marine life in the Atlantic.

What can be done? Only the banning of CFCs and the prevention of the emission of fossil fuels to the atmosphere could, over a long time, create the conditions for repairing the ozone layer. But little or nothing is being done.

In 1987 many governments met in Montreal to discuss action on CFCs. They decided to phase out these gases by the year 2000. Even this was too little, too late, and in any case, there is little evidence that this target will be reached.

To stave off ecological catastrophe, defending the ozone layer is just one, admittedly important, step. The other major task is stopping global warming.

There is now a mountain of evidence about the shift in global weather patterns because of warming. The desert is spreading, rain belts are moving northwards. Agriculture in southern Africa is being devastated; in Zimbabwe it will take a generation to recover, even assuming that normal rain patterns return.

This summer in South Africa temperatures of up to 45 degrees have been recorded, way above normal.

Climate changes are worsened by the methods of agro-industry, and the consequences of third world poverty. Rain forest destruction and intensive forms of cultivation causing permanent soil erosion threaten new dustbowls. As the climate changes it will be the poor of Africa, Asia and Latin America who will suffer first.

Defending the planet means international action and international planning. World capitalism will not and cannot take the necessary action. The imperatives of short-term profit are always too great. Which means that whatever steps are taken to lessen the dangers of global catastrophe, until a more rational social system is created, the danger will remain.

The struggle to defend the environment can mobilise a huge coalition. Enabling it to conquer permanent victories means the destruction of the capitalist world order.

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Don’t let Kinnock lose us the election!

By Pete Firmin

With all the news of rising unemployment, house repossession, cuts in education, failure of the NHS ‘reforms’, Labour should be a long way ahead in the opinion polls.

But things seem to have been shot at ‘best pegging’ with the Tories for months. This could produce a hung parliament, or possibly even another Tory victory given that Labour needs an 8% majority to ensure victory.

Why? While the Tories or secret services may have engaged in dirty tricks, they have no real need of them when Labour refuses to put forward anything more than half-measures (at best) as its alternative.

Having spent several years attempting to prove that it is no threat to capitalism by removing the last vestiges of ‘left’ policies, the Labour leadership has very little to offer that might fire the imagination of the millions who have suffered under the Tories.

Where are any signs of Labour’s policies against job losses, such as the closure of Runcorn steel, or just support for a struggle such as that at GEC Manchester?

Labour could only offer its ‘total support’ when the Tories said they would have to backdate legislation to allow the liability orders against millions of poll tax payers to go ahead.

Retreats

Even when Labour does have half-way decent policy, such as making the well-paid ‘pay National Insurance contributions or the introduction of a minimum wage, it runs a mile when attacked by the Tories and their tame media, claiming they will be ‘phished in’ or watering them down further.

Come the election, the Labour Party leadership will expect its members to turn out en-masse to the doorstep to say how wonderful Neil and the Party are.

But they have spent years undermining those activists, expelling critical ones, removing their right to elect their representatives and make policy, and changing the policy themselves whenever they felt it expedient (when the press got too hot for them). The deep sense of demoralisation and even betrayal indicates that members will not turn out like the robots.

By Pete Firmin

with better policies on many issues (not least of the Scottish and Welsh people to determine their own futures) do not have this independence.

This means that socialists must hold in their stomach muscles and campaign for a Labour vote, while being sharply critical of Labour’s policies and putting forward demands in the interests of the working class.

These will need to be fought for, even against a Labour government. Such a campaign will lay the basis for transition to a potential Labour government.

‘Socialists for Labour’ has been set up for this purpose. We need to campaign for CULPs and union branches to combine a call for a Labour vote with a fight on the anti-Tory issues which the Labour Party leadership won’t touch, such as anti-racism and unleashing the unions from the Tories’ laws.

Links have to be made with struggles and campaigns, preparing them while arguing for a Labour vote - as well as fighting against their issues.

Opposition has to be built amongst the labour movement where fascists such as the British National Party are putting up candidates to prevent their meetings taking place.

Socialists for Labour is planning rallies in several cities in advance of the election, and it is not to late for them to be built elsewhere.

A cheap broadsheet which can be used in canvassing and campaigning is also planned, which will argue the Left’s case for a Labour vote.

Don’t leave it too late, don’t let Kinnock throw the election away! Socialists for Labour can be contacted c/o 1 Greatfield House, Canterbury Road, London NW6 5TA.
Rolan Adams’ parents join the 4,000 strong march to demand the closure of the far right British National Party headquarters in Welling on February 22. Their 15 year old son was stabbed to death by racists a year before in Thamesmead, just nearby. A wreath was laid outside the racists offices.

Racist attacks have increased by over 140 per cent since the BNP HQ was set up, and pressure is mounting on the Tory council to have them removed. Some BNP supporters heckled and attacked the marchers, resulting in six arrests.

Why left should back public sector union merger

By Doug Thorpe (Islington NALGO)

MERGER MADNESS seems to have seized the union bureaucrats in their desperation to topple falling membership, and their consequent financial difficulties.

For many, defending the apparatus is more important than mounting a real fight against Tory attacks.

Socialists can’t take a position of principle for or against this current phase of mergers. The proposed AEU-EEU merger would clearly create a powerful, highly undemocratic business union within the TUC, strengthening new realism. Such mergers must be opposed.

Divisions

The proposed NALGO-NUPE-COFSE merger has the potential to strengthen workers’ ability to take on the employers, by overcoming divisions between manual, craft and white collar workers. But only if activists within the three unions can get the right rules, conditions and structures before amalgamation.

NALGO’s 1991 conference laid down the ‘baseline’ conditions of the merger. But many activists thought possible. The principal demands were that the new union annual conference should remain the supreme policy making body. Branches should retain similar financial control as exists now in NALGO: that the new union should be under lay control and membership led; and the right of individual branches and groups to organise and campaign in the union be recognised.

In addition, demands were made for the rights of self-organisation for women, black members and lesbians and gay men; and for the rapid integration of manual and white collar structures.

A new report by NALGO’s leadership goes to a special conference on 3 March (NUPE and COFSE’s leaders have chosen not to have conferences) contains substantial advances. It provides for an annual conference, elected by all members, the calendar of branch finances, a provision for self-organisation and a commitment to integration of structures.

Amendments submitted from branches include demands about branch financial autonomy, and the proposal that branches collect their own funds.

Stumbling block

Central collection of dues would ensure adequate branch financing; but it is a major stumbling block, since NUPE and COFSE are resolutely opposed to branch dues collection.

The left will also be fighting to guarantee the right of groups and individuals to organise within the union.

The fear exists that the document’s references to ‘unrepresentative groups within the union’ and a requirement of adherence to the ‘agreed policy of the union’ might be used to attack militant branches or rank and file political groupings.

Unfortunately there are no amendments proposed that would strengthen the commitment to women’s self-organisation alongside the much vaunted commitment to proportionality of women on elected bodies.

Opinion on the left has veered from the SWP, who seem to be moving to a position of opposition to all mergers, to advocates of ‘One Big Union’ who back merger in any circumstances. But most activists, including Socialist Outlook supporters, have reserved judgement depending on the conditions.

There is still a lot to be fought for to make the conditions for merger right; but the process of the merger should be supported. The left in the three unions, now woefully divided, must work towards the formation of a democratic broad left encompassing all three unions.

Whatever the outcome of NALGO’s special conference, the wider membership of all three unions remains to be persuaded.

Many manual workers see NALGO members primarily as managers.

Affiliation to the Labour Party is rejected by many NALGO members. And inter-union rivalry in workplaces is common.

The way to overcome division, and create a stable basis for unity, would be to mobilise the three unions in a common fight against low pay, cuts and jobs losses, and in favour of harmonising pay and conditions for manual and white-collar workers.

NALGO, NUPE and COFSE combined would have immense potential power. It remains to be seen whether the leaderships want to use it to throw back all the Tory attacks on the public services.

Anti-Racist Alliance launched in Manchester

By Rachel Newton

APPROXIMATELY 250 people attended the launch meeting of the Greater Manchester Anti-Racist Alliance (GMARA) held in the Pakistani Community Centre, in Longsight on 13 February.

The meeting was addressed by various religious leaders, including an Imam from Eccles who is himself under threat of deportation.

Also in the line up were black community leaders: representatives from Labour Party Black Sections, the trade union movement, local radio, and representatives from the ARA nationally.

The launch was clearly seen as a success and a step forward for the anti-racist movement in Manchester, as it was able to draw a wide layer of people, including many from the local Asian community.

As with the national launch of ARA however, the meeting was marred by the speakers from the national campaign.

Marc Wedworth and particularly Shabir Bhatti did both use the opportunity to impose the national preoccupation of counterpitting the ARA to the SWP dominated ANL, utilising as many false arguments and moralistic imperatives as possible in the process.

Aside from this, the main problem with the launch was that because the list of speakers was too long, the plan to have open discussion afterwards had to be abandoned and no future meetings or any other kind of activity was organised.

There are many good activists attracted to the ARA who must be supported in order to make sure that Manchester’s ARA achieves its huge potential.
New anti-union laws planned
Tories promise ‘right’ to sue strikers

By Alan Thornett

ANYONE NEEDING a reminder of the grim implications of a fourth term Tory government only has to look as far as their latest plans for extending the existing draconian anti-union legislation.

Tory Employment Secretary Michael Howard has already drafted a fresh round of new laws, to be pushed quickly onto the statute book should they win the election. His proposals are based on “Industrial Relations in the 1990s”, the Green Paper published last year. The principle measures include:

- COMPULSORY postal ballots for all strikes, except the very smallest, reversing the legislation of the 1980s which allowed workplace ballots as the acceptable method of taking decisions.
- a minimum of SEVEN DAYS strike notice after completing the ballot, and a legal obligation to give the employer full information on any ballots either planned or carried out.

“UNSHACKLE THE UNION”

“WE demand the complete repeal of all anti-union legislation and that the British Government commit to Conventions and Principles of the United Nations International Labour Organisation for the full restoration of trade union rights.

We do not accept the criminalisation of trade union activity and the attacks on civil liberties.

We reject the argument that a trade union movement of 9 million members has no alternative but to comply with the anti-union legislation.

We support trade unionists threatened by use of the laws and all those who challenge the laws to defend their interests.”

“Unshackle the Unions” is a campaign launched by the Socialist Movement Trade Union Committee, the Haldane Society Employment Committee, Solidarity Network, Labour Party Socialist and Trade Union News. The above statement was circulated in the labour movement for support from activists.

The strike has kept its public profile high by producing a paper, the Real Advertiser. It really galls management that workers are putting out better paper than they can, even without any resource. Right issues of the paper have been produced and sold around the town to provide funds for the dispute. The journalists have also organised dozens of days to rally support from outside, attracting delegations from local factories and NUJ members from all over the country.

The strikers are determined to maintain their struggle for union rights. But they need support.

Donations and messages of support to: Rotherham Advertiser dispute, c/o ISTC, Edgcomb House, Doncaster Road, Rotherham. Cheques to: Rotherham Advertiser NUJ Social Club.
No pre-election truce in witch-hunt

By Steve French
(Suspended Lambeth Councillor)

THE LABOUR Party NEC has decided that the witch-hunt will focus on rooting out left candidates for the General Election. All other expulsions have been postponed. Even with the threat of a hung Parliament, the NEC is doing the best it can to demobilise Labour activists in key marginal seats, risking a rough-shoot over their right freely to select candidates.

In three Parliamentary seats, Hattersley’s NEC election panel has rigged the short lists which will be put to a postal ballot, removing members’ rights to interview candidates and reach a collective decision.

Rewarded

In Coventry South East and Liverpool Broad Green, officials who gave evidence at the NEC to expel Dave Nellist and Tim Field are rewarded with a place on the short-list.

In Wallasey, Lol Duffy, former leader of the NEC, has been excluded even though he received twenty ward and union nominations. Duffy took the flak as a result of his conduct at the NEC election panel in May. John’s ward is firmly behind him and refuses to see him without his job. His case was put to a constituent in Wallasey jail at the same time as Lesley Mahood. The NEC says this means he supported the candidate. He emphatically did not.

On the National Executive Committee, the Labour Against the Witch-Hunt is winning support for the demands that the charges and suspensions should be dropped.

The witch-hunt has divided the Stratham Party which needs to unite to win this key marginal seat from the Tories. Two recent council by-elections have indicated that the Labour vote has collapsed.

Twenty-six Party members face expulsion in Brighton. The two CLPs remain suspended, despite NEC pledges, for supporting councillors who opposed the Poll Tax. Council Leader Steve Bassam has drawn up a wide ranging list of 50 people for the NEC.

Soft left

This has angered the soft left who have threatened legal action and Bassam has given an apology to one, not so left wing, member included on his list. Brighton Kemptown is a key marginal.

Manchester Councillor John Clough has been suspended from the Group which controls the NEC to the next council elections in May. John’s ward is firmly behind him and refuses to see him without his job. His case was put to a constituent in Wallasey jail at the same time as Lesley Mahood. The NEC says this means he supported his candidate. He emphatically did not.

On the NEC, the suspension is not sustainable. Gerald Kaufman as- sisted at the NEC that the suspension must remain because of John’s ‘association’ with the SWP. John did not support the SWP in a public meeting arguing for people to join the Labour Party.

In Bedford the NEC has gone as far as to expel 13 members for supporting Labour Party policy in opposing a pact with the Liberals.

Eight more Liverpool councillors have been banned from the NEC for associating with the group, many purely for abstaining or even being absent when the votes on privatization were taken. The minority Labour administration is now a rump with only 35 members (33 have been suspended) and depends on the Liberals to get votes carried.

The Regional office is now gearing up to impose twenty candidates for the May elections. However a number of candidates to independant left wingers on the NEC is growing and getting successful.

Last year in Leeds, Patrick Hall was banned from the council ‘panel’ because his phone number was on an anti-poll tax leaflet. Council Leader John Trickett led attacks on Patrick’s University Ward, calling for an investi- gation into why they were allowing the ‘Militant’ to be sold!

Postal ballot

Whilst this charge could equally be levelled at the right wing CLP officers, the NEC hatched a plan to hold a postal ballot to remove John Clough.

Labour sacks Camden NALGO strikers

By Carolyn Sikorski
CAMPDEN’s Labour council, after threatening to sack striking social workers since last October, this week dismissed all those on strike.

250 Social workers, Social Care Officers and others have been on all out indefinite strike action since June 4. This followed a successful ballot with a 76 per cent majority for action.

The issue is Camden Labour council’s failure to implement a nationally-negotiated regrading agreement which affects the pay and status of social workers and social care workers.

The council signed the agreement in February 1990, but unlike fellow employers in other London boroughs failed to implement it. The strike raises issues of national concern. If employers successfully renege on a nationally negotiated agreement, the whole power balance between staff and employers will be tilted in the detri- ment of every NALGO member.

The employers used the strike to radically restructure the social services provision within Camden. Their plan was to institute the ‘church of care’ model currently causing havoc in the NHS. This will mean massive job losses and increased privatization.

Staff on strike were locked out of any consultation process and the new structure deletes all their posts. In line with an increasing use of the sac to in- quality strikers, Camden council have issued sack threats since October 1991 in the national and local media.

They have used every oppor- tunity to intimidate other trade unionists in their employment discussing the issue.

The threats intensified on December 20 when the council made an ‘offer’ to the social workers of one increment (half of the National Agreement). This was conditional on completely changed job descriptions and new conditions of service involving a series of redundancies.

The ‘offer’ was ex- posed as an ultimatum by the council’s further demand to show acceptance of the new condi- tions, strikers had to return to work. Social workers were issued with letters spelling out the sack threat.

It is clear that the council were using the smokescreen of new contracts as a means of breaking the strike, and as a final desperate bid to shirk their duties under the 1990 agreement.

Strikers voted overwhel- mingly not to bend to this in- timidation. Their resolve was strengthened by the predica- ment of 24 social service workers who were also on strike.

In the new restructured so- cial services department many of their jobs would disappear. They would face certain redundancies if the conditions for a return to work were accepted.

The militant Camden strikers has been run demagogically from the start. They have made contact with the UEF strikers, in- cluding the Pergamon strikers in Oxford.
Outrage at Irish ayatollahs

Women challenge bigots’ constitution

By Ann Conway, People’s Democracy

IT IS JUST over eight years since the anti-abortion amendment to the Free State constitution was passed. Those eight years have witnessed a constant and escalating series of attacks on women’s reproductive rights.

First the pregnancy counselling and abortion referral services of two Dublin women’s clinics were closed down through rulings in favour of SPUC, the anti-abortion ‘Society for the Protection of the Unborn Child’. Then British magazines such as Cosmopolitan had their Irish editions censored after advertising abortion clinics.

In the last few months, books such as Evangelists and Our Bodies Ourselves were removed from libraries. Now a 14-year-old rape victim has been injunctioned by the courts from procuring an abortion in Britain.

This has provoked a major political crisis for the Irish government, and a number of militant protests organised by feminists and student activists. LIFE, an offshoot of SPUC, have offered to care for the 14-year-old until she reaches the age of 18.

Fanatics

But their cynicism has alienated supporters. They are now widely viewed as “bigots and fanatics”, as Ireland’s leading broadcaster Gay Byrne put it.

The case presents the government with a major political problem, and they are aware of the depth of public outrage at the case. New Taoiseach Albert Reynolds has been forced by popular outrage to attempt to resolve the matter.

They are clearly pushing for the Irish Supreme Court to lift the injunction, another Irish “solution” to the problem.

But there are growing demands for a repeal of the amendment – a popular radio programme showed a large majority in favour. Now the Workers Party has backed the repeal, and have called for the resignation of the Attorney General.

The amendment was carried against a background of political instability in 1983. Challenged from the left, the main parties were looking to the right for some stability.

Fianna Fail – the main bourgeois nationalist party – readily agreed with SPUC to hold an anti-abortion referendum. They hoped to gain votes on a Catholic/conservative ticket. But today popular Catholic nationalism has run its course. Since 1983 the working class – and particularly women, youth and the rural poor – have suffered unemployment, emigration and diminishing civil rights.

This has led to unprecedented political instability and alienation from the main parties – witnessed in the election of Mary Robinson as President and the sizeable left vote.

SPUC, LIFE and others are contributing to the instability and damaging Ireland’s profile in Europe. The politicians who once covered them now want to take their distance from them, as does the Church.

Europe

Because of the case Reynolds is now confronted with difficulties in relation to Maastricht. Although Ireland was granted a derogation (a let-out clause) from the treaty around the issue of abortion, there is now a real fear that the backlash from the present case could mean problems in ratification.

This is exerting major pressure on the government to get the amendment repealed.

It is vital that feminists and activists throughout Europe and internationally organise protests in support of their Irish sisters. Demands for the lifting of the injunction and the repeal of the amendment are particularly important.

Dutch parliamentary complaints to the Irish government have received widespread coverage, and this is another channel for pressure.

As we go to press the rape victim’s family are appealing against the injunction to the Supreme Court.

The strategy of both government and opposition parties seems to be to sugarcoat the amendment enough to take the heat out of the situation, without offending the church.

But such an outcome, which SPUC claims to favour – will not appease the forces of the right who will broaden their assault on women’s rights as soon as the present crisis is over.

Nothing less than repeal will do.

Urgent solidarity needed!

OVER THREE hundred people turned out to picket the Irish embassy in London within days of the tragic story hitting the headline:

The picket was called by Women Against Fundamentalism, and supported by various women’s organisations – National Abortion Campaign (NAC), Irish women’s groups, Women for Socialism, student women’s groups – as well as individual women and men and small numbers from the left.

The extremely good turn-out showed that, even in these seemingly passive days, possibilities for mobilisation around women’s demands really do exist.

There has been widespread condemnation of the Irish Supreme Court decision. Wherever anti-abortionists have attempted to ‘Justify’ this nightmare they have been roundly and soundly condemned. Support from passers-by on the picket strongly indicated this general mood.

Time is not on our side though. The young Irish woman in question is in a desperate situation, and the clock ticks on.

IT IS THE POSITION OF THIS COURT, YOURS LADY, THAT A FETUS IS DECEDENT AND SHOULD NOT BE ABORTED, EVER AFTER RAPE.

ONE DOES, HOWEVER, THE CHILD MAY BE GIVEN MOTHERCARE HOUSING, EDUCATION, NURITITION, DEPENDING ON EQUAL OPPORTUNITY, AND IF SHE REALLY NEEDS UP, MAY BE RAISED, GET DEPENDANT, BE FED OR ABORTED.

Solidarity action is both urgent and vital if the Irish pro-choice movement stands any chance of emerging from the political turmoil of this tragedy able to make the gains for Irish women that are so desperately needed.

As NAC have said, ‘make no mistake, anti-abortion organisations have made it clear that they want Ireland’s law everywhere. They do not believe that rape or incest is a reasonable ground for abortion.

What has happened in Ireland is a natural and foreseeable consequence of their draconian law’.

A further victory for anti-abortionists in Ireland would fuel the bigots here. It will also be used to strengthen anti-Irish racism in the British state, and poor petrol on the fires of reaction in the Six Counties.

Women’s organisations, trade union and labour movement bodies must show their support now for their sisters in Ireland, and line up with NAC and other fighters for women’s choice here.

For campaigning details/ messages and financial support contact NAC, 4, New Court, London, WC2B 5AT. Tel: 071-405-4801.
I will resign and go now...

By David Coen

They had to resign! Haughey farewell with quotes from Hamlet: 'good night sweet prince and flights of angels sing thee to thy rest'. It must have been galloping to listen to such royalist rafferty in a republican parliament.

Haughey's dubious reputation as a republican rested on two events. In 1969 he was sacked from the Cabinet by Jack Lynch and tried for attempting to import arms, said to have been for the IRA.

In 1972 he wanted Lynch with the support of Seán de Valera and a number of TDs from the West who were more sympathetic to the republican cause. Repulsed by the Taoiseach for Haughey, like Fianna Fáil, was never more than a useful tool during the frequent economic crises of the past 13 years.

Historical settlement

Cynes claims, with some justification, that the hate headlines were designed to bolster his position as leader of the largest party and so the best chance for doing a successful deal on the North. He certainly saw himself as being entrapped with a historical mission to bring about a settlement.

After his first talks with Thatcher, shortly after both came to power and to her ex-triumph and haunt, he oversold the outcome to the media. The result was a distinct cooling of relations.

Haughey remained silent during the Hunger Strikes. In June 1981 he lost the general election, partly due to the election, unusually in his constituency. In 1982 he won back some popular support by refusing to back the Malvinas War.

He was out of power during the process which led up to the Anglo-Irish Agreement in 1985 and threatened to repudiate it on return to government implemented it faithfully.

But what brought Haughey down had little to do with his politics or with the stream of corruption scandals which constantly embarrassed him. His downfall was a combination of the economic crisis of the 26 County state and the suspicion of him from the Free State's ruling class.

Fianna Fáil's dominance of Free State politics since 1932 lies more on clanlessness than ideology. 'Parish pump politics' means a job or a grant often depends on how you vote. This worked reasonably well during times of prosperity but support ebbed during recession, in spite of the occasional boost by 'managing' from Brussels.

No majority

Haughey never won a majority in the five elections he fought between 1979 and 1992. To maintain his base he had to hang the republican drum, but his reputation, the ruling class feared that sections of his base would hang him at his word and take an openly anti-British line.

The combination of a republican rhetoric with economic crisis could become a dangerously potent brew and so he was constantly denounced for his 'flawed pedigree'.

But why now, you may well ask. After all, the period of worst danger to the Southern ruling class was when the rise of Sinn Féin following the Hunger Strikes combined with the Free State's runaway deficit crisis.

They panicked and there followed the New Ireland Forum and the Anglo-Irish Agreement -- both designed to stem the rise of a radical alternative.

The threat from the left has receded, at least in the short term. But the economic crisis has returned with a vengeance.

Despite all the monetarist slashing that occurred during the 1980s the economy is in a spiral of decline.

With emigration slowing down, unemployment is above 20 percent and the total number of workers is contracting, in spite of low inflation and rapid growth of GDP.

Abstainer

Haughey's successor, Albert Reynolds, the first Taoiseach born west of the Shannon, is a typical member of Fianna Fáil. A total abstainer, he made his living from running dance halls in the 1950s and 1960s and then started a pet food business in Longford.

He appears to be without strong political beliefs and, in the charisma stakes, stands in about the same relation to Haughey as John Major does to Margaret Thatcher.

Despite the show of unity by Fianna Fáil behind Reynolds, the political pressure on the Dublin ruling class will not go away. Haughey was a populist wheeler-dealer, caught once too often helping his friends. They need someone more exciting than the cautious Reynolds to try to stem the loss of Fianna Fáil support to the left.

Support for both the main parties, Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael, is falling to the benefit of 'left' parties such as Labour, the socialists and now divided Workers Party and a variety of independents and Greens.

Europe

A significant part of the Southern ruling class has given up the idea of independent statehood. They see European unions as the solution to their economic and political problems. They want to change articles One and Two of the Free State constitution which define the national territory as being the whole island.

To carry a referendum they need to be sure that Fianna Fáil will not oppose the change. By replacing the adventurist Haughey with Albert Reynolds they have moved a step closer to that goal. But they may have, at the same time, backed away some of the political fabric which held the state together for 70 years.

And so the 'boss' must stay to his island on the west coast of Kerry, there to end his days in quiet contemplation of its desolate beauty. Like St Brendan, after journeying to the New World and back. And long before that fella died in 1492!

New Israeli blitzkrieg

By Paul Clarke

THE LATEST Israeli incursion into Lebanon, attacking the villages of Kafr and Yarzeh, and allegedly aimed at damaging the 'peace process' opened up at the insistence of the United States.

Israel's actions over the past two weeks have utilised all the casual ruthlessness and brutality which were the hallmark of the 1970s, when the Syrians especially to US policy aid.

The US expects the peace negotiations to be long and drawn-out. For the US that is not necessarily a disadvantage, so long as the US dominates the political agenda in the region. But for that to happen the talks have to at least appear to have the possibility of a realistic outcome.

What does that mean in practice? It can only mean demobilising the PLO and Arab resistance to Israel in return for some kind of political autonomy (not necessarily independence) for the West Bank and Gaza strip. It is not that US political objectives clash with domestic Israeli politics.

Far from preparing to campaign any kind of autonomy, Israel is setting tens of thousands of new immigrants, mainly from the Soviet Union, in new settlements on the West Bank. Arab homes are being bulldozed to make way for new Israeli villages. The aim is to permanently change the population structure of the area.

Shimon Peres: lost the Labour election

Housing construction is in the hands of extreme right-winger Ariel Sharon, who as defence minister personally organised the massacres in the Lebanon-Palestinian refugee camps in 1982.

Israeli politics has been ineffectively shifting to the right for more than a decade. The election of Yitzah Rabin as Labour Party leader is one more sign of this shift.

The lessons are clear. Peace talks are going nowhere, because the US lacks the clout to impose on Israel even limited autonomy for the Palestinians. Neither side wants to be seen to pull out of the talks. But on the ground nothing will change. The broad consensus in official Israeli and Palestinian politics is for maintaining the iron hand of force against the Arabs. That means more air raids, the continuing detention of hundreds of Arab prisoners, and brutal repression in the occupied territories.

There is no road to freedom for the Palestinians in the near future. Neither is there any road forward in isolated military attacks. Only by halting the Palestinian struggle to a regional strategy to defeat both reactionary Arab regimes and Israeli-Zionist leaders can a new phase of the Palestinian liberation struggle be begun.

International News

Outlook

No. 17  Feb. 29, 1992 Page 7
Towards a hung parliament?

IT'S OFFICIAL. Britain is in the grip of the biggest recession this century, something which should, in all logic, ensure a Tory election defeat.

But poll after poll puts the two main parties level pegging, just weeks before the general election. Ever since detailed opinion polls were started, the election campaign itself has never greatly altered the relative strengths of the parties.

Unless something changes quickly, the most likely outcome of the general election is a hung parliament. If that is indeed the outcome, political developments will move rapidly. The left must arm itself to intervene in the political crisis that would follow.

Disappointment

A hung parliament, let alone a Tory victory, would be a big disappointment for the labour movement and for millions sickened by 13 years of Toryism.

That there is now substantial doubt about whether Labour can win is entirely the responsibility of the Kinnock leadership.

Kinnock's accelerating move to the right has created a situation where many voters see very little difference between all the main parties. This is also a consequence of the Tories ditching Margaret Thatcher. If she had stayed, it is difficult to see how the Conservatives could have rebuilt their position.

But now with Major at the helm, and Kinnock's ultra-bleness as the main opposition, and in the absence of clear alternative policies, it often comes down to traditional loyalties, or bunches about who would best manage the economy.

Even the kind of crusading spirit generated by Harold Wilson in the 1964 election, although his policies were entirely pro-capitalist, escapes the dead hand of Kinnockism.

The situation in a hung parliament depends entirely on which party is the largest minority, and the attitude of the Liberal Democrats.

Liberal leader Paddy Ashdown would demand a pledge to implement electoral reform, some form of proportional representation, as the price of agreeing a coalition. If the Tories were the largest party, agreement on PR is almost certainly ruled out. The chances of a Tory-Liberal coalition seem slim.

Much more likely is a Lib-Lab coalition. How far Kinnock would go to agreeing proportional representation is as yet unclear. Socialists inside and outside the Labour Party must demand that Labour forms a minority government if it is the largest party.

A coalition with the Liberals would be a permanent guarantee that only the most openly right-wing pro-capitalist Kinnock policies could be implemented. It would be a permanent obstacle to any pressure from the ranks of the labour movement on the new government.

A minority Labour government would be under the threat that at any time it could be brought down over a major issue, or a vote of no confidence. But the Tories and Liberals know full well that the history is that minority governments rapidly brought down stand a good chance of re-election. Labour should insist, if it is the largest party, on forming the government and carrying out its programme.

Undemocratic

None of this means Labour should reject proportional representation, but that should not be part of a coalition deal with the Liberals. The British electoral system is outrageously undemocratic. The argument against PR in the labour movement is an outright partisan one, that PR would make the election of a Labour government very difficult, and rule out the possibility of progressive or left-wing legislation.

But to implement any meaningful pro-working class reforms, especially in a period of acute capitalist crisis, requires building a majority.

The idea that a left Labour government could sneak into power with a minority vote, and implement substantial left wing reforms is a non-starter. A Labour pledge to introduce electoral reform would seize the mantle of democracy from the Liberal Democrats.

If Labour were already pledged to PR its fate at the general election would be determined. The actual implementation of PR would mark a major democratic opening in British politics, while also ensuring that for the foreseeable future a Tory government could not be elected.

The coming general election will be major watershed for the future of the Labour Party. Failure to get enough support to form the government would put question the whole of Labour credibility as a party of government. Losing four elections in a row would bring Labour out of government for more than a generation.

The rock of Labour's position as one of the two main parties is not just me support, but its position as the party the trade union bureaucracy, especially the trade union bureaucracy. However, party which seems never able to use its power has declining usefulness to the trade unions.

Block vote

Now that merger between the AUEW and EETPU looks certain, the grip of new realist right on the TUC will deepen. Union leaders like Charlie Haigh, Bill Jordan and Eric Hamner could easily back stronger links with Liberal Democrats, and the ending of union block vote in the Labour Party.

If Labour loses, the Liberal Democrats will go on a huge offensive, claiming they are the only party capable of becoming the alternative government to the Tories. Sections of the ruling class will go whole hog and try to deal Labour a knockout blow.
Time to party?

By Will McMahon

WILL it be possible or desirable to launch a new socialist party after the election? Apparently the Socialist Party thinks so, according to New Times.

The candidates of Tony Field and Dave Nettie, the probable transformation of Labour into a two-party system, the discreditation of the UUP, the fragmentation of the British left and the prospect of PR all raise this question.

Any developments will depend on the election result. A Tory victory would further demobilise the struggle of the oppressed and the working class and discussions about a new party would be off the agenda.

A Labour victory or Labour-Liberal coalition would open up wider possibilities. The Labour leadership would move very quickly, using the authority of an election victory, to close down any channels of dissent within the party.

It is likely that Connolly will provide an ideological glue that has been delivered in local government - social, economic and political attacks on the opposition and the trade union movement.

The dramatic struggles, some left with death and imprisonment might be possible. Further debates around the creation of a new socialist party would be inevitable. In the event of by-elections, one, two, three or more Convention South East seats might take place.

Smaller

So a call for a new socialist party may attract people who want to fight the Labour Government, which will appear incapable of solving the problems from the Tories. How many could be brought to a "socialist" banner? In present conditions, perhaps a couple of thousand. Probably a new socialist party would be smaller than the UDF or Milliband.

Such a small and politically isolated organisation would be no solution to building a real alternative to the crisis and decay of British democracy.

For any new party to succeed in three conditions would be crucial. First, that a substantial section of the left of the labour movement will have concluded that the Labour Party is no longer credible.

A genuine socialist party without the lies of Benn, Skinner, Scargill, Corbyn and others would not be subject to the rule. Second, that the new party will have shown itself to be an alternative to Labourism in practice.

Majority party

Thirdly, that the economic and social struggles after the election will have been deep enough to break the hold of the Labour Party on millions of workers. It is worth noting that even in Scotland, Labour (poll tax and affluence) is still the majority party of its working class supports.

The crucial, it will not be enough for a few thousand activists, from different left fragments, to want to fight the Labour leadership at elections.

It will take millions of workers to have realised the same conclusion. This will only be possible off the back of mass struggles against the Labour Government.

The reason is that new mass struggles against a Labour Government will inevitably involve tens of thousands of Labour Party and trade union members. It will also include other left activities yet to convene that a socialist party is possible.

More importantly, those workers who have fought long and hard will not give up their old organisations easily. Their first port of call to demand action will not be the headquarters of the new socialist party in formation but in Waterhouse House and Committee House.

Their priority will be to win their struggle and to win wide support. They will not yet be interested in forming an alternative to Labour - but in putting demands on the Labour Government.

Splitting

The strategy of splitting the Labour movement when they will require maximum solidarity will not be very appealing. This is why launching a pre-emptive left party would be a mistake. There will be enough organisations out there already to be the socialist party already.

Instead, what is needed is a political formation that will support and organise mass struggle against the Labour Government and aim to split it and capital. This could be done through a series of united front campaigns that would present no obstacles to unity in action.

United front campaigns could bring together many activists disillusioned with Kencher or the remnants of the SDP-Liberal Alliance, those socialists in the Labour Party and forces of thousands of working class and oppressed people.

Such campaigns would be most effective if they took a two-back strategy (inside and outside the Labour Party) and moved towards a national coordination. This would pose an question of forming a nationalist left wing movement (or nationally federated) with socialists from all currents.

Alternative

A mass, democratic movement would be the vial ingredient of left reorganisation. It will prove a solid and the opposition it would begin to challenge labour movement leaders from within and pose the question of an alternative to Labour to even many Labour Party members.

While a new party was being debated, this movement would not split off from those who were prepared to fight against a Labour Government, but remain loyal to their own local: traditional organisations. It would also help to clarify in others who were left with serious about unity and class struggle politics.

Such a strategy, combined with a united front organisation, is that in the Socialist Movement, The Socialist Movement should take a political role in coordinating the kind of united front campaigns that could lead to a national left wing formation.

The Conference of the Left in October of this year should concentrate on this. The next step is not to bring a new socialist party into being, but to create the conditions in which that step might be possible.
Amazon sisters need your support

The last issue of Socialist Outlook carried a review of Channel 4's 'Amazon Sisters', now being used to build support for the Brazil Network Chico Mendes Solidarity Fund. Here, the film's director, ANNE MARIE SWEENEY, looks at both the experience of making the film and probably the most immediate struggle in need of solidarity - that of the rural workers of Tucurui.

MAKING documentaries is by its very nature a slow process. It is not easy to be aware if you are changing people's political consciousness and gaining a sense of control over the point where actions around the issues will be significantly altered.

Of course the truth is that television is the most powerful means of communication. Right now the old maxim that 'the pen is mightier than the sword' no longer rings true. Not because computers have replaced the pen, but because more base information is replacing that of the printed word.

When I went to Brazil, I carried with me letters of solidarity from many organizations - including those of Ama- zoonia from Oxford and District Trades Council, Women Against Racism and South Wales NUM.

I was invited to address meetings of women strikers in the fish-processing and Brazil nut industries, trade unions in the public sector, education and health, and the annual assembly of Amazon trade unionists in South Para. Not invited as a Channel 4 television director, but as a 'companion', a sister trade unionist and socialist.

My awareness of the great responsibility I carried in making these connections was heightened when I was presented to a group of rural women workers as 'the communist who is making our film, who will tell our story'.

Clearly, the most important judges of whether we fulfilled our responsibilities in this respect, are the women workers, the unions and the trade unionists whose struggle we covered. We discussed and sought coverage of their struggles with the women themselves. They now want to show the completed video and production photos throughout the movement, wherever they can get hold of a video. Other Brazilian trade unionists are also requesting copies.

But our responsibility does not end here, nor does the programme finish and show its end credits 4. We have to ensure that it is seen, discussed and acted on, for a whole range of reasons. But the prime reason is that the struggles seen in the film are urgently in need of interna- tional support.

One of the most immediate of these is that of the rural workers in Tucurui. Their fight centres around their dam, completed in 1994 by the state elec- tricity company Electro-Norte.

The dam is the first major hydro-electric dam in the Amazon. It covers 2,430 square kilometers of tropical forest and required the forced relocation of 23,871 people, including indigenous peoples. It was the dam that 'inspired' the film 'The Emerald Forest'.

Capemini, a pension company, won the contract to clear the forest before flooding. Though it was paid, they in fact failed to clear the area. If ever there was a case that warranted the demand to 'open the books', this mega 'development' project is it!

Submerged rotting vegetation left behind, caused a prolif- eration of mosquitoes that makes clearing and working in nearby areas unbearable. It has also caused an epidemic of diseases like dengue fever.

Led by the Rural Workers' Union of Tucurui, local people are demanding - yet again - relocation with full compensa- tion to an area where they can farm.

Women have played a leading role in the occupation of Electro-Norte's offices. After August 1991, when the com- pany obtained a court order against the occupation, the pro- testers left the offices but set up camp outside the company's main gate. Around 8,000 women, men and children have vowed to stay there until Electro-Norte enters negotiations with them to resolve the prob- lem.

I also visited the Donations Office of the Tucurui Rural Work- ers' Union can be contacted at 23,871 people have been left out of work. The union has become the target of police harassment.

The land has already been sold and the union is fighting to stop the land being sold. They have raised money to improve the union's communications and photographic equipment to strengthen their struggle.

Contact has now been established between British oil workers and the Transport Federation of the CTC (the Brazilian TUC), while the Sao Paulo metro workers have begun to support the Amazon workers' union and London Underground workers.

While for many unions in rural areas the money is crucial to their survival, the fund is aimed at supporting the workers in their struggle to halt the degradation of the global environment.

Contact and send donations to Chico Mendes Solidarity Fund, Brazil Network, 63-65 Old Compton St, Soho, London W1D 4HA.
Far right victories threaten Mitterrand government

By Patrick Baker

France's 'socialist' Prime Minister, Edith Cresson, is certainly going through a rough patch. Nailing the lid on the coffin of the French Socialist Party government.

Cresson, France's least popular Prime Minister in decades, appears incapable of opening her mouth without losing the Socialists a few more points in the polls. Now a major victory for the far right Front National looks almost certain in the coming local elections.

Debacle

The latest of Cresson's spectacular botch-jobs has been the 'Altogether Handout'. The simple facts might lead you to the conclusion that this was a complete non-event. But Cresson's skill managed to convert it into a full-scale governmental crisis.

George Hashash, leader of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), was invited into France for a vital operational mission. A cerebral stroke, fixed up by the Red Cross/Red Crescent. Then he was flown out again. Hardly the stuff of front-page headlines.

But within hours resignations and sackings were declared left, right and centre in Cresson's administration, as the hapless PM collapsed before the howlings of the right. That the right-wing declared Hashash a 'terrorist' is no great surprise, and nor is their hypocrisy in demanding that he be refused medical attention. It is the reaction of the Cresson/Mitterrand duo that is of interest. The fact that they immediately collapsed into the racist agenda of the right is symptomatic of an administration in deep crisis.

This crisis is not something that was born with the arrival of Edith Cresson, though she has done a remarkable job at worsening it. Rather it is the consequence of the lengthy denigration of a party that started with lukewarm policies, and has ended up with a similar agenda to the right-wing RPR and UDF.

This is the fertile breeding-ground for the extreme right. And there is no doubt which party is on the rise in France today. The FN, led by Front National have scored a few victories over the past few weeks, and are sure to win more in the local polls, particularly in Paris and other centres of urban poverty.

Le Pen himself looks on course for election in Nice/Marseille, even if his prediction of 70 per cent-plus is over-optimistic. Meanwhile the PS are scraping around to get their vote above 20 per cent.

Fascist victory

Preliminary results from the first round of one local election in Nice are still worse: the Socialists vote dropped by nearly half to 12 per cent, and the FN candidate Jacques Peyrat scored almost 40 per cent.

The elections are shaping up to be a pretty gloomy affair, but nowhere else are things looking brighter. The 100,000 strong anti-racist protest on January 25 was a promising display of unity between France's black communities, youth and students and the trade union movement. It is

Freedom march highlights Kashmir freedom struggle

By Baia Kumar

THE GREAT freedom march from Pakistan-occupied Kashmir to the Indian-held part has been met with bullets and tear gas by Pakistani troops.

But it has succeeded in focusing world attention on a forgotten conflict. And the size of the march has demonstrated the mass support for the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF).

For two years an 'intifada' has been raging in the Indian-held part of Kashmir. In that time 3000 people have been killed. Thousands of suspects have been tortured, and women systematically raped.

The victims are nearly always Muslims and the culprits include the Indian police and army. But the scale of the uprising has shown the overwhelming support the people for Kashmir's independence.

The roots of the conflict lie in the historical domination of the Kashmir Muslin masses by a Hindu raj.

In 1947 when India gained its independence both parts of the state, with Pakistan took place, Kashmir's Hindu rulers opted to join India.

Poorest state

Forty years after the partition, the situation in Indian-occupied Kashmir is no better. Kashmir is one of the poorest states in the Indian union. Tourism provides 40 per cent of its income, while the Indian government has actively undermined its agricultural and industry, thus encouraging a dependent relationship.

But unification of Kashmir within Pakistan is no solution. Indian dominance would be replaced by that of the Punjabi ruling class. Kashmir would be thoroughly 'Islamised' lead to stepped-up oppression of women, and the Hindu and Bhumihit minorities.

Pakistan's shameful role is shown by its attitude to the march. Although pressured by popular opinion to support a one-day strike in solidarity with the march it did all it could to prevent it taking place. Near the border Pakistani troops killed 16 people and wounded 350.

Among the Kashmiri resistants there are a number of Muslim fundamentalist groups. Afghanistan has substantial support and other fundamentalist groups have links with the Afghan Mujahideen, and are armed by Pakistan.

But the fundamentalists are usually in favour of joining Pakistan. It is the JKLF which is in favour of the project of an independent Kashmir. The Kashmiri people have shown their resolve by their determination, and their struggle deserves the active solidarity of all socialists.
Are two parties always better than one?

Charlie van Gelderen forgets that a class dictatorship existed between the February and October revolutions in Russia and did not resolve the question of government. The Bolshevik revolution did not resolve this, creating a Bolshevik Party government and a soviet.

The German, Polish and Hungarian revolutions also demonstrated that soviet (i.e. socialist) democracy without a strong revolutionary party capable of forming a government, could not succeed. It is therefore not surprising that in the Transitional Programme Trotsky calls for multi-party sovereignty but at the end of that section he says: There is but one party capable of leading the Soviet masses to insurrection - the party of the Fourth International.

Can 'multi-partyism' achieve this task? No, and our criticisms of Stalinism 'one-partyism' must not create illusions that 'multi-partyism' is really a substitute for a single revolutionary party that unites all class-conscious workers and socialists.

Both Lenin and Trotsky understood that in the concrete conditions of the early Soviet state the dictatorship of the proletariat had to take the form of a Bolshevik Party dictatorship.

But it was hardly the product of Trotsky's alleged 'concept which substituted a Party dictatorship for a class dictatorship' as Joe Slovo suggests whilst trying to forget that it was his former mentor Stalin who both practised and theorised the real subversion - a class dictatorship of a personal clique based on a bureaucracy.

Wot? No slums?

Your criticism of Outrage, namely that it constitutes a threat to the general level of political apathy behind the strategy of slums, is点半 of course quite politically correct. No doubt there is a high level of frustration at the general level of political apathy behind the strategy of slums.

You are, however, being a trifle inconsistent by half. At least Outrage want to do something about the slums. The job of socialists is to patiently explain why alongside 'actions' the laboratory of society where the labour movement is the key to longer-term change. The two do NOT need to be counterposed.

Keith Flett
London N17

Hitting the right targets?

I wish to take issue with some of the points raised (and not raised) in SO 11 in Ireland. In neither Liam Mac Uaid's article nor the forward cover article do the authors put the revolutionary manit position - unconditional (but not unrealistic) support for the armed struggle. Moreover, the author describes Stalinist 'decisions' as 'deteriorating into adventurism'.

I am sure that the points raised, if debated, would engender the same criticisms as described in the article, but the article makes the IWA's 'adventurism' sound like something else.

Liam's article, this tactic is cited with bombs on protestant estates as a description of the IWA's 'adventurism'. Surely we recognise that there is a War of National Liberation in Ireland. Within this war we support the linkage of national and democratic and working class and anti-capitalist goals.

Why then should we oppose the targeting of capitalist collaborators? Or a class basis we might question the tactic of bombs on protestant estates. Liam neglects such class criteria by putting these two things together.

On the back page, last Saturday's bombing of Bellist Millroy Hospital was a well-chosen target.

Our tasks are to build: to organise our political unconditional support for the liberation movement in Ireland; and to participate in building a mass movement in Britain for withdrawal. Without addressing ourselves to these tasks we become commentators.

Name and address supplied

Look who's being impressionistic!

Dave Shepherd writes to take issue with my article The hitting the fruits of marketisation. He calls my piece 'impressionistic and superficial'. Melthinshe protests too much.

His criticisms concentrate on two points - national autonomy and marketisation. I largely agree that a major reason to welcome national independence - as I did - is that it reduces the potential for conflict. There is no doubt that things would have been much worse without.

Dave points out that this is one reason why comparisons with Yugoslavia are inane. True, this is why I made no such comparisons. But I stand by my assertion that the potential for national conflict is considerable.

The independence gained after the August coup has not prevented conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan; it has not solved anything for people such as those in Chechen-Ingush who claim the right to national autonomy; it did not stop extreme right using nationalism from becoming very popular.

The innumerable problems caused by decades of national oppression by Great Russian Stalinism are not done away with by the independence of sets of people. Particularly where the prevalent conception is bourgeois nationalism.

Secondly, on marketisation. Dave goes on to argue that I ignore the uprisings currently taking place against price rises. Leaving aside the fact that most of these have taken place since the article was written and that I predicted such risings and stressed their importance, I would make two points.

First, it just isn't true that these have swept the whole Soviet Union and forced the new republican leadership into retreat. This has happened in some places, and that's encouraging. But that doesn't add up to the over-enthusiastic picture Dave paints.

Second, like nationalism, straightforward protests against price rises can be a double-edged sword. And this is where my point about the 'name of socialism being discredited' is important. Both of these factors can lead to a growth of the far right, not the far left, in the former Soviet countries, especially Germany. To blind ourselves to that is to shut our eyes to reality and does no-one - particularly the Soviet workers - any favours.

Finally, Dave quotes a poll to try and show that socialism, rather than the market, is the popular political force in the ex-URS. Let's not kid ourselves. In every one of the independent republics, ultra pro-market forces are in control; nowhere is there any sign of them being replaced by left forces. There is no left party in the ex-URS of any significant size - at best they number in three figures, but mostly two.

Yes, when good things happen, when workers rise, we should say so. But we shouldn't ignore the good things that we don't like them. The real, complete picture is the only basis on which we can positively intervene and contribute to the situation.

Patrick Baker
London N4

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Letterbox 109

February 29, 1992
Mouthwatering meals at the delicatessen

Delicatessen

Directed by Jean-Pierre Jeunet and Marc Caro, showing in Cannon cinemas
Reviewed by Geoff Ryan
Delicatessen is set in a bleak, post-apocalyptic landscape of rubble and bombed-out houses. Food—especially meat—is in short supply; money no longer exists and trade is carried out by barter. Lentils are a major form of currency. A perpetual mist adds to the gloomy and menacing atmosphere. The delicatessen is the ground floor of an apartment block, inhabited by half-crazed boarders. Into this deli-wanders the rather naïve Louis (played by Dominique Pinon). Very soon, the way in which the butcher—the owner of the apartment block—and the other tenants look at him becomes clear: a series of antics. This does not provide any solutions other than love and friendship. What you do get is extremely funny and imaginative farce played at a frantic pace with many memorable scenes—most of which are impossibly descriptive as they rely so much on the combination of visual and auditory images.

Benn hits back

A Future for Socialism

Written by Tony Benn
Published by Fount Paperbacks, £2.99
Reviewed by Patrick Baker
Tony Benn's 'A Future for Socialism' is a powerful assertion of democratic socialism. There are no concessions to post-modernist theories of class politics, and none to the 'post-communist' association of socialism with dictatorship. It is a welcome counterblast.

Supergroup of the Nineties?

Little Village

Little Village, WEA WX462, all formats
Reviewed by Dave Osler
The name Little Village may be unfamiliar, but the musicians that make up the band—Ry Cooder, Nick Lowe, John Hiatt and Jim Keltner—are anything but. The first supergroup of the nineties, the band is made up of musicians from the sixties and seventies, and the results are beautiful. The band's music is a mix of folk, rock, and country, and it's all delivered with passion and emotion. Ry Cooder's guitar playing is always exceptional, and his voice is warm and inviting. The band's sound is a perfect blend of all these elements, and it's a treat to listen to. The album is a must-have for any music lover, and it's a testament to the power of music to bring people together.
Asylum Bill scrapped — for now

ANTI-DEPORTATION campaigners celebrated as Kenneth Baker’s racist Asylum Bill receives its last hurrah. Baker explained that the Bill had not been withdrawn, but was merely a victim of a lack of time at Westminster. But there is no doubt that the massive campaign against the Bill has provoked united opposition from the black community, trade unionists and Labour supporters — with the result that enough Labour MPs to overturn the Government’s majority. The Tories had already retreated on a number of its key provisions, extending the time allowed for appeal against deportation and extending the legal aid not.

But the pressure must be maintained. Baker has made it clear that he will remove the provisions that have been bracketed.

The campaign against the Asylum Bill shows that the only way that the racists can be beaten back is a united fightback, mass mobilisation of the whole community and the labour movement on the streets.

Fascists scuppered in Rochdale

By Janet Watson

ACCORDING TO the British National Party, up to 100 of their supporters were expected at a Rochdale city centre rally on February 16th. The rally was to be led by one of the BNP’s candidates, Robert McDonald. The event was intended to be the launch of their campaign leading up to their leading candidate contesting the Rochdale seat in the election.

The location of the pub where the rally was to be held was forced to be changed owing to the meeting place being occupied by hundreds of anti-fascists. Some supporters of the SNP attempted to meet in another pub nearby, but were likewise prevented from doing so.

Around 300 anti-fascists took part in the occupation of the centre of Rochdale as well as distributing thousands of leaflets on the streets.

The mobilisation was a success in the limited time available for mobilisation — 3 days. However, what was evident was the problems caused by duality within the anti-racist/anti-fascist movement.

The mobilisation was the result of the activity of individuals involved in various different groups, including, Anti- Fascist Action, the Anti-Nazi League, the BNP and the Right. Organisers feared that the BNP would turn out at the event, and a number of anti-fascist groups decided to take precedence over the building of the strongest possible opposition to the rising threat of fascism.

Saitharan murdered by racists

Deane family to be protected by police

MARCH FOR JUSTICE

Demonstrate against racist attacks and police harassment

Assemble 12.30pm

Saturday 28 March

Plashele Park, East Ham, London E6

Organised by Deane Family and Saitharan Memorial Committee, in conjunction with Newham Monitoring Project
Students fight poverty

OVER 20,000 students demonstrated against cuts in their living standards and educational facilities on February 12th. The demonstration had been called from a London NUS-organised activists conference in response to the biggest wave of student action since the anti-Iraqs campaign.

Speakers at the rally included a representative from the teachers’ union AUT and Tony Benn. Stephen Twigg, the president of NUS also spoke and was critically heckled and booed by the students present, who clearly felt that the NUS leadership had failed to offer them anything.

Students were demanding a decent grant, restoration of benefit entitlements, affordable accommodation, restoration of education services that have been cut (i.e. libraries, teaching staff, support staff etc), and an extension of these services to meet the growing number of students.

On March 3rd and 4th, the NUS leadership will be holding a ‘Reform Conference’ to seek ratification for its proposals to cut one of NUS’s conferences. All students must mobilise to ensure that this attack on the democracy of the NUS is defeated.

Vauxhall workers win strike ballot

VAUXHALL car workers have overwhelmingly rejected management attempts to attach their latest 5 per cent pay offer.

Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU) members at Vauxhall’s Ellesmere Port – the largest union in the plant – voted 3-1 in favour of strike action.

Despite increased profits, Vauxhall are attempting to push ahead with local negotiations and attacks on working conditions. Team working – otherwise known as ‘peripatization’ – has already been introduced.

But the TGWU claim that it has been successful in keeping the workforce together.

“There is a long road between introduction of team working and making it stick,” the union organiser said.

Now the TGWU has a clear mandate from workers and its members in Luton look likely to endorse the move.

AUW engineers at Ellesmere Port and Luton are also expected to reject the latest offer.

The only stumbling block has been the ETUW, whose members voted to accept the deal, but there is now going to be a fight to reverse the vote.

The first move, however, has been an overtime ban. AUW and TGWU workers should argue to escalate the action.

Hello to the working class!

ISN’T IT old-fashioned to talk about class struggle and class struggle, like the ‘postmodernists’, not to mention the Kinnockites, claim?

Not according to British workers. A survey by the US Wall Street Journal found that more than 65 per cent of British people say they are working class, 28 per cent think they are middle class, and 1.4 per cent upper-middle class. Another 2.5 per cent said they were just poor.

True or false? Probably a chunk of those who said they were middle class are better-paid workers. The middle class is probably a lot smaller than 26 per cent.

Telecom slash jobs

True to form, British Telecom (BT) have just announced yet another package of job cuts. Despite escalating profits – currently around £100 per second – BT has sacked around 20 per cent of its staff in the last two years.

Now your caring, sharing Telecom has declared that the 75,000 redundancies among operators announced last year was not enough. Another 3,000 plus operators are to lose their jobs.

But identification of themselves as ‘working class’ seems almost universal among the core sections of workers. The same survey found that the richest 20 per cent own 42 per cent of the wealth, and the bottom 20 per cent own 8 per cent.

How would the averagely intelligent person interpret these figures? Do we live in a capitalist society? Do classes still exist? Or is all this a figure of the imagination of the hard left?

Answers on a postcard to N. Kinnock, House of Commons, London SW1.

GEC strikers sold out

INTIMIDATED by management and undermined by national union officials, 400 strikers at GEC Alsthom in Manchester have voted 2-1 to return to work.

Echoing the situation facing the Camden social workers’ strike, the GEC strikers were threatened with the sack if the action continued. And officials from the engineering and shipbuilding workers’ federation, the CSEU, let it be known that they thought the strike was heading for disaster.

In this situation shop stewards at Higher Openham were unable to turn the tide, despite an impressive tradition of solidarity among the workforce. It is a tragic example of a real opportunity lost.

The GEC workers had maintained pressure on the company, operating a 24-hour picket and colouring the country to win support. GEC itself was not as vulnerable the company had just won orders worth over £2.5 billion and would have faced problems if the action had spread.

Now the workers face not only the original 12 sackings that provoked the action, but also a wave of 15,500 across the whole of the GEC Alsthom group over the next year. The workers made it clear that they would try to maintain the solidarity that had been built on the picket line inside the factory. But this is easier said than done in a situation of retreat.

‘New realism’ union officials have shown once again that for the Kinnock agenda, beating back the jobs massacre is less important than ‘beating down the general election’.

300 Club

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Beat back the bigots!

ALL OVER the world abortion rights are under attack. The injunction against a 14-year old rape victim in Ireland, preventing her from getting an abortion in Britain, is just the tip of the iceberg of anti-abortion attacks internationally.

The Polish Sejm (parliament) is about to pass the Unborn Child Protection Bill, banning all abortion unless the mother’s life in danger.

In the US abortion rights are under legal threat in several states, and anti-abortionists have started using guns in their attacks on abortion clinics. George Bush’s main Republican contender, Pat Buchanan, would severely restrict abortion.

In Germany the moratorium on changing East Germany’s liberal abortion laws will expire within two years.

In a period of capitalist crisis attacks on women’s rights are multiplying, especially in eastern Europe. The right to abortion is central women’s ability to control their lives. An international campaign is needed in solidarity with women under attack. Defend abortion rights!

Defend abortion rights

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