End 13 years of misery

VOTE LABOUR and fight for socialist policies!
Economic disaster blights Major’s election hopes

By Paul Clarke
THE CITY went into deep gloom after Norman Lamont’s budget, both because it was not an election winner and because it does nothing to get British capitalism out of its slump.

The economic figures are catastrophic. There are now officially 2.6 million people out of work, and in reality many more. Two thousand people lose their jobs every day. Investment is at an all-time low, making eventual recovery much more difficult.

The recession is estimated to have cost £100 billion in lost production. And in a few years the public borrowing account has gone from a surplus, to a deficit of an astounding £28 billion. Men and women are facing a third year of Tory government.

The Tories claim to have achieved two things. First, productivity per worker has increased dramatically. But this has been achieved mainly by cutting the number of workers, not by expanding production.

Between 1979 and today the number of people in manufacturing industry has declined from 4.7m to 2.4m. But the Tories have achieved one thing – a drastic cut in the number of days lost through strikes. Last year it was 800,000 days, as opposed to nearly 30 million in 1979.

What all this adds up to is that the successive Tory strategies – privatisation, anti-union laws, monetarism, tax cuts – none of them has stemmed the decline and crisis of British capitalism.

Overall Tory economic policy has been deeply recessionary. This was disguised in the mid-80s by the financial and housing boom, itself dependent on the US debt-led economic expansion. But once that receded, after the November 1987 stock market crash, the recessionary character of government policy re-emerged.

Britain is unlikely to re-emerge from slump in the foreseeable future.

Tory attacks on unemployment and social security benefits have made each downward shift worse. When people become unemployed they have been thrown into ever-deeper destitution, with much less unemployment benefit to spend than they did in 1979.

Thus consumer spending and industrial production have been forced down. British membership of the Exchange Rate Mechanism reinforces pressure towards slump. By being in the ERM Britain is forced to maintain the value of the pound by attracting overseas financial deposits.

To do that it has to keep interest rates high, which makes borrowing for investment and spending very expensive, thus holding back economic recovery.

The mid-80s boom made sure that the downturn which followed would be very severe. Because it was based on low interest rates, huge borrowing and the house price boom, public and private debt rose to enormous proportions.

Debt repayments are now an enormous burden for national and local government, firms and countless individual households. Once again, the burden of debt inhibits economic expansion.

If the Tory economic experiment has led to greater slump and decline, what is the underlying reason?

Of course, Britain has suffered from economic crisis worldwide, in 1975-7, 1979-81 and again since 1989. But that is not the essence of the matter. British capitalism has been in decline vis-a-vis its main capitalist rivals for a century.

Indeed, Thatcherism emerged because it proposed a radical new way for the capitalist class to break out of that decline, but a combination of social engineering and economic restructuring, all based on inflicting big defeats on the labour movement.

John Major is in trouble because the balance sheet of Thatcherism is economic failure.

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Sheridan jailed in poll tax show trials

Leading anti-poll tax activist Tommy Sheridan was jailed last week for six months, when three judges upheld a sentence meted out in January. Sheridan’s sentence does not arise from non-payment of the poll tax, but from his attendance at a warrant sale organised by Strathclyde’s Labour council.

The council ordered sheriff’s officers to carry out the sale of a non-payer’s property, but hearing mass protests got a court order banning Tommy Sheridan from attending.

Undeterred, Tommy Sheridan attended the warrant sale and tore up the court order in front of the crowd. The judges said that he had carried out a "flagrant and calculated breach of the court order" banning him from the sale.

Campaigners have already collected thousands of signatures calling for his release, and plan a big demonstration in Glasgow on 28 March. Sheridan is continuing with his plans to be the Scottish Militant Labour candidate in Glasgow Pollook constituency.

Meanwhile four people have been convicted of riot or violent disorder as a result of an anti-poll tax demonstration in Cumbernauld two years ago. The four will be sentenced on Monday 6 April at Forth Royal Crown Court, and 13 others have yet to be tried on riot charges.

The case arises from a demonstration of over 2,000 in March 1988 which was attacked by police using horses and dogs. Activists claim it was a premeditated and deliberate assault.

Activities of support to Tommy Sheridan should be sent to Civil 3392, Saughton Prison, Edinburgh: fax 031 455 7247.

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Labour victory can turn the tide

THE OUTCOME of the general election will not just have decisive significance in Britain, it will have great importance internationally. Thatcherism has been a cornerstone of the international right-wing offensive for a decade. Its defeat would be a victory of workers everywhere.

But as we go into the election campaign a Labour victory is by no means certain. Over a decade Labour has ditched every vestige of radicalism, and the new style of the Tony Blair government has 'softened' its image. Real differences between the three main parties are hard to detect.

Indeed the benefits of a Labour government for working people, at least at the level of government policy, would be minimal. Labour is pledged to scrap the Tory health reforms, introduce a minimum wage, and may not build a fourth Trident submarine. And that's about it as far as progressive policies go.

But a Labour victory, or even a hung parliament, is a much wider issue than is involved with government policy. A Tory defeat will create an entirely new mood, and at least the potential of a new phase in the class struggle. But Major back in Downing Street will deepen demoralisation in the labour movement, and further strengthen the grip of the new realist right.

Expectations in what a Labour government will actually do are far removed from those which existed in 1945, or even 1964. No thinking worker expects a 'new dawn', or major steps towards a more egalitarian and just society.

But Labour will be expected to defend the welfare state, do something for the NEU, education, the elderly and the poor. It will be expected to stem unemployment, to defend the coal industry and not to ruthlessly use the courts against the trade unions.

Above all the very defeat of the Tories would lift the feeling that defeats were inevitable, and that resistance to the capitalist offensive is hopeless.

That the Tories are in real danger of defeat shows the ultimate failure of Thatcherism. It is a failure at two levels. Obviously monetarism, privatisation and the attack on the unions has failed to solve the prolonged economic crisis of British capitalism. By turning Britain into a rentier capitalism and smashing up its industrial base, Thatcherism has made ultimate capitalist recovery more difficult.

But contrary to the ideologues of 'authoritarian populism', Thatcherism never won the hearts and minds of the British people. Ideological commitment to the welfare state and ideals of social justice is as strong as ever. Popular support for liberal social policies is stronger than ever - witness the huge majorities in favour of abortion rights, women's equality and basic freedoms for lesbians and gay men. Both Thatcher's Victorian values and the Neanderthal venom of the popular press had little long-term impact.

The most significant victories of Thatcherism were however the defeats inflicted on the organised working class movement. The defeat of the wave of struggles including the miners strike, over rate capping and other local government struggles, and the wapping printers fight, clinched the collapse of the Labour left, and generated a steamroller crushing working class jobs, rights pushing back working class living standards.

This is the enduring legacy of the Thatcherite years, the one that is most vital to turn around. If Major wins on 9 April that task will be much, much harder. If he loses, then we will barely face an immediate revolution. But the preconditions for a much quicker and stronger fightback will be there.

The Tory crisis exists today for two main reasons. First, because Thatcherite arrogance lumbered them with the disastrous poll-tax, which directly led to Thatcher's personal demise and unleashed a campaign which inflicted the first main defeat against them. Second, because economic crisis cut deeply into the living standards of Tory voters in the south of England.

The final denouement of this whole development now hinges on the outcome of 9 April. Socialists must do everything possible to ensure a Tory defeat, and if at all possible a Labour victory. On 9 April it will be literally true that the whole world will be watching.

Hands on Brighto

Why socialists should back Nellist and Fields

In this election, the priority of all socialists is the return of a Labour government. However, nobody can have any illusion that a Labour government will provide anything other than ruthless pro-capitalist policies.

But a Labour government will create a new political situation, opening up the possibility of a new class struggle. By contrast, another four or five years of the Tories will be deeply demoralising for the left and the labour movement.

Returning a Labour government means voting for Labour candidates. No matter how thoroughly right-wing. Millions of workers will vote Labour with few illusions in Kingston - to try to keep out the hated Tory regime.

Socialist Campaign is fighting for a Labour victory against the official Labour candidates in poverty-stricken South East London and Liverpool. Although the sitting Labour MPs, Dave Nellist and Terry Fields have been expelled from the Labour Party.

The expulsion of Nellist and Fields in the first time for decades that sitting MPs have been expelled by Labour, has provoked widespread opposition and rebellions throughout the movement. It is another guarantee to the ruling class that a Labour government will have no truck with socialism, or indeed anything vaguely left wing.

We are backing Fields and Nellist because their candidates provide a focus for the campaign against the Labour with the fight, and for class struggle, as opposed to class collaboration. Democracy and the wishes of the local labour movement have been crushed underfoot in their expulsion.

When socialists call for a Labour vote they are not expressing loyalty to the structures and policies of Kinlock's Labour Party, but loyalty to the working class in its anti-Tory struggle. Supporting Labour candidates is not a fetish or a timewise imperative, it is merely a question of tactics. So long as there is no mass socialist alternative, we call for the election of a Labour government.

But while democracy has been trampled, and where the possibility of a fightback with a real echo in the local elections, backing socialist candidates is a legitimate tactic.

To maximise the effect of our candidates Fields and Nellist should use their campaigns as a platform for all those standing for class struggle, all those who support Kingston's new realism. All socialists prepared to lend support must be able to participate in the campaign.

In backing Fields and Nellist we are not sanctioning a generalised policy of standing against Labour. In every other constituency we call for a Labour vote. But a campaign for alternative socialist candidates in two constituencies is hardly going to split the Labour vote nationwide. And if, by a fluke of electoral arithmetic, voices for Nellist and Fields do allow in the Tory or Liberal Democrat candidates, the responsibility lies entirely with Kinlock and the right wing, and not with the expelled Labour MPs.

The next issue of Socialist Outlook will carry news of the Fields and Nellist campaigns.

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Mergers point to new 'superunions'
Bye bye to the TUC?

Most trade unions are likely to end up inside one of just half a dozen emerging 'superunions' inside the next five years.

While the left has been slow to respond, the pace of change is already dizzying.

The last weeks have seen the AEU engineers and the EETPU electricians confirm fusion into what will be the AEEU from May 1, while a special conference of local government white collar union NLGCO debated terms for joining manual counterparts NUPE and health workers in COHSE.

Socialist Outlook: the GMB and TGWU general unions - rivals in many sectors - are openly dropping get-together lines, while the TGWU is in ongoing talks with the National Union of Mineworkers.

A civil service amalgamation between the CPSA and the NUCPS is currently on ice after CPSA members rejected the proposition last October, but the logic will ultimately prove compelling.

Media merger?
The same is true of a media union, to take in GPMU printers, entertainment workers in BECTU (both born of mergers of problems that are too close to one another). The name of 'William' is the AEEU.

While the AEEU would prefer to act as a politically dominant influence inside Congress House itself, it is undoubtedly ready to create an alternative New Realist federation around itself if it is not allowed to dictate the terms of affiliation to the TUC.

Willis's statement shows he is aware of the gun being held to his head. 'Where there is more than one centre or unbridled competition between large unions, the trade union movement is split and weakened against all unions' disadvantage.'

Absolutely right. But what conditions Willis and co. will draw is another matter. Given the EETPU's lamentable track record of organised scabbing and open attempts to bust up smaller unions, the admission of the AEEU to the TUC is a matter for the whole movement. If the 'delegate E' is to be allowed in, it can only be on the basis of adherence to the TUC rules and order and making suitable amendments to the many unions seriously burgled throughout the 1980s. An ideological blacklist must be rejected out of hand.

Defend NUS democracy

By Andrew Berry, City of London Poly delegation leader

THis MONTH'S Extraordinary NUS Conference, attended in chaos as the Kinnsbridge leadership of the union blatantly fudged every constituent resolution in the battle through its proposals for reform.

Democracy was doomed right from the very start though. Only three months ago, at what may have been the last Winter Conference of the union, the National Organisation of Labour Students (NOLS) proposal to abolish Winter Conference fell on a card vote, when it did not receive a two-thirds majority.

Mysterious

 Undecided by constitutional rules, the following morning saw the bureaucrats put the resolution for a revote. This week, on a 18,000 vote from Strathclyde had mysteriously disappeared overnight.

A liberal majority of NUS can only be called at the request of 25 colleges or more. Only 13 out of 35 such requests were validly sent to the NUS Steering Committee (the body charged with managing the NUS).

When a proposal was made at a February NEC meeting to suspend conference arrangements, pending the outcome of an investigation, three NEC members - including NUS President Steven Twigg - walked out in protest. When it was raised at the conference itself, Steven Twigg was so angry that he thought the conference needed to be re-opened.

Further floating of NUS democracy included:

- three un-elected, and therefore unaccountable, delegates to the conference.
- only 450 delegates present when normally there should be 500.
- only eight delegates were from the already under-represented FE sector - the majority of NUS's membership.
- the time of the resolution on abortion failed to get a two-thirds majority on a card vote. It was discovered that two colleges had not voted. After the Rules Revision Committee ruled that their votes should be cast respectively - yet another breach of the constitution - the vote was voided.

Understandably, many student activists are furious with tricks from the left-wing NUS leadership, one that made students to defend education and fight student poverty, one that can defend union democracy - the only way to defend the national union.

New Telecom jobs massacre

By Josie Mitchell

AFTER the bad news, come the very bad news. To add to the more than 30,000 redundancies in British Telecom in the past two years, the employers are looking for another 20,000 over the next twelve months.

BT's announcement last week was justified by reference to increased competition, increased price regulation. While it is true that BT profits have fallen slightly, due to the recession, the company still has about 95 per cent of the British market. BT is normally only on about 5 per cent. Even if no jobs were cut, BT would continue to make hundreds of millions of pounds profit.

It is not the threat of bankruptcy which motivates BT, but a fear of any slight reduction in profits for its private shareholders, mainly big financial institutions.

Between 1990 and 1993 BT will shed about 57,000 jobs, or 400 a week. The response of the BT union, the NCU, has been half-hearted. General secretary Tony Young says the NCU will insist on no compulsory redundancies. Such the promise of rising unemployment that it is very doubtful that this year's batch can be achieved, with voluntary redundancies.

In any case, voluntary redundancies still amount to jobs lost. Intensive negotiations with BT, all the NCU leadership has on offer, are not going to save them. The leadership has forgotten the need for a successful conference decision by all that, working hours to combat redundancies.

Tony Young and his friends may be banking on a better deal from Labour. But industry spokesman Gordon Brown says the recession will 'inevitably take its toll' on BT, and that all the NCU can accept BT's logic. Without a deputy general secretary Bob McCloy says the recession and an 'inflationary regulated regime' (ie lower prices) are to blame for job cuts. In other words, jobs are being taken away to defend BT's mammoth profits. With logic like that, who can blame the latest lockout from the NCU leadership?
MORALISING AND lecturing is not NMP’s style. Their anti-racism forms the nuts and bolts of their campaign. They work directly with the victims of racism. They work directly with a community constantly facing police harassment and harassment.

As Unmesh explained, their whole experience has shown that one of the biggest issues the anti-racist movement has to tackle is that black people are criminalised for fighting back against racism.

Since its inception in 1980, NMP has used the issues raised by its casework to actively campaign among both the black community and white working class youth in schools and youth centre.

Asad used the example of the forthcoming March for Justice to show their approach to campaigning. The demonstration involved a march from mass local meetings following police violence and harassment against two local shopkeepers, Mr. Deane and his son.

Following the racist murder of Tamil refugees Panchadcharam Shittharan at the new year, NMP linked up the families and their campaigns. The Deanee attended the Sahiharan Memorial Committee, proposing they become involved in the March for Justice.

Labour, unemployment and Asad argued, still play the numbers game. ‘Once you accept the logic behind the Asylum Bill then you accept the laws. It’s the same in France with the Socialist Party, and it’s the same with the Social Democrats in Germany.’

There is a problem with refugees, but there is an enormous problem with imperialist foreign policy that forces people to flee their homes and countries, from war, famine, poverty and repression.

Both the anti-racist movement and the left need to turn this argument around, turn it from a racist argument on numbers, to an assault on imperialist foreign policy.

Central to this is the whole question of putting the black experience at the heart of the anti-racist/anti-fascist struggle. This is about white activists learning from the history of black struggle, working alongside black activists to do so. If you cannot have a strike without strikers, how can you have anti-racism without black people.

Our job is to support people fighting back – not to substitute for them.

In the fight against the National Front through the 1970s self-organised black groups were not around in the way that they are today. The white left need to accept this self-organisation in practice – and not fall in the trap of abstract propaganda.

To push this point Unmesh recounted a recent example seen in Tower Hamlets. Some sixty Bengali youth were standing outside a hall, waiting for a meeting to work out how to fight the growing cases of racist police harassment in the borough. Only twenty yards away stood a group of white anti-fascists. These sorts of barriers need to be broken down.

In contrast to this, Unmesh gave an account of forging black and white unity in action in one of the most racist areas in the country. The Docklands development has produced one of the biggest claims for damages in history.

From within the community an action committee was set up to fight the developers. Unmesh is convinced that the left needs to catch up with the importance of community politics – especially in areas where you do not just see the unemployed, but also the never-employed.

Fighting fascists in the 1990s will mean trade unions and socialists implanting themselves while maintaining their organisational independence in community defence. That means building a mass anti-racist/anti-fascist movement from bottom to top, giving national expression to local campaigns, but with the ‘sharp political’ edge necessary to combat the political and ideological offensive from the right.

Stop Tyndall – Stop the fascists

NOW THE election has been called all speculation regarding the numbers of fascists in the BNF and the NF are standing is over.

Rumours abound over an NF financial crisis which is limiting their activities to 15 seats. The BNP have restricted themselves to 14 seats, concentrating on areas where they can field candidates as ‘Rights for white’ candidates.

Both groups will attempt to bridge the gap between their ‘antiracist’ują race hardcore, its few isolated and decimated ‘whitefronts‘ and the respectable image that those such as Le Pen have cultivated.

The badge of disaffection Tyot right who want to increase re-elections on immigration, increase police powers and ignore police racism.

It is to combat this threat that an ad hoc committee has been set up in East London where both Tyndall, leader of the BNF, and Edmonds his stonge are standing.

Tyndall is standing against Michael Gordon, one of the few Labour MPs with a consistent record of fighting fascism and racism. It is also in an area where the Liberal Democrats have seen ‘Island homes for Island people’ (referring to the Isle of Dogs) in a populist attempt to appeal to all nationalists.

The campaign was only formed on the 8th March but has already produced a letter opposing the town of Tyndall and his cronies. Other activities are going to include counter mobilisations and a large public meeting immediately prior to the election.

Organising bodies such as the ‘Stop Tyndall – Stop the Fascists’ campaign are a way to build a united front against all fascists and show that unity in action can be built.

Contact STIF on City Poly St 102, Whitechapel High St E1 7RA or ring 071 637 1181 (MUS London)

Stop Tyndall – Stop the fascists

Proud to be European?

By Rebecca Flemming

ORGANISERS OF Euro-Pride 1992 proclaim that the event will be a celebration of European lesbian and gay identity, within the context of moves towards unification.

It is based on the mistaken belief that the measures coming into force in 1992 will result in a real improvement in the legal position of homosexuals and gay men in Britain. The racism implied in most concepts of ‘European identity’ was demonstrated by the logo initially adopted – two joined, white hands.

It marks the demoralisation and depoliticisation of much of the British lesbian and gay community today. It also marks the fact that the last vestiges of Pride’s accountability were swept away earlier this year, with the announcement that it was to become a limited company.

This completed the gradual transformation from an activist-led event to one dominated by gay business.

Illusion

The Bosnian that a project aimed to unite markets and increase profits will lead to Dutch or Danish style moves towards lesbian and gay equality, is born out of the defeats of the Thatcher years.

But history shows that real changes have come from the activism and self-organisation of the lesbian and gay movement – not the goodwill of anonymous bureaucrats. Lesbians and gay men need to fight racism in their communities, and build alliances with black people fighting back. This means no bolstering of an exclusive, white ‘European identity’ and the reality of ‘false Europeans’, closed to migrants and asylum seekers, that lies behind it. A range of lesbian and gay organisations have protested against Euro-Pride, with some success.

The logo has been changed, and there is agreement for a black space at the event. But the underlying issues of the political and organisational direction of Pride remain.

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**SNP – making up policies on the hoof**

By George Eastwood

When Alex Salmond, leader of the Scottish National Party (SNP), appears in debate there is palpable tension as people wait to see what new policy wheeze he is going to deliver, seemingly on the hoof.

In recent weeks we have had promises that the SNP will cancel the housing debt; lower interest rates; abolish unemployment in one term; nationalise Ravenscraig; and properly fund training, education and health.

These policies could be adopted by other parties, but it might be expected that those would be subject to financial constraints (if a £28 billion borrowing requirement can be called restraint).

But the SNP just claims that an independent Scotland will have the skills, resources and people to attract industry and generate wealth.

Whenever opponents politicians try to ridicule the SNP’s promises, as Labour Shadow Chancellor John Smith did over the ‘Cancel the housing debt’ pledge, they are quickly wrong-footed.

Smith claimed the effect of the promise would be to give the Scottish budget a £7.1 billion deficit.

Salmond, a trained economist, quickly pointed out that the debt transfer from local to central government was financially neutral and would have no effect on public borrowing. Smith was widely seen to be making a glaring and elementary error in his sums.

The point was rammed home when studies by independent (sic) economists pointed out that Scotland contributed as much to the British exchequer as it gets out. So no tax change would be necessary to finance a Scottish budget.

The overall effect was to give the impression that the SNP had won the argument, Smith was less competent than Salmond, and a Scottish parliament made economic sense.

How then did the SNP get into this enviable position? Partly it is the personal qualities of their leaders — Salmond in debate is bright, quick and incisive, and Jim Sillars’ brand of fiery thuggery can browbeat opponents and to hell with logic. It is also partly a result of the quality of the opposition.

**Alienating**

Most of Labour’s senior politicians are focusing on the south of England. Those that are left in Scotland are not allowed or able to make policy initiatives for fear of alienating Scottish voters.

The Tories have also boosted the SNP. By stating that independence is a principled option, Major was aiming to squeeze Labour in Scotland.

He did that, but only by boosting the attractiveness of independence.

Suddenly the Tories have launched a campaign against the SNP; but too late — the SNP has won popular opinion on both the principle and the economics of independence.

What then are the real politics of the SNP? How do they reconcile calls for scrapping Trident, for a nuclear-free Scotland, and withdrawal from NATO with support for retaining Highlands?

The SNP are a nationalist party and will do or say anything to defend their varied constituency of support. But they are aware that those drawn to left nationalism are not easily squared with the fictitious glorious history of the Highland regiments in defending the Empire.

The SNP has been described as a petit-bourgeois nationalist party, acting in the interests of neither the bourgeoisie nor the working class. They sway in the wind.

While sections of the bourgeoisie might support an independent Scotland (the Economist), the case for or against national self-determination doesn’t rest on this.

For electoral reasons, the SNP is orienting to the working class. But don’t expect a consistent socialist policy from them.

**Bitter rows as ‘Stickies’ come unstuck**

By David Coen

The tensions from the collapse of Stalinism in eastern Europe have rippled out even to the far west. The Workers Party, a product of the split in the republican movement in 1969, has itself split.

Six of the party’s seven TDs (MPs) walked out after a special conference narrowly failed to give them the two thirds majority they needed to restructure the party.

The two main points of issue were ‘democratic centralism’ — whether the apparatus should have control over the parliamentary representatives — and the existence (much denied) of the official IRA.

The six who left set up the New Agenda Party believe that there is a new constituency to the left of the Labour Party around issues such as ecology and workers’ rights.

They have abandoned a project which began with an isolated and decentralised republican movement following the defeat of the IRA in the border campaign of the 1950s. In the 1960s Sinn Fein turned its attention away from partition and concentrated on economic and social questions. The IRA dumped its weapons.

When the Civil Rights movement emerged in the North in the late 60s, Sinn Fein seemed particularly well placed. They had been involved in housing and resources protection campaigns, particularly in the South, and undoubtedly played a significant role in the growth of the civil rights campaign.

Partition soon reassured itself. The response of the Unionists to the demand for basic rights was to launch pogroms against nationalist areas and the IRA was incapable of protecting them. Partly for this reason, the IRA split into the Official and the Provisionals in 1969.

Three years later the Officials declared an indefinite ceasefire. Any shots fired in anger since then have been directed at the Provisionals, at breakaway organisations such as the Irish Republican Socialists (RSF) for fundraising purposes.

After the split, the Workers Party became distinctively more Stalinist in outlook. It welcomed foreign capital because it increased the size and significance of the workers. The war with the British saw it as a deliberate deterioration of the path to socialism.

In some ways its programme for government was a left version of Fine Gael’s (FF). Because of the machiavellian nature of FF, the Workers Party would have to step in and accelerate modernisation. Taking power would not however mean a complete change to the Free State.

At least part of the reason for the demise of the Workers Party is that neither version of capitalist development could be shown to work after the mid-1970s — a lesson learned also in other parts of the world.

Socialism in Ireland cannot avoid the national question. No amount of concentration on bread and butter issues or preaching workers’ unity gets round the fact that the history of modern Ireland has been shaped by imperialism.

Partition is the foothold of the British state in Ireland. This led, as Connolly predicted, to a caravel of reaction in both sides. The tragedy is that neither side of the split in the Workers Party sees remotely to recognise why they split.

**Fact:** The Officials, now the Workers Party, gained the nickname ‘stickies’ from the Provisional wing after they produced Easter lilies one year as sticky-backed labels rather than the traditional lapel pin.
US women defend abortion rights — ‘We won’t go back!’

By Sam Inman

ONE MILLION people are being called to march on Washington D.C. for the 5 April ‘March for Women’s Lives’ expected to be the largest demonstration ever in defense of women’s reproductive freedom.

The initiators of the march, the National Organisation for Woman (NOW), say their massive numbers and mobilised majority are 'our best hope to protect and restore the right of women to control birth and legal abortion’.

Few socialists and feminists can be unaware of the raging battles around abortion rights that have taken place recently into the 80’s. Never before have there been stronger attacks on a woman’s right to choose in the years since the Roe v. Wade Supreme Court decision, legalising abortion in 1973.

This is the country that spawned the most militant of anti-abortion initiatives – Operation Rescue – which, quite literally, terrifies abortion clinics and women’s health centres. But now, the Supreme Court itself has joined in the fray. Earlier this year it announced that it will consider the case of Planned Parenthood v. Casey, the restrictive Pennsylvania law requiring parental consent, a 24-hour waiting period, spousal notification and counselling on the abortion procedure and alternatives.

This opens the prospect for a complete reversal of Roe v. Wade, which is why on the anniversary of the 1973 decision pro-choice rallies and picket lines are organised throughout the country, and the call for the 5 April march launched from these.

Meetings, rallies and speaking tours are now being organised to try and reach the one million goal. Socialist feminists in the US are worried though, that the NOW leadership is reverting to the same tactics as it did at the beginning of the US women’s movement, that is concentrating on electoral strategies.

Mobilisations that are used as campaign rallies for pro-choice Democrats or Republicans would blight the campaign, and make it less likely that working class women, the black and latino communities are brought into the movement.

A small step forward for Irish women

The Dublin Supreme Court has now overturned the High Court injunction preventing a 14-year-old rape victim from travelling in Britain for an abortion.

Thankfully she has been able to terminate her pregnancy, but the abortion debate rumbles on.

PENNY DUGGAN looks at the issues.

OUR SIGHT to choose how to express our sexuality, to decide when and whether we want to be mothers, is a basic democratic right for women, because it is fundamental to our control over our own lives and bodies.

Denial of this elementary right, as is so graphically illustrated in this case, leads inevitably to the denial of other basic rights.

Since 1983, the amendment has already given rise to a series of attacks on women’s simple right to information on what possibilities exist in the case of an unwanted pregnancy. The thousands of people on the streets of Dublin who chased the telephone number of a pregnancy clinic, and the Catholic Church still threatens Irish women’s abortion advisory service during recent demonstrations were committing an illegal act.

The recent injunction was a denial of another basic right – the right to travel. The young woman had committed no crime against Irish law. She was the victim of the crimes of sexual abuse and rape. She would commit no crime in Britain, where abortion is legal.

The only reason for preventing her – or any other woman wanting to terminate an unwanted pregnancy – from travelling to a place where it could be performed in safe and legal conditions, is to impose a barrier that takes no account of the individual woman’s circumstances.

Actual life

This is the view that says that the potential life of a foetus, is always an absolute priority over the actual life and well-being of a woman. The High Court judge summed it up when he said that the risk of this young woman committing suicide was ‘much less and of a different order of magnitude than the certainty that the life of the unborn will be terminated’.

But no legal or constitutional bar will offer any other certainty. Because bans only ensure that abortions are not legal – they still occur, in the worst and most dangerous conditions. Or women give birth, frightened and in hiding, like the 15 year old girl who died after giving birth alone in an Irish churchyard five years ago, too frightened to tell her family.

The Supreme Court ruled that the risk to the life – the health or well-being – of women should be taken into account. This is progress, but limited. Women will have to threaten that they would commit suicide if not allowed an abortion.

Independence

Only women’s possibility to decide for themselves on when and whether to have a child can ensure that such barbarities do not recur. That possibility necessitates information, education, and social and economic independence.

Any attempt to impose that choice – whether it be by a so-called ‘Communist’ state in Ceausescu’s Romania, an Islamic fundamentalist movement, or the combined weight of the Catholic church and state as in Ireland and Poland – has consequences that are disastrous for individuals and restrict the rights of society as a whole.

By Lois Lane

ONE OF the best things to emerge from the recent Women for Socialism (WFS) Congress, was the organisation’s commitment to ensuring that women’s demands are raised in the election campaign.

An Election Manifesto for Women in Ireland was produced that will enable activists to raise their demands wherever they are campaigning.

Broad demands

Within the manifesto broad demands are made, for example, around everything from Equal Pay to domestic and racist violence, reproductive rights to public transport.

The initiative will give WFS a much-needed boost to its national profile, and could well draw new activist blood into both the autonomous women’s organisation and the wider Socialist Movement.

By linking up the disparate struggles that feminist activists have been involved in for many years, the manifesto could provide an opportunity for socialist feminists to take the lead in the post-election period. This could in turn create new conditions for a reformed women’s movement for women’s liberation.

Of course, to a large extent, what is possible will depend on the outcome of the election.

But whatever happens, the necessity of having a strong and radical socialist feminist network remains. The importance of using the manifesto to reach new layers of women and bring them into the network is self-evident.

Campaigning

But the manifesto can also serve another useful purpose. It is an opportunity to put the demands of women onto the agenda of the left.

By pulling in new activists through the election campaign, October’s planned Conference of the Left – to be called by the Socialist Movement – will be well attended, representative, and most importantly a place where a campaigning strategy can be mapped out with the strongest possible input from socialist feminists.

Centres of the Election Manifesto for Women can be organised in Women for Socialism, c/o 57 Binn Road, London, N4 3JL. Tel: 071 272 7030.
Paul Clarke looks at what Labour ought to be saying, but won't

The socialist alternative

Things fall apart

A VISITOR from Mars would be gobsmacked. The election is being held in a society falling apart. Thirteen years of Thatcherism have greatly deepened the chronic crisis of British capitalism. Britain today is in deep decay – decaying industry, decaying living standards, decaying health and social services.

The country's whole infrastructure – its industry, communications, schools, hospitals, transport – need totally renewing. Yet none of the major political parties challenges the absurd idea that the capitalist market can solve these problems.

Labour is standing on its least radical programme since the second world war. In 1974 it promised 'a fundamental shift in wealth and power to working people'. In 1983 its manifesto contained dozens of radical reforming proposals. But today's Labour leadership is a model of neo-market, tight money, rectitude.

That is the measure of Thatcherism's impact on British politics. Successive defeats inflicted on theLabour movement have left all its leaders striking out for the crushing and marginalisation of the Labour left.

Nowhere is this more vividly shown than in local government. Yesterday's radical municipal socialists are today's local Kinnockite apparatchiks, cutting jobs and services with cynical glee. Even while Bennite crusades like Margaret Beckett sit on the Labour front bench preaching orthodox monetarism.

Thus the door to radical politics stays firmly shut in Labour's new orthodoxy. But there is a socialist answer. The crisis can only be solved by making a radical break with pro-market politics.

Socialist Movement

If there is a hung parliament with Labour the largest party, socialists must demand that Labour fronts a minority government. But there is still the possibility of an outright Labour victory.

If Kinnock becomes prime minister, the left must regroup and build broad support from a charter of alternative, anti-capitalist policies. The Socialist Movement could play a major role in organizing such an opposition in every part of the Labour movement.

Such a programme of demands would necessarily be limited to a few key demands which break the logic of pro-capitalist politics. But today socialists must elaborate their own answers, not just bemoan the fact that Kinnock has none.

A Barlow Clowes society

Tony Britain is a rip-off society. A few spectacular rip-offs make the headlines, while the daily rip-off by big business, finance, insurance companies and stockbrokers go unreported.

Dozens of people are being imprisoned for poll-tax non-payment. At the moment people owing £300 get around five weeks. Financier John Barlow, kingpin of the Barlow Clowes empire, stole £150m from small investors and got ten years. At the same rate as poll tax defaulters he should have got 36,000 years! Robert Maxwell and his sons stole £450m from pensioners and it is still to be seen whether anyone goes to jail.

John Barlow was unlucky; he bent the rules a little and got caught. For years the Bank of England and financial institutions knew about his activities and nothing was done. But the vast majority of the rich who make a killing from the misery of ordinary people do so perfectly legally.

They are the moneylenders and the people responsible for a society in which tens of thousands lose their homes from mortgage default each year, and millions are put on the streets.

Thirty years ago people talked about Britain as a society of 'private affluence and public squalor'. Today it is a society of super-affluence for a tiny few, and chronic despair for millions.

British capitalism is a society incapable of providing the basic necessities of life: a secure job with a living wage, somewhere to live, decent education and training, a health service that works, equality for women and freedom from racial attacks.

Even services which are available in some capitalist countries – like a functioning transport system and clean streets, a utopian dream in 1992 Britain.

London, the centre of Thatcherite 'affluence', is a living testimony to the real state of British society. Hundreds of the swanky new apartments in Docklands are empty because no one can afford them.

Yet huge office blocks stand empty. At the same time, thousands of people, mainly young people, are living rough on the streets. Nothing could be a more eloquent statement about the real state of the country.

Capitalism isn't working

The long decay of capitalist Britain is now compounded by a terrible slump. Two thousand workers are losing their jobs every day. Official unemployment is at 2.6 million, but real unemployment is rocketing towards 4 million. But the real employment situation is much worse than that.

One of Thatcherism's terrible legacies is the vast increase in part-time, low-paid, insecure jobs – especially for women. This, combined with the semi- destruction of the benefits system, has created a vast army of the new poor.

Over twenty per cent of the workforce earns less than the Council of Europe decency threshold, about £9,300 a year. Single parents, pensioners, and young people unable to get a job constitute the new underclass of the impoverished.

The irony is that these are the things, at a time when the 'victory' and 'success' of capitalism is being trumpeted by ruling class ideologues, People in Eastern Europe are being told every day about the wonders of Western-style capitalism. But Western capitalism isn't working, especially in Britain. That is the truth that Labour's leaders refuse to tell.

Fight for socialist policies

In this general election campaign socialists have to tell the simple truth. We need a Labour government to break the logjam represented by Major's Tories, but a Labour government will by itself solve nothing. Workers will need to fight back under a Labour government, and the left will have to campaign for socialist policies, as well as championing every workers' struggle.
Socialists will have to fight around those policies which can lead the way to a society which can satisfy the people's needs. Socialism is not an old discredited idea, it is an idea which has never been and the only one which opens the way to a radically different future.

A Programme of Action

How could a Labour government start the process of breaking the long crisis which Britain has been living through? The first thing it would need would be a programme of economic and social reconstruction.

Such a programme would have to be based on a national economic plan of investment, industrial rebuilding and infrastructure reconstruction. This would require the mobilisation of billions of pounds. Thus any Labour government intent on a break with the priorities of capitalism would have to answer this first question: where did the money come from?

There are two answers: first, it is a prerequisite of such a plan that the banks, insurance houses, building societies and all other financial institutions be nationalised. A national plan without control could not be implemented. Second, there should be a punitive wealth tax on the rich.

Government spending on defence should be cut by at least 80 per cent, and a programme of reconversion of the arms industry undertaken. Money saved in defence should be redirected towards investment in industry and social welfare.

The export of capital would have to be subject to strict government controls. The billions which leave the country each year to boost the profits of the few must be brought under social control.

The de-nationalised industries should be re-nationalised, together with those major firms which control the economy. Nuclear power should be phased out, and the coal industry rebuilt. The energy network, controlled by a nationalised electricity and gas industry, would have to utilize the ecologically sound techniques which are already available.

Rebuilding

What are the priorities for investment? Manufacturing industry needs vast investment to introduce modern techniques. The transport system needs a radical overhaul. Vast spending on the rail network and other forms of public transport are needed to break the ecologically damaging and socially irrational use of millions of cars.

Britain's telecommunications network is antiquated by modern standards. British Telecom should be re-nationalised, and Mercury nationalised, and a fibre optic national grid constructed capable of carrying all television, broadcasting and telecommunications signals.

The country's housing stock is inadequate and crumbling. A vast programme of constructing local authority housing is needed to smash the housing crisis.

Thousands of schools and hospitals are falling to bits. Many need to be completely demolished and rebuilt. A vast programme of constructing local authority housing is needed to smash the housing crisis.

Living standards

The first requirement to solve the crisis of living standards is a national minimum wage at a level to ensure a decent standard of living and freedom from crippling debts.

All benefits and pensions should reach the level of the national minimum wage, and be indexed against inflation. All wages should be indexed on a sliding scale; there should be a sliding scale of hours. Work time could rapidly be reduced to 32 hours or less.

Welfare state

An ageing society needs billions poured into the NHS. The Tory health reforms need to be totally scrapped.

Education needs to be transformed, with the opening of higher and further education for all. Nursery education, available only to the lucky few, needs to become available to all.

Private homes for the elderly should be scrapped, with a national system of free and universal care, including residential care, for senior citizens established. At one go, the enormous burden on carers in the home, mainly women looking after elderly parents, would be broken.

A free national childcare and creche network would transform Britain at a stroke. The crippling burden on millions of women forced into part-time work, or forced to stay at home, would be destroyed. This in turn would unleash an enormous creative potential in society.

The fight for an alternative society requires free and fighting trade unions. The first act of a Labour government should be to unshackle the unions by abolishing the anti-trade union laws. This would go hand-in-hand with an extension of democratic rights, in the first place the introduction of proportional representation, the abolition of the House of Lords, and measures to bring the police and legal system under democratic control.

Rights of the oppressed

Capitalism's crisis hits hardest the oppressed - women, black people, young men and women, the handicapped and people with disabilities. A socialist government would have to immediately introduce sweeping measures to break discrimination. These include:

- equal pay for women
- positive action for women, black people and people with disabilities in education and employment
- a ban on abortion and contraception on demand
- abolition of all immigration laws
- measures to promote training and employment for people with disabilities, and to make transport and all public buildings and open spaces accessible to them.

- outlawing of discrimination of all kinds; on grounds of race, gender, sexuality, physical or mental disability or age.

International

British troops have been in Ireland since 1969, fighting a useless and destructive war against Irish unity and self-determination.

There is no British solution to this war. The troops must be withdrawn and the Prevention of Terrorism Act must be repealed.

Britain should get rid of nuclear weapons and withdraw from NATO.

Scotland

Support for self-government is overwhelming in Scotland. The basis of self-determination must be the creation of a Scottish Assembly with full powers.

If it is the will of the Scottish people, then they have the right to full independence. A Welsh Assembly with its own powers must be established.

The policies outlined here are not just building a powerful class struggle to support and impose them.

A Labour government with the most radical policies would be a broken reed without a mass mobilisation of the labour movement. Addressing basic human needs means taking anti-capitalist measures; they would be resisted every inch of the way by the capitalist class and its allies.

A socialist economic programme would above all need the fight for workers' control in the factories and workplaces; workers' control means first of all winning class supervision over the implementation of an economic plan.

But capitalist opposition would not be the only obstacle. At each stage the right wing and bureaucracy of the labour movement would try to sabotage socialist advance.

For this reason it is a major strategic task to fight for the implementation of the labour movement around class struggle and anti-capitalist policies. This is inescapable without generating a tradition of united action on a class struggle basis by the left and the most militant sectors of the working class.

Breaking with capitalist policies means not just building a powerful class struggle left wing, but forging an alliance which includes the self-organisation of the oppressed as a major strategic force to defeat the right.

Where to begin?

There is a central paradox and contradiction in outlining policies which would meet the scope of the present crisis. Labour is light years away from embracing such a programme.

While anti-capitalist policies are inevitable as a solution to the depth of the crisis, large parts of even the left of the labour movement will be sceptical about the viability of a labour programme, or the possibility of fighting for it.

After the election, if a Labour government is elected, the task is precisely to adopt a charter of basic demands which sum up and encourage a capitalist approach - demands which can gain a wide echo in the labour movement and the working class.

This would have to include demands such as nuclear disarmament and the slashing of the defence budget; taxing the rich and funding health and social services; scrapping and enforcing the laws; amnesty for all poll tax prisoners and defaulters; a Scottish assembly with full powers; abolition of racist immigration laws, and equal rights for women.

Such demands inevitably point in the direction of an economy which works according to a different logic to the capitalist one, a radical anti-capitalism. Building support for such a programme is central to renewing working class politics and the fight for socialism.
De Klerk’s desperate end-game

By Charlie van Gelderen

ON MARCH 17, South Africa’s white voters, representing 57 percent of the population, will be asked to approve the reform programme initiated by President De Klerk on February 7, 1990.

De Klerk has pledged that there will be no constitutional changes without the endorsement of a majority white vote.

A massive propaganda campaign has been launched to counter the right wing Afrikaner opposition. The ruling National Party is counting on 125 million Rand from big business to finance the campaign.

One giant corporation has already guaranteed R20 million. A return to even a modified apartheid would be a mortal blow to South Africa’s economy, laid low by the current recession.

But it is not only big business who is endorsing the referendum. Nelson Mandela and the ANC have put all their prestige behind it.

In an open letter published in the Johannesburg Sunday Times, Mandela wrote that while it was “painful and aberrant”, he nevertheless urged white ANC supporters to vote ‘yes’.

Opinion polls indicate a narrow majority for De Klerk, but the recent by-election in Potchefstroom where the right wing Conservative Party scored a landslide victory points to the opposite conclusion.

De Klerk has assured whites that their living standards would not be threatened. This is plainly poppycock if he is sincere about a genuine move towards democracy.

The privileges enjoyed by whites in the economy, in education, housing and social amenities is based on the exploitation of black workers. Any more equal distribution of wealth must, in the immediate future, lead to a lowering of white incomes.

While most of the limelight is concentrated on the referendum, the 17-party Conservative Democratic South Africa (CODESA) seems to have agreed on an interim government by the end of the year. This won’t be elected, but all the main parties will be represented.

Mandela moves closer

Mandela and De Klerk have been moving closer towards each other, public attacks notwithstanding. The ANC has long been accepted as a transitional government, putting the demand for a constitutional assembly to the back burner.

Although De Klerk at first resisted this demand, the National Party now sees it as an attractive alternative to a Constituent Assembly elected by proportional representation.

Its proposals include a two-tier parliament with regional representation, a system of vetoes, an enforced coalition and a presidency rotating among the main parties.

Mandela has got himself boxed in by the negotiation process and is governor of difficult for him to extricate himself and rescue the armed struggle. But armed resistance to the CODESA process and a narrow victory for De Klerk in the referendum may come from another source.

The Conservative Party (CP) and the openly fascist AWB have joined the campaign for a ‘no’ vote in the referendum and vowed to fight for Afrikaner self-determination (sic) whatever the outcome.

But Bechtleu now appears to be in alliance with the CP to resist. It will be the organised forces of the working class – the COSATU and NACTU unions, who were excluded from the CODESA proceedings – who will have to provide the force which will counter the attacks of the right.

The real problem for Bush, apart from his chronic inability to get his own name right in front of a camera, is that US voters just don’t buy it.

A year ago, 90% of voters backed him in the gruelling self-congratulations that followed the damage in the Gulf. Now he is struggling to get 40%.

Which means we know as Margaret is meekly telling the world that Bush isn’t a long-term factor in the Gulf War.

While he is certainly not a long-term factor in the Gulf War, the US is an economic factor in the economy of the world. It is a driving force in the world economy and the US economy as a whole is a driving force in the world economy.

More and more politicians are beginning to understand the importance of this. In the world economy the US is the largest economy. It is the world’s largest consumer. It is the world’s largest investor. It is the world’s largest lender.

But in this it is accompanied by a devaluation of the dollar. The dollar is being sold off. It is being sold at a discount. This is a concern to many people around the world because it is a concern to people who are concerned about the future of the world economy.

Deng wins ding-dong

DENG XIAOPING, the aged but still dangerous Chinese leader, is trying to have his cake and eat it as well.

In a move that shows a remarkable lack of attention to detail, Deng has decided that the new economic system of China will be called ‘socialism with Chinese characteristics’.

This means that China will continue to be a socialist country but with a number of distinct Chinese characteristics.

One of these characteristics is the existence of a large number of private enterprises. These enterprises will be able to operate in the market economy.

But in this, Deng is following in the footsteps of the Western democracies, which have also created a large number of private enterprises.

The problem is that the Chinese system of socialism is not as clear-cut as the Western system of democracy. There is a lot of room for interpretation.

For example, in the West, there is a clear separation between the state and the economy. The state owns the land and the means of production. The economy is run by private enterprises.

In China, the state owns the land and the means of production but the economy is run by private enterprises.

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There is a lot of room for interpretation.
Ten years as Chinese political prisoner

Survivor tells of ‘hell on earth’

By Gregor Benton

Liu Shannqing was freed on December 25, 1991 from a gaol near Guangzhou, South China, after serving ten years as a political prisoner. Liu had been arrested and imprisoned on charges of ‘counter-revolutionary propaganda and incitement’. He served the entire term, without remission.

Liu, aged 39, a leader of the Hong Kong student movement in the late 1970s, was arrested while trying to visit the families of He Qiu and Wang Xizhe, arrested leaders of China’s 1970s ‘Democracy Wall’ movement.

For the first seven or eight months he was interrogated almost daily and pressed to admit to counter-revolutionary activities.

He refused, insisting to the contrary that his activities had been revolutionary. He called on his prosecutors to prove evidence of his wrong-doing, but they failed to do so.

In 1985, acting under great pressure, Liu wrote a letter admitting that he had done wrong and requesting lenience. He was then awarded some small privileges, including a radio.

Solitary confinement

A year later, he withdrew his confession and was returned to solitary confinement. He was also refused the right to work, and was thus deprived of both exercise and a small income.

The worst time came when it was discovered that he had given his family a copy of the verdict against him and asked them to publish it in Hong Kong.

As punishment, he was kept in a darkened room for one month. He said ‘When I was in a dark cell, I was chained at the feet...At times, nobody came for 24 hours on end...The Chinese prison system is really like hell on earth. Human dignity is completely downgraded’.

Amnesty International adopted Liu as a prisoner of conscience, and his friends in Hong Kong organised hunger strikes and appeals to keep him in the public eye. Liu’s name was on the list of prisoners given by John Major to Li Peng during his visit to Beijing in September 1991.

The Hong Kong colonial authorities also appeared on his behalf. But he was shown no mercy, unlike other political prisoners who had displayed a cooperative attitude.

Liu was greeted as a hero on his return to Hong Kong, where he continues to campaign for the release of China’s other imprisoned dissidents, particularly Wang Xizhe (a revolutionary Marxist) and Wei Jingsha (a liberal democrat).

But not all Hong Kong’s pro-democracy activists joined in the movement to protest against Liu’s arrest and imprisonment. Many were biased against him because of his Trotskyist ties.

Trotskyist

Back in Hong Kong, Liu told a press conference ‘I am a Marxist-Leninist. Trotskyite is a term generally used against us by our enemies. However, if people say that I share Trotsky’s ideas, I would accept that. I support Trotsky’.

Zhang Fengqun, a member of the Executive of the Hong Kong Citizens Patriotic Federation in Support of the Democracy Movement, writing in the Hong Kong newspaper Xinbao expressed his deep regret at the movement’s failure to rally round Liu Shannqing.

With his defiant stand against political persecution, Liu is the most recent in a line of Trotskyist political prisoners in China. His arrest happened twenty-nine years to the day after that of two of Trotsky’s hundred trotskyists in 1952 by the newly-proclaimed Mao regime.

Twenty seven years later in 1979, 20,000 students and eleven other survivors of this first wave of repression were under supervision, their ideas (like Liu Shannqing’s) intact.

Queer Nation challenges US Boy Scouts

THE AMERICAN gay organisation Queer Nation has launched a boycott campaign against the Boy Scouts of America.

The campaign was launched at a rally outside the annual meeting of the Scouts executive board in Washington on 11 February. Protesters chanted ‘We’re here, we’re queer, and we’re going camping’.

Homophobia

Protesters are claiming the Scouts are a stronghold of homophobia and religious bigotry. In many areas Scout organisations are a stronghold of the Mormon religious sect.

Protest organiser Bart Church claimed ‘The Boy Scouts must be convicted one of the most dangerous, bigoted organisations in the United States, promoting superstition, homophobia, and blind patriotism. Scouts organisations have refused to take children whose parents are openly lesbian or gay, and have thrown out teenage scouts alleged to be gay’.

Funding

US Scout organisations enjoy huge funding: The Scouts have reserves of $350m, and receive $93m each year from the United Way, a right-wing Christian organisation.

Queer Nation intends to continue its campaign of harassment against the Scouts and United Way, and is demanding a congressional investigation into its funding.

Other imaginative slogans chanted by protesters included “Scouts honour ‘we’re queer’ and ‘Boy Scout bigots’ founder was a flag” — a reference to Scouts founder Lord Baden Powell.

Hunger strike hits at Russian bigots

THINK BRITAIN’s bad for lesbians and gay men? You’re right, but you should see the Soviet Union.

The barbaric laws introduced by Uncle Joe Stalin in the 1930s are one murky area where the light of glassnost hasn’t shone.

If you come out in the USSR, chances are that you might end up in a psychiatric hospital or prison. Gay-hating is national. Twenty Russian lesbians and gay men went on hunger strike in protest that bigotry is still the order of the day.

After demonstrating outside the Bolshoi Theatre in the summer, the activists are refusing any solid food for three days to protest at Boris Yeltsin’s lack of action.

Ron Kaltin, editor of the Tomsk gay magazine, said ‘Russia is continuing to violate human rights ...it is time this bizarre article was removed so that gays and lesbians can at last come out of the closet.’

Fallacies of State Capitalism

A debate between Ernest Mandel and Chris Harman

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What hope of a new union?

I WAS disappointed to read yet another largely non-political appraisal of the impending CONE-NALGO-NUPE merger, this time from Doug Thorpe in SO 17.

Of course unity is a wonderful thing - so long as it is unity in struggle, and not unity in retreat. Unfortunately union mergers have shown an almost universal tendency toward a retreat from struggle, to the benefit of the employers.

One example, which was naively supported by the left on both sides, was the NUM/TASS merger that produced the ghastly, inexcusable mini-mash of NSF.

Doug’s optimism represents another chapter in his hope over experience. In an article entirely bogged down in the minutiae of upholding CONE’s ‘socially orientated structures’ - effectively arguing for a ‘greater NALGO’ - Doug did not once raise the issue of the politics of the bureaucracies of the merging unions.

Whatever the fine words in the merger document, surely the photos of reading NUPE bureaucrats signing a pledge to build a ‘member-led union’ should make us suspicious.

The threeger union-friendly unions than NUPE, whose full-time members exercise complete domination over branches, and have ruthlessly used this through most of the 1980s to crush almost any fightback on jobs, pay, or conditions.

Tom Sawyer and, having won the union to near-bankruptcy, appear to have decided that they have little choice but to go for it.

But there is no evidence whatever of any change of heart among most NALGO members. Instead, Sawyer and co seem to be banking on this assessment that with neither NALGO nor CONE having any comparable politically developed bureaucracy, NUPE’s hard core of new realist officials will quickly take control over the branches and structures of the new union.

Is it worth risking all this to achieve a single union? Doug glosses over the progressive element that has been visible in the inter-union cmdline at least within the NUNS, where NALGO is almost non-existent as a force.

Without cut-off protection between NUPE and CONE it is likely the 1988 NUNW strike would not have taken place and that the single union would have been driven into a more radical stance under pressure to retain and recruit members.

A single union, dominated by a cynical army of new realist officials, is likely to be more effective at stopping than starting action.

Instead of tail-ending the organizational debate and echoing platitudes about the need for growth it is a good thing to make further preparations for battle from day one.

Only through a political fight can the left ensure a genuinely new union coming out of the old NUPE well in the sheep’s skin of a greater NALGO.

Jack Dobbermann
London

When criticism is the key to serious support

IN THE LETTER published in SO no 17, your correspondent criticizes me for not putting forward the Marxist position of unconditional but critical support for Irish republicans fighting for national liberation.

I am also accused of being blind to the class criteria that one should apply in dealing with capitalist coalitions.

Well, I suppose if I’d been writing for, let’s say Socialist Worker, I’d have made sure to put in every relevant slogan from my Ladybird Book of Marxism.

I took it for granted that readers of SO would be sufficiently familiar with both our history of involvement in virtually every government-imperialist initiative of recent years as well as our theoretical positions to make it unnecessary for me to go over the basics. Mess maximus.

My intention in the offending article was to draw attention to the growing realization that the terrorist activity, the lack of mass struggle in the north of Ireland and how this absence was isolating the main revolutionary organisation, so causing its leaders to drift into separate political and military considerations. This is the critical half of the ‘unconditional but critical’ formula.

My only regret is that the analysis in the article continued to be borne out by subsequent events. The IRA would not have killed the Protestant minister in Enniskillen if they had been Catholic.

In a revolutionary situation it is essential to deal honestly and fully with collaborators, but political considerations come before moral or military ones.

Peter Brooke does not give a damn about the dead men and the British Army will pay whatever is necessary to have its border posts built. But how will such an action be judged by Protestant workers?

How does it break them from loyalty? It just makes them more likely to believe Ken McGuinness when he talks about a campaign of genocide around the border.

And how does leaving bombs in railway stations or disrupting football matches bring British workers to support the right of the Irish people to self-determination? It just strengthens all the reactionary, chauvinist prejudices.

When a revolutionary organisation forgets that its political and its support among the working class and the oppressed are infinitely more valuable than prosecuting acts of violence in which it substitutes itself for the working class, it is on a road to disaster.

Support which is frightened of criticizing mistakes is worthless.

Liam Mac Uaid
East London

The myth of the Red menace

YOUR FRONT page on Trident (15 February) was extremely misleading about what the cold war was - and is.

It said that ‘with the collapse of the Soviet Union, the cold-war arguments of nuclear deterrence are redundant.’

The threat of nuclear warheads will not be there to defend anyone. The case for billions spent on nuclear submarines is as dead as the Soviet Union.

The implication is that the Soviet Union used a threat to the British people, who needed defending against it. This is nonsense.

The Soviet Union was a threat to the British people, who needed defending against it. This is nonsense. The Soviet Union since 1917 has defended itself against imperialist invasions and threats.

Each move in the construction of its nuclear war was a response to previous escalations by imperialist powers. For socialists, the nuclear wea

You are also wrong to say that this issue has changed fundamentally with the collapse of the Soviet Union. We are not at the end of the cold war. On the contrary, it is now in its sharpest period.

The aim of the cold war has been to revive capitalism in the non-capitalist countries. This has not yet achieved the C5.

The imperialists are using both their military superiority and economic blockade to force it through.

As the C6 countries make sweeping unilateral cuts in their military capacity, the imperialists are able to make modest cuts in theirs, and thus save money, but they are maintaining their military superiority.

Your comments that the Tories’ commitment to a fourth Trident is ‘dozy’ and merely ‘enables capitalists Britain to pretend to be a world power’ are therefore wrong. The British ruling class needs nuclear weapons.

First to push through the cold war against the Soviet Union by C5 to its desired conclusion; second to maintain pressure on the remaining de-fomed workers’ states (which is the largest enemy: the world); and third as a toll in its international economic, and potentially military, rivalry with other imperialist countries.

Your front page minimised and trivialised this world imperialist offensive.

Jamie Gough
Camden

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Exaggerating capitalism’s successes

The end of history

The End of History and the Last Man

Written by Francis Fukuyama

Chatto and Windus, £20

Reviewed by Paul Clarke


His new book elaborates on the thesis in more detail. The collapse of Stalinism represents the final and definitive victory of capitalist democracy over all forms of totalitarianism. History, far from being indecipherable as weak-minded postmodernists say, has a direction and logic. The logic is towards economic growth, which represents the great Mechanism of history. But Marx was wrong to imagine that socialism provided the basis for sustained economic growth; actually free market capitalism is the answer.

But human beings do not live by economic advance alone. They demand a ‘recognition’, a feeling of personal worth and esteem. Only liberal democracy can provide this. Democracy is the best fractional system in providing the best framework for capitalist economic efficiency; and, fortunately, liberal democracy gives human worth and dignity.

Fukuyama openly adheres to the theoretical framework of Hegel rather than Marx. The end of history, or rather human pre-history, is not socialism but the liberal constitutional state. Thus the dawn of the end of history can be said to have been the battle of Jena in 1806, in which Napoleon’s bourgeois republican army defeated the Prussian Junkers. Fukuyama at least has the merit of trying to interpret history and discover its underlying logic and patterns. For this he has been roundly attacked by French right-wing 'new philosopher' Bernard Henri-Levi as the ‘last Marxist’. Can his ideas be sustained against the evidence?

In fact the basic idea is old hat – that advanced capitalism more or less automatically gives rise to liberal democracy; Seymour Martin Lipset was making his intellectual reputation saying the same thing in the 1950s. Emptily, Fukuyama can point to the fact that all the main advanced capitalist countries are liberal democracies. But he makes several assumptions without which his propositions begin to collapse. First, that liberal democracy is based on a more-or-less stable capitalist economic system, and thus democracy is secure. Second, that democracy is an inimitable product of advanced capitalism. And third, that if the countries outside the ‘third world’ can become advanced countries provided they adopt a rigorous free market economy.

Wrong struggle

Democratic rights under capitalism are not simply the product of the bourgeoisie’s struggle against pre-capitalist classes. On the contrary, there is a mass of historical evidence that the key class in securing the establishment of democratic freedoms is the working class and its struggle.

Constitutional democracy is far from having conquered the world after the collapse of Stalinism. There are about 25 states which can be reasonably said to be liberal democracies. There is no guarantee that, for example, the ex-Soviet Union and China are headed in that direction.

The era of liberal democracy after world war two coincides with the long post-war economic boom. Bourgeois democracy is much easier for the ruling class when there are big concessions to be made to the working class. But once economic crisis and massive class struggle set in, the bourgeois move against democratic rights, and anti-democratic movements with big support among the bourgeois start to emerge.

Fascists emerge in Germany (ironically Hegel’s own country) after constitutional democracy had been established in a revolution against the liberal democratic Weimar republic. There is no proof that capitalist democracy is absolutely secure; the rise of Le Pen’s Front National in France shows that it could face short-term threats.

Fukuyama’s assumption that the economic development of Korea, Singapore, Taiwan and Hong Kong shows that free market capitalism is the answer for the whole world’s economic preposterous. Thatcherism in the Sudan or Bangladesh boggles the imagination!

Idealism

Equally, Fukuyama’s picture of the advanced capitalist countries as being a big friendly ‘Sweden’ (or Sweden as it used to be) with bored consumers, efficient health and social security provision, and general affluence is also highly idealistic.

US votes abstain in huge numbers not because they are satisfied affluent zombies, but because there is no real choice on offer from the main parties. Crisis-free affluent capitalism is another Fukuyama myth.

There is a correction, or rather a deeper speculation, introduced in the book as opposed to the 1989 article. Fukuyama wonders whether the satisfied citizens of liberal democratic capitalism (the Last Man) will be content with their lot. Will they be prepared to put up with a life, which involves no further challenge than choosing the next consumer goodies, with no real conflict of values or allegiances? Might they not rebel against the end of history?

He has a point here. Even assuming his idyll came true, the victory of the commodity spectacle would be a cross that sells for the worker, no firing bluff. But in any case it is highly unlikely ever to come about.

Francis Fukuyama has the great merit of posing the big questions. He is a coherent opponent of Marxism, who takes history seriously, like the nihilistic postmodernists. Much of the hostility to him in the British academic establishment is backwater, a refusal to debate generalising and historical theories. But to make his extra-avant-garde claims he is led to systematically exaggerate capitalism’s successes, most obviously in the developing world. Part of the reason he can get away with it is the relative weakness of the left and the labour movement, and the disorientation which this has brought about. The cold war victory of the US had caused.

Refuting Fukuyama is in the end a practical task. Swatting capitalist ideology won’t matter much if a serious capitalist challenge is not built in the advanced capitalist countries.

Flashbacks and puzzles

Merci la Vie

Directed by Bertrand Blier

Reviewed by Geoff Ryan

Merci la Vie (Thank you Life) is very difficult to describe.

The title is ironic: the film basically tells the story of two young women, one of whom has AIDS, and the way in which she is treated by society as a whole, and by men in particular.

However, it is the way in which the film is put together that is interesting. The film moves from colour to black and white and back to colour; characters comment on their actions as they are making them; there is a film within the film and it is never clear whether or not people are themselves or ‘characters’ in the film.

The chronology jumps about with numerous flash-backs – some of which are impossible, putting the women into scenes that took place before they were born.

There are breaks in continuity, so the women sometimes finish a scene wearing different clothes to those they had on at the beginning. About half-way through the film we are suddenly transported back into the Second World War, with France under Nazi occupation. The treatment of occupied France by the Nazis becomes a metaphor for the way in which people with AIDS are treated.

However, given the structure of the film then, the AIDS existing at the same time as the Nazi occupation has to be comment ed on.

One of the characters points out that if the AIDS were seen as Nazi, and if there are Nazis there can’t be AIDS and we can all carry on ‘fucking’.

Merci la Vie is certainly not as easy to fit into one of the easy films that needs a lot of concentration to try to work out what is meant to be happening. The performances of Charlotte Gainsbourg and Anouk Grinberg as the two main characters are superb. From the ubiquitous Gerard Depardieu as the NATO’s bodyguard to the ubiquitous Gerard Depardieu as the NATO officer; the performance here, make it worth the effort.

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Stalinism and the State

LENIN argued that the revolutionary workers’ state — the dictatorship of the proletariat — was to be a different type of state, for the first time representing the interests of the vast majority of the population. As it progressed towards socialism and communism, the state would ‘wither away’, as the disappearance of class divisions made compulsion and repression unnecessary. Though workers led by Lenin took power in the October 1917 Russian Revolution, this is obviously not what took place in the Soviet Union.

What went wrong?

LENIN spelled out the perspective of a workers’ state which would ‘wither away’ through disease, and the elimination of class divisions rendered it unnecessary. This conclusion flowed from the analysis of the state as an organ of repression wielded by the dominant class against those it sought to oppress.

Contrary to the ‘withering away’ — the overwhelming majority — because of the ruling class, and the bourgeoisie as an oppressed minority, it was obvious that the form of the state machine would have to be very different. As Trotsky wrote, summarising the theory in Revolution Betrayed: “The regime of proletarian dictatorship from its very beginning thus ceases to be a ‘state’ in the old sense of the word — a special apparatus, that is, for the holding in subjection of the majority of the people. The material power, together with the weapons, is directly and immediately into the hands of workers’ organisations such as the soviets. The state as a bureaucratic apparatus begins to die away the first day of the proletarian dictatorship.”

Of course this didn’t happen in the USSR, as Trotsky stressed: “The bureaucracy not only has not disappeared, wielding its place to the masses, but has turned into an uncontrolled force dominating the masses. The army not only has not been replaced by the armed people, but has given birth to a privileged officers’ caste ... while the people, the armed bearers of the dictatorship are now forbidden in the Soviet Union to carry even non-explosive weapons.”

By HARRY SLOAN

Materialist view

What then was the key to this apparent refutation of Lenin’s most essential theory? Trotsky returns for explanation to Marx’s materialist view of law and social relations. He pinpoints the problem as the painfully inadequate economic growth of the post-revolutionary Soviet Union. The Bolsheviks inherited the war-ravaged, backward peasant economy of the collapsed Tsarist empire, and then faced internal isolation and blockade with the failure of revolutions elsewhere in Europe.

These were the material conditions that made socialism — the elimination of want — impossible, and communism — the eradication of class divisions — inconceivable.

Without this development of the material base for socialism, the related political developments were impossible. Trotsky quotes the early Marx from two years before the Communist Manifesto spells out the painful truth that: “A development of the productive forces is the absolutely necessary practical premise of Communism, because without it want is generalised, and with want the struggle for necessaries begins again, and that means that all the old crap must revive.”

Thirty years later, Marx touched upon the same theme when he argued that: “Law cannot be higher than the economic structure and the cultural development of society conditioned by that structure.”

How, then, did the proletarian state of October 1917 degenerate into the bureaucratic parody of itself that Trotsky so ruthlessly dissected 20 years later.

Lenin, echoing Marx, accepted that until it could radically change the economy and eliminate shortages, the early stages of the workers’ state would ‘inevitably’ continue bourgeois law in allocation of insufficient supplies of commodities. Until it could generate sufficient wealth to create equality it would have to reorder inequalities. He argued that: “Bourgeois law in relation to the distribution of the objects of consumption assumes of course inevitably a bourgeois state, for law is not nothing without an apparatus capable of compelling observance of the norms. It follows that under Communism not only will bourgeois law survive for a certain time, but also even a bourgeois state without the bourgeoisie!”

Lenin did not accept this as a norm; he saw it as a transitional stage to be overcome by breaking the isolation of the Russian Revolution, opening up links with more advanced economies to make rapid progress.

Trotsky emphasised the importance of Lenin’s analysis in understanding the dual role of the state under Stalin’s burgeoning bureaucracy: “The state assumes directly and from the very beginning a dual character: socialistic insular as it defends social property in the means of production, bourgeois insular as the distribution of life’s goods is carried out with a capitalistic measure of value.”

Who, then, is to uphold the authority of this state? Not the workers, who have no interest in defending the privileges of the minority.

For the defence of “bourgeois law”, the workers’ state was compelled to create a bourgeois type of instrument — that in the same old gendarmerie, albeit in a new uniform.”

The privileged minority defended by this gendarmerie was no longer the bourgeoisie — long gone — but now that of the bureaucracy.

As the bureaucracy itself became entrenched, this led to a complete break from the meth- odological programme of Bolshevik.

Of course the Soviet Union carried on with its quasi-industrialisation programme that would have been incomparable under capitalism, without which it would have languished and stagnated.

But Trotsky had little time for these apologists for Stalinism who renounced the antithesis of the lack of workers’ democracy by marveling at the economic advances that had been made under Stalin, comparing conditions in the 1930s with those of the old Tsarist regime.

The real comparison that counts, said Trotsky, is between living standards in the USSR and those in the advanced capitalist countries.

Socialism requires a higher development of the productive forces than is possible under capitalism. It is this same component that is today exploited by those arguing for capitalist restoration in Eastern Europe.

Eastern Europe

Trotsky’s writings on the USSR help us understand today’s complex events. The failure to eliminate want has brought back all the ‘old crap’ in the shape of restorationist currents and the characteristic fragmentation of the Soviet Union into nationalistic religious and ethnic spheres.

The new, bureaucratic regimes in the ex-Soviet republics are essentially reproducing what they were privatizing their economies, while still relying upon the state machinery of the bureaucratised workers’ state to maintain against worst opposition from the working class.

Marxist fighting against the stream is long and hard. If we cannot bring back a Bolshevik-type programme in Eastern Europe and the ex-USSR, we must have the way to which the Bolshevik concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat has been discarded by association with prolonged Stalinist rule, which in reality reproduces the antithesis of the marxism fought for by Lenin and Trotsky.
Civil rights attacked by the back door

How many socialists know or care about Operation Spanner? Recently, a group of gay men in Northern Ireland, who had previously been convinced that their lives were in danger, decided to come out. They were attacked and beaten by a group of men who claimed to be members of the Ulster Volunteer Force. The attack was apparently in retaliation for their decision to join the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Movement. The attackers were shot dead by the police, who were called in to break up the violence.

Their sentiments, however, were reduced to no more than three months, with some of the 'participants' getting only a few months. They had been convicted of treasonable and complex police operation, Operation Spanner.

So why should socialists care if a few people in rather peculiar things get locked up? Clearly, there are some rather unappealing things going on like pseudo-fascist thugs, prison warder-role-plays and beatings. But these convictions establish a new fact for the courts to try into our bedrooms and continue with anti-gay opinion. And they establish a precedent, in a general sense, that is a very dangerous one.

This is the idea that a crime is a crime, regardless of whether there is any victim. This has been used to harm 'minorities' on numerous occasions, but has been particularly aimed at lesbians and gay men. The main thing to be taken from this is that there is an important one. It is the general rule that 'crimes' should not exist without victims, particularly when the parties involved freely consent to them. Socialists should fight all such attempts to extend the law in this direction, criminalizing lesbians and gay men and attacking civil liberties.

Women's TUC backs Irish abortion rights

By Marian Brain, NCU delegate

Delegates to the TUC Women's Conference should be women. What is obvious, you might have thought. But it was actually very controversial among the three hundred delegates to this year's conference, only passing by a whisper. The delegation had a strong message to Norman Wil- liams that Congress House should not hit equal opportunities first, as they had with the amalgamation of the TUC's equal rights department with areas as varied as environmental protection. Continuing a tradition of militancy, the Blackpool conference agreed a campaigning agenda, sending a message of solidarity to women in Ireland and asserting Irish women's right to choose.

MSF delegate Ann Hope pointed out that 'We are represented as part of the United Kingdom when it comes to reproductive legislation such as anti-abortion law, but not when it comes to extending the Abortion Act'.

There was also broad support for the Women's TUC's campaign to make a legal political attack to destroy the BBC and its independence. 'The report described the massive cuts as a commitment to becoming leaner and fitter'.

BECTU fiddles while BBC jobs burn

Ten thousand BBC workers are to lose the jobs in the next three years, in a campaign to cut its workforce by nearly 50 per cent.

The recommendation to BBC director general Michael Grade has been welcomed by the NUJ, BBC's largest union, and the BECTU, the union for the arts and entertainment industries.

Grade's plan, which has been met with widespread criticism, is to cut 900 jobs in the BBC's news and current affairs departments.

Grade said he wanted to make the BBC 'more efficient and effective' and to reduce costs.

Grade's proposals, which were unveiled in March, include closing down the BBC's five regional offices, reducing the number of programmes by 20 per cent and cutting the number of journalists by 20 per cent.

Grade also plans to make the BBC more attractive to young people by introducing more digital services and reducing the number of programmes aimed at older audiences.

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South Africa referendum:
This is no road to freedom!

ON THE EVE of South Africa's all-white referendum on reform, the odds were heavily on state president De Klerk winning a 'yes' vote. Nelson Mandela has warned that a 'no' vote would mean a lurch towards civil war. Certainly a 'no' vote would result in a further international isolation of South Africa and a blow to the hopes of big business.

The proposed reforms, crystallised in the CODESA process towards a transitional government, are not about a liberal South African white regime having seen the injustice of apartheid. Rather it is about a political elite which has seen the unworkability of the apartheid system in modernising South African capitalism.

The maintenance of 'racial capitalism', a capitalist system in which blacks make up the bulk of a super-exploited working class, and whites the bulk of a capitalist and middle-class elite, is not dependent on keeping petty apartheid rules.

For example, the Group Areas Act, keeping blacks in designated territories and relying on widespread migrant labour, is economically inefficient. For the white ruling elite old-style apartheid is unworkable economically and politically; a new form of running South African capitalism has to be found.

The transition in South Africa is about finding that new mechanism. It means, of course, that whites especially poorer whites will have to give up some of their privileges. In particular, space will have to be found for a new, emerging middle class.

The mid-1980s culminated in a huge semi-insurrec-
tionary wave of struggle by the non-white population of South Africa. What is being played out now is how that process will finish. The road of the ANC towards integrating the black population into a reconstituted South African capitalism is not set.

It remains to be seen whether the South African masses can chart another course.

French Socialists face poll drubbing

The French Socialist Party government of François Mitterrand is about to suffer humiliation in next Sunday's elections for local councils.

Opinion polls put the Socialists - the country's governing party - on between 35 and 37 per cent. For the party in power this is a devastating result.

The extreme right-wing Front National of Jean-Marie Le Pen looks certain to win the elections in the prosperous Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur region.

This area, besides being next to Marseillais with its huge immigrant population, is also home to hundreds of thousands of pieds noirs - white former residents of French North Africa.

Disillusion

Defeat for the Socialists and the rise of the Front National stem from the same root cause - utter disillusionment with the Socialist Party in government.

When Mitterrand came to power in 1981 it was on the wave of extravagant promises for a new France. The SF looked back to the 1930s by posing as the 'modern' face of socialism, compared to the old-fashioned Stalinism of the Communists.

Until 1984 Communist talking points participated in the government. After an initial attempt to reform the economy, the Socialists adopted rigorous deflationary policies, preserving over-governing unemployment and worsening living standards.

The organisational base of the SF in the working class has withered. SF leaders, including prime minister Édith Cresson, have capitulated to the racism of the Front National and begun expelling im-
migrants. And scandal and corruption have rocked the government.

Anti-racists

The current election campaign has been marked by the adoption of a new and more militant tactic by anti-racist and anti-fascist organisations.

After the huge success of the 25 January anti-Le Pen demonstrations, the anti-fascists have turned to mass street demonstrations against the Front National at all its election rallies.

This culminated with street battles in Charente last Sunday after Front National thugs attacked demonstrators with baseball bats.

It seems likely that the 'yes' vote will suffer from a split which means there are two ecologist slates. The only far left slate are those of the Trotskyist organisation Lutte Ouvrière.