TIME TO CLEAR OUT THE TORIES

Vote Labour
Left flies the flag

The grey face of the Labour leadership doesn’t inspere much hope for socialist change. Every press conference features the latest attempt to move even further towards the ‘middle ground’ of respectable, do-nothing politics. And most of the new model candidates dance to the same uninspiring tune.

But not everywhere. SOCIALIST OUTLOOK looks at a couple of areas, Islington North and Birmingham Edgbaston, where Labour candidates are going out to their communities with a firm, socialist message. And we take a look at Coventry South East, where Dave Nellist, selected to fight the seat for Labour, was ditched by the party leadership but is fighting on against the Kinnock lookalike.

Nellist defies witch hunters

Dave Nellist’s campaign in Coventry South East has won strong support among Labour movement activists in the city. But the big question is, will this be enough to win the seat? The highly-respected former Labour MP — expelled last year for alleged Midland links and now standing as a Labour Independent — has won public backing from key shop stewards and even some regional union officials.

But Labour is now heavily pushing the line ‘a vote for Nellist is as good as a vote for the Conservative candidate’, and increasingly finding an echo among ordinary workers desperate to get shot of the Tories nationally.

Nellist’s stated canvass returns put him on 44 per cent, with 23 per cent going to both official Labour candidate Jim Cunningham and Tory Martine Hyams. Supporters who claim to have seen Labour’s return say they give Nellist 31 per cent, Labour 25 per cent and the Tories 22 per cent.

But senior local trade unionists report the official Labour vote hardening markedly over the last fortnight, making the seat effectively a three-way marginal.

While Midland patently constitutes the backbone of the Nellist campaign, it encompasses many people not previously active politically. Local Morning Star supporters are also much in evidence.

Cunningham minders are pulling the Walton stunt of photographing Nellist supporters, with those identified as Labour party members certain to face expulsion proceedings.

Corbyn raises tempo

Jeremy Corbyn’s adoption meeting was one of the most inspiring evenings for a long time. Not only was Dennis Skinner at the peak of his entertaining anti-Tory form, but the room was jam-packed with 350 activists.

They came not just from the Labour Party, but from every community and campaign in the constituency. And the meeting wasn’t out of step with Corbyn’s campaign.

Hard-hitting leaflets focusing on housing, health, women and pensioners go with commitments to remove all nuclear weapons and publicly explaining why the market cannot solve problems from homelessness to pollution.

Corbyn is maintaining a high profile locally, canvassing on a daily basis, visiting community groups and debating other candidates. Working with Jeremy is a rewarding experience, not only because of his politics, but also because of the warmth and respect for him among local people.

Battling to win in Brum

John Wilton is aiming to destroy a Tory majority of 8,000 in Birmingham Edgbaston. Labour has to win the seat if it is to get an overall majority.

And the sitting MP is definitely on the most odious wing of the party — John Knight, author of the anti-union and gay Section 28, has been an outspoken supporter of anti-immigration legislation. John is optimistic.

In 1987 he increased the Labour vote by 50 per cent, one of the largest swings in the country. Now he needs just 8 per cent. Edgbaston is a constituency ravaged by the destruction of manufacturing industry, with male unemployment doubling in the last year to 25 per cent.

After a housing adoption meeting attended by over 200 supporters, John went out to one of the wards particularly hit by the job massacre with Tony Benn to argue the socialist case. As an engineering worker made redundant in the early 1980s, pledged to take only a skilled worker’s stage if elected, he has rather more credibility than Dame Jill.

Stop Tyrndall — Fight racism

Public meeting, Sunday April 5, 5pm
The Davenant Centre, Whitechapel Road between Whitechapel and Aldgate East tubes
Invited speakers include:
Mildred Gordon, Bernnie Grant, Cllr Jalal Uddin

I’ll say things are getting worse - My cardboard box has just been repossed!
We predict the Election result

A weak and crisis-ridden government

SOCIALIST OUTLOOK goes to press at the end of a week which has been dominated by the slanging match in Labour's NHS broadcast. The truth about that is obvious; the Tories did everything possible to cause a scandal because they didn't want to face the real issues about the NHS.

That manoeuvre has blown up in their faces. Nothing seems capable of reviving their flagging campaign, despite the weakness and an-tisemitic vagueness of Kinnock's efforts.

But none of the toing and froing in the election campaign – photo opportunities, tabloid press scandal and gossip, incessant discussions on the TV – should detract socialists from the major underlying realities of the campaign.

First, after 13 years of the Tories, Britain faces an unparalleled economic crisis. Second, whatever the result of the election the Tories have been gravely weakened. Third, whichever government comes to power will be totally incapable of resolving the crisis. And this, given the likelihood of a minority government or one with a tiny majority, means a period of weak government.

Revelations in the Guardian have shown that this year's public borrowing figure of £28 billion is a fiction. In reality there is a government deficit of another £11.3 billion. This is the result of growing crisis.

The government's financial crisis stems from two things: the slump has drastically reduced the tax base, as taxable profits and earnings have fallen. Recession also means skyrocketing unemployment and other welfare payments. Any incoming government will face the consequences of this financial catastrophe. Kinnock has totally failed to explain how taxes on the rich will be kept minimal, and Labour's welfare and NHS pledges upheld.

At the time of writing, it is still possible, though unlikely, that the Tories could form the government. In that event, they would be in a totally different position to Thatcher in 1983 and 1987. It would be a very weak government staggering from crisis to crisis.

The Tories sustained themselves in the 1980s through a programme of privatisation which brought huge revenues to the Exchequer. Now there is little left to privatise. The Tory programme has run out of steam. It has failed economically and has nothing new left to try to carry through.

We are therefore headed, whatever the election outcome, for a period of combined political and economic crisis. How should the left confront this period?

If the Tories win, the opportunity will present itself, whatever the disappointment at not having a Labour government, to push home the counter-attack on Toryism, to rebuild the fight against the anti-working class laws and other anti-working class measures, under the slogan of kicking out the Tories and replacing them with a Labour government committed to socialist policies.

If Labour is the largest party, then the left must demand it forms the government with no deals with the Liberals. With Labour in government, whether it was a minority or majority government, the left would have to campaign around a programme of basic socialist demands, against the new realist Programme of Kinnock.

It remains true that a Labour government will give the best conditions to rebuild struggles and the left. But Labour is gravely weakened by the cautiousness of its programme and the hesitancy of its campaign. But Labour majority or not, the election shows the tide is turning. The Tory illusion of an easy lap of the defeat of Thatcherism begun by the anti-poll tax campaign and the fall of Thatcher herself.

Socialist Outlook has for the last two years argued that we were in a preparatory period, and that with the election the political scene would shift decisively. That is hard upon us. A rapid recomposition of British politics is underway. The key task is to build a socialist alternative capable of challenging whichever government comes to power.

NHS waiting list scandal behind broadcast row

By Harry Sloan

WHO NAMED the little girl whose case was dramatised in Labour's Party Election Broadcast? The Tory press.

Who fed to the newspapers and radio, claiming her 11-month wait for ear surgery had nothing to do with cuts – despite having written to her father admitting that was the case? Tony consultant Alan Atison. Who claimed the story was false, and compared Neil Kinnock to a Nazi propagandist for upholding it, despite every aspect of the case being shown to be true? Tony Health Secretary William Waldegrave.

Why were the Tories so desperate to keep the girl's name out of the news, to deny her a five-year-old girl into the headlines, and falsely to smear Labour as the source of her name? Because the case is not unique, and their record on the NHS will not stand public scrutiny.

It was for the same reason that in 1989 the man who decided to fraudulently manipulate into a wholly misleading case study the death of Edna Healey, wife of Labour politician Dennis, for having had a private hip operation in order to avoid a five-year wait for NHS treatment. Then, as now, the Tories tried to make the issue one of Labour hypocrisy rather than NHS waiting lists.

Since the row erupted the Labour Party and the Daily Mirror have been inundated with similar examples of lengthy waits for treatment. Yet the Tories have been trumpeting their 'success' in reducing the numbers of patients waiting over two years.

There is no real contradiction here. The Tories have cynically singled out this one, relatively small, sector of the waiting list for special attention. They have attacked on three fronts:

• Many of the numbers quoted by the list are not the result of operations being carried out, but the outcome of a clerical exercise known as 'validation', through which thousands of names are cross-referenced from waiting lists around the country.

• Others, like some 200 women waiting for varicose vein operations in the opting-out Waltham Forest authority, have received letters saying that to save them waiting longer, the list has been closed and the treatment no longer available.

• Elsewhere judicious use of one-off special funding to finance certain operations has succeeded in whittling down the 2-year queue. This is no surprise. Socialists have always said that the waiting lists could be eliminated if adequate funding was available; there is no waiting list in most western European countries, yet in England alone 926,000 people are currently on that queue.

The surprising thing is that even with all the folders and tricks, the overall waiting list is still going rapidly upwards.

Government figures show numbers waiting up to one year - the biggest category of patients - rose in February in ten out of 14 English regions - by a massive 8.4% in NW Thames - with an overall increase of around 9,900 in one month. This is an annual rate of increase of over 100,000 a year.

It remains to be seen if the Tories have succeeded in diverting attention from this monumental failure.

But with Thatcher's market reforms creating the NHS crisis, the deepening recession, the anti-working class laws and other anti-working class measures, the NHS is now in the forefront of the political agenda.

If you don't want to see this continued, then support the Socialist Party and our policies and campaign for a NHS for all.
Time to end the Tory nightmare

AS WE GO to press the outcome of the election is undecided. But whatever the outcome, the Tories have been fatally weakened.

The election is a distorting lens, but it reveals something very basic. Thirteen years of Tory attacks, part of the world-wide capitalist restructuring offensive, have failed – failed grossly to restore the fortunes of British capitalism.

Thatcherism emerged in the 1970s as a ‘new start’ for British capitalism, as a way to crush the working class and pave the way for a new surge of capitalist growth.

The results of the Tory attacks are everywhere: a Labour Party shifted to the right, industries and social welfare destroyed, unions on the defensive, lives wrecked. But in the end it is petering out into fiasco. Tory Britain is bankrupt Britain.

In nine pages of analysis of the Tory decade, SOCIALIST OUTLOOK examines what happened and why it failed to revive capitalist fortunes.

Hollow echoes of Empire

By Paul Clarke

FOR THIRTEEN years of Conservative rule British capitalism has faced a central foreign policy dilemma.

As British capital has relied more and more on profits from foreign investment, the Tories have been hobbled by the contradiction between the rapid development of European unity, and the post-war stance of Britain as an empire and loyal ally of the United States.

This dilemma has not been finally resolved; but overall, the Tories have been dragged screaming and kicking into the process of deepening European unity.

Central role

The problem stems from the fact that the US and NATO have provided Britain with its nuclear capacity and its central role in international politics – including its permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council. This has been vital in promoting and securing British overseas interests.

On the other hand, only a small part of British capital is deeply involved in the US market. For the long-term future of the economy, as world capitalism divides between the three major blocs of North America, Europe and Japan, the EC is much more important.

Echoes of Empire have resounded through the Thatcherite years. The British ruling class may not be very good at much these days, but it is good at war.

General Galvani’s 1982 invasion of the Malvinas islands provided Thatcher with a golden opportunity to win a clear election in 1983, on the back of victory against a third-rate military power.

It was a close-run thing. Only a few unexploded Argentine bombs stood between the sinking of British aircraft carriers and defeat, and the ultimate squallid victory. The calculating optimism of the British ruling class was vividly shown in Thatcher’s decision to sink the Argentine warship Belgrano, which was sailing away from the British fleet, with the loss of 1,200 lives.

The international scene in the 1980s was dominated by Ronald Reagan’s ‘evil empire’ crusade against the Eastern bloc. As the US unveiled Star Wars and waged counter-revolutionary war against the peoples of Nicaragua, El Salvadore and Afghanistan, Thatcher played the role of star supporter.

Britain’s subordination to the US was highlighted during the 1983 invasion of Grenada, a country formally under the jurisdiction of the British crown. Thatcher and foreign secretary Howe were appalled by the high-handed action of the US in not consulting Britain, but acquiesced nonetheless.

British capitalism couldn’t afford the vast rearmament programme undertaken by the US under Reagan, but Thatcher did her bit in commissioning the £15 billion Trident submarine programme.

The most dramatic demonstration of Tory prostration to the dictates of US foreign policy was the 1976 use of British airfields for F-111 bombers to attack Libya. Thatcher fully participated in the growing international trade against terrorism – an easy way to scapegoat and criminalise radical third world regimes.

Stalwart

Britain under Thatcher and Major has remained a stalwart of international support for the apartheid regime in South Africa, blocking every attempt at effective sanctions.

Concern for human rights did not extend to the fate of workers and the left in Hong Kong; successive Tory foreign ministers negotiated the return of Hong Kong to China with no human rights guarantees. The rich of course will be allowed into Britain.

The key foreign policy episodes in the final years of the Tory regime were the Gulf war and the continuing saga of European unity. Moth-eaten and decrepit British imperialism was wheeled out again to play key supporting role while George Bush murdered 250,000 Iraqis.

But Gulf war glory couldn’t hide the reality. Britain is a declining imperialism, more and more forced under the European umbrella to fight for economic survival. British foreign policy in the 1980s will be remembered for its martialistic hostility to the third world, fanatical anti-communism and slavish following of the United States. A sorry and sordid record.
What happened to the economic 'miracle'?

By Andy Kilminster

Five years ago the Tories won the last election, claiming that an economic 'miracle' had taken place. Now the picture is very different. What has really happened to the British economy since 1979?

When the Thatcher government came to power they wanted above all to do two things. First, to defeat the labour movement and allow profits to be raised. Second, to provide conditions for stable capitalist growth and realise those profits in the market. This was to be done through 'monetarism' - control of the money supply and public expenditure.

Monetarism was designed to attack the working class by signalling that wage rises would not be matched by printing money. Unprofitable firms would not be rescued.

Workers would have to adjust and accept wage cuts and worsening conditions. Through lower taxes and government withdrawal from the economy the conditions would be laid for renewed profitability and accumulation.

Failed strategy

The current economic crisis stems from the failure of this strategy. The Tories have not succeeded in defeating the labour movement in the way they hoped. Real wages have risen since they came to power, by 2.8 per cent per year from 1980-88 as compared with 0.9 per cent from 1974-79. The share of profits in national income actually fell from 15.6 per cent in 1979 to 16.1 per cent in 1988. This meant that any rises in profitability have been dependent on rises in productivity. This rose faster in the 1980s than in the 1970s.

But this is largely because productivity in manufacturing has risen as the number employed has fallen and the least profitable firms have shut down. It cannot be sustained in the long term.

So while the profit rate rose to a peak of 11.3 per cent in 1987, this was not significantly higher than in the late 1960s. From 1987 onwards the profit rate and productivity growth have fallen sharply. The Tories have not decisively changed the conditions for creating profits in the workplace.

Neither have they created a stable environment for capital. The initial attempt to control the money supply, from 1979 to 1981, led to a collapse in profits as demand was cut while wages continued to rise.

Foreign currency flowed into the country to get the benefits of high interest rates, pushing the exchange rate up and hitting exporters. There was a huge recession, particularly in manufacturing. And the targets for controlling the money supply were not met.

Abandoned

Gradually the policy of targeting the money supply was abandoned. The way was open for the debt-fuelled boom of the late 1980s.

As interest rates fell and profits rose after 1981 there was no corresponding rise in investment. Real manufacturing investment in 1987 was 9.5 per cent lower than in 1979. The capital stock in industry and agriculture grew by only 1.2 per cent per year from 1979 to 1987, less than the North Sea oil and gas are excluded.

But investment in banking and finance rose by 12.7 per cent over this period and in business services the figure was 35.5 per cent. With manufacturing so weak, the boom of 1987-88 led to a large balance of payments deficits as imports were sucked in.

Interest rates

Increased demand began to raise inflation and wages began to follow. The Tories' answer was to put up interest rates, but with debt levels as high this has led to a massive slump.

The monetarist project failed either to destroy working class organisation or to provide for growth on firm foundations. By 1987, as the Tories swept back to power, monetarism as defined in 1979 was dead.

Their next step was to look for another way to threaten the labour movement and stabilise the economy. Joining the European exchange rate mechanism (ERM) provides this alternative.

If sterling is tied to the German mark, it means that wage rises and productivity must keep up with German rates. If wages rise faster and productivity slower than in Germany, profits will fall and unemployment will rise.

But for a weak capitalism such as Britain, this policy is fraught with difficulties. It raises the possibility of increased foreign competition and a continued slump.

The central problem for the Tories since 1979 has been their inability to intervene decisively in the restructuring of British capitalism. Where they could influence industries directly, as in coal and steel before privatisation, productivity has risen dramatically. But this has been on the basis of closing down most of the industry, not by creating profitable growth. In areas such as cars and shipbuilding, where international competition has been intense, we have seen the same result.

The policies of deregulating business have speeded the internationalisation of British capitalism and taken it out of government control. Increased foreign investment has made British firms vulnerable to recession in Europe or the USA. Monetarist policies failed partly because control of the money supply is not possible in a world of highly integrated financial markets. Intervening in the labour market through anti-unions has weakened resistance to closures in contracting industries.

But it has not yet led to sustained increases in productivity across the economy. Productivity has risen most in manufacturing, but is of decreasing importance for British capital. In 1989 only 16.8 per cent of business income came from manufacturing profits.

Speculation

The rise in profits under the Tories did not lead to renewed investment, but increased competition and financial speculation. This explains why the Tories cannot put forward a coherent economic programme for this election.

The process of European Monetary Union (EMU) is likely to ruin a boom such as 1987-88. Government projections put the deficit at 5 per cent of GDP for 1992-93. Even in recession the balance of payments deficit is still significant.

Tory policies no longer even pretend to lay the basis for renewed capitalist profitability in Britain. Instead they concentrate on limiting the labour movement's ability to challenge the initiatives of private capital. This is the background for the current bosses' offensive.

Throwing the Tories out of office is not just important because of their mismanagement of the economy. It is also the first step in the fightback against this offensive - an offensive which has its roots in the failure to transform British capitalism in the last decade.

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What choice for women?

By Rebecca Fleming

CHOICE, a KEYWORD in the Tories' election campaign, has also been a central theme in demands raised by the women's liberation movement.

In reality 13 years of Tory government – 11 of them under Britain's first woman Prime Ministers – have systematically eliminated women's choices. The gulf between rich and poor has been sharply cut across and magnified by the gender divisions of society. Commentators now talk of the ' feminisation of poverty'.

Crushing

The crushing burden of holding families together, under the assaults of redundancies, repossessions, evictions, Poll Tax, and rising benefits, generally falls on women. And, contrary to pronouncements of Tory ministers, single mothers consistently appear at the bottom of poverty league tables.

Over the last decade, the proportion of women in waged work has increased. But deciding to work, is often not the positive choice that the women's movement envisaged, but the product of sheer economic necessity.

The average woman's wage – compared to the average man's – has fallen again. Furthermore, women are systematically denied rights as part-time workers and as the vast majority of the rapidly expanding population of home-workers.

The terms of women's employment have not been shaped by women themselves. They have been shaped by employers operating within the parameters of economic recession and the crushing of militant trade unions under the twin weights of government offensive and the capitulation of new realism. Women's cheapness and flexibility has recommended itself to the bosses – and they intend to keep it that way.

Exceptions

There are, of course, exceptions. Some women, such as some women, have done well under the Tories. Pay differentials at the top of the scale have decreased, and women are finding promotion easier at managerial levels.

These women have dramatically benefited from the impact of feminism, however much they might deny it. But the choices offered to the few cannot outweigh the choices denied to everybody else.

Changing childcare provision illustrates this. Overall, the number of nursery and creche places has fallen over the last decade. But the decline has been in the public sector, while the Midland Bank, for example, has been leading the way in the provision of private, work-place nurseries.

Choices have dwindled in other areas too. While the Tories remain deeply divided over the question of abortion, reproductive rights have been further restricted.

Savage cuts

Savage cuts and structural changes in the NHS have exacerbated problems of regional variation in the availability of publicly-funded abortions. It has resulted in an increasing dependency on charities, themselves feeling the pinch.

The practical and ideological measures in the Embryology Act 1990, concerning access to donor insemination (DI), have led to the closure of one of the only two non-discriminatory services.

These latter moves were part of a central project of the Thatcher years – the strengthening and buttressing of the nuclear family. It runs like a thread through such diverse pieces of legislation as Section 28 and the abolition of benefit for 16 to 19 year olds. It shows itself in government propaganda around AIDS, and has frequently erupted in the speeches of Tory leaders.

Women, as the rock on which the nuclear family rests, have particularly suffered under this offensive. Responsibility for caring has increasingly been shifted even further to the family – and this, essentially, means women.

Specific groups of women have also been singled out for more explicit attack – lesbians, young women and disabled women.

Division

A major exception to the general rule has been provided by the tightening of immigration laws. These divide black families, and further undermine the position of black communities.

The one victory – the decision of the European Council of Human Rights that Britain discriminated against women in its rules concerning being in prison – quickly turned to defeat. The Tories simply applied the regulations to husbands as well.

The war in Ireland has also provided impetus that overrides concern for the integrity of the family. Women have provided a particular target for state terrorism – strip-searching being the most publicised example.

But all exceptions are double-edged. The racism fuelled by the Tories is one of the pressures on black communities that encourages fundamentalism and reinforces family structures – both to the detriment of black women.

Monument

Finally, Margaret Thatcher herself. Attacked by both right and left – including some feminists and the macho wings of anarchism, such as Class War – for being a woman. Occasionally her sex has been offered as her defence.

But she should be seen as a monument to the complexity of real life. Testament and prooem to the fact that capitalist society is not only divided along one line – be it class, sex or whatever – but divided along many.

All constantly intersect, intersect and form part of a new identity. The battle to be waged, not only to reverse the defeats of the Thatcher years, but to make progress towards equality and liberation, has to be fought on many fronts!

The recent release of June Scotland, acquitted of murdering her husband – who tortured and abused her for many years – has been welcomed as a victory by groups campaigning against violence against women.

The attitude of both the jury, who accepted her plea of self-defence on grounds of diminished responsibility, and the judge, who sentenced her to a probation order, have undoubtedly been affected by the campaigning around Sara Thornton's case.

But questions remain. For the plea of diminished responsibility upheld in this case is a plea of 'temporary insanity', not of self-defence or provocation.

In the best legal tradition, the central issue has been avoided. A way round thorny questions has been found, which maintains the system, keeps the premises it is based on intact, but does not upset public opinion.

The latest detour taken is a long-established one: labelling women who commit crimes, particularly those who involve violence, as mad not bad.

While welcoming June Scotland's release, the campaigning must continue. There are still women in prison for killing abusive husbands, and the law still refuses to recognise their actions as justified self-defence, rather than the aberrations of a deranged female mind.

FOR WOMEN, a group campaigning around domestic violence, can be contacted at 22 Finbury Park Road, London, N1.
NHS: Sore Tories still trying to get even

By Harry Sloan

In 1945-46, Tory MPs following Winston Churchill's 3-line whip marched time and again through the lobbies to oppose the establishment of the National Health Service.

The NHS nationalised the patchwork of private, charitable and municipal hospitals which had proved incapable of delivering adequate services in the war, and many of which were run on a shoestring. So popular was the new service that in its first two years it brought the collapse of the market in private health insurance, which shrank from over 10 million subscribers before the war to just 120,000 by 1950.

Many Tories still resent the NHS, which they describe as 'formal'. The 'free' form' pushed through Parliament in 1990 - against almost unanimous opposition and professional opposition - give a framework in which a fourth-term Tory government could attempt to roll back the wheel of history, moving towards an increasingly privatised system.

Until now, the Tory hostility to the NHS has been the theme of rearguard sniping exercises designed to entrench the edges rather than attack the fundamentals of the service.

Prescription charges

Despite the well-known 1950 rows and resignations in the Labour Party over the imposition of charges for NHS dental treatment and spectacles, it was the Tories under Churchill who first imposed prescription charges, beginning with a shilling (5p) per form in the early 1950s, rising rapidly to 10p per item in 1960.

After the Tories were turfed out by Wilson's Labour Party in 1964, the prescription charge was abolished for four years before reappearing as part of a crisis package in 1968.

Meanwhile in opposition, Tory shadow Health minister Sir Bernard Braine floated in 1969 the idea of imposing a prescription charge for NHS treatment which 'could be covered in part ... or wholly by health insurance'. But we might even look at the possibility of levying a hospital charge for outpatients.

When Ted Heath's Tory government took office, Chancellor Sir Anthony Barber lost no time in elimination the NHS in a mini-budget and increased prescription charges and jacked up dental and spectacle charges to help finance a 2.5p cut on basic rate income tax, which gave an average working family £7 a year and a top industrialist £3400.

Under Heath, Secretary of State Sir Keith Joseph dreamed up controversial NHS forms which were pushed through to take effect in April 1974, just two months after the months after the months after the months after the months after the months after the months after the months after the months after the months after the months after the months after the months after the months after the months after the months after the months after the months after the Heath had lost the election. The scheme was opposed by many NHS administrators and led to an increase of £17,000 administrator and cost at £600 a day to implement.

The incoming Labour government did not reverse the Tory measures, but set up a Royal Commission which eventually condemned them - but only after Thatcher had taken office in 1979.

Meanwhile with all Labour's policies effectively decided by the bankers and the International Monetary Fund, Chancellor Denis Healey imposed heavy cuts in NHS spending in 1976 which triggered a wave of hospital closures. The fightback against these coincided with rising wages militancy among newly-organised health unions and contributed to the 'winter of discontent' of 1978-79.

Pay increase

When Thatcher came to office she inherited a relatively generous 'compulsory' pay deal for nurses which automatically implied a big increase in NHS spending if immediate cuts were to be avoided.

But the traditional Tory hostility to the NHS was visible from the outset when, despite demands from the election, prescription charges rocketed 125% within six months, another 55% in April 1980, and by December 1980 had risen five-fold in Thatcher's first 18 months.

Soaring prescription charges have risen ever since, with the current charge of £3.60 a massive 18 times the pre-Thatcher level. The total raised from this charge, from which 75% of patients are exempt, is dispiriting compared with the £30 billion NHS budget: but as a flat-rate charge it bites especially hard against the low-paid workers, many of whom are now unable to afford all the items they are prescribed.

Thatcher's first Health Secretary Patrick Jenkin showed his contempt for the low-paid when he immediately suppressed the embarrassing findings of the Black Report on inequality and health, which showed that the palliative measures of the NHS had had little effect in stemming the tide of ill-health among poorer working class families.

Reforms

In 1982 the Tories again reorganised the NHS, scrapping some of Sir Keith's reforms, and establishing the present arrangement of District and Regional health authorities - as always - by non-elected quango bodies of political appointees. To this in 1984 they added a new tier of bureaucracy by establishing 800 new regional and district general managers.

The second Thatcher victory, the landslide against Michael Foot, heralded a new wave of cash cuts, again causing hospital closures (the 'Lawson cuts'). Meanwhile cock-a-hoop Tories began fantasising on the market-style solutions that could begin privatising the NHS.

While Tory policies for five of the first six years screwed down NHS spending to below the 2% a year real term increase needed to keep pace with new technology and an ageing population, right-wing Tory think tanks went into overdrive.

They charmed out ideas for privatisation of ever-wider ranges of services, for 'hotel charges' on hospital beds; for compulsory private health insurance; voucher systems or 'medicards' to enable NHS money to be diverted and 'topped up' in payment for private treatment; for internal markets; and for charity funding or even a lottery to pay for the NHS.

Stay off cuts

Yet the 1987 election again saw Thatcher cynically claiming that the NHS was safe only 'in our hands', and vigorously denying any intention to privatise.

The government - as they are doing now - rushed around the country doling out one-off payments to stay off cuts and closures until after the election. Yet at the same time they agreed a 9% pay increase for nurses which they then refused to fully fund.

That was to cause the huge 1987-88 winter crisis in which 5,000 NHS beds closed across the country.

This in turn helped trigger the 1988 nurses strikes over pay and conditions. When the election already in the bag, Thatcher was able to come out into the open and declare in January 1988 her intention to review the NHS.

A back-room cabal of right-wing fanatics dreamed up the new marketisation policies which appeared the January 1989 White Paper, which was then arrogantly pushed through Parliament by Health Secretary Kenneth Clarke.

Key features of the NHS Act are:

- the separation between purchasers and providers of health care, to create an 'internal market' in which hospitals compete against each other for patients.
- the opting out of hospitals from health authority control to become self-contained business enterprises.
- the imposition of restrictions and cash limits on GPs as the stick to force greater practices into becoming independent fund-holders.
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How Tories worked to bust union strength

By Angela Watson

TORY STRATEGY has been to destroy effective trade unionism through legislation and the creation of an atmosphere of fear in the workplace.

The economic driving force was the absolute necessity for lower wages, poorer working conditions and a savage reduction in health and safety standards. All this was aimed at maintaining profitability in a gathering world recession.

The American model of company unions or, ideally, union-free workplaces protected by employer-friendly legislation which had led to a sharp drop in unionisation since the 1960s was the Tories' aim.

In Britain in the '60s the Labour government's 'In Place of Strife' attempt to shock the unions by forcing the leadership to control the activists and consequently industrial action. It never reached the statute books and unofficial strikes were called by shop stewards ensuring that trade union leaders could not fulfil their side of the bargain.

Dracoonian

The Tories' defeat followed on its heels - the draconian Industrial Relations Act was rendered inoperable by unions breaking it at every level. The AEU engineering union was threatened with sequestration and fined £250,000 for supporting unofficial action.

Then the 'Pentonville Five' flying pickets were thrown into gaol, only to emerge free, carried high on the shoulders of an enormous demonstration. The whole country saw the humiliating defeat of the law on their television sets.

This defeat was followed by the 1972 and 1974 miners' strikes, which finished off Heath's government. But the Tories learned the lesson and made their preparations.

The task that lay ahead was made easier by the 1979-80 Labour government - brought into power by trade unionists. It immediately repealed the Industrial Relations Act - but after a short period in office it turned on working people, through the 'social contract'.

Decisive

And, in turn, their job was eased by the unofficial leadership of the shop stewards who had defeated 'In Place of Strife' and the Industrial Relations Act. At a conference against unemployment called by the Communist Party-dominated Liaison Committee for the Defence of Trade Unions (LCDTU) in 1976, the platform argued that the government should not be challenged.

The idea that Labour must retain power at all costs was a danger to the recipe that led to the situation today, with little cross-union coordination among activists and virtually no solidarity action.

Once back in power in 1979, the Tories gradually introduced legislation, exploiting the political weakness of the labour movement.

In 1982 union leaders met for the TUC's special conference in Wembley and declared that they would face gaol rather than accept the proposed anti-union laws. And when union members tried to implement the policy of defiance, it was another story.

Unions that tried to go it alone - ASLEF and the NGA - were cynically betrayed by the TUC.

An explanation for the defeat of the Labour government developed and was eventually peddled by what became the Kinnock wing of the Labour party and by most trade union leaders. Apparently Labour had lost the 1979 election because strikes were unpopular, not because of Labour's austerity measures, social contract and government assault on the low paid.

They concluded that the legislation could not be defeated - the only solution was to wait for the next Labour government. Conveniently for any future Labour government, obeying the law has largely replaced any collective memory of the history of defiance of anti-union legislation.

Dominance

The dominance of new realism was cemented by crucial working class defeats: the 1984-85 miners' strike and subsequent defeats for the Welsh miners and dockers.

NUM leader Arthur Scargill points out in his 'New Realism - the politics of fear' that new realism is neither new nor realistic. The current situation has much in common with 'Menden', the class collaborationism adopted by the TUC in 1927.

It was a response to the Trades Disputes and Trade Union Act passed in the aftermath of the defeat of the general strike, in which secondary action was banned, picketing severely restricted, unions were prevented from disciplining scabs and their funds made liable for civil damage.

Just as TUC General Secretary Walter Citrine argued that a partnership of unions and capital, aiming at greater stability and harmony in industry, today AEU president Bill Jordan talks of a 'partnership of common interest' with employers.

Defeatism

Miners' leader AJ Cook wrote that the influence of the Labour party on the dominant trade union officials has been a decisive factor in fostering the growth of a Mondist policy in the trade union movement. Citrine's 'industrial peace' meant the breaking of agreements, speed ups and a huge fall in living standards.

Then as now, a political response to the situation in the unions is necessary.

Another legacy of 13 years of Tory rule and the increasing grip of new realism is the growth of union mergers. Initially recognition refused by many unions. In some cases they were seen as an opportunity for greater rank and file unity within industrial sectors.

But the emergence of the amalgamated Engineers and Electricians Union, the AEU, will form a company union block inside the movement.

Employers have welcomed it as a 'force for change'. It is just what they need to drive home new management techniques.

In 1992, whatever the election outcome, trade unions face the recession, the latest employers' offensive, anti-union laws and a combination of new realism and company unionism. This has effectively de-unionised many car plants and is now sweeping into the public sector.

Resistance is weak - as is reflected in strike figures - but still exists. And Britain remains relatively heavily unionised, with some 8 million union members. But the refusal to resist anti-union laws and new management techniques - has to be fought politically.
Kinnock, new realism and the Left’s defeat

By Pete Firmin

NEIL KINNOCK said recently that Britain would have been better off if there had been a Labour government since 1983.

The Tories claimed that he still bankrolled after the left policies on which Labour fought the election that year. Kinnock, of course, meant no such thing. But it is worth taking a brief look at just how far the Labour Party has shifted.

Labour’s 1983 manifesto was certainly ‘left’ by today’s standards. It was committed to unilateral nuclear disarmament, repeal of the anti-union laws, nationalisation of privatised industry, and much more.

At that time the party was far more democratic than it is today; there had been a fight over party democracy going on since the mid-1970s. The 1983 manifesto was drawn up with much more party input than before. The leader could be elected by the whole party – not just the MPs. Mandatory re-selection resulted in a crop of new left MPs and candidates.

It was during the Labour governments of 1974-79 that the impetus came for changes in Labour’s policies and party democracy. The Callaghan government’s ‘Social Contract’ provoked escalating strikes, and was eventually defeated at both the TUC Congress and Labour Party conference.

Opposition to a key government policy overflown into demands for greater accountability of the party’s representatives. In the aftermath of the ‘Winter of Discontent’, provoked by its persistence with an incomes policy – forty times the current level of days lost through stoppages were seen – Labour lost the 1979 election.

Within eighteen months of the Tories being elected, mandatory re-selection and election of leaders by party conference passed. In October 1981, Tony Benn came within one per cent of beating Denis Healey for the deputy leadership.

Some ten years on and we are now in a position where resistance to redundancies and speed-up is low, MPs have been expelled, Labour Party Young Socialists has been smashed, Labour’s policies look like wet Toryism, and conference democracy is on the verge of being abolished in favour of bureaucratic ‘policy forums’.

From the early 1980s the right wing and the bureaucracy planned their fightback against the high tide of Bennism. After the defeat of Benn in the deputy leadership election, the SDP split and the 1983 election defeat, the right hit back with the election of Kinnock as leader, and the expulsion of the Militant editorial board.

Facing Thatcher’s intransigence, the trade union leaderships were incapable of putting forward any policy other than retreat. A special TUC conference in 1982 had pledged outright opposition to the 1980 and 1982 anti-union laws – even if this meant unlawful action.

But during the first full test of the laws – the Stockport Messenger strike of mid-1983 – the TUC failed to give serious support. Verbal opposition was then dropped in favour of attempting to negotiate with the government. Ever since then, individual unions have been left to fight alone, hamstrung by the law, and have been defeated.

The fate of the Labour left during most of the 1980s has been one of retreat and rearguard action. The marginalisation and defeat of the left has only been closely linked to the major deficits suffered in the class struggle, especially the defeat of the miners’ strike. The right wing has been able to consistently use the argument that struggle leads to defeat, and that only by moving right could Labour win another election.

Of course, it would have been a completely different story if the miners’ strike and other major struggles had won. Thatcher would probably have been brought down. The left would have been dramatically strengthened in the Labour Party.

These massive class battles were lost because of the lack of any attempt to capture the new, the new from the new realist leaders. But that to a certain extent begs the question, because of course the right-wing leaders betray – there is nothing new or exceptional in that.

Two factors have to be taken into account when examining the failure of the Bennite left to overcome right-wing and bureaucratic resistance. First, the alliance around the Bennite, for example the electoral bloc which brought Benn to within half a per cent of winning the deputy leadership battle, involved a very temporary bloc, which included left and not-so-left bureaucrats disgruntled with the Callaghan government. That alliance could not hold the long term.

Second, the Bennite leaders were very late to organise the left, to form a powerful rank-and-file movement in the party and the unions. While the SDP eventually formed the Socialist Movement, the defeat of the left was already sealed.

There is no question of a strategy which involved strong rank-and-file organisation and a challenge to the bureaucracy would have won. Even the best strategy can end in defeat, given a bad relationship with the Mandelists. Political possibility existed of a different outcome if a strategy based on mass action and a challenge to the bureaucracy had been adopted.

In the late 1970s there was widespread debate in the Labour movement of a left policy for government – variations on the ‘alternative Economic Strategy’ theme. What was lacking, though, was a programme that could relate to the struggles of the working class in a more direct way, linking their demands to what the Labour Party should do.

Far from uniting resistance, sections of the left have refused to defend militant supporters, while Militant itself has, at best, set up ‘front’ campaigns, refusing to work with others in a broad campaign. At other times it has either put up no resistance at all, or has resorted to the courts.

The upshot of these failures is that the bureaucracy now feels confident to expel almost anyone who resists its policy directives, to impose candidates at will, and to expel two sitting MPs, Dave Nellist and Terry Fields.

Join the Campaign Against the Witchhunt c/o 56 Ashby House, Loughton Road, Brixton, London, SW9 7SL.

Unshackle the Unions

‘We demand the complete repeal of all anti-union legislation and that the British Government comply with the Conventions and Principles of the United Nations International Labour Organisation for the full restoration of trade union rights.

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

We reject the argument that a trade union movement of 8 million members has no alternative but to comply with anti-union legislation.

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

If you agree with this statement please write to the Socialist Movement, Trade Union Committee c/o Carolyn Sikorski 53a Geere Road, London E15 for more details.

A full list of supporters will be given to the media at a press conference on May Day. Arthur Scargill, Tony Benn and Joe Marino will be speaking at the press conference.
Will left learn in time?

By Peter Purton
Labour Campaign for Lesbian and Gay Rights
TORY BACK-BENCHER

Harry Greenway began his election campaign by an-
ouncing his support for the Asylum Bill in his local
paper. He also claimed that a Labour government would
mirror the policies of the last local Labour council - high
rates for 'lesbians, gays and other de-
viants'.

While John Major might not
follow Tebbit's 1987 course of
stirring up homophobic prejudice against Labour's les-
bians and gay equality policy, local campaigns have no such
qualms. Defence of 'the family',
ascription of 'traditional values',
and attacks on 'deviance' are a
central feature of Tory ide-
ology.

They know that no Labour leader will court tabloid head-
tlines by publicly coming to the
defence of lesbian and gay com-
munities. This has been a regu-
lar feature of the thirteen years of Tory rule and, if lesbians and
gays had any right back the situation would have been
even worse.

State harassment has been continuous. Police victimi-
amation of lesbians and gay men scarcely offsets the occasional gestures by liberal 'community' police officers. Nor do they off-
set police inaction in response
to queerbashing and murders.

Prosecution of the 'Gay's the
Word' bookshop in 1994 has been followed by action against
other bookshops and publica-
tions. Despite winning the
backing of artists and liberals, these causes have failed to
generate practical support from the labour movement.

Appalling silence

Where the defendants have been people like the said maso-
chists sentenced to monstrous prison sentences in 'Operation
Spanner' - for completely con-
scious adults - the silence of the labour movement has been
appalling.

Since 1987, the state's attacks have been upstaged by legisla-
tive onslaught. Why? Because the gains made by lesbian and
gay campaigners seemed to pose a real threat to Tory social
order. Moves by some Labour councils to introduce positive
images of lesbian and gay sex-
uality in schools triggered Sec-
tion 28.

In outlawing the 'promotion
of homosexuality' and the
teaching of lesbian and gay re-
lationships as 'pretended
families' it was the first move which explicitly attacked les-
bians through the law. It was
also the first legal assault since
the 1885 Laboursphere amend-
ment criminalised male homo-
sexuality.

Success encouraged the right
further in their crusade against
the undermining of the family.

Section 28 was followed by at-
tacking donor insemination - a
second direct assault on les-
bians - through clauses in the
Human Fertilisation and Em-
byology Act.

Despite the fact that lesbians and gay men should not be allowed to parent also lay behind the attempt to exclude us from fos-
tering or adopting children with
the Paragraph 16 gui-
delines to the Children Act.

The right also took this oppor-
tunity to strengthen the anti-
gay provisions of the Criminal
Justice Act with Section 25.

Obscene tabloids

Alongside the grim cata-
logue of Tory persecution were also the effects of the AIDS
crisis. When it first became ap-
parent that AIDS was becoming
a serious health threat, and that
gay men were the primary suf-
ferrers in Britain and the USA,
the tabloid press ran what must
rank as one of the most obscene
press campaigns that even this
degraded medium could man-
age.

Gay communities were scapegoated as 'plague-carr-
riers' in the worst tradition of
media glorification of the
Thatcher government's re-
sponse, at the level of a health
crisis, was criminally inade-
quate. Appeals for charity are not
an effective deterrent - but they
were cheap!

Only in more recent years, when the real truth about HIV
and AIDS translated into seri-
sous numbers of heterosexual
cases, has there been a slight
shift of approach. But the press
continues to resurrect the terri-
fying image of the plague-car-
rier.

When the 1989 Labour Party
conference reasserted its com-
mittance to an equal age of con-
sent, the paper's editorial stated that
this meant exposing children to
AIDS. If a new Labour govern-
ment acts on its commitment to a
free vote on the issue, there
will be a real change.

Fightback

In 1979, lesbian and gay
rights was a fringe issue. No
political party even thought
about it. Even the left gave it
some thought. But only token
support campaign of the

This changed dramatically over the following ten years, as
lesbians and gay men became
both active and organised
across the labour movement.
Trade union lesbian and gay
groups began to force unions into
better equality policies.

The miners' strike of 1984-85
was a turning point, providing
the impetus to win the first clear
policy votes at the TUC and La-

Within the labour movement,
despite all the triumphs of new
realism, LCGR has succeeded in
consolidating those policy gains. Even the 1987 and 1992
Labour manifestos retained
commitments on equality policies.

Biggest ever

Section 28 generated the big-
gest political movement ever
seen by Britain's lesbian and
gay communities. Organised
and run by lesbians and gay
men, the campaign turned out
tens of thousands in protest.

Aside from the national mobi-
lisations, actions were organised
in towns and cities which had
never seen lesbian and gay pro-
test before.

One gain from the unpre-
cedented media debate was in
public perception of the ques-
tions. A recent opinion poll re-
vealed a big majority in favour
of lesbian and gay equality - a
useful reminder to anyone who
assumes that steps towards
equality will inevitably be un-
popular.

The left could play a role in
preparation for the bigger bat-
tles to come, by actively chal-
pioning the struggles of lesbians and
gay men against institu-
tional, social and legislative op-
pression. There is no doubt that
these struggles will continue.

The question is - will the
left and the labour movement
learn their significance in time?

Family Rights' campaigner confronts Outrage! activist.

A bad example...

By Sam Imran

THE FAILURE of the labour
movement to act decisively on its
new policies and be seen to resist
the Tory offensive, has helped cre-
ate widespread disillusion in
the lesbian and gay communities.

If this distort could lead to self-or-
ganisation in order to win the labour
movement to firm action it would be
positive. Currently it leads to pity,
ultra-left or stultifying politics - not
connected with trying to build either
a mass campaign or labour movement
backing.

It is frustrating in the extreme for
lesbian and gay activists within the
labour movement to be constantly
told through the media - left and
mainstream - that Outrage! and
Peter Tatchell in particular are the
only spokespeople for lesbian and
gay communities.

Shouts like the recent and much
publicised 'Right to Marry' protest or
organised by Outrage! are ambiguous
flew-intentioned. Of course lesbians and gay men should have their rela-
tionships legally recognised. Death of
a partner can result in lesbians and
gay men losing their right to a home
and can lead to horrific experiences
with homophobic families.

But in celebrating an institution
that has formed a cornerstone of
women's oppression for centuries -
legally tying women to the family -
only serves to further depoliticise the
issues at stake.

An example of the depoliticisation
of the politics of sexuality was seen
on a recent TV phone-in debate about
the latest Royal separation. One
woman phoned in to say how as
a lesbian, she thought the prospect of
a Royal divorce was 'bulling a bad
example'. She was laughed at.

It just shows how you cannot fight
heterosexism and homophobia by
playing up to the straights. Outrage!
should take care.

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2UU
Wales: Tory dream and workers’ nightmare

By Daffyd Rhys

The 1980s will be remembered as the decade when the Welsh coal industry was finally destroyed. Wales entered the decade with over 30,000 miners employed in coal and left it with less than a thousand. This butchery was made possible by the defeat of the 1984-85 miners’ strike, a defeat with far-reaching political and economic consequences in Wales.

Additional job losses in steel and other manufacturing industries pushed unemployment above the UK average in the early 1980s. It peaked at over 30% in 1986 but then began to steadily decline and the gap between Wales and the UK average began to narrow. Wales attracted a fifth of all foreign investment in the late 80s, despite containing only a twelfth of the UK workforce. Welsh secretary Peter Walker claimed a major success, and declared ‘Wales entered the 1990s with remarkably economic prospects...the 1990s therefore do not contain the downside risk of the 1980s.’

A glance behind the rhetoric reveals another story. Welsh workers slipped to the bottom of the UK incomes table in the 1980s, earning only 86 per cent of the UK average in 1990.

The Tories have been more successful in Wales than any other part of Britain in pushing down wages while increasing productivity. They have created a low waged, low skill economy based on the entry of large numbers of women into the workforce.

Two factors made this possible. First, the huge pool of unemployment made it relatively easy to put the squeeze on wages. Second, the defeat of the miners’ strike had a devastating impact. It destroyed the South Wales NUM, without doubt the union with the strongest traditions of militancy in Wales, and demoralised supporters of the strike. The Wales TUC has enthusiastically supported the view that inward investment is the only answer. Affiliated unions have pursued a policy of single-union deals and no strike agreements.

Many of the US and Japanese companies which have invested in Wales do not recognise unions in any of their other locations. But they are happy to accept a workforce disciplined by their own organisations.

Following a brief left wing flourish in the early eighties the Plaid Cymru leadership has also been moving steadily rightwards. Daffyd Ellis Thomas moved the writ for Bobby Sands MP in 1981, but by 1990 he was calling for a ban on a visit by Sinn Fein councillors! Plaid also opposed mass non-payment of the poll tax and so failed to capitalise on the issue in the way the SNP did in Scotland.

The challenge is to build a new left in the Welsh labour movement with an alternative to the inward investment line of the right wing trade unions. We need a left which positively addresses the national question and defines its own Welsh language.

These demands can be focused in a call for a Welsh Assembly with real powers to defend Welsh workers, which will only be won through struggle. In this process we will need to draw on the rich history of working class militancy in Wales. Significantly, 1992 marks the eightieth anniversary of the publication of the syndicalist Miners’ Next Step in the Rhondda. Give our workers their voice as fresh and vital as the day it was written: ‘The old ideas of selflessness between employers and ourselves be abolished, and a policy of open hostility be installed.’

Scottish crisis looming

By Patrick Baker

The 1985 Anglo Irish Agreement much has been read as the death of the most Unionist Prime Minister since the War.

Margaret Thatcher had to concede the involvement of a foreign government – Duble – in order to counter the rise of Sinn Fein. The ‘resolve approach’ was seen to work. Looking back, the Agreement’s only success was as ‘pre-presentational object’ for a Government embarrassed by world-wide censure of its policy in Ireland, particularly during the 1980-81 Hunger Strikers]

Thatcher had personal as well as political reasons for her hatred of Irish Republicans. Her political mentor Aine Neave was killed by an INLA bomb in 1979. Five years later the在家里 was almost wiped out in the IRA attack on the Grand Hotel in Brighton. The ‘resolve approach’ had many attractions for the British ruling class when Thatcher became Tory leader in 1975. The economic crisis combined with Heath’s defeat by the miners the year before led some sections of the ruling class, according to Peter Wright of ‘Spycatcher’ fame, to conclude that ‘the dirty tricks were not solely directed against the Wilson Government, but also Heath. Colin Wallace and Fred Holroyd have both noted the Northern Ireland situation was used for destabilisation purposes. Aine Neave was himself closely linked with the ‘security’ services.

Tony policy on Northern Ireland and after 1979 was at first blood from that of Roy Mason under Labour. There were no concessions on political status during the Hunger Strikers, though the demands were later granted in all but name. Throughout the 1980s Thatcher’s refusal to talk to the men of violence ran parallel to a stepping up of the covert war. An Amnesty International Report in June 1986 detailed 49 killings by the security forces in Northern Ireland during the previous six years. Most were Catholics – Nationalists – and the victims were generally unarmed.

Aside from this was the return to a strategy employed by Brigade General Kilburn in the early 1970s of setting Loyalists and Nationalists against each other in a series of tit-for-tat killings. The new model involves using Loyalist death squads to target Republicans using information from the Army and the RUC. As well as keeping British hands clean, it has the added benefit of showing them in the role of peacekeepers.

Overall the strategy has failed, as the tactics of the Brooke talks. After 20 years of being sold on by Westminster, a British settlement is as far away as ever. Which is a surprise only to those who believed that the sectarian stalemate could be reformed or that Britain is actually the peacemaker. The Labour Party now favours unity by consent, but supports the Brooke talks excluding Republicans. The question for those who see the Anglo Irish Agreement as the vehicle for harmonisation, ultimately leading to Irish unity, is this:

‘What happens when the Unionists refuse consent, not only to but to any steps towards harmonisation?’

The last 23 years suggests that another internal 4-county settlement will be tried, combined of course with vigorous prosecution of the war against the Nationalists.

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Paisley and the Loyalists: calling the shots?
Law and order: the silence is deafening

By Piers Mostyn

With the skill of experienced ballet dancers, the Tories have deftly avoided any serious criticism of the issue of law and order. And yet they ought to stand most exposed on this question.

From beginning to end, they made it a central theme of their policy. But long-term statistics over the period show that, despite a massive increase in spending, reported crime has doubled since the Tories came to power in 1979. Statistics, however, have been years of growing crisis in the criminal justice system.

The police are increasingly seen as law unto themselves. Literally. Only recently the official inquiry into the West Midlands Serious Crimes Squad described it as being ‘out of control’ And North London police officers are being investigated for selling cocaine and framing suspects.

Recent Joyce acquittals in political trials - Irishmen Kevin O’Donnell, Dossie Ellis and William McKane; Randle and Portie; and numerous Poll Tax riot defendants - do not reflect a cleaning up of the system but massive public cynicism in it. There have been waves of prison riots and strikes. Deaths in custody - whether black people in East London police stations or young offenders committing suicide on remand - have become a major issue. So has police violence, again particularly against black people.

Ironically, 13 years of monetarist Tory law and order policy are not better symbolised by than the Metropolitan Police. Having an annual budget of hundreds of thousands of pounds for paying out settlements for claims for wrongful arrests, assaults and malicious prosecutions.

Frightening the police would never work. Giving cops’ soaring wage demands and the money that needs doling out to keep their victims quiet, it could never be made profitable.

Then there are the courts - a major wing of the British state that remains extremely unaccountable, elitist and tied to highly conservative values. It is too easy for them to castigate Labour’s bipartisanism on the issue to degenerate into a head-long slide into Tory-style policies.

Roy Hattersley has studiously courted the reactionary Police Federation. Labour local authorities are now promoting police-council-business partnerships in place of the demand for accountability and support for oppressed groups that found limited favour ten years ago. Police pay and numbers would increase under Labour.

Labour’s commitment to civil liberties will likewise stretch little beyond cosmetic law reform. Gone is the opposition to the 1986 Public Order Act or parts of the 1984 Police and Criminal Evidence Act.

There has been silence on the large-scale police operations followed by criminal prosecu-

The crushing of municipal socialism

By Paul Lawson

LOCAL GOVERNMENT was at the heart of the Tories’ attacks in the ‘manifesto’. The Thatcher government’s record in 1979 local councils wielded considerable financial clout.

By definition, they were bastions of non-Tory local power in many areas. But what set the Tories on their crusade against local jobs and services was the growth of the local government left - "municipal socialism’.

In the early 80s, the GLC under Ken Livingstone and other metropolitan councils like Sheffield, put forward progressive policies aimed at helping working class communities. They were unsurprisingly infiltrated at the ability of local authorities to buck the Westminster mainstream.

The Tories devised two major proposals which would erode the municipal councils - rate capping to curb local financial power, and the abolition of the Metropolitan Councils, which would conveniently scrap the GLC.

Abolition of the Metropolitan councils was a first step. But rate capping could, potentially, be resisted by refusing to set rate-capped budget levels, by mobilising workers and the local communities in defence of social needs.

The struggle over rate capping There have been struggles with the miners’ strike in 1984-5. To be effective it required co-ordinated resistance of a swath of Labour councils, prepared to go into illegal and face disqualification.

Brave words however did not bring forth such brave actions as council bodies in the face of the Thatcherite local government. The battle for the control of the local Labour left was tested. A church council to form the GCL.

Livingstone’s decision to fold up the rate capping struggle, against the resistance of John McDonnell and Joe, gave the green light to dozens of Labour councils to shoulder the work. In the end, half-way through 1985, the Camerons, Greenshields and others fell only by the wayside. But the struggle was valiantly fought by Liver-

police, under Militant leadership and by Lambeth.

But the end resistance could not be sustained by just two councils. After the imposition of abolition and rate capping, the Tories stormed forward to hit local government with privatisation - "compulsory competitive tendering’.

The local government unions, vigilantly in the case of NUPE and the GMB, issuing unrelenting threats of resistance by MILGO, largely conceded - at least at national level. As the tide of redundancies grew in the late 1980s, local branches were generally left to fight cuts and redundancies on their own, suffering numerous defaults. And then came the poll tax.

The poll tax was a bridge too far for Thatcher. It ran into trouble because of its blatant injustice and because it hit the black sections of popula-

The bureaucracy could not derail it. In March 1989 200,000 people marched against the tax. The calculated police assault on the demonstra-

In contrast to the Tories, Labour leaders
De Klerk’s landslide victory shores up white power

By Charlie van Gelderen

A white referendum is the most insulting and most unacceptable of all the political structures of apartheid - a betrayal of the political policy and practice of our movement. This is how WOSA, South Africa’s Workers Organisation for Socialist Action, described the recent vote.

De Klerk’s huge majority in his white referendum surprised nearly every commentator, and probably even De Klerk himself. But will this vote of the white minority affect the black majority of the population and the progress towards a democratic constitution?

Although the ANC and the Communist Party (SACP) rejoiced on their previous promises to have no truck with the institutionalised racism of the state and urged whites to vote ‘yes’ to De Klerk’s reforms, this outcome will rebound on them. Whites did not vote for the surrender of their economic and social privileges. They know that a return to apartheid, advocated by the Conservative Party and the openly fascist AWB, was not feasible.

Such a retrograde move would still further cripple the already enfeebled economy. Bringing with it renewed demands for sanctions even if the British Tories would find difficult to oppose. So they gave De Klerk his landslide victory to strengthen his hand in his negotiations with the ANC and others in the liberation movement.

The National Party is now openly talking of an interim government, including the ANC, for the next decade.

They now feel strong enough to defy the call for a Constituent Assembly, unless it is backed up by militant mass action, drawing in organised workers, youth and the landless rural people.

De Klerk knows this. This is why his first demand after the referendum results were announced was to demand the disbanding of the ANC’s armed wing, Umkhonto we Sizwe.

WOSA concludes ‘negotiations for power sharing are a death trap for the oppressed and exploited people. We have to continue the liberation struggle by means of mass action and mass mobilisation for fundamental social reforms around the issues of employment, housing, electricity, health, sport, culture and recreation. Only by organising the urban and rural poor in such mass campaigns will we be able to alter the balance of forces in favour of the oppressed people in order to achieve full democratic rights by means of a Constituent Assembly...’.

French local elections

Cresson ready for the chop

By Patrick Baker

There will be some change of Prime Minister. What day? I cannot tell you... Edith Cresson knows very well that her days are numbered, after winning less than one in every five votes in recent local elections.

And no wonder. Beaten by the Front National in areas of Paris as well as Nice, the Socialist Party needs something close to a miracle to save it. They have lost half their vote in four years.

According to Le Monde, it is not the issue of immigration, picked on by Le Pen, that is making Socialist voters desert in droves. Rather it is their handling of the economy, and the corruption that has plagued the party. Whether a result of inserting EC commissioners Jacques Delors in Cresson’s place will lift the bill is doubtful.

Dewos might be more popular - most people are - but whether he can salvage the Socialists’ fortunes after a decade of austerity and broken promises is something else.

Victor

There is no doubt, on the other hand, as to who is the victor from the March 27 elections. Jean-Marie Le Pen did not outscore the traditional right Union for France (UPF) in the Nice-Marseille region as he had hoped.

But he beat the Socialists, and saw his vote climb to nearly 30 per cent in the area. On a national level, the number of FN councilors increased by three quarters.

As for the left, the Communist Party vote held up fairly well with around 8 per cent. Communist dissidents, such as the ‘reconstructors’, generally did better where they stood. The only national far left campaign, presented by Lutte Ouvriere (Workers’ Struggle), won around 2 per cent.

Exceptions to the rule included candidates supported by the Revolutionary Communist League.

Fallacies of State Capitalism

A debate between Ernest Mandel and Chris Harman

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The ruins of the left intelligentsia

By Will McMahon
ROBIN BLACKBURN’S editorial ‘The ruins of Westminster’, in the latest New Left Review (NLR) centres on three issues: constitutional reform and Charter 88, the left agenda and Europe, and a demand for PR.

Amongst these Blackburn views PR as ‘the strategic imperative’ – giving space for a new left party – and so calls for a liberal-Labour coalition in preference to a Labour majority government. If this sounds familiar, it is because it was the litany of the thankfully-deceased Marxism Today.

That it should appear on the eve of the election in NLR is evidence of the intellectual collapse of a section of the left intelligentsia which previously had some association with revolutionary marxism. Blackburn’s support for Charter 88 is a reflection of the lack of class interest in his position. Not only is Charter 88 itself undemocratic, but it makes no mention of the democratic right of working people to have a voice in the running of the economy. And his mistakes, and almost unconscious, conflation of Europe with the west European Community is only overshadowed by his strategy for eastern Europe – its gradual, but wholesale, integration into the west European capitalist economy.

Finally, there is the call for coalition government to force the issue of PR, and in turn make space for a new left party. This puts the desire of these intellectuals for the project above the crucial need for a majority Labour government, creating space for class struggle. It is all too reminiscent of the ultra left politics of the RCP, but with an additional facade of ‘pragmatism’ and ‘reason’.

So why has the layer of intellectuals represented by Blackburn gone for political necrophilia with the corpse of eurocommunism?

The answer lies partly in the obsession of the present left intelligentsia with western Europe and the supposed background of the British political system. But the recent Clintonian creation of capitalism, by Ellen McKechnie Wood, effectively debunked the mythology of British backwardness. Rather than being peculiarly backward, it argues, it is a particularly capitalist social formation.

But for Blackburn and friends, the working class has let down the generation of ’86. The defeat of the 1984-85 Miners’ Strike was the signal for the intellectuals’ retreat from class and the slide towards the more comfortable aloofness of constitutional reform.

Is this an aberration? I hope so. It is with sadness rather than anger that we see the editor of collections such as ‘Revolution and Class Struggle’ tread the path to the morais of eurocommunism.

Learning the lessons of history

Killing the Nazi Menace: how to stop the fascists
Written by Chris Bambery
Published by SWP £1.50
Reviewed by Pete MacDonald

THIS PAMPHLET starts off with a general if staid round up of Trotsky’s analysis of fascism. This is probably the most common reading of the text, partly because by definition it is the least self-serving. It accurately traces the petit-bourgeois roots of fascism that are turned into ‘a battering ram against the working class.’

What Bambery then fails to do, however, is to link the current threat of fascism in Britain to a petit-bourgeois equation. He is silent about the deregulation of Thatcherism, and which is now facing a recession. In fact the role of Thatcherism is completely ignored by the pamphlet – there is no mention made of her ‘two-terms’ of 1979 and the effect this had on taking votes away from the National Front.

No, we are told that the only thing that stopped the fascist threat in its tracks was (predictably) the ANL. Bambery goes further, stating ‘The ANL was a model of how to organise against the Nazis’ – admitting to no regrets, no mistakes, no corrections and therefore needing no alteration despite over a decade of cold storage.

Given this, it is only logical that in any other country
Productivity key to Stalinist failure

Harry Sloan spoils an otherwise very good account of the state under Stalinism with a false name regarding the criterion for success of socialist construction in the USSR.

The real comparison that counts said Trotsky, is between living standards in the USSR and those in the advanced capitalist countries. This is not true, Trotsky said that always along the productivity of human labour was what counted (Revolution Betrayed chapter 1 section 2).

Trotsky held Lenin’s theory that in the “advanced capitalist” countries there exists a labour aristocracy that is effectively bought off by means of imperial super profits and upon which rests a labour bureaucracy. Trotsky gives this theory a new twist in this article of 10 October 1928.

The existence of the labour aristocracy and a bureaucracy enjoy either above average wages, better working conditions, and shorter hours etc; or a combination of both.

It is, in fact, no more coincidence than that associated with the labour movement, there are a number of academic, and who would reject Lenin’s theory of labour aristocracy (eg Eric Hobsbawm), just doubts about its validity, or simply ignore it.

Get back to the real issue

Rather than enter the debate about unconditional critical support for Irish socialist republicanism I’d like to encourage SO to get on with our main job here – building and maintaining anti-imperialism.

We could discuss the Labour Party’s position on Ireland and what is being done to change this, coverage of anti-imperialist initiatives which SCI may or may not be involved in and reviews of the many TV programmes articles and books (some from left publishers) that put the blame squarely on the “unwary” “sectarian” Irish.

Above all, more emphasis on how we in the heart of the beast can stop this last Great British colonial “intervention” (823 years young).

Roy Rudditt

London

In response to Liam Mac Uaid’s letter in SO 18, in which he responds to criticisms of a previous article written by him about Ireland, may I make a few comments.

Firstly on reading the article by Liam, I too had criticisms which I considered forwarded to your paper but didn’t, mainly because I’m a relatively new addition to you readership and am not (as Liam assumes of your readers) sufficiently familiar with your history of involvement in virtually every serious anti-imperialist initiative of recent years or of your theoretical positions.

I remember thinking when I read the article they’ve taken a series of current happenings/events in the six counties, put them together and included them in their paper as if to say – now, an article on Ireland. I felt confused by it and wondered what issues from outside Ireland might make of it.

I confess I recall everything that was in it now, but do remember being a bit disturbed by the use of the term ‘fit-for-tar’ because what it implies is so far removed from what is actually happening here. Also, it is a term more often used in pro-British anti-republican publications or tabloid type reporting.

It is true that the IPLO have carried out a number of blatant sectarian attacks on Protestants, and while I personally feel that these attacks have been wrong morally, politically, militarily, tactically and every other wrong you can think of, a dozen or more Catholics were probably killed or wounded during this period.

The point being, every time a Catholic is shot it’s said to be in retaliation for a previous killing, when more often than not, the previous killings have in fact been random attacks on Catholics by loyalists.

The use of the term apart from being factually incorrect, in my opinion, dangerous, in that it can lead to people being confused about the conflict here.

While possibly agreeing with Liam that in a revolutionary situation it may be necessary to deal harshly with collaborators, but political considerations come before moral and military ones.

I fail to see how anything in his article ‘continued to be borne out by subsequent events’. His assertion that the IRA would not have killed the Protestant building workers at Treban or if they had been Catholics is misleading, in that it intimates that the IRA would not kill collaborators if they were Catholic and ignores the fact that you simply would not get a van load of Catholic workers returning from work on a British Army installation.

The killing of UDR and RUC members by the IRA has been portrayed as sectarian by loyalist politicians and British Government ministers or as ‘goonism against the Protestant community’ by Ken Maginnis. Whether or not you agree with the killings and Treban, or any other killings carried out by the IRA, it is not those deaths that make a Protestant worker a loyalist.

It may be the case in theory, that all members of the working class are potential socialists and by extension that all members of the Irish working class are potential supporters of an independent Ireland.

The reality however, and historically proven to be the case, is that the British presence militantly, economically, and otherwise, is an obstacle which until removed, will never see the unification of the working class in Ireland.

P. Devenny

Long Kesh Prison

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P. 15, No. 18, April 2, 1992
ONE HUNDRED police attacked a Kurdish demonstration outside the Turkish embassy last Tuesday. The attack with truncheons and dogs left many Kurds with head injuries, including one man, Kadir Koskocon, who had his skull smashed.

Koskocon was left unconscious on the ground for one hour before police, fearing that he would die, airlifted him to hospital. After two days unconscious in hospital he was removed by police into custody. It is not known whether he will suffer permanent affects from his beating.

The Kurdish demonstrators were protesting against continued Turkish repression against Kurdistan, including the bombing of Kurdish areas. Since the Gulf war Saddam Hussein has been prevented by the West from using fixed-wing planes against the Kurds, but Turkey has bombed Kurdish civilians and supporters of the Kurdish Workers Party (PKK) in both northern Iraq and Turkey.

Twenty demonstrators were arrested and face serious criminal damage and public order charges. They will appear in court again on 19 April.

INSIDE: 9 page special election supplement

New year massacre

Turkey's brutal war on the Kurdish people escalated on March 21, the Kurdish New Year 'Newroz', with a massacre centred on the towns of Sirnak and Cizre, a stronghold of the Kurdish Workers Party (PKK).

The Newroz celebrations, traditionally a focus for Kurdish demonstrations, developed into a near-insurrectionary rising in North West Kurdistan, South Eastern Turkey. Mass demonstrations were attacked by Turkish troops near the Syrian and Iraq borders. In the following days warplanes, tanks and artillery bombarded the region around Sirnak, supposedly focusing on guerrilla bases run by the PKK.

But Kurdish and Turkish intellectuals and MPs have gone on hunger strikes, claiming that the operation is a campaign of genocide against the Kurdish people. Reports indicate that more than a hundred civilians had been killed in the first three days of the assault.

The Newroz massacre is a reminder of the brutal tactics employed by the Turkish military in its war against the Kurds. The PKK has been fighting for Kurdish autonomy in Turkey for decades, and the government has consistently used force to suppress Kurdish activism.

The Newroz celebration is a time for Kurds to gather and celebrate their culture and identity. The attack on the demonstrations by the Turkish police is seen as a violation of free expression and a symbol of the government's repression of Kurdish rights.

The Newroz massacre highlights the ongoing conflict between the Turkish government and the Kurdish people, and serves as a call to action for international attention and solidarity with the Kurds.

The Newroz massacre is a stark reminder of the ongoing struggle for Kurdish autonomy and the need for international support in the face of Turkish oppression.