Labour must...

Demand a vote on Europe

Danish workers delivered a massive blow against the Maastricht treaty when they voted 'no' in last week's referendum. The vote was far from being an expression of petty nationalism; the whole of the left had campaigned for a 'no' vote, arguing for a rejection of the undemocratic bosses' Europe that Maastricht implies.

Maastricht is an issue of vital concern to workers. European monetary union means deflationary policies to suit the German Bundesbank, which in turn means big cutbacks in social spending throughout Europe.

The European Social Charter is a con; the European parliament doesn't even have the power to impose a 48-hour maximum week on Britain - a hundred years after workers won the 8-hour day! There is no chance that it will ensure fundamental social rights - of employment, health care, minimum wages and good working conditions.

Undemocratic

Fortress Europe will mean tough policies against immigrants and asylum seekers. It means an undemocratic Europe in which the crucial decisions are made in secret by the Council of Ministers.

Preparations are already under way for the creation of a European strike force, a multinational army of 100,000 soldiers for use against the third world.

The Maastricht process itself is profoundly undemocratic. The new Europe is being stitched up behind the backs of the people; after Denmark, Ireland is the only country certain to get a referendum, and France might.

The left should demand that the British people have their say; if the Danes can have a vote, why not the British? If a new Europe is to be created, the people of Europe must decide.

After the fall of Stalinism, the reconstruction of Europe is inevitable. But its shape must not be left to the bankers and the bosses; the answer is a European constituent assembly, a congress of the peoples to hammer out their alternative.

Here and now Labour must use the opportunity of the Maastricht debate to inflict a defeat on Major in parliament; and the Labour leadership must demand a referendum. If the Labour leadership backed it, the pressure for a referendum would become irresistible.
Community fights Manchester racist murders

By Trevor Wongsam

SIDDIK DADA, a 60-year-old shopkeeper from Walthamstow, was found unconscious in a pool of blood with multiple deep skull fractures. A gang of white youths armed with machetes had carried out this bruteforce attack. He was rushed to hospital, where he died on 5 February.

Many of the victims of the attack, the racist thugs roamed the streets in search of their next victim.

Mohammed Sarwar, a 46-year-old taxi driver was dragged out of his car and beaten to death. His blood-soaked body was left in the middle of the street, while the murderers calmly drove around before setting the taxi alight.

Mohammed Sarwar's nephew said: "I had to go and identify the body of my uncle. It was such a brutal murder that my uncle's body was unrecognizable. It was a sight that will haunt me for the rest of my life..." His uncle's murder can unite people to stop racist murders, then I believe, his blood will not be in vain.

The murders sent shock waves throughout Manchester. On 20 February, the day Mohammed Sarwar's body was released, over a thousand taxi drivers and members of the community accompanied the body from the Mosque to Manchester Airport.

A convoy of more than 800 cars, most of the taxis displaying black flags and posters, brought parts of the city to a standstill. The majority of the taxi bases stopped work and observed the strike call.

Shops along Wilmowski Road, the heart of the Asian community, closed as the procession passed. Despite police attempts to sabotage and divide the procession, the local press stated that it was the largest funeral procession the city had ever seen.

These racist murders are the most disturbing affront to the black community in Manchester for many years. They have resulted in a depth of feeling that demands a militant and effective response.

The recent establishment of the Mohammed Sarwar and Siddik Dada Memorial Committee has provided a focus. Present at the launch meeting was the nephew of Mohammed Sarwar, who is, along with a representative from the Dada family, one of the honorary chairs of the Committee. The committee also has the support of many anti-racist and community-based organizations, including Greater Manchester Anti-Racist Alliance, The Black People's Alliance, GM Immigration Aid Unit and the West Indian Organisations Coordinating Committee.

The committee aims to organize a national demonstration in August demanding justice for the families, and that the police and courts recognize the murders as racially motivated.

Danes block road to Fortress Europe

By Bodil Rasmussen, SAP (Danish Section of the Fourth International), Danish politician, from left to right, from unions to employers, were united in the 2 June Maastricht referendum: they wanted a 'yes' vote, and were sure they were going to win.

None had expected the 59.3 per cent majority against Maastricht. So while the government immediately held a crisis-meeting, the rest of the establishment fumbled for an explanation for their defeat - and started to pin the blame on each other.

But the opposition had no such problem. Around midnight, 500 demonstrators gathered outside parliament, chanting 'Uffe the foreign minister must go!'

In a statement the Unity slate, a coalition of left parties including the SAP, said 'The Danish people have won a victory over the establishment!'

Prime Minister Poul Schluter has declared, with the support of other bourgeois parties, that the government will stay. But a number of union leaders, supported by a section of the press, have demanded new elections.

The Unity slate were among the first to challenge the Schluter administration. 'We don't believe that the politicians who called for a 'yes' vote will act in our interests in negotiations with the EC or act against the employers, who are sabotaging the economy. The only democratic solution is to call new parliamentary elections.'

Resistance to Maastricht was concentrated among women and working people. Polls showed that 57 per cent of women opposed the treaty, fearing that the union would mean an attack on social welfare.

And many workers also blame the EC for high unemployment and costs in social welfare and working conditions.

It was these factors that lay behind majority 'no' votes in the big cities such as Copenhagen and Aalborg, as well as areas of high unemployment such as Northern Jutland.

It also explains the 64 per cent 'no' vote among social democrat voters, despite their own party leaders' advice. As for the part of the right, the 'no' vote was considerably higher than in the EEC referendum of 1972 and 1986. EC policies on agriculture and fishing, as well as national sentiments, played a role here. But racist arguments were rare.

The 'no' campaign was grouped around two coalitions - 'The people's movement against the EC' and 'Denmark No'. They were backed by the left, from the Socialist People's Party (SFP) to the far left. But support also came from the ultra-right Progress Party, clerics, ex-Communists and members of the Left Socialists.

How to vote in the referendum was where the campaigners agreed; what to replace it with was where they didn't. Some wanted to accept the Maastricht social charter and the environment policy; others wanted Denmark to stay in the EC, but without economic and political union.

The Unity slate, opposing EC membership, have proposed developing relations with other countries - the Nordic countries, eastern Europe, and the third world.

The SAP, Danish section of the Fourth International, has launched a 'Campaign against Fortress Europe'. Finn Kyell explained: 'We have started to break down Fortress Europe. We want to use our victory to support people in other European countries who fight for the same goals.

And we want to go on with new activities against the racism, imperialism and militarism of Europe.'
Is anyone Left in Labour leadership battle?

THE LABOUR leadership campaign has all but disappeared from the media, and quite understandably. Neither Smith nor Gould, nor any of the other official candidates have two ideas to rub together. But what little the different candidates have been saying exposes the idea that any of them have left credentials.

To create a voting constituency Gould and Prescott have been trying to dust-off left wing credentials. Even Margaret Beckett has been alluding to her semi-Bennite past.

On the crucial question of Labour’s links with the unions Gould has no more significantly a position than Smith. He was in favour of the NEC decision to end the union vote in selecting candidates; and the attack on the block vote is a central part of his platform.

John Prescott has been stressing that he is the candidate who represents the link with the unions. But nowhere has he stated exactly what that means; he has not come out clearly on the block vote.

The search by some on the left to find something left wing in any of the official candidates, or some basis to vote for them, is ridiculous. The fact is that the only left candidates, Livingstone and Grant, were excluded by the undemocratic nominations procedures. Ken Livingstone himself has been spreading illusions. At all his meetings now he explains he will vote for Gould and Prescott. Yet in a Socialist Outlook interview a month ago he insisted that Gould could only be supported if he comes out clearly in favour of the union link and against the witch hunt.

Gould has of course made neither statement. Livingstone’s position however fits in exactly with what is the core of his project – an attempted realignment of the left in the PLP towards a bloc with the soft left and centre.

If this indeed becomes the position of the Socialist Forum which Livingstone wants to build, then that body will turn out to be useless. The best that can be hoped is that a Livingstone-style realignment would produce something akin to the clapped out Tribunism of the 1960s.

In any case, from the point of view of socialist politics it is a utopian project, drenched in wishful thinking. The only way you can realign with the Kinynockite and semi-Kinynockite centre is by moving to the right.

The fact is that the left in the PLP today is extremely small. For those who operate in the parliamentary arena this creates enormous pressures, mainly by the right wing pressures on the left edge.

Smith, Gould, Beckett and Prescott are all deeply implicated in new realism and the Kinynockite legacy. There is no basis to support any of them. Ken Livingstone is spreading illusions – and thus doing damage to his own ‘shadow’ campaign – by suggesting there is.

Socialist loses direction

SOCIALIST OUTLOOK has supported the Socialist Movement on paper – Socialist – since it was launched last year.

Many of our supporters however, have been dismayed by recent editions of the paper and feel that the present political trajectory could destroy the potential that it represents.

Many of us, along with other Socialist Movement activists, argued, right from the early editions, that Socialist has been too bland and has needed a far stronger and more direct voice.

We said it needed to reflect the Socialist Movement and its campaigns and priorities in a much stronger and more direct way.

Failure

These problems, however, have paled in comparison with those which have arisen around the general election and since. First Socialist Movement failed to give up-front support to Labour during the election campaign.

Then after the election it failed to support, and in fact criticised, the left Labour leadership challenge launched by Ken Livingstone and Bernie Grant. This came at a time when the Livingstone/Grant campaign was finding wide support and when there was a danger of a sterile right against right ‘contest’.

No reflection

Despite some change in the latest edition, in which an article by Hilary Wainwright supports the Livingstone/Grant campaign, this is not reflected in the paper as a whole.

The crucial lack of political direction and editorial judgement comes out clearly in the current edition in an article on the ‘Labour in focus’ page headed ‘why is the Labour leadership so ugly’.

The article amounts to a series of gratuitous personal insults against the Labour front bench as to why they are so ‘ugly’ – short, fat, hunched or bald. The article is in parts racist and sexist. If it is supposed to be funny, it is not.

This kind of coverage, in place of solid support for the current left project against the right, is particularly damaging in the post-election situation. There is a clear need for the left to regroup into a more effective force in an adverse political climate.

Socialist Outlook supported the original Chesterfield Conference because they represented the most militant forces – from the Labour Party and the trade unions – coming out of the Bennite revolt of the early 1980s and the miners’ strike of 1984-85.

The Socialist Movement represented an attempt to develop this further and break from a purely parliamentary framework to embrace the broader movement. This became known as the ‘twin track’ approach.

With others, we argued that the Movement needed a newspaper if it was to weather the storms of a difficult political period and develop its potential.

Our concern today is not whether we agree with every article or political line Socialist produces. We don’t expect to. Our concern is that it approximates to this political role and strengthens the left at this time.

Potential

We think Socialist has the potential to do this. The paper’s own survey, published in the current edition, shows that the vast majority of the readers of Socialist are members of either the Labour Party and/or their trade union.

Socialist should be developing that support in a fight against new realism on behalf of the left. New realism, created to ‘make Labour electable’, is in crisis and the left needs a clear voice to express that alternative.

Unless Socialist changes course, it is doomed. Its future lies in regrouping those on the left that wish to fight new realism, promoting their struggles.

If it made such a change, it could become a vital asset for all those that are committed to continuing to promote workers’ struggles.

Without such a change, it will become a mere tabloid journal, irrelevant to the real challenges facing socialists in Britain.
Local government unions – fighting for their lives

By Doug Thorpe, Islington NALGO

What may be the last real conference of NALGO, the local government workers’ union, finds it facing threats to its very existence.

The most immediate threat is not Rodney Bickerstaffe, the crown prince of Unionism, the proposed merger with NUPE and CORSE, and his Kinnockite audia. It is something even more sinister, a Tory government elected to its fourth term in the context of a Europe-wide offensive against public service provision.

The Tories are legislating to extend compulsory competitive tendering (CCT) to whole new areas of white collar services.

Their ultimate aim is to reduce local councils’ ‘enabling authorities’, whose only role would be to award contracts to the private sector.

This would devastate NALGO’s membership. Whether they go that far or not – the timetable for the first phase has already slipped – they will find winning contracts in Labour local authorities.


Dented shield

Following Labour’s election defeat, the Town Hall Kinlockites led by Margaret ‘Lady London’ Hodge have rapidly ditched the last vestiges of the ‘Dented Shield’ strategy.

They have embraced the new ‘quality’ unionism, talking of pre-empting Tory legislation in a race to shore up services to the private sector and launch a new round of cuts, only months after setting this year’s budgets.

Across the country thousands of jobs are going and they are increasingly those of NALGO members. Conference must adopt a national campaign of action against CCT and coordinate strike action across branches facing cuts rather than leaving them to fight alone.

On pay, once again we have seen the National Local Government Committee fail to mount a serious campaign around a flat rate tactic. And, more seriously, they seem reluctant to prepare the membership for the attack on national pay bargaining that the employer plan to launch next year in the form of ‘Kitty bargaining’.

The ‘unshackle the unions’ statement will be discussed, and successive conferences have pledged to defy the law where necessary in the past. But still the National Executive are opposing the statement.

This shows something of their intentions, as well as their sectarianism. In the face of Tory proposals for ‘cooling off periods’ and ‘the right of individuals to initiate action against public sector unions’, it is important that the statement is wholeheartedly backed.


Merger

But the issue that looks set to dominate the conference is the proposed merger with NUPE, the public sector manual workers’ union, and CORSE, the health workers, to form the 1.5 million strong UNISON.

In this merger there is the potential to create a powerful public sector union, breaking down the divisions in the workplace between unions and between white collar and blue collar workers. But this is the furthest thing from the union that members want.

In their desire to maximise income and not spend it on strike action, they will attempt to use the merger to curtail democracy and squash rank and file initiative to fight. The left will be supporting amendment 5, which strengthens democracy and the right to campaign openly.


Amalgamation

We will also be demanding the right to discuss the draft rules of the new union before any ballot on amalgamation. But at the end of the day it won’t be the wording of the reports that determines the outcome of the coming struggle with the bureaucracy (and it will come in NALGO, merger or not), but the level of organisation and combativity of those in the union who want to take action.


Left mobilisation

Provided the left organises, the potential of a merger outweigh the risks, but it is essential that this organisation starts now. Despite the size of left votes at conferences, the level of formal left organisation remains abysmal.

The Communist Party machine is disintegrating, the Broad Left has been reduced to an SWP caucus, and NALGO Action has died of exhaustion.

The only successes we have been where branches have called single-issue conferences – such as Strathclyde’s initiative among nurses, which led to a revised national strategy.

But such one-off campaigns are not enough, for the onslaught which faces us now, two ad hoc conferences calling for a democratic merger have so far been called.

These initiatives need to be formalised into a Campaign for a Democratic and Fighting Union which studies both on the issue of democracy and national action in defence of public services.

It needs to organise at every level of the union, particularly the districts, to support struggles and challenge the bureaucracy.

London hospitals – sacrificed on altar of Thatcher’s market

By Harry Sloan

THE TORY government never really bothered to make secret of their intention to close thousands of beds in London’s hospitals.

Instead they have relied on Labour’s ineptitude and one-sided press coverage to keep it from the headlines as they push towards the new market system proceeded.

Last autumn Health Secretary Waldergrave set up the Tomlinson inquiry, with a duality of brief to draw up a list of hospitals for closure and to help save off any embarrassingly large closures until after the election.


Autumn

Tomlinson’s report is now due in the next few weeks, but, being a health authorities which buy services from inner-London hospitals have jumped the gun and begun to send their patients elsewhere, triggering the current crisis.

The key issue here is the Tories’ new NHS market system, which has taken the place of any attempt at regional or national planning of health care.

While most people saw only the unpopular proposals for hospitals to opt out, the core of Thatcher’s NHS Act was the establishment of this new competitive ‘market’, which was certain to put London’s hospitals at a disadvantage.

● All of London’s hospitals are saddled with inherited sites valuations reflecting the 1980s property boom: as a result they must now pay higher capital charges under the new system. Worst-hit are the inner-London teaching hospitals.

● Inner London also loses out most heavily from the costs of London weighting payments for nursing and other staff – all of which help inflate the gross hospital costs expected.

● And the teaching hospitals carry additional costs as a result of their higher levels of medical staffing and the increased numbers of more complex cases they have to handle, as well as research work.

The irony is that the biggest potential saving hospitals are far from realising: they are as busy as almost any hospital in the country, treating a massive 49% more patients in 1990 than they had been in 1989.

On completion of the 2,000 bed targets expected to fall under Tomlinson’s axe would lead to the loss of up to 100,000 operations a year, and as many as 10,000 jobs.


Targets

With either the UCH or Mid-District Hospital in London closing as a result of the Bloomsbury cash crisis, the front-line targets for closures seem to be Charing Cross Hospital, and St Thomas’s, which sits on the most valuable hospital site in London, valued at £150 million.

A scandalous and transparent silence in these proceedings is likely to come from the Labour Party, Shadow health secretary Robin Cook supports the Tory view that London’s NHS is ‘over-bedded’ and that there is a need for closures.

Throughout the process of the inquiry, Cook and the Labour team refused to fight the Tory closure plans or to challenge the Tomlinson inquiry, allowing the Tories to sidetrack the whole NHS issue into the divisive war of Jennifer’s ear.

Waiting lists

130,000 Londoners on NHS waiting lists are not likely to agree with Cook or Bottomley that there is a surplus of hospital beds in London.

And with prices breaking out over prices for treatment between health authority purchasers and hospital providers throughout London and the home counties, there is no prospect of stability emerging from the Tory shake-up.

The fight is on to prevent London becoming, in the words of ChOE’s London regional secretary Pete Marshall, a ‘hospitalisation zone’.

Socialists must work to link up hospital unions, local organisations, pensioner’s groups and health campaigns to ensure the Tory bill is beaten back.
The bosses’ offensive

The fight against new management techniques will be a main topic of discussion at the conference being organised in July by the Socialist Movement Trade Union Committee. Here ANDREW KILMISTER explains how these techniques work and why they challenge millions of trade unionists, from car workers to teachers.

THE IMPOSITION of new management techniques will be, together with the anti-union laws, the key question facing workers in the next decade.

Although generally associated with manufacturing industry, especially car, they are now being introduced in the public sector, health, education, the post office, telecom and transport all face the same offensive. Few workers will not be faced with some aspect of these techniques in the coming years.

New management techniques are known, variously, as ‘Japanese’ because Japanese firms have played a key role in introducing them. But they did not all originate in Japan; indeed, many were developed in the US and introduced into Japan during the post-war occupation.

There are four main elements to these techniques. First an attack on trade unions. Second, the transformation of working conditions: Third, the reshaping of the workforce. Finally, these techniques are held together by an overall ideological offensive.

None of these elements, taken separately, is new. What is new and threatening is the way these things are being integrated into an approach in which each one reinforces the others.

Attacking the trade unions can involve outright de-recognition, as in the Unipart plant in Oxford, and in the print trade. But derecognition so far has involved relatively few areas. Anti-unionism has included a range of measures designed to break the ability of workers to organize themselves and to appeal to their employers. These measures include performance related pay, individual contracts, no strike agreements and binding arbitration, reduction in trade union facilities and the abolition of the check off system where union dues are deducted at source.

Work teams, often with elected team leaders, are promoted by management as an alternative to unions, and workers are encouraged to look to their team leaders, rather than shop stewards, to solve problems.

The aim of course is to make it appear that pay and conditions are determined on an individual effort and not on collective union action. At Nissens Sunderland plant workers get an annual pay increment if their performance is judged to be good compared with what is being proposed for teachers in higher education.

At Unipart the company employs a solicitor to give free legal advice, including on questions like unfair dismissal. Such measures constantly undermine the independent role of the unions.

The new techniques demand an intensification of working levels, achieved through a reduction or abolition of job demarcation, as is being proposed on London Underground, and by putting responsibility for quality control and maintenance on to production workers, thus cutting the workforce.

Defining jobs in terms of tasks to be carried out per week, rather than hours worked per week, effectively introduces compulsory overtime.

Speed-up often operates through team-working. Teams have the responsibility for checking their own output and also checking and reporting on other teams.

But it is not necessary for teams to play this role in every workplace. In education for example the focus is much more on individuals, teachers, and instead of team monitoring the emphasis is on formal appraisal systems.

The changing character of the workforce involves increased use of part-time workers and temporary workers and stopped-up subcontracting. In Japan this has played a very important role.

The so-called ‘lifetime’ employment system in large companies rested on a huge network of smaller firms which carry out subcontracting work in appalling conditions and provide very insecure employment. In large companies temporary workers have faced particularly severe conditions.

In Britain the main focus in this area has been in the public sector, especially local government, with compulsory competitive tendering. In education, telecommunications, social services and publishing the use of agency staff, freelance workers and workers on short-term contracts is on the increase. The workforce becomes divided, with obvious implications for those already discriminated against such as women and black workers.

The different aspects of the new techniques are held together by a number of ideological phrases or buzz words which are constantly used: ‘like choice, flexibility, and quality’. Companies aim to become ‘world class’ through introducing systems of ‘total quality management’.

Management tries to portray anyone who opposes the techniques as being inflexible, as standing in the way of providing choice or quality for the ‘customer’ or ‘client’. Unscrupulous in its denigration of social services departments or educational managers have no compunction about using the situation of working class people who use these services as a lever to introduce new working practices.

Teachers and social workers are told that accepting new techniques is a necessary part of providing accessibility and quality for a wider range of people; without being given any more resources to do this.

A further element of the ideological offensive is simply the proposition that unless new management techniques are accepted, then the company will go the wall. Belling, the electric cooker manufacturer, forced through new techniques on just this basis, and promptly went bankrupt.

Employers have come a long way in developing new ways of screwing the workforce.

New management techniques are not all-powerful and they can be resisted. This depends on a broad alliance of the militancy and attitude of the workforce. Teams cannot be used to replace trade unions if the workers refuse to see the teams who are representing their interests. Changes in the workforce need not weaken unity or trade union organisation if the unions respond and actively resist.

The techniques have been more easily introduced by Japanese companies in new plants with a new workforce. Introducing them in existing workplaces with existing union representation will be more difficult. The struggle against the introduction of these techniques will play a major role in determining the possibilities for trade union organisation in the coming decade.
Spanish strikes defend dole payments

In the aftermath of the Spanish general strike, JOAQUIN NIETO, a leader of the CCOO union federation, explained what was behind the mobilisations.

Since 1991 various regions of the Spanish state have seen resistance to the government's economic plans. How did the call from the big union federations—UGT and CCOO—come about for the May 20 general strike?

First there has been mounting discontent in response to the Socialist Government's economic and social policy. Their credibility is fading. The anger has been expressed in a rise in mobilisations and wage conflicts.

The number of strike days in 1991 was well above the 1990 level, and the first four months of 1992 have seen two or three times as many days lost as the whole of 1991.

The factor which finally set the powder-keg alight was the government's persistence in its anti-socialist policies against all the protests. A very tough economic programme is being prepared to meet the requirement of the Maastricht treaty.

The government's 'convergence' plan necessarily involves a savage attack on the unemployed, the workers and the public sector as a whole, including a decree sharply reducing unemployment benefits. The most recent measure announced involves restrictions on the right to strike, in the hope of checking the expression of discontent.

The ruling Socialist Party (PSOE) has had to resort to measures reminiscent of France to get its decree on unemployment passed.

The decree was not adopted by the usual parliamentary channels but in the form of a decree decided by the Council of Ministers. It was neither discussed in parliament nor submitted for consideration by the unions.

This decree is in a very authoritarian way of governing; here in the Spanish state we are highly sensitive to this kind of thing, which reminds us of the dictatorship which used to govern by decree.

What is the content of this decree?

The proposal is one that affects all wage-earners. The plan is to increase the length of time one has to work before becoming entitled to unemployment benefit. This is from six months to one year. Furthermore, the decree reduces the rate of benefit by between 10 per cent and 15 per cent.

Here unemployment is the highest in the EC—at 17 per cent or over—2.6 million workers and two million women have little social security. More than half of those without work (1.4 million people) get nothing—and this is only officially registered unemployment.

Why, after a long period of dragging their feet, have the union leaders decided on a general strike?

Besides the violation of the government's attacks, the union leaders are also under strong internal pressure.

After the various regional general strikes, rank and file pressure for large-scale action is growing. The union leaders know they have to respond if they are not to lose credibility.

Do you expect to see increasing unity between the UGT and the CCoo?

I think we may take unity a step further; some of the biggest obstacles between the two confederations have disappeared. Almost all the political links have frayed.

The CCoo has simply cut its ties with the Spanish Communist Party (PCE) while the UGT is at loggerheads with the PSOE—so it seems indeed that the UGT would welcome the defeat of the PSOE in elections, since this would split the party.

What happened on May 27?

In some places there were calls for 24-hour strikes, as was also true for some industrial branches including mines, steel and teachers, with the support of the students' organisations.

The rest observed a half-day strike between 2 and 5 o'clock. Electricity consumption fell by 48 per cent, showing that production had been seriously hit.

But the fact that there was no unified strike call affected the mobilisation. Where a whole day strike was called it was total. Where it was partial, the paralysis was less. In the centres of work, particularly in industry, construction and services, the effect was less impact on social life as a whole.

The unions' appeal had a significant impact on the workers, disproving assertions that the unions no longer have worker support. So they are right to consider it a success.

It seems clear that if the unions called for a 24-hour strike the dynamic would have been stronger. We have counted 140 demonstrations on May 26, with tens of thousands in the big cities. The biggest was in Madrid—the radio estimated 100,000 people at the next biggest in Barcelona.

Abridged from International Viewpoint, journal of the United secretariat of the Fourth International.

SCANDAL ROCKS ITALIAN SOCIALISTS

The last few weeks have seen a series of scandals erupt in Italian politics, demonstrating the corruption of the Italian political system. The alliance between the Christian Democrats and the Socialists that has dominated the system since World War II, the 'partitocrazia', has collapsed.

Socialist Outlook asked LIVIO MAITAN, a leader of the Party of Communist Refoundation* (PCdR) and a member of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International, what the series of crises means for Italian politics.

What does the seeming collapse of the 'partitocrazia' mean for the Italian bourgeoisie?

I think it is a collapse in the sense of an exasperation; it is a deep crisis, but not yet a collapse. It means that the bourgeoisie consider that their apparatus is no longer viable as a means of defending their interests, particularly in terms of the unification of Europe. It just can't deliver the goods.

It seems that all the main Italian parties—the Christian Democrats, Craxi's Socialists and to some extent the Communist Party too—are implicated in corruption. Can they carry on in the same way when they are so publicly implicated in corruption?

Obviously corruption is no new phenomenon. The only thing that's different now is that it has come to the surface, and people can see what has happened.

In reality, it's been a kind of political law that if you want something, you have to pay the political price. It's a result of the integration of all the parties—including the parties of the workers' movement—into the system for the last 40 years.

It's a crisis now. But there is no real alternative. That's the problem.

With the leaderships of the traditional parties so discredited, are there new opportunities for the left?

The real danger is that right-wing forces will exploit the situation. People are against the political regime, not against the capitalist system.

And the people who appear most obviously hostile to the political regime are the Northern League and other right-wing organisations.

The problem is that the left parties don't appear to be the real opposition to the regime. The only positive thing in the Italian situation today is the existence of the PCI. But it's very new.

It is not a very big party, but it's got a solid working-class broad base and is seen as the only real left opposition. But it's still a fragile organisation and has to develop its political line a lot more.

The big question mark is to what extent it will be able to counteract the offensive by conservative forces.

So are the extreme right—the MSI, the Lombardi League—a real danger?

They are a real force. There hasn't been a big rise of the MSI, but in the Centre and the South the league is growing. For example in Milan, where the administration is in crisis, there are no regional elections. They will probably show a growth of the League.

What are the main projects of the Party of Communist Refoundation?

The first thing, which is very positive, is that there are still a lot of people who identify as communists. Of course they aren't all statistically, they criticize what happened in the Soviet Union, but they still want to be communists.

Second, in terms of the main issues of the day, the PCI is taking the initiative around two issues. Crucially around the sliding scale of wages and secondly around Europe. It will be campaigning in parliament against the Maastricht agreement. These should help the PCI to appeal to a new generation.

*The Party of Communist Refoundation was formed out of the break-up of the old Italian Communist Party (PCI), in alliance with the left party Democrats of the Left.

In recent elections it has won 5.6 per cent in parliamentary elections and 6.6 per cent in the Senate, compared with 16.4 per cent for the Northern League. It has 35 MPs and 20 senators. It is the largest organised current in the CGL union federation, formerly led by the PCI.

Subscribe to International Viewpoint

A fortnightly review of news and analysis published by the United Secretariat of the Fourth International. 1 year 280 FF or £28; Six months 150 FF or £15 (French francs preferred)

New subscribers—Address

Return to: IVP, 2, rue Richard Lenoir, 93108, Montroulez, France.
Which way for the Labour left?

Stop the rot: start the fight!

By Pete Firmin

THE ELECTION defeat and its aftermath have clearly shown up the political and organisational weaknesses of the Labour left.

Kinnock and friends bent and broke every rule in the book to overturn democratic decisions they didn’t like, to distance the Party from struggles against the bosses and Tories, to drop all socialist policies and to close down dissident parties.

All those who refused to go along with this were expelled. And all this in the name of ‘making Labour electable’, in which of course they failed.

While the blame for the election defeat rests fully with the Labour leadership, much of the left was not prepared to challenge them. They felt that Kinnock should be given a chance, even if they agreed with left policies in their hearts. And many didn’t want to be accused of having lost the election for Labour.

Much of the left failed to seriously campaign against the witch hunt, or to build a fight around alternative policies to those of the leadership in the run-up to the election. Such retreats mean the left is seriously weakened.

When the Campaign Group of MPs decided to put forward Ken Livingstone and Bernie Grant for the leadership, this was welcomed by activists as a sign that a left alternative was being put forward to the twaddle and Tweedledum contest. But the low level of support among MPs reflects the serious weakness of the Left.

While little support could be expected outside of the Campaign Group, what was disturbing was the number of left MPs who supported one or other candidate of the right. A left vote would have indicated their opposition to all those who talk of cutting the link between Labour and the unions and parts with the Liberal Democrats.

But by voting for those that have supported Kinnock all down the line in recent years, they signalled that there was really nothing to worry about. Ken Livingstone’s current support for Bryan Gould is to be regretted as a step backward from his decision to stand.

Gould has said he is for breaking the link with the unions and in favour of pacts with the Liberals. He may not be quite so open about this in the run-up to the vote – but he shouldn’t be given any support by the left.

We shouldn’t underestimate the weakness of the left outside parliament either, both in the Labour Party and the unions. Years of attacks on democracy, demoralisation at defeats and retreat to the right have taken their toll.

Unless the left begins to organise in a way it hasn’t before, the right will consolidate its hold on the Party under Smith. The harangueing of activists seen in recent years will become a flood.

That’s why the holding of the Leeds conference to relaunch the Labour Left is to be welcomed. It is a sign of a commitment by the Campaign Group to organise its supporters in a way it hasn’t before.

But the years under Kinnock have shown that the left in the Labour Party can’t isolate itself from the struggle in the unions and around campaigns if it is to have any success. New realism gained the upper hand precisely because it exploited the industrial defeats and the subsequent strengthening of the right in the unions.

The fate of the Labour left does not rest just on its conduct of the internal fight in the Labour Party. It has to link up with those organising in the unions and those campaigning against Tory attacks such as the latest anti-union laws and the Asylum Bill.

Stronger organisation of the Left which comes out of the Leeds conference is to be welcomed, but to be effective it has to be committed to building a common movement with others outside the Party fighting for the same aims.
Don’t let them cut Labour’s roots!

YET another Labour Party inquiry has been set up, this time into the links with the unions. HARRY SLOAN argues in defence of the union block vote.

"NO SAY, NO PAY" is the militant-sounding slogan under which leaders of the public sector union NUPE are challenging moves that could break the historic links between the unions and the Labour Party.

NUPE Deputyl General Secretary Tom Sawyer, spelling out the policy at their annual conference, opposed any further reduction in the weight of the unions’ block vote at Labour Conference, and any attempt to remove the 12 trade union representatives who sit on the Party’s National Executive.

"This is a non-starter and would take away our influence," he told delegates. Sawyer is not the only union leader anxious to limit the extent to which Labour’s rightward-moving leadership is allowed to distance the Party from unions which built it and still sustain it financially.

TCGU leader Bill Morris and, surprisingly, even the GMB’s new realist General Secretary John Edmonds have also drawn attention to Labour’s dependence on union funds.

"During the election we were asked to keep our heads down, and we did, while contributing hugely to their political funds. Then after Labour screwed it up at the election, they turn round and blame us. There is a lot of anger out there," Edmonds told the Observer.

Unlikely

The anger reaches into even the most unlikely unions. While engineering union bosses of the AEEU make the most explicit calls for severing links between unions and Labour, stewards in Manchester recently crowded into a much larger than usual meeting of the Confed of engineering unions to pass militant resolutions in defence of the block vote.

Instead of building on this base of rank and file support to build a campaign that could back the modernisers, Sawyer and his co-thinkers are restricting their efforts to lobbying the top level of the bureaucracy.

And they are already making concessions, voting to set up an NEC inquiry into the trade union link, which Sawyer says will look at the issue ‘in the round’ rather than chip away at it piecemeal.

Meanwhile union chiefs have also helped nod through by 18 votes to 2 on the NEC the decision to weaken trade union involvement at local level in the selection of local parliamentary candidates, by instituting a ‘one member, one vote’ ballot procedure.

The issue of union links and influence over Labour has always been central to the very character of the Party, which was built on the wave of anxiety among union leaders after the 1901 Taft Vale judgement, which declared the rail union ASRS liable for damages as a result of an official strike.

Independent voice

The inability of the unions’ traditional alliance in the Liberal Party to deliver the necessary legal reforms generated a dramatic shift towards an independent voice for the labour movement, and the tiny Labour Representation Committee mushroomed into the Labour Party in 1906.

Interestingly, the early party had no individual membership structure at all—it was entirely constituted of MPs and affiliated organisations, reflecting the politics of the union bureaucracy.

Trotzkhy did not exaggerate when he wrote in 1929:

"The Labour Party in England, the classic country of trade unions, is only a political transposition of the (...) trade union bureaucracy. The same leaders guide the trade unions, betray the general strike, lead the electoral campaign and later on sit in the ministries. The Labour Party and the trade unions—these are not two principles, they are only a technical division of labour."

Examples of such leaders include the infamous rail union leader and Colonial Secretary JH Thomas; Ernest Bevin, the right wing TCGU leader turned Minister of Labour and Foreign Secretary, and another TCGU leader turned minister under Wilson, Frank Cousins. More recently Tom Sawyer, union boss and leading architect of ‘new realism’, was widely expected to have taken up a political post if Labour had won in April.

Even when union leaders themselves have not taken on the role of leading the Labour Party, they have shaped leadership in their own image: Neil Kinnock and his ‘dream ticket’ pairing with Roy Hattersley was the fruit of bureaucratus union manoeuvres, just as the Smith-Bennett candidacy is the result of several years’ back-room plotting by right-wingers anticipating a Kinnock failure.

Labour is the only European social democratic party to have been built and influenced in this way by the unions, and integrally tied to them.

Organic

Its very character as a workers’ party has always hinged not on its (generally right wing, bourgeois reformist) programme, still less on its stubbornly parliamentarian methods, but on its organic links to the unions which have always been the front-line organizations of the British working class.

In this respect Labour has always been qualitatively different from the US Democratic Party, who, like the 1901 Liberals in Britain, angle cynically for union votes and cash, while in practice remaining a thoroughly capitalist party allowing no union voice in the shaping of policies.

British employers have always recognised the union-Labour link as a potential threat, and their attacks on Labour have time and again focused on efforts to cut it off, often by changing the law to obstruct collection of the political levy.

For a capitalist, of course, any notion of party democracy or bloc voting to determine policy is alien and irrelevant.
The Tory Party never had any internal democracy whatever, leaving all policy decisions to the leader. This is quite sufficient for a party of wealthy individuals who trust to their personal money and influence to pull strings for the limited changes they may wish to see.

For the working class, however, the situation is quite different. The only way an individual shop floor worker who pays the political levy can make his or her voice heard by the leadership of the labour movement is to act collectively, through policy resolutions from branches and through their union conference which then commits the union to support a policy or a candidate.

Abuses
Of course there are often abuses of the delegated powers vested in union leaderships, not least in the way they cast block votes at Labour Conference. With rare exceptions these abuses of democracy have struck blows against the left union block votes have been the bedrock of support whenever right wing Labour leaders have attempted to push through unpopular policies, and Kinnoch’s ‘new realism’ project, ditching almost any radical or progressive policy commitments, relied on the setback from the backing of top union bureaucrats.

Many of the problems in the way the block vote has been used, often with little or no consultation within the unions concerned, must be taken up in the battle for democracy in the unions.

In particular, it would be more democratic if block votes representing the whole union membership were to be proportionally divided according to voting patterns within the union’s membership, rather than cast monolithically on one side or another.

Principle
However the principle of workers whose political levy payments are the mainstay of the Labour Party having the decisive say on key policy issues is a basic one to be defended against all those who would prefer to cut the Party loose from its working class roots, turn back the wheel of history, and repudiate the Liberals in the twilight zone of ‘middle ground’ politics.

The fact is that Labour could cut its union links only at peril of bankruptcy. It can’t afford to forego the income from the unions’ political levy. And, as NUPE’s ‘No say, no pay’ slogan declares, union leaders will not continue to pour funds into a party over which they have no control.

Irrespective of the delusions of the right wing, Labour cannot survive as a party of individual members. General secretary Larry Whitty recently revealed that under Kinnoch, membership has plunged to just 270,000, the lowest since 1929, while budget cuts of up to 30% of spending are already having to be made.

The fight must be to go forward, battling for union democracy and socialist policies in the struggles against the Tory government, not backwards to a feeble and disastrous re-run of the failed Lib-Lab years before Taff Vale.

Rumpus over PR
Keep it in proportion!

By Dave Packer
The Tory election victory means that proportional representation is off the agenda as far as constitutional change is concerned. But it is not off the political agenda for the left, which is deeply divided on the issue.

Many socialists have made opposition to PR a principle. Although some prominent socialists like Arthur Scargill support PR, the majority of the Campaign Group of MPs make opposition a key political issue.

Many Labour MPs who oppose PR do so because they believe that it would prevent Labour ever having a parliamentary majority. This is defeatist. Socialism is out of the question in any advanced capitalist country without a majority. And opposing PR puts socialists on the defensive on the question of democracy.

At the heart of the argument against PR is the concern about coalitions and the issue of class independence. But sections of the left are digging in to an undemocratic institutional form rather than engaging in the real battle.

Workers’ control
Revolutionary socialists do not defend the existing form of state - bourgeois democracy. We stand for a much more democratic system based on workers’ councils and workers’ control.

However, we are not indifferent to the form of capitalist rule. We fight to extend democratic rights within the existing system and to defend those rights against anti-democratic and authoritarian attacks.

Britain’s parliamentary system has been particularly effective at providing stable government for the ruling class. That’s why not just the Tory party but the overwhelming majority of the ruling class are against PR and want to stick to the first past the post system.

Under the present system Thatcherism has been in power for thirteen years on a minority vote. What other Western country perhaps with the exception of the US, has such a stable system? And no doubt the Tories are quick to point to the government chaos in Italy as proving their point.

But there are those on the left, who support PR for narrow, sectarian reasons. They believe that PR is the way to create a new ‘red-green’ coalition, to break Labour’s near-monopoly of working class politics.

While it is true the present system discriminates against small parties, any PR system introduced would almost certainly have a 5 per cent cut-off point, making it very difficult for small parties to get representation.

But in any case, the idea that constitutional reform is the key to changing the balance of class forces, or to fighting against new realism, is absurd.

Socialists should take a principled position in favour of democratic reform. But for the moment, in terms of the immediate tasks of socialists, it is at least a secondary, if not tertiary question.
Unite to fight our way out of crisis

By Pete Firmin

LABOUR'S election defeat was a disaster. Not because a Labour government, elected on a pale Tory platform and inheriting a crisis-ridden economy, would have done great things.

But because it was a disaster for those millions who have borne the brunt of Tory attacks for 13 years - the homeless, the unemployed, the low paid.

A Labour government would not have done a lot to change their plight, but it would have lifted morale, showing the Tories could be beaten.

And it would have given workers the feeling they could beat back the bosses' offensive through their struggles. Instead, morale is going to sink further before there is the confidence to fight back.

The responsibility for the defeat lies squarely with the leadership of the labour movement. They spent the best part of ten years distancing the Labour Party from any fightback against the Tories - such as the miners' strike and the fight against the Poll Tax.

They ditched all policies which offered an alternative to the Tories, and stilled Party democracy including by a massive witch-hunt.

And then the Labour leaders offered no inspiration to activists and no vision of an alternative to the electorate. There is no greater condemnation of 'New Realism' than that it could not win an election in the middle of the recession.

The trade union leaders played their part in this. They discouraged and undermined the struggles which took place, limiting their horizons to a Labour government which would welcome them back to the corridors of power.

They spent years telling us to 'wait for Labour'. This gave the bosses the upper hand and let the Tories win the election. And now those architects of defeat are telling us that the way forward is to take even greater steps to the right.

They want to sever the Labour Party-Trade Union link (but not the influence of the union leaders) and are floating a pact with the Liberal Democrats. Developing a strategy to defeat the coming Tory attacks is furthest from their minds.

The Left has to put forward a clear alternative, rejecting such proposals. They would mean the end of the Labour Party as a party of the organised working class. And the left must reject the class-collaborationist direction taken by the labour movement leadership over the last ten years.

The fight for socialism requires a link with the struggles of the working class, not the Liberal Democrats. The Left needs to overcome its fragmentation and build a united democratic left which links together all those in the unions, Labour Party and campaigns who agree with such an approach.

Time is short. The formation of a united left will not immediately turn around the balance of forces in either the class struggle or the labour movement. But it will certainly strengthen our ability to campaign for policies to defeat the Tories and to capitalise on the upsurge when it comes.

It might even enable us to defeat the 'new realists' on particular policies in the short term, something our divisions undermine at present. A failure to grasp this opportunity will leave the Left, and the working class as a whole, in a weaker position in the coming battles.

The Leeds conference of the Left called by the Campaign Group of MPs is the first of a series of conferences which will help the development of such a Left.

The Socialist Movement Trade Union Committee has brought together many militants in the unions, particularly through its 'Unshackle the Unions' campaign against the anti-union laws.

It is holding a major conference on July 18/19. And the Socialist Movement is initiating a 'Conference of the Left' in October. Rather than be three entirely separate events with separate agendas, those three conferences should be linked towards a common aim.

The fate of the Labour Left and of the fight in the Labour Party cannot be divided from the fight by and in the unions and the campaigns against particular Tory attacks, such as the Asylum Bill and the ongoing resistance to the Poll Tax.

A revival of the fortunes of the Labour Left depends on an upsurge in the class struggle and its ability to link up with it.

And taking struggles and campaigns forward depends on developing structures in the labour movement which support their aims and challenges those who refuse to do so.

The Left should drop secondary differences and agree to build a united democratic organisation around a basic platform of support for struggles of the working class and specifically oppressed.

It would need to fight for labour movement democracy, for keeping the Labour-union link and opposing pacts and coalitions, and for anti-capitalist and internationalist policies.

---

Battles in the unions are the key to the survival and strengthening of the Left.

Heyday of the left 1982: Benn, Scarlaff and Livingstone

Become a Socialist Outlook Supporter

Yes! I want to become a Socialist Outlook supporter.

I want more information about Socialist Outlook.

I want to take an order of ........... copies of Socialist Outlook to sell.

Name: ____________________________

Address: __________________________

Tel: _______________________________

Return to: Socialist Outlook, PO Box 1109, London, N4 2UJ

Page 10 June 13, 1992 No. 23

---

Subscribe to Socialist Outlook

Yes! I want to take out a subscription to Socialist Outlook.

EC Europe (including Britain): 1 year's subscription £15.00

Non-EC Europe: 1 year's subscription £20.00

Rest of the World: 1 year's subscription £25.00

I include a donation of £______________

Name: ____________________________

Address: __________________________

Send to Socialist Outlook, PO Box 1109, London NW4 2UJ
How the RAF slaughtered German workers

Statue unveiled to war criminal

By Paul Clarke

The Lancaster bomber which dropped a 25,000-pound bomb on the city of Dresden on February 13, 1945, was one of the most destructive raids of the war. The blast killed an estimated 135,000 people, making it one of the worst mass killings in history. The bombing was part of a larger campaign of strategic bombing that targeted civilian populations.

Hamburg was also a target of the Allied bombing campaign. The city was heavily damaged by Allied air raids, and an estimated 40,000 people were killed.

The key to the universe?

A huge wave of publicity greeted the announcement of the discoveries made by scientists working on the COBE (Cosmic Background Explorer) project. What do the discoveries really amount to? RICHARD ROZANSKI reports.

For cosmologists the COBE discoveries are very important—they still need independent confirmation and many more details, which should become available over the next few years. The generally held model is that of a Big Bang explosion some 15 billion years ago which marked the birth of the universe, which has been expanding ever since.

Today we see a universe which is very 'lumpy'—galaxies and galaxy clusters separated by huge amounts of empty space. Yet when the universe started the distribution of matter was almost certainly very smooth and uniform. So how did it end up like it is today? How did the galaxies, and the stars within them, form?

Different theories suggest different catalysts, but how can we test these theories? Because space is so vast, when we look into the depths of the universe we effectively look back in time. The light which reaches us from the edge of the observable universe started its journey towards us when the universe was only about 300,000 years old.

The problem is that although this is very early in terms of the 15 billion-year history of the universe, it was after the formation of galaxies. Thus we cannot directly observe the formation of galaxies and galaxy clusters.

Until the formation of galaxies, the even distribution of matter meant that the universe was clumped in 'frog'; when the frog lifted it would have been possible to 'see for miles' as it were.

At that point the temperature of the universe was about 3000 degrees. As it continued to expand this temperature gradually went down. Now the overall temperature is around 2.70 degrees; only three degrees above absolute zero.

The COBE satellite acts as a sort of thermometer, measuring temperatures in different parts of the universe with astonishing accuracy. The different theories of the origin of the universe predict different temperature variations. Now we can measure these variations, we can sort out the viable and the non-viable theories.

As a result of this work, the COBE results are at least compatible with the Big Bang theory. Hence the general sign of relief among cosmologists world-wide. Practically at least the results explain that there were ripples in the fabric of space, when the universe was infinitely small, which worked their way through into temperature differences, creating unevenness in the universe and allowing the formation of galaxies and stars.

Much of cosmology in the past couple of decades has been concerned with the process of the formation of the universe. Once we agree on the general dynamics of the Big Bang, we can consider how different reactions naturally occur; like what 'exist' before the Big Bang? Perhaps the advances that recent work by well-known cosmologists like Stephen Hawking are permitted with direct and indirect references in the future. Outlook Article I will return to why discoveries in cosmology should be of interest to Marxists and socialists.

An Reahblhood

Fighting for a workers republic

Available from: People's Democracy, Conway Mill, Falls Rd, Belfast 12

Four issues £5
Outrage’s right against homophobia

Sam Innan’s letter (SO May 16) shows a deep misunderstanding of the recent moves to welcome bisexuals into lesbian and gay campaigning groups and the basic debates around autonomy.

The main purpose of organisations such as Outrages! is to challenge and fight homophobia. At the forefront of these campaigns is clearly the need to bring all those who suffer from homophobia, directly, every day.

This is the principle of autonomous self-organisation, which as Sam Innan says, is an essential prerequisite for building a liberation movement. This includes bisexuals.

The homophobic attacks of the Tory government and the overall moral shift towards the ‘normal’ family has affected bisexuals as much as lesbians and gay men. The bigots don’t differentiate in who they attack on the street.

Of course there are differences between bisexualke groups and oppressed, but there are differences in the experience between bisexuals and gay people.

The movement has always coped with these by recognising the similarities.

Basically the oppression results from homophobia and those that face this must unite. Bisexuals have always been involved in this liberation struggle, now we are claiming our right to be there openly.

Behind Sam Innan’s comments lies a mistrust in the existence of bisexuality... (didn’t Queen Victoria doubt the existence of lesbians once upon a time), and a disbelief that those strange people could possibly suffer from homophobia. The objection to transvestites and sado-masochists shows a narrow definition of the lesbian and gay community.

Many sado-masochists are lesbians and gay men. Do we have to be a certain sort of gay to have the political ideas to fight?

Autonomy doesn’t mean the right for certain sections within the movement to have their own safe space.

Uniting all those that suffer from homophobia is not a diversity into identity politics, but the best way to fight for liberation and it is this active struggle that will politicise the movement, not to cut out large sections of the community.

Angela Bryan
Sheffield

Zionism and apartheid

In the light of the article by Michael Warschawski on racism and Zionism (SO21), and in view of Socialist Organiser’s known opposition to the Middle East, it may be useful to examine the connections between the Zionist state and South African apartheid.

During the period when South Africa was the object of western sanctions, Israel was compensating for the isolation by continuing commercial and military relations.

For example, the R4 automatic rifle used by the South African ‘Defence forces’ is a slightly modified version of the Israeli Galil assault rifle.

This is the sort of arms industry relationship which normally only exists between military and political allies.

There is also evidence of a connection between the apartheid state and Zionism.

On March 9 this year, during the South African referendum, the Reuters news agency reported that Andries Treurnicht, leader of the pro-apartheid Conservative Party, had said about Israel: ‘I have great respect for you (Israeli) people, who do not want to share power with other groups in the Middle East. If you save power you lose it. If you were ever forced to share power with the Palestinians and the Arabs, you had better run for your life.’

Reuters went on to report that Treurnicht had implied that Israel was ‘an example of the kind of strong state that (Treurnicht) wanted to create for minority states.’

It is obvious that Zionism and the South African apartheid regime are quite comparable, and have much in common.

I am sure even Socialist Organiser would call the apartheid regime and its mentality racist. What then of a Middle Eastern regime which clearly shares many features with apartheid?

Stephen Kacynzki
Reading

Who is leading Kurdish struggle?

I am writing to protest at the ill-informed and irresponsible article on Kurdistan in SO of the 17th April.

Having been to Turkey three times and visited Iraqi Kurdistan twice in the last year, and having spoken to Barzani in some detail, I can only conclude that Geoff Ryan has misconceived his article by reading the British press and certain sectarian pamphlets.

The reality is different. The Kurds in Iraq support Barzani and the Kurdistan Front because they represent forty to fifty years of historical struggle.

The Kurdistan Front (KF) is a broad united front of eight parties that covers not only the ‘big two’ of the KDP and PUK but also communists, socialists and the ethnic minorities of the Assyrians and Turkomans.

Currently it controls a population of three or four million and is the longest lasting autonomous government the Kurds have ever had.

Faced by an Iraqi blockade that has crippled most public services and cut off food and with a Turkish armed forces of over a million growing across the Northern frontier, now is not the time for any adventures.

The PKK’s strategy of setting up in the Bekaa Valley as a client of Syria and send in small teams to attack targets is one the KF could follow, but it would leave the Kurdish people to the mercy of Saddam and would be a gross betrayal.

All the Pesh Merga we spoke to are determined to stand and fight Barzani and Talabani are determined to stand with them.

British socialists need to raise real support for Free Kurdistan.

The PKK is irrelevant in this debate and is not the ‘leadership of the fight for Kurdistan’ as Ryan asserts.

Keith Veness
Islington
Falling asleep on the job

My Own Private Idaho
Starring River Phoenix, Keanu Reeves
Reviewed by Derek Colbert

One of these days there will be a film about gay relationships that gives me hope. But one of these days there will still be the start of the end of the system that causes gay oppression. Until that latter day, it is perhaps only right that films such as 'My Own Private Idaho' tell the truth. In that sense it is a film which is a statement about the alienation that people and particularly gay people live under in capitalist society.

The critical point though is whether this statement includes any way out. Any way out apart from falling asleep... On the face of it, a rent boy with narcolepsy who falls asleep in his client's apartment is quite an amusing scenario. It really plays them off. But it also seems to pissoff River Phoenix (Mike) as well as John Malkovich ('his friend' Keanu Reeves, Scott), who is about to inherit a fortune from his father. Mike and Scott live in an 'underground' world run by a father figure with whom the young scoundrel groomed (Boss) in the axis around which the 'scene' in Portland seems to operate. At the end of the film Scott

is seen at the religious funeral of his dead father, while across the field his former friend mourns the death of their own private father in a pagan-like ritual which ends in a collective outburst of anger and celebration.

Despite the love Mike felt for Scott, his confidence has now married and become respectable and he moves to anywhere the man he never loved. He can only watch the people who once loved him from a distance.

Yet neither world, the lowlife or the high life offer any answers. The honesty of the former carries you to it in the latter you seem to care about each other. But at the same time, the rent boy circuit of Portland is as moribund of love as the high finance capitalists burying their dead.

Mike ends the film by falling asleep where he can dream of the world he wants to live in. But there is no agenda for changing the world he does live in.

It reeks of the 'life's a bitch and then you die syndrome. It seems people seek out the passive recipients of all the world has to offer and as the selfish grabbers of all they can get. When Scott respects Mike and Bob, he is only acting according to the way in which the world works.

Just because Scott only has sex with men for money, it means that he has to get married. In one of the most moving scenes, you see Mike crying while he hears his friend making love with his future wife.

But as in so many films, the truly gay character is a poor, unfortunate soul who suffers not only from sleeping fits, but also unrequited love. Well we all suffer from the latter at some time, but it would be nice to see a film where something other than this happens. Where Mike and Scott make it, or where Mike's kicked-up psyche is not seen as the result of a broken home (there is always a reason why people are gay?)

But the most depressing aspect of this film is that the character seem so hopeless (particularly Mike). The film may paint a realistic picture of how life can hurt and we may identify with that... But there is no idea of how we can fight against this situation. The idea that by joining together against the real enemy we will eventually succeed. Scott spurns his gay friends and joins the ranks of the bourgeoisie and 'My Own Private Idaho' is yet another film that says that there is nothing you can do about it.

Not dirty enough for the nineties?

Dirty Tricks
By Michael Dibdin (Faber & Faber, £4.95)

Reviewed by John Lister

If, like me, you're one of those annoying people who likes to laugh at things you're not supposed to, you should like Dirty Tricks. Don't be fooled by the blurb-writer's hyperbole, which promises that 'the conventions of sex and violence have never been more salaciously explored.' The publishers and I have blessed the Trades Descriptions Act does not apply. Cribly written, chirply cynical and bouncing with galloping enthusiasm, Dibdin's latest novel is no earing social commentary - but because of this it makes good summer deck-chair reading.

His anonymous narrator-hero is an amusing, but self-obsessed, nasty bastard. Maybe that's what struck the common chord with me, but somehow Dibdin persuades the reader to find points in common with him as he takes his jaundiced look at life among Oxford's pampered middle classes.

It is hard not to share his contempt for small business people, his disgust at Thatcherism, his weariness at wine bongs and postures. Only his ruthless attitude to women is clearly designed to shock and prevent us from liking him too much.

The plot has a neat succession of twists and surprises, but if anything the weaknesses are in the limited number and restricted dirtiness of the tricks on offer.

Perhaps Mr Dibdin is more easily outraged than I am, or maybe today's palate has become jaded from overdozes of television, video and comic book fiction. But somehow the mixture of adultery, carnality, avarice, deception and murder needs to be offered in larger portions or more highly spiced or quickly presented. It's rather like ordering a bowl of leek soup and finding out all the ingredients are probably there, but the combination of quality and quantity never quite lives up to the promise of the menu.

Dibdin's style - much more readable than in his rather laboured Italian cop thriller Vendetta - reminded me of another novel narrated by a witty but thoroughly nasty and vindictive hero, which also makes a good summer holiday read. Now made into a disappoint- ing Chevy Chase movie, Memoirs of an Invisible Man by H.F. Stainton has many moments of quite deliciously poor taste comedy. Ignore the film - go straight to the book.

I went looking for my copy to check the publisher - but it had disappeared.

Virtually a waste of time

The Lawnmower Man
Starring Pierce Brosnan, Jeff Fahey
Reviewed by Kate Ahrens
'THE UK's first virtual reality film' opened on June 5th. As a marketing technnology, this was clearly an asset for this film as it told the potential viewer absolutely nothing about the plot.

Well, I saw the plot, but in 'reality' it was little more than a vehicle for a lot of trendy computer graphics and special effects.

Virtual reality is computer simulation on a grand scale, using not only visual stimuli but also motion and touch to create the feeling that the view on the computer screen is where you really are.

The film suggests that one of the applications of this technology could be to stimulate areas of the brain that for one reason or another have not been developed to their full potential. In true Stephen King tradition, the result of an experiment along these lines goes horribly wrong and the result is a 'superbeing' with psychotic tendencies.

There is a vague attempt to critique the way funding from the state into new technology tends to push research into weapons building instead of constructive technology, but since that fact is so obvious anyway, the film's apparent surprise that this might be the case somewhat blunts the point.

The computer graphics and special effects in the film are far away and the best aspect of this film, but that in itself is not a good enough reason to buy a ticket. You could stand outside a computer shop for free and see similar effects.

If you're a fan of Stephen King films (which I'm not) then you may find this film disappointing as it has a remarkable lack of gore. If you have a distinct aversion to the twist in the science fiction genre, then this film is definitely worth missing.

Outlook Reviews

No. 23 June 13, 1992 Page 13
Earth held to ransom — who will pay?

CURRENT RATES of species extinctions are at best, three, at worst, four, times higher than in any other period of the history of life as seen in the fossil record. It is with this sobering fact and it is against this that all the malarky surrounding the Biodiversity Convention at Rio’s Earth Summit should be judged.

Amidst speculation that George Bush and head of the US Environmental Protection Agency, Bill Reilly, disagree over whether or not to sign the convention, it is a disgraceful fact that the US biotechnology industry and agribusiness to sign away their rights to exploit 'third world' natural resources.

Reilly is really only concerned about the US presenting an acceptable face to world leaders at Rio who are really trying, in peaceaccord, to display their eco-friendly feathers.

Of course, with Bush still in Washington, it’s Reilly who’s the one on the hot-seat at Rio with the unenviable job of defending the US environment—

record – the country that is the world leader in global nitrates.

Bush on the other hand has more than a few problems at home. He will not sign a convention that ‘attacks the American way of life, attacks the American family,’ according to the wording of the convention would, if implemented, result in the loss of thousands of jobs in the US. While with the US in deep recession, it’s the last thing that Bush needs as he runs for re-election.

Bush’s obstruction stems from the fact that developing countries have insisted on their right to share the profits generated from biotechnologies developed from their natural resources.

By Sam Inman

Loose, woolly and exceedingly limited the Biodiversity Convention may be, but socialists should give critical support to its general framework.

If current trends continue into the twenty-first century, by 2050 half the species alive today will be lost forever. Any first year ecology student could tell you what this would mean for the long-term stability of the earth’s biosphere. It is also not true that only ‘third world’ nature has to be conserved. There are woodlands, forests, moors, grasslands, rivers, beaches, falls, hills and mountains that need to be protected from the pollution, urbanization ravages of capitalist development in the imperialist heartlands and former satellite blocs.

But to make any Biodiversity Convention work to harmonize human need with global ecological stability, requires the fundamental challenging of a world economy based on competition in pursuit of profit. No amount of noble stunts from Greenpeace and other ‘Earth Warriors’, Blue Peter appeals, liberal pleadings from Jonathon Porritt, or retreats into spiritually connecting with the Earth will change the nature of the problem itself. Socialists have to fight for a class response to the destruction of life on earth.

Only working class people – now a majority of humanity – have the power to challenge the dynamics that are driving those industries, banks and governments that are stretching the biosphere to breaking point. And that means constantly striving for the fullest active cooperation between socialists, workers and the oppressed in the world – the leading idea of socialist internationalism.

2000 march in Brighton Pride

By Julia Stevens

Brighton This May was the scene for a ten-day long lesbian and gay festival. Vastly expanded over the Brighton Pride events held last year, the festival attracted hundreds of lesbians and gay men to Brighton from all over the country, particularly for the march towards the end of the week, which at over 2000 people, was the largest such event ever seen in Brighton.

Dan Areen, a member of Pink Paradise, the organizing committee, said: "The festival was a brilliant success. We achieved our aim of increasing the visibility of lesbians and gay men in Brighton. As a result of the Pride festival, seven new lesbian and gay groups have now been set up in Brighton.

Despite concerted attacks from the local media and the local Conservative Party, the public response was generally very positive. There was a lesbian and gay drop-in centre set up to run throughout the festival, providing resources and information as well as giving away safe sex kits for lesbians. A 'Lesbians' tour around Brighton, and there were many groups organized specifically for lesbians – something that many lesbian and gay events fail to do."

As well as the highly successful march, there was also a concert 'Pride in the Park' and a Pink Picnic on the beach to round off the festival. Even the weather was kind!

'We hope this will now become an annual event, and that next year's Pride will be bigger and better than the one this year," said Dan Areen. Despite the enormous success of this year's Pride however, the festival has cost a lot of money. Pink Paradise are asking for donations to cover the cost of this year's Pride and to enable them to organize a similar event next year. Please write to Pink Paradise, c/o Brighton Unemployed Centre, 6 Tunbury Place, Brighton BN1 2GY.

Chaos rules at Euro-Pride

By Rebecca Fleming

AT THE SAME time as the Danes were sticking a spanner in the Maastricht works, Euro-Pride 1992 was steam- ing full ahead with its bid to become something even John Major could approve of.

Hot on the heels of the privatization of Lesbian and Gay Pride 1992 was an announcement that the political context of this year's event would be 'a celebration of European lesbian and gay identity' against the background of the single market, as some of the revelation that, for the first time, the March and Festival are to be separated.

On 27 June, the festival will take place in Brockwell Park, South London. People will have to make their own way between the two.

Pride organisers blame the policy, but it is really an indication of the general depoliticization of the event. The chaos and confusion caused, coupled with a ridiculously early assembly time, will provide strong incentives for people to skip the march altogether and head for the main attraction – the festival. Of course, this will also protect the public from the ensuing political message of Lesbian and Gay Pride. The anti-racist and anti-fascist content being built is gaining momentum for its project of injecting a much more coherent and diverse political content into Pride. But the battle to restore Pride to the control of the lesbian and gay community and a real relation to political events in Europe will continue long after 27 June.
Left pressure builds up in NUPE

FOR YEARS the far left in NUPE, the public employees' union, has been isolated in calling for a militant response to employers' attacks. But after losing 100,000 members in five years, this year's conference saw more than a third of delegates challenge the "don't rock the boat" line. Early votes for action against cuts and opposition to anti-union laws were passed, and by the end, the executive were forced to agree national backing to prevent further local disputes.

Debate on the merger with NALGO and COHSE was germ-ridden to prevent any real debate, with a vote on the main document taken before any amendments were put. NUPE branches are now launching a campaign for a special conference on the issue.

Despite a predictably new realist speech from General Secretary Tom Sawyer, his defence of Labour-union links through a "No Say, No Pay" campaign was backed by delegates. Other positive votes included a refusal to suspend union elections during the pre-merger period and support for the Frakes Charing Cross anti-deportation campaign, ending with a "N-right backed" demonstration in September.

Crisis of the capitalist cistern

By David Locke

As the early summer turned into the predictable June downturn, the press and television was full of the water shortage bizzards that a country like Britain should be apparently suffering from a water shortage.

Both the government and the water authorities are staking up an old campaign to publicise use too much water, and to stop you doing so we shall make you pay more.

In other words, the mass introduction of water meters is the way, with consequently much higher charges to the consumer. Thus water consumption will go down and profits will go up. The water shortage stems from prolonged under-investment in the industry. Day to day, the bulk of all water pumped into the system gets lost through leaky pipes. Billions are needed to finance the provision and the collapsing sewage system.

The media generally keeps a disquiet silence about the flood-backs which inundate several hundred homes with sewage.

But the crisis of the sewage system is responsible, with urban decay, for the vast increase in the rat population in Britain.

Sewage blockages tend to be worst in areas of high-density popula-
tion, like council estates.

The privatization of the water authorities requires two things. First, investors have to see a significant profit. Second, money has to be found to renew the system.

In turn this means higher charges through metering, and attacks on the pay and conditions of the workers in the industry.

Privatisation meant an end to national pay bargaining, with each authority negotiating separately.

The authorities and private water companies have been in the forefront of new management techniques like performance related pay, personal contracts and removal of union negotiating rights.

1968 Appeal

Andrew Berry, a Socialist Outlook supporter, is cur-
cently doing a project on Revolutionary Politics in France, May-June 1968.

If any of our readers have literature or information from, or about that time, please get in touch with him on 0272 42723 and ask for Andrew Berry at 38 Berkshire Road, Bishopston, Bristol BS7 2EX.

Many thanks.

Labour council sacks strikers

In the wake of the defeat of the Camden social workers' strike, and the consequent move from re-employment of selected strikers, Newham Labour Council has voted to fire the six workers on a four month strike against redundancy.

Now there is a call going out for all supporters of the Unshackle the Unions statement to immediately write to the council, demanding they reverse the redundancies.

End

Home News

MSF Conference

Delegates yawn as stalinists crumble

By Glenn Sutherland

MSF London Region

(personal capacity)

After Labour's election defeat and a period of no signifi-
cant industrial struggles, the Union has been held in a climate dominated by the sterile machine-politics of 'Maggie for Labour' and 'Unity Left'.

Both the uncontroversial agenda and delegates' lack of confidence meant unanimous votes for 'good' and against 'evil'. Neither leadership faction felt strong enough to challenge the union's opposition to all anti-union laws or support for unilateralism, so both were reconfirmed on the 'no'.

All four candidates for Labour leader and deputy spoke, but the speeches were notable only for the lack of politics. Prescott's standing ovation, following an old-fashioned rant, showed delegates' desperation for anything to relieve the monotony.

But this was also a symptom of the lack of any effective left organisation in MSF. The politi-
cal crisis of the Stalinist-led 'Unity Left' (UL) was revealed when they organized to stand against arch-right winger Beres Sadby for Vice president.

With the retirement of Stalinist General Secretary Ken Gill, UL has now lost all control over the union's apparatus - unless there's a stitch-up with the right.

A small ray of hope was provided by 'Network '90', formed by left activists to camp-
aign for union democracy. Its daily bulletin impartially at-
tacked both leadership factions, becoming required reading for delegates and executive mem-
bers alike. It also organised a successful joint fringe meeting with the Socialist Movement Trade Union Committee, attracting 70 delegates.

There is a desperate need to forge a real broad left in MSF, but this will only be achieved with the break-up of Unity Left and a fight against their apoti-
cal and bureaucratic methods.

What has Doug McAvooy got to hide?

IAN MURCH, recently elected Treasurer of the teachers' union NUT, has been suspended from his union for one day less than six months.

Ian, the Bradford NUT secretary, was the left candidate in the election where he defeated Gordon Green, a leading member of the miners' Broad Left.

He was charged with various 'offences arising out of the TV programme 'Class Action', which ran a feature on the NUT earlier in the year.

He was elected as treasurer on a platform which included a careful scrutiny of all aspects of union finances. Many members will wonder what the union leadership feels it has to hide. They may feel it is not unrelated with press reports of big unexplained increases in General Secretary Doug McAvooy's salary.

Murch's suspension could, of course, also have something to do with the fact that the national executive ap-
pear to have the right to nominate his replacement.

Steps are already being taken to mount a campaign for his reinstatement by activists in the union's main two opposition groups - the Socialist Teachers Alliance and the Campaign for a Democratic and Fighting Union.

McAvooy had already started to be-
moved by NUT headquarters a few days after Ian's suspension. NUT members should be immediately raising this issue at all levels of the union and sup-
porting the defence campaign that is being built.

The leadership of the union were defeated last time they suspended left wingers, in London. It is essential they get similar treatment this time.
Tory blitz on London’s NHS beds

By John Lister

A LONG, HOT summer and an autumn of crisis seem certain for London’s NHS as the Tory government’s market reforms bring chaos to health care in the capital.

Already unions in two London health districts - Riverside and Bloomsbury & Islington - are discussing industrial action to fight massive spending cuts that threaten to decimate health services.

Riverside health chiefs have admitted that they are to axe at least 500 jobs as they struggle to balance their books: there are fears that the actual toll of job losses could be double this figure.

World-famous teaching hospitals and vital local hospitals have been losing out because they have been forced under the ‘internal market’ arrangements to compete at a huge disadvantage in the cut-throat fight for patients and revenue.

As a result many already face multi-million pound deficits for the current financial year, and are turning to massive cuts in services in their efforts to balance their books.

Bloomsbury & Islington health authority, probably the worst affected, faces a huge £20m shortfall on the income needed to run its University College Hospital and Middlesex Hospital, and £3m on the Whittington.

Last week they admitted they plan to close the Elizabeth Garrett Anderson Hospital for women and either the UCH or the Middlesex in order to claw back this shortfall.

Other big hospitals deep in financial trouble include the opted-out Royal London (G7m), Barts, St Thomas’s (£5m), King’s (£8m), and Riverside’s two teaching hospitals, Charing Cross and the Westminster.

With over 70 percent of NHS spending accounted for by staff costs, these financial problems have already begun to fall most heavily onto health workers.

But the cutbacks, carefully staved off by the government until after the election votes were safely counted, are only just beginning.

In the autumn a Tory-commissioned report by Sir Bernard Tomlinson will outline new proposals to ‘rationalise’ hospital services in London. Health Secretary Virginia Bottomley no longer bothers to deny that on his hit-list for closures will be at least one teaching hospital: in fact anything up to three could face the axe.

But health workers and local campaigners can be expected to fight back in strength, as they have done against every major cutback and closure.

Already nursing staff in Bloomsbury and Islington health authority have staged strikes in defence of jobs, successfully overturning staff cuts in the mental health unit, and opposing the loss of 60 nursing posts at the UCH and Middlesex Hospitals.

With profound unease within their own ranks, the Tories remain vulnerable on their NHS policies - the left must work to ensure that every fightback receives the maximum possible support.

(See Page 4)