Sterling, economy, Maastricht ...

Tory CRISIS!

Thank god there's no opposition!
Blame Tories, not the Germans
No substance in Lamont’s lament

Nothing could be more ridiculous than the claim that the pound’s noseive "did not reflect the real economy". At the same time as the financial markets were smashing the pound, the news came through that 40,000 people joined the dole queues last month. Only an imbecile could imagine that there is no link between economic recession and the fall in value of the pound.

The dominant world currencies today are the dollar, the deutschmark and the yen. Self-evidently, this reflects the fact that these countries are substantially the most economically powerful. The decline in the pound reflects the accelerating decline of British capitalism.

The currency speculators are right to have been disappointed. If the attempt to link it with the much more powerful German currency through the ERM was unsustainable. So much everyone agrees. But what lies behind the huge speculative movements of capital and Britain’s economic decline?

Terror in the financial and currency markets is itself a reflection of prolonged international economic recession. During the 1980s there was a huge growth both in the generation of speculative capital, and fictitious capital as in the US 'junk bonds' boom. This is typical of a period of crisis. Today it is not only banks and investment houses which play the speculative market, but also giant multinational corporations.

As the rate of profit declines, more and more companies discover that they can make more money through 'lending' capital and currency deals, than through actually investing it in production.

Not a lot to laugh about
This trend was tremendous
ly fuelled by runaway the US budget deficit, especially under Ronald Reagan. This pushed up interest rates interna
tionally. The certainty of a return on a short-term loan to the US government was much more profitable than long-term investment in new plant and equipment.

Currency speculators make a killing from selling a currency as it goes down, and then buying it back when it hits the floor. People who played the market right last week increased the value of their stake by up to 15 per cent, making billions.

But why was the British cur
cency a suitable target? Put simply the pound in the ERM was overvalued against the real strength of the British economy.

Britain’s economic decline is an old story. But the 1980s crystallised important changes in the structure of British capitalism.

British capitalism is now a becoming a rentier capitalism, with a growing percentage of profits coming from overseas investment, the service sector and financial institutions.

Manufacturing, industry drastically declined, and with it the structure of employment. More capital flowed in overseas investments; as debt grew, so did the financial sector.

And foreign investment in Britain increased.

Every crisis of world capitalism brings a new 'international division of labour'. Today this means the growing relative strength of Japan and Germany, and the relative weakening of the US and Britain.

But the US is still the largest economy and the largest domestic market. Britain by comparison is a minnow in the big league. In the last five years it has ranked the second-worst country in terms of growth and investment in the top 21 OECD economies.

Capital, increasingly mobile across international borders, can 'restructure'. But economic decline and crisis is always an attack on the working class.

The options
Underlining these inter-governmental conflicts is a stark fact: European economic policy is preparation for the European con
tinental unity - has been met by a massive working class backlash.

Under the threat of the EMS, every state is supposed to take co-ordinated action. This German currency. This is the German govern
tment and the Bundesbank consistently failed to do in relation to the pound.

Demonstrate Brighton October 6, 1pm Tory conference Madeira Drive march to the Level No Privatisation of Royal Mail Called by the UCW

Maastricht: Has crisis killed the Treaty?
LAST WEEK'S financial turmoil has dealt a massive blow to the Maastricht road to European capitalist unity.

Monetary union, due to be completed by 1999, is about the moves towards political union. The chances for achieving it are now remote.

The chaos in the markets, and the row between Britain and Germany, are symptoms of the underlying con
tradictions in the whole process. The problems need European in
tegration to compete with the United States and Japan. But while they need unity, the interests of the dif
f erent capitalist classes are not iden
tical.

Savage
The savage deflationary policy and high interest rates of the German Bundesbank, required to draw in money to pay for the oil crisis, is devastating for the weaker economies in the EU. It also com
ers other currencies to follow the Deutschmark, ensuring massive de
clation.

The crisis has hit Italy, forcing down the lira and compelling cut
cacks in the large state and welfare sector.

In Greece, (as we report on page 13), the government’s deflation policy - in preparation for the Euro - has been met by a massive working class backlash.

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Capitalism in disarray, Tories in crisis, but... WHERE IS the Labour opposition?

As the Pound collapsed last Thursday, Labour economic spokespeople Gordon Brown and Harriet Harman flitted around the TV studios. But they had absolutely nothing by way of an opposition policy, or indeed anything intelligible, to pronounce.

The reason is obvious: Labour policy has moved so far to the right that John Smith was advocating ERM membership before the Tories adopted it, and even Keynesian growth policies have been abandoned.

Harman and Brown argued for minor measures for 'training' and small-scale help for the housing market. But it is totally incredible to believe that these very cautious measures would have led to any fundamental change in the economy if Labour had been elected.

Half-way

Any policy that is half-way oppositional to what the Tories are doing, let alone socialist, has to propose measures to promote economic growth, create jobs, drastically cut interest rates, and get the economy out of recession. But even these measures for capitalist growth elude the present Labour leadership.

Even if the devaluation of the pound leads to interest rate cuts, the economic situation now directly leads to more huge attacks on the working class.

While the currency crisis dominated the headlines, government ministers were meeting to decide next year's public spending levels.

Tax revenue has slumped with the economy, and major cuts are inevitable. A public sector wage freeze could be one consequence of this situation. Other cutbacks in benefits and social spending are almost certain.

At the same time, unemployment is skyrocketing, with the real figure at more than 4 million and 30 people chasing each vacancy in the London area.

The tragedy of the situation, and the big danger, is that here we have a giant economic crisis, a massive attack on the working class, and the forces of real opposition to slump policies are tiny, given the total abdication by Smith and company.

All this of course is the direct consequence of what has happened to the Labour Party over the last decade; the rightward move, as Labour goes into its annual conference, has reached grotesque proportions.

As we report on page 5, this year's TUC was marked by the growing ascendency of business unionism, and the open abandonment of any form of challenge to the diktats of the

"John Major's oft-repeated argument that 'inflation hurts the poorest in society' is ideological claptrap."

Not out of the woods yet ...

Interest rates

It is possible that under the pressure of sections of their business base, the Tories themselves could now go for cutting interest rates and limited economic growth. But the structure of British capitalism today, the immense weight of the financial sector, and of interests whose investments are located abroad, makes this by no means certain.

The aim of capitalism is not 'economic growth' but profits. Finance capital wants 'sound money' which prioritises the 'fight against inflation'. This was the original logic of locking the pound in the ERM and tying it to the Deutschemark.

John Major's oft-repeated argument that 'inflation hurts the poorest in society' is ideological claptrap. If the heroic struggle for 'zero inflation' is pursued it means just more unemployment, more attacks on the welfare state, and mass poverty.

Imagine Labour had won the election. The new Labour government, like previous ones, would have been at the mercy of the currency speculators and could have been brought down by the pound's crisis. Once market forces are unfettered either a Labour government does what the capitalists want, or they launch an all-out attack against it.

The recent events show that any realistic socialist policy would have to be based on attacking the power of capital.

Nationalisation

A socialist plan to combat the present economic crisis would have to start by nationalising the banks and finance houses. It would have to create a vast programme of public works and socially-controlled investment.

And none of these things would be accepted by capital, or imposed by them, without the most gigantic struggle.

Such policies could only be advocated in the context of actually organising a struggle against unemployment, against welfare cuts, against the anti-union laws, against the destruction of local government – against the whole Tory offensive.

This kind of thinking is of course a million miles away from that of the current Labour and trade union leadership. Which is why Major and Lamont can afford to ignore the bungling and putting of John Smith; and it is why the left in the labour movement faces a long hard struggle back to defeat the iron grip of business unionism and post-Kinnockite new realism.

Next week's Labour conference will show the left at a new low point. Any dramatic short-term breakthrough by the left is off the agenda. But by sticking to its guns, by supporting each and every trade union struggle which arises, by building the anti-racist fight, through a myriad of campaigns and through continuing to argue the socialist alternative, the left prepares the basis for capitalising on the inevitable crisis of the current leadership of the labour movement.
‘Paddy Voted Down’ goes courting Labour’s right
A Liberal dose of coalitionism

by Dave Osler
IS A Labour lash-up with the Lib-Dems the way to get the Tories out of office? Epped on by Marxism Today, key thinkers on Labour’s right have advocated a pact for years. Now Liberal Democrat leader Paddy Ashdown is sending word to Labour leaders.

After floating the idea in a keynote speech just days after April’s general election, Ashdown saw ‘working with people of all parties and none becoming official policy’ in his party’s conference in Harrogate last week.

The resolution carried against fierce opposition from MPs Alan Beith and Liz Lynne and campaign mastermind Des Wilcox, and many of the rank and file. Its passage represents a potentially crucial victory for the New Coalitionists.

Green light

With John Smith’s New Paths to Victory, leadership election manifesto explicitly inviting non-Labour contributions to discussions on social policy, the green light for dialogue has been signalled in both camps. Many would go further.


His NSS piece was written in collaboration with New Statesman Liberal Democrat MP Simon Hughes, who in 1988 openly floated with the Greens when they looked on the verge of an electoral breakthrough.

Yet significantly, it backpedals on positions advanced for the smaller but more influential Fabian audience.

Macdonald demands Labour backing for proportional representation by the year end as a platform for joint campaigning between the two parties.

This experience could lead to ‘local electoral agreements, with Labour and Liberal activists coming together behind single candidates standing on a common reform platform’ (emphasis added) in around 50 seats, resulting in a ‘reformist, centre-left – and presumably coalition – government’.

What backbenchers Macdonald counsels openly, many in the shadow cabinet are undoubtedly saying privately.

Superficially, this quick fix may even tempt some serious socialists. They should think twice.

Far left publications generally dismiss contemporary Liberalism with trite cliches such as ‘the bosses’ B-team’, which are true but scarcely analytically trenchant.

Based on a philosophical tradition stretching back over 200 years, the party has over 100,000 paid-up members and 18 per cent electoral support. Liberalism will obviously not evaporate even in any transition to socialism.

Furthermore, a pioneer movement comprised of the effects of Kinncosh on Labour and the permeation of Labour right ideas into Liberalism via the Social Democratic Party split of 1983 has blurred the programmatic edges considerably. Some Liberal Democrat manifestos are well to Labour’s left.

Macdonald makes much of this ‘overlap’, wrongly concluding: ‘Emerging consensus between the two parties of the progressive left is part of a long term trend.’

Symptom

It is rather a symptom of Labour’s current ideological confusion, which the left must overcome by arguing for a socialist clarification.

This is something Macdonald plainly dreads. In NSS, he argues: ‘The Labour Party has rescued itself from the depths of the early eighties and we will not relinquish the centre-left ground of British politics again.’

A deal with the Liberal Democrats constitutes an insurance policy against socialist ideas returning to the mainstream political agenda.

However innocuous or commonsense the siren calls for a 50 seat deal appear, socialists must firmly oppose them.

 Racists

There are other arguments against Liberalism’s centrism is extraordinarily heterogenous, ranging from self-perceived radicals to outright reactionaries of the calibre of MP David Alton and its disinterestedly racist group running Tower Hamlets council.

Its electoral backing – which in any case fell by five percentage points in the last election and includes a substantial tactical voter element, with as many anti-Labour as anti-Conservative supporters.

 Anti-Labour

The Liberal Democrats probably couldn’t even deliver half its recent gains in a pact with Labour; radical policies could win over most of those elements anyway.

That Labour secured almost twice as many votes as the Greens’ two is testimony to its enduring status as a class-based mass party, a standing the Liberal Democrats can never hope to emulate.

The difference largely lies in Labour’s organic link with the unions, a salutary warning for those who would sever it.

Yet it is noticeable that it is precisely these unions that are the furthest from Labour’s working class base that are the most favourable to a pact with Paddy.

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Labour witch-hunt claims new victims

As the witch-hunt against left-wingers in the party continues, further cases are expected in both parties. The separate moves follow the recent round of expulsions in Lambeth and 127 suspensions in three Coventry parties.

Those kicked out in Brighton are Ray Apps (a Labour Party member since 1945), NUPE executive member Paul Cadman and Sheila Hall. Up to another 20 still face investigation, including several members of the Christian Socialist Movement.

A recent GM meeting came out in opposition to all expulsions from the Labour Party. The decision sparked persistently heckling from MP Norman Hogg and two Wolverhampton Road officials who were in attendance, according to witnesses.

Socialist Organiser supporters of Chris Croome and Wendy Robson were expelled in Sheffield last week. Charges against Cath Fielding, Alison Brown and Neil Tolson appear to have been withdrawn.

Five other sellers of the pro-Labour newspaper will be taken before Labour’s National Constitutional Committee at an unspecified later date.

Expelled Lambeth councillor Steve French of Campaign Against the Witch-hunt commented: ‘These expulsions just show that people should not be compliant about the Smith leadership.’

The witch-hunt continues. ‘There’s hundreds of cases in the pipeline. We need to build a united campaign that defends all those people under attack.’

Campaign Against the Witch-hunt, 56 Ashby House, Loughborough Road, Brixton, London SW9 7TR

Militant trounces Scottish Labour

Red faces for grey bureaucrats

By Paul Nowell

THREE Brighton Militant supporters and two Socialist Organiser journalists have been expelled from the Labour Party in the last two weeks.

Campaign Against the Witch-hunt

Meeting Saturday

SEPTEMBER 26 7pm

Central Library Lecture Theatre, Abingdon Street, Blackpool

with TONY BENN MP

DENNIS SKINNER MP

KEN CAPSTICK NUM

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Scottish Militant Labour has taken a formerly safe Labour seat on Strathclyde regional council – the largest local authority in Western Europe. 56 per cent of the vote was 54 per cent of the vote in a recent by-election.

Christina McVicar’s victory in Easterhouse/Arthurlie ward is a clear indication that Militant has built a successful base in Scotland’s largest city.

Prison

Last May the tendency won four seats on the city council, with leading anti-police campaigner Tommy Sheridan elected from his prison cell.

It also proves there is an audience for left-wing politics in sections of the Scottish working class. Easterhouse/Arthurlie is based around the Easterhouse housing estate, one of the most run-down in Britain.

Two years ago Labour took 71 per cent of the vote; this time its support was reduced to 28 per cent, despite sending seven MPs to canvass in the ward.

The episode should clearly warn the Scottish Labour Party that it cannot take its electoral base for granted.

Yet there is a danger that Militant supporters will mistakenly draw utopian conclusions from this victory. The political vacuum created by Labour’s decimation and SNP’s rise can also be occupied by other forces, including the SNP, possibly even the far right.

There remains at present no objective basis for a working new mass workers party in either Britain as a whole or Scotland alone.
TUC congress 1992

Keeping the white flag flying

By Jim Watkins

This year’s TUC was not just routine Congress. The invitation to CBI director general Howard Davies to address the conference, and the unconditional re-admittance of the scab EETPU, mark more than a deepening of new realism.

Coming after Labour’s fourth election defeat in a row, these two decisive moments of the 124th TUC herald a fundamental political realignment of the British trade union and labour bureaucracy.

Labour leader John Smith attended Labour’s Central Council dinner and slipped away the same evening.

Arrogant

In his address, Howard Davies arrogantly called on a movement battered by 4 million job losses and daily victimisation, to accept a pay freeze in the public sector so that wage levels could compete with those in Korea and Taiwan!

Only 50 delegates followed Arthur Scargill in walking out when the CBI boss rose to speak.

"The course which is now being charted by the TUC is profoundly worrying," he said, "in making active and critical participation in the competitive ‘realisation’ of a Europe A: A Europe which is a harsh, brawny version of business unionism is achieving political ascendency.

The tone of the week was set by the first composite resolution: ‘The False Role of the TUC’ in which AEEU leader Bill Jordan laid out the new agenda.

The strength of the unions, said Jordan, ‘lies in the world of work’; thus it shouldn’t deal with social issues such as lesbian and gay rights. And the role of the TUC isn’t to address industrial issues – that is for individual unions in their dealings with employers.

User-friendly

Rather, the way for the TUC to become user-friendly and deliver a quality service is to become a centre of excellence on health and safety, pensions and low pay. It should develop relationships with the bosses, and the national and international labour movement through the European Community.

Again this project to permanently deport the TUC and turn it into a servicing agency for the big four of five unions, the left could only muster calls for maintenance of strong, effective international and European trade union relationships, or in the case of the EPTU, a call for the AEEU to be better behaved vis-a-vis the smaller unions.

The TUC will now set up an office in Brussels. But Jordan made it clear that the AEEU, which increasingly is setting the agenda for the TUC, has no faith in either the corporatist economic model of Germany and Sweden, or in the Maasstrict social chapter, or indeed in any union links.

The business union right-wing no more wants to confront the European multinationals than it wants to talk on the bosses’ base here.

Not surprisingly the only person prepared to speak out and expose the nakedness of the centre and left at the conference was Arthur Scargill, in the crucial debate on employment law.

The composer on this issue was moved by Alan Jinkinson of NALGO, who made much of the proportional court ruling on the Newham dispute, in which NALGO had been banned from campaigning for a ‘yes’ vote in a strike ballot (the ruling has since been overturned).

The motion’s seconder, Bill Morris, accurately outlined the inequalities of the present situation and called for a legal framework of trade union rights.

But NALGO and the TGWU had agreed to the deletion of the crucial section of the motion calling for the repeal of all Tory anti-union legislation. Scargill came to the rostrum and immediately declared that he agreed with everything Jinkinson and Morris had said, but wanted to know what the movement was going to do about it.

Minority

The NUM’s own motion calling for a ‘refusal to co-operate with anti-trade union legislation’ was massively debated, but there was a significant minority in all delegations supporting non-compliance. For example in the NCU delegation support for the NUM position was only lost by 9 votes to 8.

The only real struggle at Congress was the prolonged fight by the NUI to impose some practical conditions on the re-admittance of the EETPU which has now merged with the AEU to form the AEEU. Their resolution called for members poached by the EETPU from TUC-affiliates at Wapping and elsewhere to be handed back. But EETPU leader Gallagher refused point blank to hand back a single member.

Threats

Meanwhile the AEU continued their tactic of threatening a walkout if their EETPU colleagues were not re-admitted.

By Thursday the NUJ had agreed to remit the motion but only after the GMPU print union, led by Tony Dabin, had stabbed them in the back.

Dabin was only able to this with the active support of the Morning Star’s general secretary Mike Hicks, who refused to fight for the NUJ position, allowing Dabin to effect the sell-out.

Dawn in the interests of ‘unity of the movement’ and ‘one trade union centre in Britain’, this actually meant unity on Jordan’s or Gallagher’s terms.

The Morning Star bizarrely reported this stitch-up with the headline ‘Brillington Rules OK’; bizarrely described this as a ‘national sanctioning’ against the spirit of Brillington, and because in any case Brillington will be banned by the new wave of anti-union laws.

Desperate

The Morning Star, in desperate financial straits, is very keen to get cash from trade union leaders; Bickerstaffe, Knapp and Cameron all attended their ‘relaunch’.

In the midst of this headlong rush to the right the ‘Unshackle the Unions’ campaign held a fringe meeting addressed by, among others, Joe Marino of the Baker’s union, Bill Morris of the NUM EC, the sacked Manchester guardsman, and an representative of OIC.

The message of the meeting, chaired by NUJ president Jim Boumella, was that the only option for rank-and-file trade unions is to fight back.

Meanwhile the General Council has invited employment secretary Gillian Shephard to address next year’s Congress.

Oh Boy! Buddy Holly lookalike Rodney Bickerstaffe presided as the CBI called for a public sector pay freeze

Davies made the terms of the deal crystal clear for his audience. The CBI sees three areas for dialogue with the TUC, on the express condition that unions ‘share our general analysis’.

The first was manufacturing competitiveness, with ‘pay increases set in the light of the needs of business in international markets, and not by reference to some going rate’.

The second was plaudits on education and training. Significantly, the third was ‘Europe’ spell out as common backing for Maasstrict. If that’s the dialogue offer, the labour movement is better kept to itself firmly shut.

Davies concluded: ‘I very much wish you did not agree with all of the speeches. If the TUC and CBI were to be at one in all points our members, and yours, might wonder what we did with our time. Quite.

Consideration is even being given to initiating a senior Tory policy probably employment secretary Gillian Shepherd, but possibly even John Major himself – to next year’s TUC.

The move would clearly and publicly undermine the distance between Congress House and Wapping Road.

Arthur Scargill – not only walks on water but also walks out of the TUC and Sweden, or in the vanishing social chapter, or indeed in any union links.

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Bill Morris: leading his members a merry dance

Dialogue and demands for more public spending on areas like transport and training.

As TGWU general secretary Bill Morris observed, 90% of the statement could have been written by any member of the general council.

The TUC clearly sees its courtship of the employers’ organisation as part of its brokerage towards the ‘social partnership’ on the German model, with the unions playing a junior role in restructuring the British economy.

Doing the Blackpool Bossanova

Take your social partner?

Behind Confederation of British Industries chief Howard Davies’ speech at the TUC lies growing opposition to the government’s disastrous economic policies, now increasingly expressed by many top bosses.

A string of leading businessmen – badly savaged by the deepening recession – have made outspoken public attacks on the Tories, putting themselves formally to the left of Labour’s ‘fighting’

* Brian Pearse (chief executive of Marks and Spencer), Derys Henderson (chair of IC) are openly calling for devaluation.

* Clifford Cretwell (chair of Wimpey) and arch-Thatcherite Amstrad tycoon John Sugar have both added the Tories for prioritising anti-inflation measures, demanding expansionary policies instead.

* On the surface, Davies’ speech simply reflects the current political confrontation. But a deeper look must be to set against the current divide between the TUC and management unions.

Davies sweetened his public sector pay restraint call with talk of ‘social partnership’

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Neo-nazis defeated in battle of Waterloo

By Pete McDonald

Hundreds of anti-fascists last Saturday thwarted an attempt by the Blood and Honour music front of British fascism to hold a public event unchallenged and unscathed.

Anti-Fascist Action, the largest contingent coming from Anti-Fascist Action, took over Waterloo station for more than 40 minutes, before police cleared them in an attempt to allow fascists access to their 'redaction point'. The Nazis were headed for a racist gig in Gravesend.

Scuffles

Large-scale protests and scuffles continued outside the station as neo-Nazi thugs tried to 'steal back' themselves into a false sense of security.

One mirror fall of black-uniformed boneheads (the 'master race') went careening down the fast lane on the wrong side of a dual carriageway, rather than confront protestors.

The fact that such events will be challenged was established on Saturday. As the Sunday Independent noted: "As protestors chanted "police protect Nazism", the neo-fascists were divided into groups of 20 and escorted out of the area.'

Police protection

In other words, only by the protection of the state can the Nazis hold an event like Saturday's.

However the need for discipline and organised self-defence at events such as this was shown by the fact that scattered anti-fascists were attacked by marauding thugs.

Given the short notice for the counter-mobilisation the attention was good.

The turnout from the Anti-Nazi League was disappointing. There were a few committed individuals present, while those who head the SNP's ANL work trailed round after camera crews hoping for an interview.

The leadership of the Anti-Racist Alliance was hardly in evidence.

Counter-fascist mobilisations are a necessary part of the overall anti-racist/fascist struggle. But considerable thought needs to be given to their organisation and especially legal monitoring and cover.

Ruined

The Battle of Waterloo was a victory. One fascist was heard to scream that their day had been ruined, when they had people coming from across Europe. So sad! The BNPs attempt to capitalise on Rostock took a nosedive to the nearest gutter.

● 28 anti-fascists and 5 nazis were arrested. Details of defence campaign for anti-fascists in the next issue.

Mass gypsy deportations start in Germany

By Ben Wolfe

The German government is to deport 40,000 Romanians, 60 per cent of them gypsies, starting on 1 November. The deportations will be carried out by the simple device of refusing requests for asylum.

The mass deportations, bringing back echoes of the mass deportations eastward during the war, are the result of a huge campaign waged by the fascists and other right-wingers alleging that foreigners are responsible for a 'crime wave'.

Fallout

But this campaign is nothing new: what is new is the political fallout from the anti-immigrant pogrom in the eastern part of Rostock.

Rostock was just the tip of the iceberg of anti-immigrant attacks. In 40 towns, including Berlin, Cottbus, Leipzig, and Stendal, immigrants have been the victims of street violence.

And the violence continues after the dramatic 25 August Rostock attack.

But on the streets the Nazi, skinhead and racist gangs are not having it all their own way. The left's anti-racist demonstration in Rostock on 29 August attracted 20,000 people - and the mobilisation was at very short notice.

The SDP young socialists stood out against the collapse of migrant rights. They are confident that it is in east Germany that the fascist street gangs have been able to whip up sympathy.

Unemployment at 20 per cent is a direct result of the decision by the West German bosses to wreck the economy of the ex-GDR.

Offensive

Many reports show that support for the fascists is far from universal in the east. But what makes the situation dangerous is that it is the extreme right wing which has the offensive, and that the SPD and unions are backing under that offensive.

The danger in the situation comes precisely from the fact that the hopes and expectations of the workers of the GDR have been cruelly dispelled. The failure and semi-collapse of Stalinism in their overwhelming majority are the realistic option - unity with the capitalist west.

The 'reward' of mass unemployment was always bound to lead to mass discontent: the question is, what political force can channel and organise it? On the streets, the left still can mobilise more than the Nazis, a lot more.

But the task is much deeper than that. The left has to combine anti-fascist with fighting for the rights of anti-immigrant workers. It has to rise and champion the fight against unemployment and the attack on welfare and other rights of the east German workers.

Anti-fascism in itself never defeated the fascists. That is a lesson which both the SPD and sections of the german left have to re-learn.
ANC under pressure after Ciskei massacre

By Charlie van Gelderen

The ANC has agreed to talks with the South African government "out of security" matters in the wake of the Ciskei massacre.

But after the full-blown which slaughtered 27 people on the borders of the puppet homeland, the so-called 'moderate' leaders of the ANC face enormous difficulties in re-opening the CODESA talks on a political solution.

All the evidence, and the eyewitness account of the neutral National Peace Secretariat, confirms that the Ciskei troops fired indiscriminately at the unarmed marchers.

A great number of the marchers were still on the South African side of the border when they were killed or wounded.

The South African police, especially the Boipatong cluster, disappeared shortly before the shooting started. They claimed they had gone to protect white-owned property in the homeland.

Formal negotiations ground to a halt after the Boipatong massacre in July, although the talks continued between ANC general secretary Cyril Ramaphosa and the Minister of Law and Order Hermann Kriel.

Manoeuvres

The negotiations strategy of the ANC, begun when Nelson Mandela was still in jail, will no longer be accepted by a large section of the rank-and-file, already exacerbated by what they see as the stalling manoeuvres of the regime and their own leadership.

The so-called 'homelands' amount to one of the key issues facing the liberation movement in its struggle for a democratic South Africa.

They were the very foundation of the Vorwoerdepian apartheid. Areas were put aside and designated as the 'homelands' of various black nations.

Whole populations, some of whom had no contact with these so-called homelands for generations, were ceremoniously driven out of their homes, their dwellings bulldozed, and dumped in these territories.

There they were forced to stay, trying desperately to maintain an existence in very difficult conditions, unless their labours were required in the farms, mines, factories and homes of the white ruling class.

The Pretoria government usually made sure that obedient puppets were installed in the seats of power in these territories.

Obnoxious

Ciskei leader Brigadier Oupa Gqozo was a particularly obnoxious and servile puppet of the Pretoria regime. After he came to power in a coup in March 1990 he ruled as an absolute dictator, subject only to the whims of his masters in Pretoria. Even the mildest criticism could land the perpetrator in prison for five years.

Pretoria saw in him a willing ally in its plans for a federal constitution in which minority rights (read: white privileges) would be safeguarded.

Now South Africa has denied responsibility for the massacre on the grounds that the Ciskei is an 'independent state' - although one recognised only by Pretoria.

Oupa Gqozo's coup, which overthrew the former dictator Lennox Sebe, originally aimed to align the Ciskei with the ANC. Alarmed Pretoria sent Col. Hugo of the South African defence Force to head the Ciskei's military intelligence and to turn the new dictator.

Within weeks this strategy had succeeded. Antoin Niewoudt, an officer in charge of South Africa's military intelligence, set up International Research and served as the brigadier's personal intelligence organisation.

It organised the African Democratic Movement on the same lines as the Bushiri's Inkatha freedom Party. Funds and arms were provided to bolster Gqozo's power.

The De Klerk government's hands are dripping with the blood of the victims. They will be avenged.

Will anti-Sendero crackdown save Peru government?

by Roland Wood

It has become commonplace to describe Peru as 'on the brink', will the state's recent capture of Sendero Luminoso guerrilla chief Abimael Guzman put it over the edge?

The worsening economic crisis bought out by President Alberto Fujimori's austerity programme has been accompanied by increasing militarisation, which began under former President Alan Garcia.

Despite Latin America's so-called 'democratic opening' in the early eighties, in Peru as elsewhere the military retained influence in the state apparatus.

The culmination was this year's coup, necessary, according to Fujimori, to control the International Monetary Fund and the reformers who tried to reform the traditional dictators would be continue to be applied.

Fujimori has formally announced elections to a new 'democratic transitional congress', with a mandate to draw up a new constitution, for November 22. Many opposition parties may not join, but, for the moment, the congress will be a mere veneer for continued dictatorship.

Yet the arrest of Guzman - and eight other members of the Sendero central committee on September 12 - may yet save the Fujimori government.

Layered. Layers of the poor and leftist intellectuals saw them as the only effective opposition.

The Peasant Confederation (CCP) and the General Confederation of Peruvian Workers (CGTP) were forced underground, with little experience of clandestine operation. The same is true of much of the Peruvian left.

Offensive

Having increased their urban presence, particularly in Lima, Sendero believe its on the threshold of the 'strategic offensive for taking power'.

This is the fifth and final stage Sendero theory dictates for the Peruvian revolution: full scale civil war in which the people's army will move in from the countryside to surround the towns, with urbanisation to complement the noose.

Such a view considerable overestimates Sendero's real backing, perhaps 5,000 cadre and a periphery of 100,000.

Initially, Sendero's violence was directed at families who had subverted industrial communities for centuries. This won them support.

But with the increase in their activity, Sendero began attacks on left-wing opponents. Many Peruvian intellectuals began to characterise them as foolish not so much of Mao but of Kampuchea's Pol Pot.

Not so shining now...
Why Africa is starving

By Norm Dixon

ALMOST 40 million people are now threatened by hunger in sub-Saharan Africa, according to a United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation report released in June.

It estimated that in the Horn of Africa 20 million people need more than 2 million tons of emergency food. Another 18 million people are at risk in southern Africa.

Yet despite the FAO’s warning, just one of every five people in the region lack sufficient food to meet their daily needs. The continent’s dependence on food imports has increased over the past decade.

In sub-Saharan Africa, one in every two people lives in absolute poverty. The number of children dying in the 1990s was higher than in the previous decade. The rate of infant mortality is 180 per 1000 (10-15 in the advanced countries).

Only 65 per cent of the urban population, and 26 per cent of the rural population, has access to safe drinking water. Life expectancy at birth is 49 years for men and 53 years for women. Only 12 per cent of Africans can read and write; the figure is less than 10 per cent for women.

Wealth drains from the poorest parts of the world to the richest.

The long-term debt of sub-Saharan Africa, $6 billion in 1970, has now reached $340 billion. Africa’s foreign debt is 112 per cent of its annual gross domestic product, and three times its annual export earnings.

The countries of Africa inherited from colonialism economies highly dependent on the export of a few primary products. The European powers did little to develop Africa’s infrastructure other than to expedite export of raw materials to advanced countries.

After independence, corporations based in the former imperialist metropolises continued to own and operate these major export industries, and little capital was invested in other sectors.

Monopolisation of international marketing by multinational corporations kept prices paid to African countries to an absolute minimum.

In most cases the governments of newly-independent Africa did not challenge this control by foreign companies. The ruling elites, often having been directly fostered by the colonial power, formed a close alliance with these imperialist companies and their governments.

Too poor to raise their own capital for investment, and with most of the profits generated by foreign companies exported, African countries were unable to diversify their economies.

Primary commodities account for more than 90 per cent of the continent’s exports. Most sub-Saharan economies depend on no more than three export commodities for 80 per cent of their total exports, making them especially vulnerable to fluctuations in a world market over which they have no control.

World primary commodity prices collapsed beginning in the mid-1970s. Prices for Africa’s most important commodities have fallen almost 50 per cent since 1980. In 1986, average real commodity prices were at their lowest level this century. They have continued to fall.

Exports

As a result of the massive drop in export earnings African countries were forced to borrow massively from Western governments, banks and institutions like the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank in order to buy essential imports (often staple foods).

The policies of the IMF and the World Bank plunged these countries into even deeper crisis. IMF/World Bank loans came with stringent conditions.

Governments have no choice but to implement ‘Structural Adjustment Programmes’ and comply with World Bank and IMF advice. A refusal results in a cut-off of further loans from all public or private sources in the capitalist world.

The thrust of these programmes is to force the debtor to export more and spend less.

Countries are forced to slash public spending, remove protection for domestic goods and allow unrestricted penetration by multinational corporations.

Budgets for health, education...
Somalia: From cold war to catastrophe

"THE DESPERATELY thin baby hung in the weighing harness, kicking and screaming in protest. Loose folds hung down from her delicate arms and legs. Bishar weighs less now than when she was born a year ago. 'The Somali director of the Save the Children Fund, Mr. Paul Simon, said Bishar was only one of 30,000 dangerously malnourished children in a city of 60,000 on the brink of starvation.' That dispatch appeared in the Times—almost 15 months ago. It illustrates how Western countries, the United Nations and its agencies, and the international news media, were aware of the impending catastrophe. Nothing was done to prevent it.

What has now become a chilling reality, Paul Simon predicted at the time: 'Until the international organisations come in here with vast quantities of food that are needed, these people will simply continue to deteriorate rapidly from the body hungry to starvation.' At least two million people are now at risk. This terrible famine is a result of the international community's refusal to come to the aid of the Somali people immediately after the mass uprooting which caused the destruction of Major Barre in January 1991, and of the West's support for the corrupt and brutal Barre regime from 1978, when it broke from Moscow, until its fall.

Famine and chaos

The world's indifference compounded the crisis created by Barre's regime, which over two decades shattered Somalia's society, economy and infrastructure. It is these factors that have plunged Somalia into famine and social chaos, not simply drought and factional blood-letting in Mogadishu.

Somalia gained independence in July 1960. It united two former colonies, British Somaliland in the north and the Italian Trusteeship Territory of Somalia in the east and south. Half the country's population is of 6-7 million live as nomadic herders. In 1986 almost 70 per cent of the export income was derived from livestock, while bananas accounted for 23 per cent. Per capita income is just $170, the foreign debt is $2 billion, almost twice the GNP.

After independence a series of civilian governments plunged by corruption, nepotism and favouritism made little progress in developing the country. In 1969, army and police officers, led by Major-General Siad Barre seized power and appointed Barre head of state.

Friendship treaty

At first the new regime announced reforms which would benefit the rural population. A friendship treaty was signed with the Soviet Union in 1974. Moscow sent 6000 civilian and military advisers, and Barre allowed the use of the Red Sea port of Berbera to the Soviet navy. But an increasingly authoritarian Barre tried to whip up nationalism over Somalia's claim on Ethiopia's Somali-speaking Ogaden region. His decision to invade Ogaden in 1978 led to falling out with the Soviet Union, which then helped Ethiopia to defeat the attack. Barre embraced Washington. The United States navy took over the Berbera port, and US economic and military aid began to flow to Somalia.

Barre-based guerilla movements began to organise. Barre devastated the home areas of the various guerrilla fronts. The hardest hit area was northern Somalia, where the Somali National Movement (SNM) was active.

In May 1988, the SNM captured and held the major northern cities of Buraq and Hargeisa.

Genocide

Barre responded by launching virtual genocide against the Issaa people, the backbone of the SNM fighters. Somali army tanks and jets decimated every village and settlement they passed through in the north. Buraq was all but obliterated. Only five per cent of Hargeisa's building were left standing.

The entire population of the towns was dispersed. Power and water facilities, bridges, communication links and hospitals were destroyed. In the countryside the wells were poisoned and livestock killed. Landmines were strewn throughout the pastures.

The majority clan in the Mogadishu area and central Somalia, the Hawyee, formed the opposition United Somali Congress, which began to infiltrate the capital. Now it was the turn of these areas to lose Barre's wrath. In late December 1990, the USC launched its offensive for the capital. In a final act of desperation, Barre ordered his troops to pound the rebel-held districts of Mogadishu day and night for weeks.

Barre scuttled out of Mogadishu towards his homeland near the Kenyan border in a tank convoy on 26 January 1991. On 31 January Hargeisa fell to the SNM, on 18 March the SNM declared north Somalia the independent Republic of Somaliland.

The country's economy was smashed, its infrastructure destroyed. Billions of Somalis were displaced and unable to plant crops or tend their livestock. The whole region was now in the grip of a terrible drought that even in normal circumstances would have been a terrible burden. In the final period of Barre's rule, the country suffered below-normal rainfall, and all aid it was hauled. Three months after the fall of Barre, Mogadishu was already in the grip of famine.

The UN, its agencies and the West, ignored the very real threat of war by aid agencies that only massive aid could relieve the mounting hunger and deliver the armed squabbling over scarce food resources. Only a full 18 months after the fall of the Barre regime did the UN Security Council belatedly authorise emergency food aid to Somalia. The terrible situation in that country is now being cynically manipulated to justify armed intervention, and the setting aside of national sovereignty, on humanitarian grounds.

"IMF/World Bank loans come with stringent conditions. Governments have no choice but to implement 'Structural Adjustment Programmes' and comply with World Bank and IMF advice. A refusal results in a cut-off of further loans from all public or private sources in the capitalist world"
World-wide attack on abortion rights

Last July the United States Supreme Court sanctioned a massive attack on abortion rights through its judgement on the Roe vs Wade case. This supported the 1989 decision that indicting women have the right to determine their own laws. Since 1989 virtually every state has voted on proposed amendments to abortion laws, as the ‘moral majority’ (sic), especially those connected with Christian fundamentalism and the right wing of the Republican party have stepped up their anti-abortion offensive.

Because of medical advances abortion is now a straightforward and safe procedure. More women world-wide have access to abortion, whether public health or private clinics, than ever before. But the issue of abortion has become a major political fight in the US, Australia, Ireland and the countries of the former eastern bloc.

Restrictive

Louisiana and Pennsylvania have already passed restrictive abortion laws. Louisiana’s law makes abortion illegal except in cases of direct threat to the woman’s life, or in cases of rape and incest – and in these cases only in the first three months of pregnancy.

In Pennsylvania abortions for women under 18 require parental permission, and the compulsory counselling of women contemplating abortions. Another 14 states have highly restrictive anti-abortion laws in the pipeline; there are only 10 of the US states where abortion is not highly restricted.

Against this, a Reproductive Freedom Bill now before Congress, which would restore unrestricted right to abortion. Bill Clinton says he supports it, but has shied clear of the abortion issue in the campaign. On the face of the extreme right-wing programme adopted by the Republican US anti-abortion campaigners there have staged well-publicised sieges of abortion clinics, harassing and physically threatening women. Arson attacks and bombings have also occurred.

By a special correspondent

But this Spring a pro-abortion march in Washington, mobilizing three quarters of a million people, was probably the biggest demonstration ever in US history.

The attack on abortion rights has spread to include attacks on access to contraception. Over the last five years, research programmes to develop new contraceptives have fallen 50 per cent; this is largely due to the anti-abortionists claim that new techniques amount to ‘abortion’.

Despite the fact that the US has the highest teenage pregnancy rate of any advanced country, now the anti-abortionists are launching a campaign against sex education in schools.

The attack on abortion and contraception is growing in eastern Europe. In Bulgaria, because of inflation, contraception has become a luxury. In Hungary the constitutional court is to make a ruling on the legality of existing liberal legislation soon. In Czechoslovakia, because of market reforms, abortion for most women will become very expensive.

Regulations

The attack is worst in Poland. In May 1990 new regulations were imposed requiring written approval by three doctors on medical and psychological grounds before an abortion could go ahead.

But the application of this regulation has been subject to a huge campaign of intimidation from the Catholic church and other reactionaries. The result in that doctors have been intimidated by pressure from inside hospitals from giving their approval. Many doctors will not give their approval to any abortions, no matter what the circumstances. The number of abortions is state hospitals has declined drastically.

State subsidies on contraception have been abolished, making it three times more expensive. Catholic campaigners have been picketing pharmacies selling contraceptives; priests are refusing to give abortion advice to or marry anyone who has not signed an anti-abortion petition.

In these circumstances women have been turning to private clinics for abortions; these charge more than a month’s salary for an average factory worker (and of course many women earn much less than that).

The absolute banning of abortion was blocked in the lower house of the Polish parliament. But the issue is still before the parliament and has not been resolved.

Last bastion

Addressing visiting Polish politicians in the Vatican two years ago, the Pope said that the country’s ‘moral standing’ resided in revoking the 1956 abortion law which he said was ‘the last bastion of Communism’.

The Polish branch of the International Planned Parenthood Association has had its state subsidy drastically reduced, resulting in the closure of nearly half its branches which give abortion and contraception advice.

Despite the role of the Catholic church, a public opinion poll still, found 58 per cent of the population opposed to any restriction on abortion.

East Germany

The situation for women in the former East Germany has worsened. Subsidies for contraceptives, creches and kindergarten have been withdrawn or severely reduced. The question of how to unify the liberal East German laws of those with the Federal Republic has not been resolved. But the Bundestag decided in June to allow abortion in the first three months if counselling from a doctor is obtained.

In the ex-Soviet Union the problem is not the lack of access to abortion, but rather the lack of an alternative. Because of the lack of contraception under the old system, the average woman had six terminations during her reproductive years.

In 1989 it is estimated that the contraceptive supplies produced only met 30 per cent of the demand. Oral contraceptives were never produced in the ex-Soviet Union. IUDs were produced in small numbers and were of poor quality. So were domestically produced condoms, often publicly denied, with many men refusing to use them.

The countries discussed here are just the tip of the abortion struggle world-wide. In many other countries, particularly Ireland and Australia, abortion is a major political divide. Everywhere that liberal laws have been established, right-wing and reactionary religious interests are engaged in a fight to overturn them. In a world where extreme reactionary forces are getting stronger in many places, feminists and their allies face a long, hard struggle.

The National Abortion Campaign has moved. It can now be contacted at The Print House, 18 Adshun Street, London, E8 3D1. Phone: 071 953 4976 or Fax: 071 933 4979.

ENWRAC, the European network of pro-choice groups can also be contacted there.
Stop hospital closures!

By John Lister

BITTER struggles are developing to defend hospital services against the impact of the Tory government’s market reforms.

- IN BIRMINGHAM, health workers and carers are opposing a £7.5m cuts package that would close the Accident Hospital and the Royal Orthopaedic and ax 600 jobs.
- IN DOWNTONPATRIK in the six counties of Ireland, a massive 20,000-strong demonstration – equivalent to millions in London – showed the scale of opposition to the closure of rural hospital services as part of a £12 million cuts package by the Eastern Board.
- IN LONDON, despite a grim silence from Labour, health unions are taking the lead in fighting failed government plans to close four teaching hospitals and thousands more beds, as the capital’s NHS goes bankrupt in the ‘internal market’.

Hit list

In October the government will publish the findings of the Tomlinson Inquiry into London’s NHS, which was set up a year ago to propose a hit list of hospital closures.

According to the latest leaks in the Evening Standard, Professor Tomlinson will propose the closure of:
- St Thomas’s Hospital
- Charing Cross Hospital
- St George’s Hospital
- Maudsley Hospital

The closure of specialist hospitals such as the Royal Marsden and Moorfields.

In all, these proposals would axe around 2,500 beds, handling at least 125,000 in-patients a year – more than 10 percent of the present London caseload.

Thousands of health service jobs would also be axed, adding new misery to the wave of redundancies that has already swept away over 1,000 jobs.

Nor will the cuts stop at inner London. Tomlinson is reported to be proposing a total of 3,000-4,000 bed closures. As Health Minister Brian Mawhinney said recently:

“No hospital is safe, no matter what their size. Some of the big hospitals are in for a shock ... and any smaller hospitals who may be hiding away thinking they have been missed have not been forgotten.”

With 130,000 people still on London’s growing waiting lists, there is little evidence that that cap is ‘over-bedded’.

There is no time to lose if these plans are to be fought.

The common demands must include an immediate end to the brutal ‘market’ system, an immediate £1 billion injection for the NHS, and the abolition of opted-out Trust Boards, returning Trusts to direct management.

BMA surrenders

The possibilities of a fightback are clear. Though the BMA has publicly thrown in the towel in London, refusing in advance to fight in defence of up to 700 consultant posts and countless junior doctors, health trade unions have already shown their readiness to fight back.

A successful London-wide demonstration in August was jointly called by the UNISON unions, COHSE, NUPE and NALEGO, following local strikes over jobs.

- Technicians’ union MSF has also staged strikes and protests against cuts and redundancies.
- Local campaigns and community organisations have also been at the forefront of resistance to attacks on services.

To link up the various organisations wanting to fight the London cutbacks, London Health Emergency has convened a meeting at Camden Town Hall on Tuesday November 10, starting at 7pm.
Blues hunger blunted by success

I was warned

By Robert Cray

Unplugged

By Eric Clapton

Reviewed by Dave Osler

Blues is a direct reflection of black experience in America. While lyrics most-ly centre on personal relationships, a significant proportion graphically depict black oppression, firstly as rural labourers in the deep south and, after the mass migration to northern cities in the forties, as industrial proletarians. Explicitly political subject matter, while not unknown ("Eisenhower Blues", "When The Welfare Turns It Back On You") is comparatively rare. Telling it like it is is usually enough.

Musically, the rudiments are far simpler to master than jazz, yet the scope for instrumental diversity is paradoxically considerable. It can even have mass pop ap-pearance, as the appearance of these two new releases in the UK album charts demonstrates.

Robert Cray is regularly at-tacked for upplying the blues, pandering to elements who want their tales of lost love and hard times smoothed over with sixties soul and then resound at them at grossly in-flated CD prices.

This is all very unfair. His best work, like "Bad Influence" and "Strong Persuader", tes-tifies to major talent. Cray is not just a fabulous guitarist, but a convincing singer blessed with songwriting ability somehow transcending the normal limitations of the genre.

His abilities in any one of these areas would have guaranteed him commercial success. For one person to be so talented in all three areas is almost unnatural.

Yet Cray is a victim of the rock 'n' roll success syndrome. The big time has blunted his edge. As Springsteen once remarked, "you gotta stay hungry", and the adage is doubly true for bluesmen.

Nevertheless, "I Was Warned" represents a relative return to form after 1990's dis-appointing 'Midnight Stroll' set, easily his weakest album. The standout track, 'On The Road Down', was co-written by Steve Cropper, the (white) soul legend whose minimalist efforts graced most of the clas-sic Stax dance singles of the sixties.

No socialist is ever going to forgive Clapton his astonishing "Eenoe was right" outreach at an August 1976 gig in Birmingham, all the more reprehensible from someone who built a career on black music. The comments, incidentally, were a major fac-tor behind the formation of Rock Against Racism.

Yet on the electric guitar, Clapton has few equals. Yes, hundreds of players are heavier, or jazzier, or faster. But Clapton's music often has the rare power to move the lis-tener emotionally where guitarists with too much tech-nique would leave them cold. "Unplugged", however, fea-tures EC and his band entirely on acoustic instruments. On the acoustic guitar - effectively a different instrument al-together - the man is al-together more average.

This is not to say "unplugged" is a bad album. It's a lovelyellow late night lis-tening. It's just that you expect it to start burning, and it simply doesn't. The new version of "Layla", for example, is posi-tively plodding.

The best tracks are the cover versions of blues clas-sics by Robert Johnson, Bo Diddley, Muddy Waters, Big Bill Broonzy and Leadbelly, and 'Old Love', co-written with close friend Cray.

Two solid and entertaining if not outstanding efforts.

Singing his way to Washington

Bob Roberts

Written, directed by and starring Tim Robbins

Reviewed by Kate Ahrens

When the credits came up at the end of Bob Roberts, the entire cinema sat in silence. It took a good two or three minutes before anyone got their breath back enough to move.

This film has such a power-ful message and hits you with such force, that some time to recover is essential! It is a story, in documentary form, following the senatorial campaign trail of Bob Roberts, a folk-singing, entrepreneurial right-winger.

The film follows Roberts and his campaign on their campaign bus from one town to the next where he plays con-certs, finds photo-oppor-tunities with small children and promotes himself through "Broken Down" his anti-drugs charity.

Wonderfully funny and ter-rifyingly serious at the same time, the film manages to com-bine humour and stark reality to create a chilling vision of what is happening today in American politics.

It was one of the most frightening films I have seen for a long time. Not because it was full of scary moments, but because it was so easy to see elements of Bob Roberts in all of the politicians leading America, not to mention the rest of the world. And it was also far too easy to believe that the opposition to the sorts of reas of offensive-ness that Roberts comes out with is so muted.

It doesn’t seem strange that hardly anybody even seems to notice how offensively racist and sexist he is. Even the op-position that does appear is centred around allegations of corruption, not about what he is actually saying.

This film has so few faults that I’m finding it difficult not to just say ‘It's brilliant – go and see it’ and not even at-tempt a criticism. I can’t say that I enjoyed this film because it made me think too much about the vicious and repres-sive nature of the society we live in – but then, that is what it intended to do.

People should go and see this film. It presents a vision, not of the future, but of the present, that gives a chilling clarity to what the real issues facing us all are.
Anger in Athens
Greek tragedy for bosses

by Greek socialists Sissy Vouvo and Andreas Ydriotis

Greece is being rocked by a series of one-day general strikes, the biggest trade union upsurge in the country for years. No photographs could adequately paint a picture of Athens and many other big cities today.

People were everywhere, in front of power stations, banks, post offices, company head offices. In many cases, clashes with riot police are an everyday event.

Tear gas and CS gas have been used twice in Athens, causing tear gas aimed directly at strikers, not fired into the air as the law demands.

The unrest stems from the right-wing New Democracy government’s attempt to attack every layer of the population at once in a bid to get Maastricht/Purpose.

Stuns over the past year include:

- Increased direct and indirect taxation and extra taxes on homeowners
- Selling off profitable state enterprises at knock-down prices
- Freezing public sector pay and pushing prices-of-inflation awards in the private sector
- Sacking 1,500 Athens bus workers and — when 7,200 colleagues struck in support — shutting the company down completely
- Promoting new social security legislation to slash pensions and other benefits despite higher contributions and increasing retirement age for both men and women
- The abolition bill that will cut state funding, introduce accidents for books, restrict democracy for both lecturers and students, and gear higher education in the private sector
- Overmassive cutting in living standards for peasants (27 per cent of the population) after withdrawal of EC farm subsidies

The package aims to cut state debt, trim the public sector and modernise the Greek economy in preparation for the single market. The government is ready to see it through at almost any cost.

Protests called by the private sector’s Confederation of Labour have not been successful, because member unions have been fighting among themselves in recent years.

But state-owned, public sector companies and the banks are in continuous mobilisation, using mass participation to build effective picketing.

This militancy has seriously damaged the government, not to mention the government’s best efforts to close down the working class and the labour movement.

The right’s slogan is: “We must save the citizens of this country from the yoke of the guilds”, as it calls the strong trade unions.

Bus workers’ boot-up with the bureaucrats

“We need less state, better state”, declares prime minister Mitsotakis, preparing mass sackings of state employees, privatisation of electricity, telephones and transport concerns and a build-up in the police force.

This government is anti-popular, an electoral minority, and must fall”, declares president Papandreou of PASOK, Greece’s mass workers’ party, between two votes in favour of Maastricht.

After promising repeal of the right’s laws, he adds: “If I say so, we need austerity measures, they must apply to everyone.” So the law determines, then. Austerity is to be multilateral rather than unilateral.

“Right wing policies are what must be defended,” state both wings of the ex-CPP in parliament, shirking the basic obligation of the left to fight for workers and the right-wing governments. And what will the next PASOK government try it on, too? Yet the unexpected strength of the movement has created divisions within all parties, especially the governing New Democracy’s ‘traditional’, ‘serious’, ‘honest’ cadres fear the leadership’s antics will cost the party the next elections.

National unity

The same goes for PASOK, with pro-European elements arguing that without ‘national unity’ and ‘wisdom’, our country won’t rise to Maastricht level.

The Union of Greek Industrialists has condemned a strike as an opposition to the government’s plans. Needless to say, its motivation is not driven by altruism.

After talks with the unions, it came on up with a middle-of-the-road, sacrifices-on-each-sides policy. The next day, the government rejected it outright.

The whole force that supports the strike practically and politically is the far left, mainly Trotskyists such as the Fourth International, OSE (issuer organisation of the British SWP) and left PASOKites aligned to Britain’s Militant Tendency, but also student left independents, anarchists and former CPers.

Mobs are about to regroup the trade union left. Demands include union democracy — decisions to be taken at rank-and-file meetings and not by the bureaucrats — and repudiation of the recent ‘class peace’ deal the PASOK-led General Confederation signed with the bosses.

The sacked bus workers have proved especially militant. Daily mass marches bring traffic to a standstill, while strikers guard depots to prevent government forces taking out the vehicles.

Irresponsible

The few circulating buses get attacked by strikers, despite union official’s denunciation of ‘irresponsible’ action as ‘the work of provocateurs’ by union leaders. Army lorries driven by soldiers are substituting for public transport, with workers demanding a meeting with workers demanding a meeting of workers, carrying a clear class message. Sixty-two coaches set off on a 600km journey from Athens, despite a police ban on public meetings in Salonica for the first time since the dictatorship. Around 3,000 riot police were mobilised to meet them just outside the city.

Politicians, union chiefs and media stars pleaded with them not to go. After the trip had already started, the strikers’ own leader held a press conference begging them to return. A mass meeting decided to go ahead.

Meanwhile, Salonica’s trades council had cancelled a mass welcome meeting and supporting demonstration. Only a few leftists were present to greet the coaches at the cops’ cordon. Many workers understood the meaning of this betrayal, deciding to return to Athens.

Slogans of the struggle include: “law is the right of the worker”, terrorism will not pass” and ‘students and workers, one voice, one fist’. As these events dramatically prove, all the aces of pseudo-analysis about ‘the end of class struggle’ are not exactly verified.

Sissy Vouvo and Andreas Ydriotis are members of the Greek section of the Fourth International

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Step up campaign against schools opt-out

By Richard Hatcher

Will schools begin a mass opt-out from local authority control this summer? That's certainly what many parents are calling for. They are demanding education, choice and diversity, and demanding the right to determine where their children will be educated. Over the last few years, some local authorities have been making an effort to ensure that enough parental choice is available. Parents have the right to say that they don't like their local schools, and that they want their children to go to a better one. The government is right to give parents these choices, but it must also be right to make sure that the schools that parents are choosing to send their children to are good schools. This is why the government has introduced the 'school choice' policy. It allows parents to choose which school their children will attend. However, the government must ensure that all schools are good schools, and that parents have the right to choose which one they want their children to attend. The government must also ensure that parents have access to information about schools, so that they can make an informed decision about which one to choose. This will ensure that parents have the right to choose the best school for their children, and that all children have access to a good education.
Is Bryan Gould doing a Hezza?  

by Dave Osler

WHY ARE Bryan Gould and David Blunkett risking the boot from the front bench by putting on a left face over privatisation and Maastricht?  

Are they hoping to emulate the calculated blunderism of Tony primadonna Michael Heseltine when he walked out on Thatcher?  

Gould and Blunkett have been proven right on the first count by last week’s ERM meltdown, and are arguing the same line as Tony Benn, Dennis Skinner and Socialist Outlook on the second.

Critic

When first elected to parliament in 1974, he became parliamentary private secretary to Peter Shore, Labour’s foremost critic of what was then the Common Market, and has never wavered since.

During his recent double whammy bid for both the leadership and deputy leadership of the Labour Party, Gould made no opposition to ERM into his major principled difference with Smith.

Yet Gould had serious difficulties even getting 20 per cent of the parliamentary Labour Party to sign his nomination papers.

Many MPs only did so to prevent Smith being returned unopposed. When the votes came in, Gould was hammered in both contests.

In the shadow cabinet election, he was humiliated with the minor portfolio of shadowing David Mellor at Heritage, scarcely one of the great offices of state.

David Blunkett this year secured election into the shadow cabinet at the fourth attempt. Yet as Gould’s campaign manager, he is scarcely in Smith’s good books.

Now a massive head of steam is building up for a referendum inside the parliamentary party.

Proponents include Benn, Skinner and most of the Campaign Group left.

Senior backbenchers like Alan Williams and Brian Sedgemore.

Rank and file rightwingers such as shadow attorney general John Morris and Dolore Smith.

Even Smith’s campaign manager Robin Cook is reputedly privately in favour.

Setting a new Gould standard

Given the likelihood of imminent major reform of the electoral college system, speculation persists that Smith may have to seek a fresh mandate within two to three years, freeing himself of the so-called ‘taint’ of the block vote.

If Gould emulates Heseltine’s 1986 Westland walkout now, leaving on an issue of principle with a cast iron guarantee of retroactive vindication, he may massively boost his presently slim chances of ultimately leading the party.

It would be a high risk strategy, but maybe it will pay off.

NALGO Gloves off in Islington strike

ISLINGTON council has raised the stakes in the 12-week strike by NALGO workers against compulsory redundancies by using vicious anti-union methods.

This week they will sack all temporary workers on strike. They have also started using private agency staff as scabs.

Despite the council’s intimidation, the strike of 700 workers remains solid and more workers joining the strike as a result of management tactics.

Levels of picketing at the council’s neighbourhood offices are high. In response to the use of agency staff, 30 workers occupied the offices of CISO, who are providing scab benefit teams to Islington.

If the agency does not withdraw its contract the strikers have vowed to return in greater numbers. Documents seen at the offices of CISO show that they plan to provide strike breakers to Newham, Tower Hamlets and Hackney in the event of strikes taking place.

The high cost of agency scabs and the wage offer to staff still working show that it is not lack of cash preventing the council negotiating a no redundancies package. Redeploying existing staff would cost no more than the strike-breaking operations carried out by the council.

What lies behind the council’s ‘tough’ stand is a determination to establish the right to impose compulsory redundancies, and behind that are its plans to voluntarily privatise many councils services, anticipating forthcoming government legislation.

In response to the sacking of temporary workers, the branch is seeking authorisation from NALGO’s national executive to ballot the 2000 NALGO workers not yet called out on strike.

NALGO calls London-wide day of action

NALGO’s Metropolitan District committee has called a London-wide action day and demonstration in defence of local government on 4 November.

Other public service unions including the NUT will be app

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Labour: break from Tories!

Demand Maastricht referendum!

THE TORY government is in crisis.

- Norman Lamont’s economic policy has collapsed, with sterling devalued by over 14 percent. The Tories are now under pressure to undertake a full U-turn, reflate the economy, and let inflation rip.

- The currency crisis and the wafer-thin French majority in favour of the Maastricht Treaty raise huge problems for Major. His commitment to force through British adherence to Maastricht without a referendum – despite overwhelming public opposition – is now dividing his own party.

- With these splits potentially destroying his small, fragile majority in parliament, the future of Major’s government now hangs on the complete absence of any opposition from John Smith’s Labour Party.

- Major could well be forced to rely on Liberal and Labour support to hold the line against his own Euro-sceptics, and to avoid allowing the electorate to have their say on the Maastricht Treaty.

- Labour has effectively adopted a bipartisan policy on Europe and the ERM: front bench Labour spokespeople offered no opposition as Norman Lamont threw away billions pursuing his hopeless policy, and now have no alternative policy to offer.

- The refusal of the Labour leadership to call for one is now the main obstacle to a referendum on Maastricht. Euro-fanatic John Smith knows as well as Major that opinion polls show less than 30 percent of British voters support the plan for a bosses’ Europe. A heavy defeat would deal a fresh, decisive body blow to the Tories, and could even force them to call a fresh election.

- This situation must be ended. Trade unions and Labour Parties must echo Bryan Gould’s demand that the Labour leadership take up the call for a referendum – and impose a three-line whip to vote for this in parliament.

- After six disastrous months in which Labour has become the bag-carriers of Tory policy-makers, now is the time to get even for the humiliating defeat of April 9. Break with the Tories! Force a referendum!