Major, Maastricht
On the way out?
Labour could topple Tories!
Labour Party Report

We're the ones who'll fight

Here we re-print extracts from DENNIS SKINNER'S speech to the Socialist Campaign Group of MPs fringe meeting at the Labour Party Conference this year.

WHEN THEY got the dockers out of jail at Pentonville we knew we were changing the very nature of government.

That was an Act of Parliament and it was stopped by the people, by millions of trade unionists up and down this country. There was something in it.

That's why we got the victory for the miners' strike in '72 and the nationalisation of coal in '74.

No wonder that me, and people like me, were thrust into the front line. We were on the NEC because we were part of that campaign and we were just lucky to be able to get there. You win the real battles on the streets.

How do you beat the Poll Tax? Some of us fought like hell against the Poll Tax in Pentonville but we still knew that if it were going to be stopped it was going to be stopped on the streets and it was going to be stopped by those 14 million people who broke the law.

On the Gulf we never thought we were wrong. We walked into that lobby knowing that we were right. And it was the same in the Falklands war.

The German public sector workers did a great job last year all over. That'll be the battle-ground.

No, I don't feel down. The Campaign Group's in business and it's the only one that can put socialism back on the agenda.

We're the only ones that are going to call for stopping the witch-hunt, the only ones that'll call for realist economic policies against Maastricht and the Exchange Rate Mechanism.

We're the only ones that are saying quite clearly "No pacts with the Liberals and all the rest of those tin-pot little armies in Parliament."

We call for troops out of Northern Ireland. We don't want any people that are saying "No to proportional representation". It can't be done.

Anyway, I heard John Smith today. Why is he not saying, as he should be saying, that "the Tories are in a mess, they're on the ropes, they're fighting like Kilkenny cats, we're going to vote against them when we go back to Parliament on October 19th and I declare, here and now, that if they put the Maastricht Treaty before Parliament we're going to run them into the ground."

That's what he should have said.

The growth of the '90s, '60s and '70s isn't there any more. Capitalism's in a real old mess. I can visualise right throughout the '90s, or the greater part of it, mass unemployment and neo-fascist parties mushrooming up.

Dullsville on sea
Most of the time John, Smith's first Labour Party conference was extraordinarily dull. Delegates were carefully allocated to specific seats to make sure the chair don't accidentally call a delegate who might question the lack of opposition to the Tories.

Labour leaders were able to stare down the new policy making framework intended to reduce the importance of conference. They also won an important victory by rejecting calls for a referendum on Maastricht, with the active connivance of the trade union bureaucrats. How many trade union members were misled by their views on Maastricht isn't known.

Dennis Skinner lost his place on the national executive, with croaking duo Gordon Brown and Tony Blair elected instead. At least yuppie labour MP's know more than their neighbours. He was seen shaking hands with every available photojournalist and up and down the country. There was something in it.

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Good in places
Although the leadership was not enthusiastic about the argument they didn't get things totally on their own way. One stunt in particular merited a resolution on pensions was deliberately timed to cut short the debate on trade union links.

Conference showed their contempt for this move by vot ing for the pensions resolution (against the advice of the NEC) and then going on to support Committee Nine. This called for continuing input from the unions into every level of the Labour Party, including selecting MPs. It's a serious set-back for Smith and Co in their attempts to distance themselves from the trade unions.

Scargill
Conference came to life with a fiery speech by Arthur Scargill denouncing coal privatisation and the reply for the NEC by Dennis Skinner.

Delegates were not impressed by their slumber and gave both a standing ovation. To rub salt in to the wound they also loudly booed Bill Jordan as he tried to interrupt Scargill.

This mood continued when delegates again debated the NEC by continuing to support reductions in defence spending.

The NEC had tried to influence the debate by cynically opposing job losses at Swan Hunter ship-yards on Tyne - a result of Tory defence cuts - immediately after the moving of the resolution calling for cuts in defence spending.

Smith's new Agenda rules socialism out of order

By Dave Osler
The cover of Agenda for Change, Labour's first policy statement under its leader's leadership, is coloured three shades of grey with a stripe of Labour Party争取ing through the centre. It could have been a textbook illustration of a sub-committee of Labour in coalition with the centre.

Between the lines the politics get even worse. What is almost certainly the biggest shift in nominal direction away from the ordinary member in Labour party history is concealed beneath the verbiage extending individual participation.

In the debate, where left resolutions to Labour's exclusion - the traditionally its time expression policy-making body - have been crushed by the block vote, the leadership has generally been able to ignore them anyway.

The slides on the proposal in Agenda for Change, carried at Blackpool last week, socialist position won't even make it onto the conference floor.

A National Policy Forum is now to be established - even weaker than the one enveloped when the idea was approved in principle at the 1986 conference.

Finances
Labour's dire financial state is wreaked out as justification for the Forum to have just 100 members instead of 300. Only 22 will be from constituency parties. It's role will be merely consultative.

Real control will be with a steering group, the Joint Policy Committee, which will have around 20 members, 16 of them from the shadow cabinet and national executive. The chair is now Labour's leader.

The JPC will commission policy proposals from subsidiary Joint Policy Commissions, given specific areas brief. Their members will contain, 'a strong nucleus of members nominated from the NEC and shadow cabinet'.

The NF will initially meet, normally rather than quarterly as first proposed, and will be limited to recommending environments, with as much capacity to initiate policy, this is 'extended party democracy, Wilson-Robbet style'.

Elsewhere, the language of Agenda is not only bland but frequently ungrammatical and littered with spelling errors.

On the economy, it is marginally interventionist, repeatedly stressing the need for lower government against the Tories' 'free market dogma'.

There is even a caution to full employment, the first mention in a Labour policy document for several years. The commitment is, however, qualified in the extreme, such aspiration is to make full employment a central objective.

On constitutional reform, the PR buck is once again passed to the people in a Labour policy document.

On education, Labour takes no position on Smith's promise that the commission will open up to scrutiny by other parties. Its composition is unspecified.

Progress in green issues is seen as coming through 'a new European Environmental Charter, along similar lines to the Social Charter'. The fate of the social charter, incidentally, will not apply to Britain even if the Maastricht provisions.

The British in the World section dignifies Labour's offer to cooperate about what the economic consequences of Maastricht would mean in practice.

By capping public spending for below average pay levels. Tony looks, Maastricht's convergence clauses resemble monetarism in international trade rather than social democracy.
JOHN MAJOR’S decision to bring the Maastricht bill back to the Commons by the new year represents a desperate move. The Tories’ European and monetary policies are in shreds; day after day mass redundancy notices are announced, further wrecking manufacturing industry. Recession and the collapse of the ERM have brought about the biggest Tory crisis since the election of Thatcher in 1990. The crisis stems from the simple fact that to implement the ‘Europeanist’ option of those who removed Thatcher requires a course to achieve monetary and ultimately economic union.

All the traumatic wounds of the Tories’ deep divisions between ‘Europeanist’ and ‘Atlanticist’ options have been reopened; there is open talk of bringing back Thatcher.

Panic

The devastation of small businesses and manufacturing industry is spreading alarm bells ringing in Tory ranks. This government is in deep, deep political trouble. Both Lamont and Major are surviving by the skin of their teeth.

This should now be the occasion for a tremendous anti-Tory onslaught from the labour movement. The balance sheet of 13 years of Tory rule is now so utterly clear that the Tories themselves hardly bother to deny it.

Disarray, crisis and panic pervade the back benches. Tory papers openly talk about the ‘biggest defeat for Britain (read: British capitalism) since Suez.’

If this prime minister and this government survive it will be in large part because of the able assistance rendered by John Smith, and the Labour and trade union leaders. Instead of putting the boot in they are throwing Major a life line.

If Labour now stated openly that it would vote down the Maastricht bill, and if the popular demand for a referendum was fought for, the credibility of the government would plummet further. With only a small majority and a substantial number of backbenchers opposing Maastricht, its survival would be at stake.

In addition, the Labour and union leaders openly called for the government to resign and for a new election; and if they mounted a serious campaign against the cascade of redundancies, a new political situation would be opened.

Campaigning against redundancies means not just cracking jokes at conferences or moaning and whining, but organising a fight, demanding worksharing with no loss of pay, the banning of overtime and occupations and work-ins to resist redundancies being declared.

The present Tory crisis, and its intractability, is a product of the whole post-war cycle of decline of British capitalism. Searching for a new international orientation in an epoch of deep recession, the ruling class find that there is none on offer which implies anything other than further decline.

Exports

Staying out of Europe when such a high proportion of exports go there would be disastrous; going with Europe has its own massive deflationary overloads, as the past three weeks have shown. The ‘fault line’ over Europe is as deep in the modern bourgeoisie as that which divided the ruling class over free trade and the Corn Laws in the 19th century.

Socialists are of course totally neutral over which capitalist option is chosen historically by the ruling class; we are neither Atlanticists or capitalist Europeans. But that does not mean we are neutral on the EC or Maastricht.

Both the institution and the treaty imply huge attacks on the working class.

The fact that a ragbag of reactionaries are also opposed to Maastricht is irrelevant; from a working class point of view Maastricht is a class issue. The defeat of the motion at Labour party conference calling for a referendum was a blow against any serious campaign to use this issue to bring down the Tories.

However, this is not the end of the matter. Labour’s attitude to a parliamentary vote on the treaty is not finalised. Many Labour and Tory MPs will vote against the bill. In every Labour movement body the fight to defeat the Maastricht treaty must be raised anew.

Italy rocked by anti-Maastricht strikes

By Paul Clarke

HUNDREDS of thousands of workers struck on 23 September in Italian cities, as the wave of industrial action against austerity measures continued.

The austerity package is a direct result of premier Amato’s preparations to meet the terms of the Maastricht treaty. Together with the massive strike wave in Greece, these are the first anti-Maastricht strikes.

During the one-day strike 100,000 people marched through Milan and 50,000 demonstrated in Bologna. The day ended with clashes with the police in Milan.

A few days later 250,000 pensioners demonstrated against the raising of the retirement age and restrictions on state pensions. A one-day strike of all public sector workers is set for Friday 2 October. Given the size of the state sector this amounts to an effective general strike.

Despite the suspension of the ira from the ERM, Italy intends to plunge ahead with ratification of the treaty. This means reducing the huge public debt, and slashing state expenditure on welfare and the big Italian state industry sector.

Next year Italy is intended to cut state expenditure by £1 billion. A key step has been the abolition of the scale mobile, the partial sliding scale of wages which has protected Italian workers from the worst ravages of inflation. Pensions will be cut and 20 million people will lose free healthcare; and the retirement age is to be raised by two years for both men and women, an unprecedented move in an advanced capitalist country.

Unions have signed an agreement to scrap the scale mobile in July. This has led to a huge fight in the major trade union federations, especially the CGIL, traditionally controlled by the Communists, and now strongly influenced by supporters of the ex-Communist PSI (Democratic Left Party).

CGIL leader Bruno Trenin, himself a PSI supporter, was booted and subjected to a barrage of bodily and rotten eggs when he tried to speak at the Milan rally. He escaped with police protection.

Militants of the left split from the Communists, the 140,000-strong Party of Communist Refoundation, have played a leading role in the campaign in the defence of the scale mobile and in the strikes.

The resurgence of workers struggle in Italy, the biggest mass strikes for 20 years, is the best guarantee against further political advances by the right-wing populists in the Lombard League, who scored heavily in Milan and other cities in elections earlier this year.

Italian strikes are planned against austerity moves in Sweden for 6 October.

The debate on Maastricht has been fierce on the left, and not only in Britain. French Trotskyist organisation Lutte Ouvriere called for abstention in the referendum, while the FI section, the Ligue Communiste Revolutionnaire, campaigned for a ‘no’ vote.

With or without Maastricht Europe remains capitalist — that is absolutely obvious. But the Maastricht road to European unity is not a matter of indifference for the working class. Monetary union means massive deflation and the destruction of state welfare systems. It means a huge attack on basic working class gains.

The strike wave in Greece and Italy is proof of the pudding. How can the left be against austerity measures but neutral or indifferent to the political measures which give rise to those austerity measures?

The debate on Maastricht parallels the debate on capitalist restoration in the ex-USSR and eastern Europe. Austerity and deflation there is a direct result of attempts to restore capitalism and the market economy.

Many on the left say the restoration of capitalism amounts to a ‘move sideways’ or even historical progress (i), while at the same time opposing privatisation and austerity measures. Such chop logic is ridiculous.

Maastricht and the restoration of capitalism represent direct attacks on the working class. Since when have socialists been neutral on such matters?

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The ‘third period’ of Labour’s council betrayals

‘Dented Shield’ Hodge changes sides

In the middle of a major NALGO strike, Islington council leader Margaret Hodge has announced her resignation. She has a new job with, would you believe, city accountants Price Waterhouse as an consultant on local government! Nothing could be more symbolic of the collapse of the so-called ‘dented shield’ approach to countering Tory attacks on local government. Margaret Hodge has changed sides – and so have Labour councillors en bloc.

This summer has seen a wave of strikes against Labour councils as NALGO and local government unions have fought back against sackings and cuts.

In addition to strikes in Islington, Tower Hamlets, Birmingham and Hampshire county council, major new redundancies have been announced in Sheffield.

There is no doubt that the significance of the latest round of cuts. The Trades Council’s aim is the reduction of local government to a ‘buying in’ agency for privately provided services.

Since the mid-1980s advent of rate capping the soft left and right wing among Labour councillors have ended in a simple case: don’t go for confrontation with the government which could lead to disqualification.

In power, duck and weave, go for ‘creative accountancy’, manoeuvre to avoid the worst of the cuts.

This approach led directly in 1985-6 to the isolation of Liverpool, and Lambeth as the only two councils which, in the end, stood out against writing a rate-capped budget. And of course it led to the defeat of the anti-rate capping struggle.

This ‘dented shield’ approach then underwent a nontechnical change; it became ‘caring cuts’. Labour councillors would be forced to go, but this would be done in such a fashion to defend the most needy. This was of course a complete fantasy.

Now, as exemplified by Islington, we are into a new ‘third period’ of Labour local government betrayal – the period of pre-emptive cuts and privatization in preparation for a full-scale government legislation.

One of the most pernicious aspects of the ideological change in Labour councils has been the attempt to set the interests of local government workers against those of the local community. This goes under the name of ‘service delivery’, but in reality means rationalization and new management techniques.

Local government workers must do more with less personnel and resources, all in the name of efficiency and economy to the poor and needy. Inefficiency in council services is nothing to do with cutbacks, but the fault of those greedy for significant council workers.

Where does all this leave ‘municipal socialism’? It is not only dead, it has got rigour mortis. Anti-cuts councillors are few, isolated and being witch hunted by many others who have either dropped out or lurched violently to the right.

Now the defence of local government, whatever acellular resolutions by their councillors may say, is in the hands of the government unions and the wider labour movement.

Hedge hedges

Despite occupation of union HQ
NALGO’s Newham sellout

by NALGO activist

Newham NALGO strikers were ordered back to work on Monday last week after the union’s national emergency committee voted to end the threat of anti-union sanctions without them even being used.

Events began to unfold the previous Thursday when the branch received a phone call from NALGO top brass calling off the dispute. There had been no consultation with the branch.

NALGO officials apparently feared that employers Newman Council would obtain a House of Lords judgment stopping the strike because outstanding defence had been mounted in the court. NALGO had ignored the trade union’s robust call for strike action.

Events continued to unfold on Friday when the branch was informed that a ballot was going to be held on Monday to decide whether the union should return to work.

A letter from the branch secretary was received: ‘No Industrial action will be taken.’

Newham’s administration wanted to see the result the go in the other way. They have even delayed handing over money owed the branch for strike pay.

Their cowardly capitulation – without even a ballot being issued – is in contradiction of NALGO national policy.

NALGO’s leadership wants to see the result the go in their way. They have even delayed handing over money owed the branch for strike pay.

The lack of a return to work agreement leaves activists open to attack. They have already discovered that if they defy Tory anti-union laws in defence of their interests.

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As part of Newman NALGO’s national policy, a branch of the branch is in the hands of the council to ensure the return to work agreement is signed. And the branch has already discovered that if they defy Tory anti-union laws in defence of their interests.

Fun and games axe Sheffield jobs

by Doug Thorpe

Despite the resignation of council leader Margaret Hodge, there is no end in sight for Islington NALGO’s fightback against compulsory redundancies. Some 750 members are already on strike, and the union is set to bring another 260 people out on strike.

NALGO is calling for removal of all redundancy notices from the council.

As a result of the escalating threat, limited conditions of employment and the council’s public refusal to negotiate.

The dispute is becoming increasingly bitter. Islington is stepping up the rate of sackings as strike breakers and starters are being sacked on temporary contracts.

Scabs are being supplied by a company called CSI, largely owned by the pension funds of British Rail and the National Coal Board, which operates extensively in local government.

It is currently bidding for local government contracts where white collar services are being privatized. NALGO is calling for a boycott of CSI.

The Islington strike committee has responded with mass pickets where agency staff are being used, which has led to confrontations with the police.

Mass picketing has been successful both in raising striker’s morale and intimidating scabs. The council is threatening to stop the picketing. The union is attacking for an injunction against the council, which is being taken.

As one of the council’s largest employers, the council has around 7,000 staff. Employees in works, cleaning and catering will bear the brunt of the sackings.

Areas to be hit include libraries, council house maintenance and school clothing grants to hard-up parents, while some public toilets and a swimming pool will be closed.

Yet according to a district auditor’s report leaked to local paper ‘Sheffield Star’ key student games decisions were made without proper financial information, while councillors failed to impose their will on officers.

NALGO staged a one day wildcat last week, with the possibility of further strike action later. Many members of other unions refused to cross picket lines.

Unfortunately, NALGO’s Democeratic Left leadership is calling for workers to take unpaid leave in order to finance an early retirement package. It would effectively call a fund to your own redundancies.

Paul Davidson, senior UCATT steward in the city’s department, said Socialist Outlook: ‘NALGO can do with demonstrations against the real fightback is what is needed but it is not enough. We have to see a new strategy that is needed.

Currently localised struggles in local authorities across Britain have been linked up into national action, with workers of council services in, he argued.

In the middle of the 1985 struggle against ratecapping, Sheffield – then led by David Blunkett and branded the ‘Socialist Republic of South Yorkshire’ – declined to return to a rate and became a prominent exponent of Keir Hardie’s ‘dented shield’ strategy for local government.

It borrowed heavily, on a deferred repayment basis, in the hope of being bailed out of its financial difficulties. Now the creative accounting workers have come home to roost, Sheffield council might see cuts of up to 25% on some estimates.

Taking on responsibility for funding community care for the elderly and the disabled has not proved to be easy. Sheffield council might see cuts of up to 25% on some estimates.

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Manufacturers churn out jobless future
by Cecilia Murphy
The door queues steadily lengthened throughout September as companies with almost 13,000 job losses announced by major employers in one working week. Among companies shedding workers were some key names in the crucial manufacturing sector. Those included British Aerospace, the UK's largest manufacturing exporter, and Rolls Royce, where the company has slashed its workforce by 57 per cent in just two years. With almost 108,000 redundancies announced by June, this year's redundancy rate is set to top last year, which stood at 18 per thousand workers in spring 1991. Manufacturing was hit hard, with a rate of 28.6 per thousand workers. This was double the rate for the service sector (11.9 per thousand) which itself saw redundancies at more than twice their 1990 rate of 5.6 per thousand.

The armature of manufacturing jobs represents a seri- ous blow to the economy and sets back any prospect of recovery. The UK's manufacturing base has been devastated under the Tories, with manufacturing jobs slashed by 36 per cent to under 4.5 million since 1979. Over 2.5m workers in the sector have lost their jobs.

The car industry has been particularly badly hit by the current recession. In the last three years the UK car market has shrunk by 2.5 million vehicles and one estimate puts job losses in the industry at around 70,000.

Unemployment has been rising steadily for the last two and a half years, with the official figure set to hit three million by the end of 1992.

In August the official count of those out of work and claiming benefits stood at 2,840,000, or 9.9 per cent of the workforce. This was a 47,000 increase on the previous month, which was itself the highest July figure for five years.

Around a third of those out of work are long-term unemployed, jobless for twelve months or more. In the year to July, the number of long-term unemployed rose by one million, the largest recorded annual increase.

This is despite government schemes which temporarily remove those unemployed from the official register and count them as 'resilient statistics when they return'.

Although unemployment levels are highest in the North, the rate of increase over the last year has been greatest in the South. In the year to June, the rate rose by 32 per cent in the South East, 30 per cent in East Anglia and 28 per cent in Greater London.

The industrial collapse of the South is highlighted in a report by business analysts Dun and Bradstreet, which revealed that a quarter of the 46,000 companies which have collapsed so far this year were in the South East.

Young people are particularly suffering under the latest job onslaught, with under-25 year olds now accounting for around 30 per cent of the official unemployed.

This is despite the fact that unemployment among this age group actually fell between 1985 and 1990 as a result of removing 16 and 17 year olds from the register.

The European Community's statistical office, Eurostat, which calculates unemployment on an internationally standardised definition, showed unemployment among under 25s to be as high as 17.4 per cent in July, compared with 10.8 per cent for the UK population as a whole.

Office statistics underestimate the real depth of joblessness in Britain today. The Tories have made over 30 changes to the way figures are compiled since 1979. Whole groups of unemployed workers, such as those under 18, have simply been removed from the register.

Sixteen and seventeen year olds are no longer entitled to benefit since they are expected to take up a place on a government training scheme. Thousands of people have been intimidated and threatened out of claiming benefit by the hurdles which they have to jump to prove they are 'actively seeking work'.

The Unemployment Unit provides a more realistic figure for the real extent of unemployment by calculating the rate according to the methodology used before 1982. On this basis the August figure stood at 4,045,000, or 13.8 per cent of the workforce.

Aerospace crush sends jobless total flying
British Aerospace has axed its factory in Hatfield, Herts, at a cost of 2,060 jobs. Some 940 jobs at two plants in Manchester are also to go. The company also announced that much of the work done at Hatfield would be transferred to a joint venture in Taiwan. Knock-on effects of the closure could see another 3,000 on the dole in the town. Unemployment is already 9 per cent - up to 17.5 per cent in some areas.

The latest sackings are in addition to 3,000 BAe job losses already this year, with warnings of up to 4,000 more coming. Plants at Kington in Hereford and Preston, Lancashire also face closure.

The stock market knocked 4.5 per cent off the value of the company's shares, which are now down at £19.5m. Nevertheless, one BAe boss said that the company had increased 350,000, and stacked chairman Sir Frederick Smith got a £1 pay-off after he hung a share issue.

Speculation continues that GEC may make advantage of the firm's difficult financial situation.

The company, one of Thatchers' first privatisations, is Britain's largest engineering employer and the biggest manufacturing exporter. It has been a middling beneficiary of the Thatcher's generosity. In 1967, it was allowed to purchase state-owned manufactures Royal Ordnance for just £100m, after hundreds of millions of pounds of public money had been pumped in to make it viable.

Some £50m worth of intellectual property rights on missile data and design went for just £1m. Profits on selling off surplus Royal Ordnance land - at the height of the property boom - were massive.

A five year contract to supply the government with ammunition and explosives, valued at the time at £130m, was shot down. The deal gave BAe a commanding position in Britain's armaments industry.

The following year, BAe got volumes of Rover for just £15m when its assets were valued at £31bn. Even then the Tories gave back any advantage the deal would have given the Polish government to transfer production of the car company to UK. It is understandable to be considering con- tracting out sub-assemblies, partnering with other companies and outsourcing the manufacture of engines made in Britain rather than Germany have been scrapped.

Around 740 jobs are to go at Hales- wood, and 700 at Dagenham. Some 47 jobs at Birkenhead engine plant, where there were 188 voluntary redundancies earlier this year, are also at risk. Southampton is also affected. Any compulsory redundancies at Ford would be the first for 25 years.

Convenors have raised the possibility of industrial action, although an official union response is not due until October. There has been no lead from the unions nationally.

Ford - still Britain's largest car maker - has shed an average of 3,200 jobs every year since 1983. Last August it put Dagenham and Southend on three and four day weeks respectively and announced a one-week shutdown at Hatfield, blaming the continuing slump in the UK car market.

Workers still get their basic wage, but lose bonuses, allowances and overtime. Now they face a further 40 per cent cut in income.

The freeze comes after the company announced a £31m operating loss for the first six months of 1992, a better performance than the year or year-earlier figure of £43m. Unions only recently agreed a major new 'deal' package of job cuts and working practices despite the government's efforts to negotiate a deal.

End of line for car workers
Britain's continuing slump has pushed the car industry into deep crisis. Ford bosses are chopping 1,500 jobs and demanding a 40 per cent cut in pay off while most of the workforce is already on short time.

They are also pushing a six month pay freeze, promising a minor image renovation in April for the Rover. Meanwhile, there are to be 950 redundancies at the Rover factory in Crews, Cheshire.

The latest Ford sackings come on top of 1,000 redundancies as early as February, Albert Copes, vice presi- dent of Ford in Britain, has already publicly stated that the company's Brit- ish plants could be at risk of closure.

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The move comes just months after Trade Secretary Michael Foot opened a new £200m manufacturing facility. Rolls Royce bosses want 950 vol- untary redundancies, but are using this as a cover to get rid of the workforce, which has already gone after this round of cuts, just 2,100 workers remain.
Major step towards restoring capitalism

Privatisation blitz hits Russia

By Paul Clarke

The world’s biggest ever privatisation programme has begun in Russia. Each Russian citizen will be issued with vouchers worth 10,000 roubles (about US $40); by the end of the year 6500 major industrial enterprises must draw up plans to become joint stock companies, exchanging shares for vouchers. In reality the majority of people are expected to immediately exchange their vouchers for cash, as happened with a similar voucher scheme in Czechoslovakia.

This means that a few weeks from now the population as a whole will end up owning the majority of shares, and indeed the companies if the auctions go ahead as planned in November and December.

Foreign companies are expected to take a major stake in some of the larger and profitable companies. However, the scheme allows for firms to become worker co-operatives, and for management buy-outs. A big international campaign is to start explaining to foreign firms how they buy-in to the Russian economy; only some small firms in the defence and energy sector are excluded from foreign takeover.

The privatisation scheme takes place against the backdrop of a major slump in the economy, and huge struggles inside the leadership and the old nomenklatura over economic plans.

According to official figures production fell by 18 per cent in the first half of 1992; inflation is expected to be anything from 1600 per cent to 3000 per cent by the end of the year. Runaway inflation has wiped out the savings of most ordinary people.

The slump and inflation has had a drastic effect on personal consumption by ordinary workers. Spending on clothes and shoes has dropped by 50 per cent and on milk products by 25 per cent. Half the population is living below the official poverty line; a recent poll found that 40 per cent of people in St. Petersburg said they were seriously hungry.

Spending on health and welfare has been slashed; one result is that 4 per cent increase in infant mortality.

Yeltsin’s ‘shock therapy’ and the general dislocation of state planning have thrown many firms into effective bankruptcy. Since they are only kept going by increasing state subsidies, a major battle has been raging between economic ultra-liberals around Yeltsin and his premier Gaidar, who wishes to force through the privatisation and bankruptcy laws, and hundreds of enterprise managers, supported by Yeltsin’s deputy Ruslan Khasbulatov.

The old nomenklatura is caught in a trap of its own making: the West in general and the IMF in particular will not come to Russia’s aid without radical economic reform.

But reform means thousands of enterprises going bust, and millions being made unemployed. In May the Russian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs, desperate to stop the destruction of state industry, founded a new political party called ‘Renewal’.

Renewal in turn is part of the ‘Civic Union’, which includes Rusku’s Poplos Party of Free Russia. Both the Russian and Gaidar factions are operating within a pro-capitalist, authori-
tarian, framework — literally boxed in Russia’s case with apathy to Great Russian chauvinism and reactionary nationalism.

Catastrophe

If privatisation and the bankruptcy laws are pushed through, civil anarchy awaits Russia. The mass unemployment which would ensue could give rise to a social explosion. But despite the strike wave earlier this year, the new workers’ movement remains extremely weak. According to Nikolai Fedenko, a leading activist in the new Party of Labour: ‘The old trade unionists enjoy no confidence, by and large; the new ones with the ex-

sisters of those in the mining regions are very weak. There are no serious organisations expressing the interests of the workers’ movement nor parties which the mass of workers could consider their own, to be counted on without fear of trea-
drial or deception.’

Sri Lanka

NSSP leaders arrested

Eight leaders of the Nava Sama Samaja Party, the Sri Lankan section of the Fourth International, were arrested on 1 July while participating in a Jana Gosa (‘people’s noise’) demonstration against the government’s IMF-imposed austerity programme.

During the protest thousands of people lit firecrackers, bashed pots and blew horns in a lunch-time protest. The eight included party General Secretary Vickramabahu Karunatna (‘Bahu’). All are due to appear in court on 19 November charged with violating Emergency Regulations. According to Reuters ‘police armed with machine guns, batons and tear gas violently dispersed demonstrators and were particularly vicious towards women demonstrating on behalf of the hundreds of ‘disap-

peared’.

Vickramabahu Karunath-

ne is speaking soon at a meeting in London — see advertisement on this page.

Unholy alliance in Romania

By Joe Pass

Romania’s neo-stalinists are set to go into coalition with the far-right after an unexpectedly strong showing in last week’s elections.

Preliminary results give the Demo-

cratic National Salvation Front 28 per cent of parliamentary vote. The party is built around the remnants of the old state apparatus of dictator Nicolae Ceausescu, who was toppled in the revolution of December 1989. The main opposition, the 18-party Democratice Liberal Coalition (CC), won 27 per cent on an explicit two market plat-

form and a clear break with commun-

ism. It has the support of most of Ro-

mania’s ethnic Hungarians, intellectuals and the middle classes.

The Front is now well placed to seek co-operation with the Socialist Labour Party and the openly anti-Semitic and xenophobic nationalists in Romania Mare.

In the presidential elections, the Front candidate, student Ion Iliescu won 45 per cent of an early official return, against 20 per cent for DC’s Emil Constantinescu. Two years ago, Iliescu took 65 per cent of the poll. Radical nationalist George Funar took 12.3 per cent, with three minor candidates. A French-style run off be-
tween the two candidates is sched-
ilened for October 11.

The Democratic National Salvation Front has secured widespread support among sections of working class and the peasantry that have to lose most from a return to capitalism. Yet it too is overly nationalistic, still advocating a slower pace of change.

Under Iliescu, privatisation of state enterprises has already begun, and prices allowed to rise by 800 per cent. A million people lost their jobs in the last two years. There is nothing for workers to choose between either camp.

Hear Sri Lankan Trotskyist leader

General Secretary of the NSSP (New Socialist Party), Sri Lankan section of the Fourth International

Vickramabahu Karunatne (‘Bahu’) speaks at Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, WC2

Wednesday 14 October 7.30pm

The working class in Sri Lanka faces bitter struggles against austerity and the senseless war waged by the government against the Tamil people. The NSSP has played an important role in the anti-austerity struggle, in the fight for self-determination for the Tamil people and in the movement in defence of the ‘disappeared’. The NSSP affiliated to the Fourth International in 1992. Bahu’s visit is a unique opportunity to hear about the Sri Lankan struggle and the role of Trotskyism.
The twilight of monetarism

Why Keynes isn’t the answer

As the disconcerting consequences of super-free market policies become apparent, voices are being raised in capitalist and social democratic circles demanding state intervention to revitalize the economy. But is it really an alternative; and would a new round of state economic intervention and debt-financing of growth have beneficial effects for working people? Here ERNEST MANDEL argues that traditional Keynesian reflationary policies must be distinguished from the budget deficit policies of Reagan, and that capitalist reflation only brings short-term advantages for the working class, and inevitably ends up in a new recession.

The fundamental idea of Keynesianism is the state spending, a national budget deficit can be used to combat economic crisis and recession. From a theoretical point of view raising overall demand in a given country will facilitate a recovery no matter what is the disposable productive capacity (unemployed workers, stocks of raw materials, machines working below capacity). These unused resources are mobilised by the additional purchasing power created by the budget deficit. Only when these reserves are exhausted do you get the fatal onset of inflation.

But there is a snag. In order for the budget deficit not to fuel inflation before full employment is reached, direct taxes must increase in the same proportion as income.

Tax burden

Given that the bourgeoisie prefers to buy state bonds rather than pay taxes, and that tax evasion by the bourgeoisie is endemic, the higher tax burden imposed by Keynesian policies falls on the workers. As the public debt grows, servicing this debt eats up a growing part of public spending, so there is a tendency for the budget deficit to grow without any corresponding beneficial effects on employment.

So in the end Keynesian expansion tends to undermine itself through growing inflation and diminishing returns from the initial budget deficit-driven ‘push’. A new recession is the result. And the growing tax burden tends to redistribute income towards the bourgeoisie.

The historical balance sheet of Keynesian policy is clear. The most extensive experiment, Roosevelt’s New Deal in the United States during the 1930s, ended in failure.

Unemployment

Despite the rise in public spending, it ended in the crisis of 1937. Unemployment reached 10 million. It was the massive disarmament thanks to the war which reduced mass unemployment.

There is something bizarre in the way in which neo-liberal dogmatists contrast their ‘supply-side’ policies to those based on creating demand through budget deficits. Never, in fact, have budget deficits been higher than under the neo-liberal champion Ronald Reagan.

The same is true to a large extent of the reign of Mrs Thatcher. They implemented record-breaking neo-Keynesian programmes while all the time professing quite the opposite faith. The real debate was not about the size of the budget deficit but what it was to be used for.

The facts speak for themselves. Reagan/Thatcher neo-Keynesianism has brutally reinforced the austerity offensive everywhere. Social spending and spending on infrastructure has been cut; arms spending had expanded massively in the USA and Britain and to a lesser extent in Japan and Germany.

Subsidies to private enterprise have increased. Unemployment and widening social inequalities have been stimulated. In the last 20 years the number of unemployed in the OECD countries has risen fourfold.

The overall social effect has been disastrous. You can learn on any college course on economic development that the most productive long-term investments are those in education, public health and infrastructure.

However the neo-liberal dogmatists overlook this elementary truth when they approach problems from the point of view of a ‘equilibrium’ which must be re-established. The favoured targets for cuts are precisely education, health care, social security and infrastructure, when the inevitable harmful effects, including on productivity, are considered.

Does this mean that socialists prefer traditional Keynesianism and the welfare state to the poisonous cocktail of monetarism and neo-Keynesianism currently on offer? If our answer is positive, it must be heavily qualified.

Traditional Keynesianism implies various forms of the exercise and division of power within the framework of bourgeois society. This leads to various forms of social contract and consensus with those who currently hold economic power on their terms.

Lesser evil

This is a purely one-way consensus and it runs counter to the interests of the working class. Traditional Keynesianism is only the lesser evil in that compared to a deflationary policy it is better and an immediate and direct stimulus to employment.

However in present conditions neo-Keynesianism is leading to an increase in unemployment and marginalisation of growing sections of the population, with all sorts of reactionary consequences.

Furthermore, advocates of traditional Keynesian policies have to deal with a fundamental awkward fact: the effectiveness of their approach is being greatly reduced by the growth in the power of the multinational corporations. While of course it is ridiculous to say that state interventions today is powerless, it is of course much less powerful than during the 1930s and 1970s.

Faced with the growth of transnational enterprises, the national state is no longer an adequate economic instrument for the dominant factions of the bourgeoisie. Thus an effort is being consistently made to substitute supranational institutions for the classic case being the various institutions of the European Community.

But many obstacles have to be overcome if supranational institutions are to take on the characteristics of a real supranational state, for example in Europe.

European unification remains suspended between a vague confederation of sovereign states and a European federation with some of the characteristics of a state, with a single currency, a central bank, a common industrial and agricultural policy, joint army and police forces and finally a central government authority.

In the process of European capitalist unification there would be an arm’s length, which is beginning to explode in the strikes in Italy and Greece. It is the simple fact that the ‘constitutional’ requirement for monetary union will have an enormous deflationary and austerity effect. This in itself should cause enough for the workers movement to reject the Maastricht treaty.

Maastricht offers nothing more than an excuse for a continuation and toughening of austerity policies. It is more vital than ever to continue the fight against it.

Running huge deficits: Thatcher

75 years of the Russian Revolution: hear

ERNST MANDEL

Friday OCTOBER 23

KINGSWAY COLLEGE, Sidmouth St
off Grays Inn Rd, London WC1

7.30pm (Kings Cross TUBE)

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**Tories create 3-way NHS crisis**

The economy and Maastricht are not the only questions on which the Tories are vulnerable: and the Labour opposition is making hay.

As hospital wards close and health workers lose their jobs in a wave of cuts and crisis measures across the country, HARRY SLOAN looks at the crisis the Tories have created for themselves in the health service. In the next issue, a special feature: What is to be Done about the Health Service? will look at the kind of policies socialists should be raising.

**Market madness**

THE TORIES' ideological insistence upon creating an amoral 'internal market' in the NHS is turning into a bureaucratic nightmare. By separating 'providers' of health care -- the fund-holding District Health Authorities and GP fund holders -- from the ' purchasers' -- hospitals and units delivering frontline care -- Thatcher's reform spawned a monster.

Each side of the split has now developed its own bureaucratic, with all its inherent problems and dangers.

In place of productive nursing, medical and support staff, hospital units are slugging it out with paralysed platoons of highly-paid senior managers and accountants, while thousands more clerical staff are required to administer the complex pricing and billing structure which now dominates the new system.

With no overall increase in resources, the Tory reforms have diverted cash from patient care into bureaucracy.

**Planning abolished**

By abolishing any presence of planning and forcing hospital units into competition for resources in which price is the key factor, they have also triggered a war of attrition against staff.

To get rid of all spending on its pay, the only way to reduce prices is to cut the numbers and quality of staff (pursuing out-staffing is not an answer) and reducing the number of beds. The key to the whole system is the concept of 'units of excellence', in which quality of care has been provided at a slightly higher than average cost. Already the victims of this policy are London's Elizabeth Garrett Anderson Hospital for Women and Sheffield's King Edward's orthopaedic hospital. Others are threatened with closure by gung-ho Health Ministers.

In the battle to complete by cutting costs and setting 'target costs' private sector hospitals, big cities such as Birmingham, Manchester, Liverpool, Sheffield and elsewhere face massive rationalisation plans involving the loss of beds and staff from existing hospitals.

The biggest of these closure-ops is in London, where A&E departments and the cost of closure, and the cost of closure, result in a new list of services.

Finding their price undercut by hospitals in the rest of London and in the Home Counties, the inner London teaching hospitals are being driven towards bankruptcy, revealing multi-million pound deficits. Every attempt to break these shortfalls by cutting services simply pushes up the unit cost of treatment.

**VIRGINIA Bottomley's announcement of a measure £540m to local councils to implement the government's community care reforms from next April will trigger six months of crisis and confusion.**

The money of which £140 million is a one-off payment for set-up costs -- is just half the amount the councils and original

**Community care: the to privatisate health ser**

VIRGINIA Bottomley's announcement of a measure £540m to local councils to implement the government's community care reforms from next April will trigger six months of crisis and confusion.

The money of which £140 million is a one-off payment for set-up costs is just half the amount the councils and originally

**Assessment**

This makes quite explicit a factor that until now had been overlooked or wilfully ignored by Labour and trade union leaders. Behind the rhetoric of 'community care' -- in theory caring for people in their own homes or small, friendly units rather than in big hospitals and institutions -- the Tories have been embarking upon the biggest exercise in privatising health care and imposing charges.

Under the new regulations, local councils are supposed to take over from health authorities the lead responsibility for continuing care of the frail elderly.

Care which was provided free at point of use in NHS beds and day centres is from next year to be subject to means-tested charges.

A London-wide meeting on November 10 at Camden Town Hall will launch the LHE campaign, which is hoping to link health and other trade unions, Labour Parties, pensioners' groups and community organisations around a joint plan to resist.

**The £2.5 billion a year in fees which will pay for care in residential and nur

**£2.8 billion market in private med statistics on private health care.**

obliged to shell out a massive £2.5 billion a year in charges and above their Social Security income support entitlements.

Elderly people coming into the new system after April (an estimated 110,000 in 1993-4) will have their entitlement to social security cancelled out by the new reforms.

Instead they can receive only discretionary support, administered by local councils which are themselves subject to...
biggest-ever move vices

rigorous government charge-capping and other restrictions. The assessment by social workers of the "needs of any client will therefore take place against a background of rigid cash limits."

Many health authorities have seen this coming, and have been quick to close down their elderly care beds, fearing that cash-strapped social services might lose 'more and more clients as needling hospital care. Mapped out in 1986 by Thatcher's right hand adviser on health policy, Sainsbury's supermarket boss Sir Roy Griffiths, the community care reforms represent the most dramatic and audacious attempt at privatisation yet proposed by the Tories. It is transparently designed to force the burden of expenditure and care on to individual elderly people and their families - almost inevitably women relatives (daughters, wives, etc.).

In one masterstroke the Tories thought they could remove a costly area of care from the NHS, forcing the users to pay much of the cost themselves or to do without any proper care at all, while foisting the blame onto local councils for the inevitable failure. Incredibly enough, the Labour leadership, beginning with the more inert council leaders and canniest social service chiefs, but soon including Robin Cook and the front bench MPs publicly endorsed this policy, and even urged the Tories to implement it more quickly.

When even bully boy Kenneth Clarke (then Health Secretary) backed off, postponing the implementation of the reforms by two years to ensure it would come after the election, Labour's leaders opposed the delay.

Bi-partisan

Instead of using the threat to elderly care as a mighty electoral club with which to beat the Tories and underline their claim that the NHS is being privatised, Labour allowed the issue to become yet another in a long list of bi-partisan policies.

It was not until the day before Bottomley's announcement of the cash allocation that Labour's new community care spokesperson Dave Hinchcliffe belatedly announced a complete reversal of policy - to oppose the reforms.

Why it has taken Labour four years to spot the obvious is a mystery. But the policy switch must now be followed through with full-blooded campaigns in every town and city against the closure of elderly care NHS beds, through which health chiefs are dumping not only the frail elderly, but also elderly mentally infirm into private, profit-seeking homes which lack the qualified nursing staff and therapeutic services that are a vital part of hospital care.

Pensioners groups, relatives and organisations for the elderly should be mobilised to combat this frontal threat to our NHS, alongside the other battles against cuts and closures.

After Tomlinson?
London Health Workers Conference
Saturday 31st October, 10-6
Camden Town Hall, Euston Road
Registration fee £5
For details ring 081 840 7000
Meeting called by London Health Emergency
Defend London's Health Services
Camden Town Hall
November 10, 7pm

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What is to be done about...

by Dave Olsen

The night before the Minister of Fun finally quit, he posed the question: "Who decides who should be a member of the queue in the cabinet - the prime minister or the editor of the Daily Mail?" Paul Dacre 1, John Major 0.

With Mellor tattle tattling the news-stands for the last three months, attention is again focused on Britain's tabloid press.

Many Mellor revelations were unaccountably in the public interest. Mellor had free use of a chauffeur driven car and a luxury Love-nest, provided by a property developer he put onto lucrative business deals; accepted expensive holidays as gifts without declaring them to the register of members interests; and ideologically exploited his wife and kids in the promotion of phoney "family values".

Even protests that his phone conversations were taped - "one wondered whether one was living in Ceausescu's Romania rather than John Major's Britain" - are rich from a minister in a government that routinely taps 35,000 telephones.

The Fourth Estate

But Mellor is not the only tabloid victim. Health secretary Virginia Bottomley, Liberal Democrat leader Paddy Ashdown, Labour general secretary Larry Whitty, the Princess of Wales and the Duchess of York have all recently been done over by the Fourth Estate. In the run-up to the general election, then Labour leader Neil Kinnock was linked with prostitution, the KGB, and a businessman on the run from the fraud squad. Presumably he was just too busy to fit any Devil worship in. Kinnock ultimately attributed blame for Labour's defeat on 'the Tory press' rather than his own disastrous political course.

Yet 'Tory press' allegations are somehow acceptable as evidence in 'expulsion' hearings, as two Lambeth councillors recently discovered.

From the 'exposures' of socialist car-workers at Cowley as red moles in 1983, to 1990's 'Sergiill in Moscow/Tripoli/Cash Shock', to the hounding of individuals like Mandy Mudd, Rachel Webb, Linda Bellos, Peter Tatchell and 'IRA-loving, poor-loving, Marxist leader of the GLC Mr Ken Livingstone himself (thank you, Sunday Express), the left is constantly under attack.

Libel laws let the rich and powerful sue. But defamation cases do not get legal aid, making action financially impossible even for the relatively well-off, let alone working class people.

Sir David Calcutt QC's inquiry into the press and privacy in 1990 led to the formation of the industry-based Press Complaints Commission (a reworked Press Council stripped of lay members and the bribe to promote press freedom) and a final opportunity for newspapers to clean up their act voluntarily.

Criminal

The penalties for failure were to be stark. Calcutt warned. A powerful government-imposed Press Tribunal and three new criminal offences stopping journalists' attempts to obtain personal information would be introduced.

The advent of the PCC - whose 16 members include editors of the News of the World, Daily Telegraph and Daily Star, all deep partisan Tory papers - occasioned Mellor's infamous remark that the popular press is drinking in the Last Chance Saloon. Ironically, his departure could hasten kicking out time.

Sir David is due to give a verdict at the end of this year. Major may use the shaming of his close friend as a pretext for tough new legislation.

Whatever the left has suffered from press harassment, it would be wrong to agree. Our starting point must be greater press freedom, not less. We are for the right to know.

The first amendment to the US constitution reads 'Congress shall make no law... abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press.' In Britain, over 100 laws make disclosure of information a crime.

The mere existence of restrictive legislation is itself a massive deterrent to investigative journalism. Further measures would shut up the John Pilger, Paul Foot and Duncan Campbell, not the anonymous young wannabes from the provincial press, mooning light on the nationals and ready to do anything for the big break.

As in so many other areas, Labour's last manifesto substantially concurred with the Tories' position on Calcutt. It also joined the Liberal Democrats in promising a Freedom of Information Act. That much is essential, but not enough.

The left should demand that a Labour government scrap all repressive limitations on journalism, including the Official Secrets Act, the D-Notice system of voluntary self-censorship on intelligence questions and the Sinn Fein broadcasting ban.

Only socially desirable limitations on matters like identifying child sex abuse victims or publishing material which could prejudice jury trials should stay in place.

Much of present press bias is rooted in virtual monopoly ownership. Three groups control over 70 per cent of national daily circulation and 80 per cent of Sunday circulation, and are extending empires into broadcast media.

Expropriation

A socialist government would ensure diversity by expropriating the mass circulation press from its present capitalist owners, and use the resources to allow all legal political views access to print. Real diversity and democracy cannot happen while the rich and powerful have a stranglehold on ownership.

Not only political parties, but mass organisations of all kinds would be given the resources to produce their own papers; such moves would have to be backed up by democratising access to broadcast media, especially television.

In the here and now, the labour movement urgently needs to build its own mass circulation press, making the basic socialist case in a professional, popular and appealing fashion to counterbalance Wapping.

Potential

Despite the disaster of News on Sunday, largely attributable to the incompetence of those behind it, the potential circulation is probably there.

But socialist papers don't get advertising revenue from capitalist businesses. Many distributors refuse to circulate them, either from ideological considerations or because there is insufficient profit in it.

State financial support for minority viewpoint publications, with no political strings attached, and a legal right to nationwide distribution, are already in place in some capitalist countries.

Papers of the Fourth International benefit accordingly.

A socialist government would also improve the education system that has left six million adults (disproportionately working class with reading difficulties. A transition to socialism will raise political awareness and interest in real issues beyond recognition. The ramifications for press standards are obvious.

Labour MP Clive Soley, working with the Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom, is to introduce a private members bill effectively giving right of reply to demonstrable lie.

An independent statutory body would investigate complaints of distortion, and be empowered to order corrections at least as prominent as the offending story to be published where appropriate. This sensible initiative should certainly be supported.
All girls together

A league of their own

Starring Geena Davis, Lori Petty, Tom Hanks, Madonna
Reviewed by Kate Ahrens

In 1943, the All American Girls Professional Baseball League (AAGPBL) was established due to fears that because of the war, men's professional baseball would have to be suspended.

It turned out not to be the case, but the AAGPBL lasted until 1954. 'A league of their own' is a commemoration of the first year, when the biggest obstacle was overcome, that of getting the American baseball watching public to accept the idea of women professional baseball players.

Its not important to care, or even know anything about baseball in order to enjoy this film - what is essential however, is to be the sort of person who stays in specially to watch slushy American TV films.

Suspense

Viewed as an exercise in acting technique, it is very good, and the subject matter is an interesting one, but there is no suspense, no involvement in the story to make the audience feel for the characters.

Dotty (Davis) and Kit (Pety) are sisters who are discovered by a baseball talent scout. The film follows Dotty through the try-outs for the league and the subsequent tour of the country with their team the Rockford Peaches.

Jim Duggan (Hanks) is the manager of the team, an ex-baseball player who fell out of the game and into the bottle. As the film progresses, Duggan sober up, and begins to take an interest in the team - a rather simplistic view of the problems of alcoholism.

This is not a feminist film. It only marginally recognises the dilemma that was raised by bringing women into the workforce during the war.

Cheap laughs

When one woman is forced to take her son on tour with them, this is only a device for a few cheap laughs, not as an example of how hard it really was for the women who worked during the war to get the material support they needed.

'A league of their own' is a nice film, nothing very hard hitting, but enjoyable enough if what you're looking for is an undemanding, nostalgic slice of the past.

Riding high in the saddle

Unforgiven

Starring and directed by Clint Eastwood
Reviewed by Liam Mac Uaid

Westerns are not popular with socialists. Faced with a choice between an acknowledged masterpiece like John Ford's 'The Searchers' and a low budget account of the 1911 Melbourne gaslight strike, I suspect most Socialist Outlook readers would plump for the latter.

The fact that westerns are white America's own mythology causes an automatic aversion to them on the part of lefties. In defence of the genre I have found myself arguing that the 'Magnificent Seven' is an analogy for the revolutionary party leading the masses in their own liberation.

But with Clint Eastwood's new film, 'Unforgiven', it is not necessary to resort to such contortions to describe what will come to be judged as one of the finest westerns and one of the best films ever made.

'Unforgiven' is in the mould of such classics as 'High Noon' and 'Red River', rather than the violent stylised films that made Eastwood's name.

It is far more grimly realistic and amoral than the conventions of the day permitted director to be in the Forties and Fifties. All the traditional elements of the western are turned upside down to give the closest recreation of the West you are ever likely to see on the cinema screen.

The legendary gunfighters are revealed to be murderous drunks with strong nerves and quick reflexes. Gene Hackman's sheriff keeps order by bullwhipping offenders and suspects - the sort of policing the film's star is usually accused of promoting.

Yet we have no sympathy for the defender of order when confronted with the paid killer. Eastwood is first seen rolling around in a piggery and can no longer mount his horse.

His accomplice Morgan Freeman loses his nerve after putting one bullet into his first victim, and Eastwood - with whom the audience is meant to identify - has to finish the job. The mythical Schofield Kid renounces killing after shooting his first victim in a toilet.

The theme of killing - how the victim feels, how the killer feels - recurs throughout the film. Eastwood murders two strangers to make money for his son and kills indiscriminately to avenge his murdered friend.

His character has a practical and ideological conception of his trade. This was not how Gary Cooper used his gun.

A review can only reveal a fragment of such a complex work. The second time I saw the film was better than the first. 'Unforgiven' will repay a dozen viewings.

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25 years after murder of Che Guevara, John Lister explores

ON OCTOBER 8, 1967, Ernesto 'Che' Guevara was wounded and captured in Bolivia by the small guerrilla force he was leading and was ambushed by troops. The next day, on orders from the CIA and Bolivian top brass, Guevara was murdered. He was 39 years old.

Guevara was a man of consistent courage and revolutionary dedication. He had been one of the core fighters who sailed with Fidel Castro in 1956 to launch the guerrilla struggle that ousted the Batista dictatorship in Cuba. He had held top government posts under Castro as capitalism was overturned - head of the Industry ministry (MINRA), head of the National Bank. He had negotiated key trade agreements for sale of sugar to Peking and to Moscow, that ensured the survival of the Revolution.

Yet none of these roles grabbed the attention of the world's youth as dramatically as his tragic death on a failed and ill-conceived expedition in Bolivia.

Indeed the death of Guevara was also the birth of the Guevara legend; the image of the courageous, selfless revolutionary internationalist was put on.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, when opposition to the Vietnam War reached mass proportions, the walls and doors of countless students and youth throughout the world featured posters bearing the handsome features of the slain martyr to the struggle against imperialism.

Trotskyists

Even those whose Trotskyist politics should have made them more critical set aside all of their usual criteria and mistakenly proclaimed Che to be (unconsciously, of course) one of theirs.

In fact, however, Che summed up the need for international solidarity, with his immortal call for 'Two, three, many Vietnams' to break the isolation of the Vietnamese fighters and spark a global revolutionary war.

But those who have sought to make Guevara a political model as well as a spiritual exemplar of the exploited and oppressed internationalist, have failed to grasp the ideological predicament of those who sought to follow his example.

Che Guevara was born in Argentina, in 1928 in Rosario, the eldest of five children in a liberal, left-wing family.

After qualifying as a doctor in 1953 he travelled northwards through Latin America, he arrived in Guatemala, where the democratically elected Arbenz government had destroyed the inflated land market and encouraged the exploitation of the exploited. In 1954, the coup d'etat led by the US-backed United Fruit Company, and was facing mounting opposition orchestrated by the CIA.

Cho, who had read Marx and Lenin (but apparently no Trotsky) made contact with left-wing circles and attempted to join the feaible resistance to the US invasion. But the Arbenz regime refused to arm the guerrillas and peasants to fight imperialism, and the Guatemalan Communist Party, hand in hand with Arbenz, began to work from within.

Forced to flee Guatemala, but clearly learning little about the politics of Stalinism, Che moved to Mexico, where he met up with exiled Cubans, including Paul Casta, brother of Fidel.

On bearing of the proposed guerrilla expedition to Cuba to overthrow the brutal and corrupt Batista dictatorship, Che signed on as the third of the band to sail in the Granma.

He became a commander in Fidel Castro's Rebel Army, which began its struggle in the teeth of political opposition from the Cuban Stalinists, organised in the so-called Popular Socialist Party.

The old Communist Party had from 1938 to 1944 played a despicable role in alliance with Batista, who saw them as a convenient means of controlling the working class through the Cuban Confederation of Workers. The CF had even two ministers in Batista's government from 1942.

The Cuban Stalinist strategy in the 1950s was to seek an alliance with sections of Cuban capitalists against Batista. This policy was only dropped late in 1958, when it was clear that the armed campaign waged by Castro's and other guerrilla forces was winning the upper hand.

Despite this, after the Revolution it was not the Stalinists, but the small Cuban Trotskyist forces who were repressed in 1961. Artists were also censored for literature.

Guevara, while conceding that the smashing of their printing press had been a mistake, in 1962 denounced the repression of the Trotskyists whose call for the working class to exert pressure on the government 'was prejudicing the discipline necessary at this time'.

He insisted that 'You cannot be for the revolution and against the Cuban Communist Party.'

Indeed Guevara himself went out of his way to identify himself with the wretched PSF tradition. He even spoke at the celebrations of the 25th anniversary of the PSF's newspaper Hoy, which had begun life under the legal protection of Batista, claiming that the party 'was the ideological precursor of our revolution'.

Politically, Guevara's version of Marxism was a Stalinist version. He described the Stalinist-dominated Communist parties without qualification as 'Marxist-Leninist'.

In formulating his theoretical views on 'Building a Party of the Working Class' (1963) it is clear that his party model is a Stalinist model, with no internal democracy, no right to form tendencies and factions: none of Trotsky's critique of Stalinism and bureaucracy in the USSR was taken on board.

There was a contradiction here, of course. Unlike the official Communist Parties, Guevara was no fan of alliances with the national bourgeoisie in Latin America or elsewhere: his view was in fact much closer to the Trotskyist conception of 'permanent revolution'.

"Faced with the dilemma of choosing between the people or imperialism, the weak national bourgeoisies choose imperialism and definitively betray their country. In this part of the world the possibility is almost totally gone for there to be a peaceful transition to socialism."

As late as 1967, Che appeared to embrace the same tactic commitment to a conception which implied permanent revolution:

"...the indigenous bourgeoisies have lost all capacity to oppose imperialism - if they ever had and have been dragged along behind it like a caboose. There are no other alternatives. Either a socialist revolution or no revolution at all."

But though he sided with left communists splits in Latin America with its community Parties, Che never followed through the logic of his decisions to challenge the official line emanating from Moscow, or to study the writings of Trotsky.

Peasantry

One obstacle to him embracing a clear perspective of permanent revolution was his persistent focus upon the method of guerrilla warfare, and thus on downplaying the role of Latin America's growing urban working class and organizing the peasantry as the key revolutionary force.

Summing up the Cuban revolutionary experience as early as 1960, he insisted that the lessons for the whole of Latin America were:

1. Popular forces can win a war against the army.

2. It is not always necessary to wait until all the conditions for revolution exist: the insurrectional centre can create them.

3. In underdeveloped Latin America the area for struggle is the countryside.

Going further, he argued that 'the guerrilla fighter is above all an agrarian revolutionary'.

In these one-sided conclusions, which he never revised, we can see the seeds of Guevara's own tragic and wasted death. It is a particular irony that his own guerrilla grouping in Bolivia was betrayed by local peasants who saw them as strange intruders and reported them to the police.

No other Latin American country was as rotten-ripe as Cuba for the regime to be toppled by a voluntarist guerrilla struggle.

Thousands of brave anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist fighters, nobly committed to the struggle, died needlessly to their deaths trying to apply the Cuban model in countries where it stood no chance of working.

Despite this final failure most of the world's left was, however, still under the spell of Che's heroic effort to put his own revolutionary, internationalist conviction into practice. As the barbarism of the US onslaught on Vietnam seemed unchallenged, Che spoke for millions:

"Let us develop genuine proletarian internationalism, with international proletarian armies. Let the flag under which we fight be the sacred cause of the liberation of humanity, so that to die under the colours of Vietnam, Venezuela, Guatemala, Laos, Guinea, Colombia, Bolivia, Brazil - to mention only the current scenes of armed struggle - will be greatly glorious and desirable for a Latin American, an African and even a European."

To Che the Argentine, having renounced his honorary Cuban citizenship, died stateless under Bolivian skies.

He deserved not to be patronised and browbeaten with gawking tributes proclaiming him a 'revolutionary of action', but politically challenged on his basic misconceptions and confusion of poetic idealism in order that more could learn the correct way forward.

Today's youth can be urged to celebrate Che's struggles and successes as a model for their own and his courage: but not his politics.
Can the military come back?

By Phil Hearse

The vote to impeach Brazilian president Fernando Collor de Mello on corruption charges opens up a period of acute danger for the ruling class in that country.

In the 1990 elections Collor, an unknown businessman who had been 'invented' in a huge advertising and TV campaign, just managed to shake off the challenge of the leader of the Workers Party (PT), Ignacio de Oliveira — universally known as 'Lula'.

Mass leader

Lula, mass leader of the early 1980s workers uprising in the Sao Paulo industrial region, came a very close second, getting 36 per cent of the vote. The PT is the most radical mass party in Latin America, with 600,000 members that dominate the CUT trade union federation, and has supporters ranging from radical unionists to influential Trotskyist currents.

A new presidential election would undoubtedly see another big PT campaign. The bourgeoisie, aided by the imperialists, will do everything possible to keep Lula out. For the first time in years there is open discussion about the possibility of a military comeback; the army took power in Brazil in 1964 coup and maintained its grip for twenty years.

'Democratization'

In the past decade a much-vaulted 'democratization' process has swept the Latin America. The military regimes which took power in the 1960s and 70s have faded from the scene. Argentina, Uruguay, Chile and Brazil now have civilian governments. In El Salvador negotiations between the left-wing FMLN fighters and the Christian regime have led to the start of a shaky and uncertain 'democratization' process.

But the attempted coup in Venezuela, the military overthrow of Aristide in Haiti and the army-backed 'auto-coup' by president Fujimori in Peru have raised again the danger of a military crackdown. But most of all the danger lies in the catastrophic economic and social situation affecting the continent.

Powerless

The new 'democratic' governments are powerless to resolve the situation, which arises mainly from the debt crisis and IMF-imposed austerity programmes. Chile is a typical example.

Here the generals who overthrew the Allende government in September 1973 imposed a savage deflationary and privatisation programme, advised by the 'Chicago boys' - US economists adept at sapping away inflation.

This did indeed 'stabilise' the economy, but without a mass reaction it was a Pyrrhic victory.

Numerous theories about the role of the military have been devised. But the reality is that the spate of military coups in Bolivia in 1971, Chile and Uruguay in 1973, Argentina in 1976 - had their roots in the inability of normal 'democratic' politics to constrain the struggle of the workers.

There is no great hidden secret here; military dictatorship, like fascism, is a last resort for a ruling class threatened with the loss of its power and privileges.

The mass movement continent-wide is now at a much lower ebb than in the early 1970s. The Cuban-inspired guerrilla groups have collapsed and the workers' movement has suffered some spectacular defeats.

Out of step

But Brazil is out of step with many of these trends. Struggle during the twenty-year military dictatorship was at a low level. Meanwhile the partial industrialisation of the country immensely strengthened the social weight of the working class.

The return of Brazil's workers' movement, especially the development of the PT and the CUT, has produced a radical generation of workers who have not experienced massive defeat.

In Latin America itself it would shake-off the demoralising effects of the overthrow of the Sandinistas in Nicaragua and the stalacite in El Salvador.

US aid

For this reason the Brazilian bourgeoisie can expect massive aid from the US to keep Collor and the PT out of power.

But the military - already primed up with generous pay increases from the bankruptcy regime - is waiting in the wings to lead a coup, if media manipulation and electoral fraud should fail.

As the experience of Allende proved in the 1970s the question of government in Latin America cannot be abstracted from the question of power - and to secure power, a parliamentary majority is not enough. The mass action of the working class is essential - together with a leadership prepared to carry through the fight for a workers' government.

Revolutionary

The PT is a mass radical socialist party - close to the left of European social democracy. It has a powerful revolutionary component.

But for all that it has a growing social democratic wing, based on the parliamentary fraction and some of its numerous city and town councillors. Much will depend on the outcome of the political struggle over the future course of this party.

Welsh Labour discusses future of the valleys

by Ed George

For many people the South Wales Valleys are synonymous with coal mines. The idea owes more to tradition than current economic reality.

In 1920 some 270,000 people were employed in the deep mining of coal in South Wales. Today the industry employs less than 1,000.

Traditional Welsh industry has been increasingly replaced by low wage, skilled jobs, dependent on reliance on the service sector. The social and economic fabric of the Valleys is on the point of collapse.

Conference

This reality formed the backdrop to the conference, 'A Post Mining Culture - A New Future for the Valleys', held in Nantyr on September 12.

The conference (organised by Nantyr Labour MP Peter Hain) was attended by over 300 people, most of them labour movement activists. It coincided with the publication of the Nantyr report that calls for a 'social and economic plan for the Valleys' rather than simply accepting grants of aid.

Central to the Nantyr declaration's demand is the call for a democratic assembly for Wales, a view supported by speaker after speaker at the conference.

The demand for an assembly is not a diversion from bread and butter issues, said one. 'It signals our determination to address them.'

Unemployment

The Maastricht treaty was also discussed. The declaration argues against Maastrecht's insolvency on monetary convergence, which would lead to a Europe run by bankers, with mass unemployment permanently entrenched across Europe.

Some speakers at the conference took a different view. In particular, Wayne Davies, MEP for South Wales, described Maastricht as an 'intemationalist' response to the dangers of 'rampant nationalism' in Europe.

Although recent events place a question mark over the precise future of Maastricht, such as the drive away from Europe-wide price stability and the construction of the Euroope are very much alive. The conference indicated that a big debate on these questions is opening up in the Welsh labour movement.

The current economic and social transformation of the Valleys could, in the words of the declaration, lead to a weakening of the ties of labourism, not a complete break, is the absence of socialist renewal.

The declaration is a response by the most forward-thinking section of the Welsh labour bureaucracy to this possibility. In essence, it represents an attempt at a renewal of labourism of Wales.

The declaration's very ties to labourism, however, mean that ultimately it falls short of what is needed in practical terms by the Welsh working class.

It calls for the regeneration of the Welsh economy through better training, environment and EC regional aid. While this approach is radical compared to government policy, it amounts to little more than the post-war state-led restructuring of the Welsh economy which signally failed to reverse the long-term decline of the Valleys.

But the declaration's demand for a Welsh assembly and its call to 'weep away the process of externalisation' of the Welsh labour movement means that the conference was the best opportunity in years for socialists to discuss the key issues facing Welsh workers.

Hain made it clear that the conference marked the beginning of a process in which all socialists in Wales should both welcome and participate in.
Asian taxi driver murdered

AN ASIAN taxi driver in Bir-

mingham was brutally

knifed to death by three

racist thugs after going to

the aid of a workmate being

beaten up outside the Red

and White taxi base in the

city centre.

Two days after the killing last

month, some 3,000 people at-
tended a prayer ceremony at

the Central Mosque, with 1,000 taxi

drivers forming a procession to

the scene of the murder.

Unfortunately, the Anti-Nazi

League (led by the Socialist

Workers Party) have proma-

tively called a demonstration

for October 10 without even

consulting relatives, in a sec-

tarian bid to outflank CARE, the

Anti-Racist Alliance and Anti-

Fascist Action.

This will only alienate the

black community and the

labour movement. Birmingham

CARE believes they should can-
cel the demonstration and par-

ticipate in a united front

protest.

For more information, con-
tact TAM/CARE, PO Box 1854, Camp Hill, Bir-

mingham B11 1NJ.

Beat back midlands fascists!

by Jack Starkey 
and Pete Bloomer

Labour movement activists in

Walsall, West Midlands, have

called an anti-nazi march and

rally in Bloxwich — a series of

isolated and impoverished

local housing estates — after

a frightening rise in orga-
nised racist activity in recent

months.

Meanwhile, an action com-

mittee against police harass-

ment is gaining wide support in

Sandwell following an alleged

police assault on an Asian family.

Fascists are operating openly,

mounting Klux Klux Klan-style

trees burning, essays, and plug-

distribution of literature includ-

ing racist hate, and street paper

sales in a bid to recruit the

employed and frustrated local

youth.

The far right has had a base in

the area since Tory MP Enoch

Powell’s notorious essay on

blood speech in 1968, and is cur-

rently being further strengthened

by resources sent in from outside.

Walsall borough Labour Party

and the local community are

planning on October 31 to drive

the British National Party and

National Front rats back to their

sewers.

Bloxwich is no Rostock, but un-

less the local black community

is defended now, the fascists will

gain in confidence and use the

area as a basis to spread its activity

in the Midlands. Support from all

over the area is essential to build

the largest possible human

barrier.

In Sandwell, anti-racist activists

are accumulating a body of

evidence of physically attacking

six members of an Asian family

after breaking into their home to

solicit a complaint about noise from a

white neighbour.

A four year old child was

violently shaken and a 10 year

old woman assaulted as the officers

shouted racist insults. It is

claimed the family were not an

independent witness who were ap-

parently detained for five hours

and later left an area.

Serious charges — including as-

sault — are soon to be brought

against four members of the family. Two
days after the incident, some 200

people attended a protest meeting

leading to the formation of the ac-

tion committee.

A public rally has won support

from Labour councillors, the In-

dian Workers Association, the

Campaign Against Racism and

Fascism, and the NAZO local

government union. Pickets of the

family’s court appearances have

been up to 60 strong.

Bloxwich demo: Assemble 12pm

in Bloxwich town cen-

tre, and march to Walsall town

centre for a rally. Further information:
telephone 0922 695679 or

Indian Workers Association

091 851 4697.

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case.

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don NW1; (b) join our 300 Club regular prize draw for

a small monthly stake (details on page 11); (c) take a

regular bundle of the paper to sell at labour

movement meetings.
Unions hang on ... against the odds

By Dave Osler

TRADE unions are down but not defeated. Two new industrial relations surveys demonstrate. Resilience is most marked in the public sector, with union influence weakest in private manufacturing.

The results of the semi-official 1990 Workplace Industrial Relations Survey - sponsored by the Department of Employment, the Economic and Social Research Council, the Policy Studies Institute and the Confederation of British Industry - have just been released.

Unions are strongest in the public sector, with union influence weakest in private manufacturing.

One of the remarkable things about British capitalism is the integrity of its public life. Two examples came up this week.

The US senate sub-committee investigating the collapse of the BCCI bank, which resulted in tens of thousands of people losing their life savings, found British banks "colluded with the suppression of the true facts" about the bank. Including the fact that it was launching a panic to launder drug money.

And last week an accountant working for the Serious Fraud Office on the BCCI case was jailed for trying to sell documents to one of the suspects.

Bumsall strikers to call for demo

by Bob Smith

STRIKERS at Bumsall metal finishing in Smethwick near Birmingham have called a demonstration and rally in conjunction with their union GMB, the local black community and the labour movement.

A date has not yet been finalised.

GMB general secretary John Edmonds and his TGWU counterpart Bill Morris have both agreed to speak.

The two unions, now holding exploratory meetings, are to start a joint recruitment campaign in metal finishing plants in the area.

Pay, hours, conditions and health standards are some of the worst in Britain, with very few workplaces organised. Typical wages are £100 per day for a 40 hour week.

The strikers received a boost last week with a victory in the courts over a plan by the company to impose a new contract.

Nuclear sh!t

In April the sewage plant at the Trawsfynydd nuclear station twice overflowed into a nearby stream, endangering public safety. Why does a nuclear plant have its own sewage works and why is there no potential nuclear hazard? Probably there is something about the workers' natural discharge which means it has to be segregated.

Real thing

In the last issue Low Down whinged about the pay of GEC chairman Lord Weinstock. But his four hundred thousand is nothing compared to the chief executive of Coca Cola earns £7 million a year, according to figures released last week.

Loony

Loony right 'libertarian' Tony MP Teresa Gorman has made a practical demonstration of her contempt for the all-powerful state. She is said to have driven to Westminster magistrates charged with speeding, and driving without a licence or insurance.

Workhouse

More on the loony right. Pat Thatcherite economist Prof Francis Filson comes clean in last Monday's FT. Victorian workhouse, he says, 'very enlightened for the time, and could be revived to cut public spending. The learned professor also likes the Workhouse.

Enlightened

As the Manchester Piccadilly sacking show, BR is a very enlightened employer. Rail worker of 46 years Alex Bryson discovered this the hard way out for a lunchtime walk of shandy on his last day before early retirement. He got sacked, losing his £20,000 golden handshake.

Eventually he was reinstated. But colleagues Alex Lockhart (30 years service) who had a pint of shandy stays sacked.

Meanwhile a corruption trial at the Old Bailey has been hearing the lavish bribes (boozes, fags, slap-up meals, trips abroad, that sort of thing) doled out to BR executives.

Integrity

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Panic

Thousands of Italians withdrew their savings from banks in a panic last week amid rumours that the government was going to freeze deposits. Rich families with suitcases full of cash headed for Switzerland. Others crossed into France to open deposit accounts denominated in French francs.

Cynic

Outlook's computers have a very intelligent spell-checking program but it flags up are 'cynic' for Kinlock, 'lament' for Lament and even more politically astute, 'bleur for Blair.'

Nuclear sh!t

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Women and domestic violence

Ahuwalia out – now free

Thornton

Kiranjit Ahluwalia was released on Friday September 25 after having served three years in jail for the ‘murder’ of her husband. An Appeal Court accepted her plea of guilty to manslaughter after, at her original trial having been found guilty of murder.

But Kiranjit Ahluwalia is not the only woman who has been languishing in jail after killing her violent husband. Sara Thornton and many others are still awaiting justice.

Until women are provided with a safe way out of violent relationships, many are still going to be left with choosing between jail and being trapped into a life of fear and pain. And with local authorities cutting back on funding for women’s refuges, the choice becomes even starker.

Congratulations to Kiranjit for her victory in the courts. The next step is to free all those other women, both those in jail and those in violent relationships.

Stop violence against women

National Demonstration

Saturday 10th October

Assemble 12 noon, Temple Gardens, Embankment, London

For further information contact: 071 231 8415 or 071 375 2680. Called by the Campaign Against Domestic Violence