BUST
Tory pay freeze!

Miners’ support pp4-5 Iraqqgate p2
Sordid saga of arms dealing

Countdown to Iraggate

By Dave Osler

Lord Howe, then foreign secretary and pliant Sir Geoffrey, told the House of Commons on 29 October 1985: 'The United Kingdom has been strictly impartial in the conflict between Iran and Iraq.' He was on the speak of 'our policy of doing everything possible to see this tragedy bought to the earliest possible end.'

In fact, as former defence minister Alan Clark told the Old Bailey during the Matrix Churchill trial, Britain's interest were best served by prolonging the war to continue as long as possible. Policy was shaped accordingly.

Throughout the 1980s, Britain systematically helped to arm both sides. The switch to explicit backing of Iraq - the root of the current scandal - only really began in 1987.

In the case of Iran:

• Major British companies - including Plessey, Rolls Royce and GEC-supplied many parts with potential military applications with full government consent.
• Up to 80 per cent of Iran's international arms purchases in the period 1980-87 were organised through London.
• The Foreign Office was in the Ministry of Defence maintained offices in Tehran, despite official denials.

In the case of Iraq:

• A British company reportedly made possible Iran's chemical weapons production line.
• Britain trained Iraqi officers.

British arms dealers illegally engaged in large scale arms trading with both combatants. The Shah of Iran was put in power in 1953, after the British and American secret service arranged a coup which toppled the radical Mossadegh regime following the nationalisation of their oil interests.

Successive UK governments, both Labour and Conservative, allowed British manufacturers to supply him with advanced weaponry, despite their knowledge of the repressive character of his regime.

Armaments included 90 Chieftain tanks, 250 Scorpion light tanks, 400 armoured cars, 2,100 Rapier surface-to-air missiles and much more.

The Shah fell in 1979 in a popular insurrection in which the Islamic clergy, led by Ayatollah Khomeini, emerged as the dominant force. Seizing a chance to assert regional dominance, Iraqi president Saddam Hussein launched an invasion the following year in the hope of a quick victory.

Britain initially favoured Iraq. But as the conflict slowly swung in Iran's favour, bets were suitably hedged. Between 1982 and 1988, Iraqi combat forces were being trained by the British military.

As late as 1984, Iranian officers were instructed in anti-aircraft weaponry systems by the British Manufacturing and Research Company's establishment at a former Royal Air Force base near Lincoln.

The years 1984-85 saw state-owned British companies massively augment Iran's ammuniption capability. British Hovercraft Corporation refurbished two Iranian B17 hovercraft, capable of carrying troops or surface-to-air missiles. Hovercraft are especially valuable as supply vessels in the marshy terrain where much of the war was fought out. Rolls Royce supplied five engines, valued at £3 million, for probable use in amphibious landing craft.

In early 1985, Clyde and Tyneside shipyards supplied the Iranian navy with a 3,500 tonne fleet auxiliary and two 2,500 tonne landing craft. The Hovercraft Corporation refurbished two Iranian B17 hovercraft, capable of carrying troops or surface-to-air missiles. Hovercraft are especially valuable as supply vessels in the marshy terrain where much of the war was fought out. Rolls Royce supplied five engines, valued at £3 million, for probable use in amphibious landing craft.

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Britain's arms buying mission in London's Victoria Street, responsible for 80 per cent of its overseas arms purchases, remained open until September 1987.

In November 1985 Plessey beat off rival Marconi to win a £240 million Iranian order for the sophisticated AR-30 radar system, claiming that these were static systems destined for the border with the Soviet Union and Afghanistan and thus the deal was in western interests. Standard military text books show AR-30 as trailer mounted and thus totally mobile.

Independent Television News claimed in August 1987 that Customs and Excise were investigating up to fifty British firms which had allegedly illegally supplied arms to one or the other combatant.

Meanwhile, British-owned companies documented as having - legally - sold explosives to Iran include then nationalised Royal Ordnance, now part of British Aerospace, and subsidiaries worldwide of ICI.

By early 1987, when Royal Navy vessels formed part of the US-led task force in the Gulf objectively intervening on behalf of Iraq, Britain came down clearly for Saddam.

Prior to this turning point, Britain had been equivocal. Two major arms deals early in the conflict were spiked. In May 1981 British Aerospace, then still nationalised, negotiated a £7.5 million supply of 30 Hawk fighter trainers given to Iraq, then considering establishing a facility in the country.

In 1982, International Military Sales was reportedly negotiating to supply integrated air defence systems captured from Iran by Iraq. Tory MP Geoffrey Pattie observed: 'It is for the Iraqi authorities to decide on the use they make of such systems.' One wonders how many of the tanks and aircraft bought by Saddam's forces were bought and designed in Britain.

Chemical weapons

Iraq was allowed to purchase 300 military land Rovers are large quantities of radar equipment in July 1985. Moreover, British companies were reportedly instrumental in allowing Iraq to manufacture chemical weapons. Other weapons allowed, such as the Scud, were on a controlled list.

In November 1985, New Scientist claimed Primary Medical Aid, based in New Hampshire, sold 10,000 sets of protective suits and breathing apparatus to protect workers making the weapons. John Stanley, then armed forces minister, confirmed in February 1984 that 'a small number of Iraqi airmen were being trained in the UK at both commercial and government establishments.

Iraqi Solidarity Voice put the number at 100. Flight International claimed that 80 were being trained at Specialist Flight Training at Carlisle alone.

Following the seizure of 200 Iraq-bound machine guns at a London dock in February 1985, a trial took place in 1985 involving three executives of Sterling Armament Company and a worker for Atlantic Commercial Ltd.

Sterling's Anthony Bianco was fined £4,000, Atlantic's Andrew Schlesinger £3,000 and Reginald Dunk, also of Atlantic, £20,000 with £7,000 costs. Atlantic was later found of the constructed 50,000 120mm high explosive shells worth £75 million. This consignment was bound for Iran.
NORMAN LAMONT’S autumn statement means misery for millions. Tory strategy in presenting the statement was to stoke up fears of benefit cuts, and when they didn’t materialise to make people think that the poor had got off lightly.

In reality the poor are being hammered. The one and a half per cent pay maximum is going to push down living standards amongst hundreds of thousands pitifully paid public sector workers – including nurses, local government workers and rail workers.

But the second vicious attack is on the council tax. Councils have to keep pay to the one and a half per cent norm, or face severe capping. A new round of redundancies and cuts is being prepared in local government, which again will hit low-paid workers and council services to the poor.

Using the 1979 methods of calculation, unemployment is today four million. And through the next year that figure is set to push remorselessly towards 5 million – much higher than during the 1930s slump.

**Manufacturing**

Lamont’s statement did nothing to restart the economy. Lowering interest rates doesn’t work any more because what matters is the rate at which the banks are prepared to lend to business customers. In any case, manufacturing is so flat on its back that only a giant programme of state-led investment would begin to solve the problem.

To the fight to defend the miners and resist redundancies must now be added a campaign to bust the pay freeze. Prices are starting to rise, especially on basic good like food. Living standards are going to plummet if the pay freeze isn’t broken.

While Major’s government is accident prone and further revelations in the Iragate scandal could destabilise it, Tory strategy for survival is becoming clear.

A one-year deal over coal is aimed to slow the pit closure programme; if the Tories have their way the ten immediately threatened pits will close, and the death of the 21 will be drawn out – in an attempt to defuse public outrage. In addition Major has decided on a long-drawn-out ratification of the of the Maastricht treaty to prevent a convulsive crisis wrecking government stability.

But there is another major obstacle in the government’s way – the Council Tax. Lack of government subsidy means that for millions there is going to be a dramatic increase in their bills compared with the Poll Tax. Howls of outrage will rock the government when the first bills start to arrive.

In this situation there is now an urgent need to link up the struggles, both against redundancies and the pay freeze.

**Alliance**

Workers must demand union leaders build a public sector alliance. But here and now, using miners’ support groups linked to the struggles can be created between miners, hospitals workers, and all other workers in struggle.

The decision of miners to lend their support to protest action at Burnstall, the Birmingham strike of Asian car component workers is exactly the kind of thing which can begin to rebuild collective action and confidence.

The pay freeze will primarily hit next year’s pay round. Unions will be formulating claims in the next few months; militants must demand pay increases to meet the rise in the cost of living, indexation of awards and action to fight low pay.

**Occupation**

Attention will be rapidly focused on the ten threatened pits; in the end only industrial action, including occupation of any pit threatened with immediate closure, will keep them open.

While protest action against pit closures is vital the demand must be pressed for the TUC to call a one day general strike to demand an end to the jobs massacre and an end to the pay freeze.

The TUC have called for a day in support of ‘national recovery’ on 9 December. It is pitifully inadequate, and aimed at being a joint protest with employers, wet Tories and bishops. Nonetheless the opportunity should be seized to get whatever strike or other protest action in possible on that day.

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**In Pictures**

Food price rises hit poor

Food manufacturers say that prices will rise sharply in the new year. Butter is expected to rise by 10 pence a pound, cheddar cheese by nine pence. Bread will increase two pence a loaf, sugar by six pence a kilo bag.

Other foods set for big increases include meat products, chocolate, marmalade and jam, and many other products. The increases are due to the devaluation of the pound; EC farm prices have not been lowered in line with the devaluation.

But these increases come on top of steady food price increases in the last two years. Cheap food in Britain is becoming a myth, mainly because of the price-fixing policies carried out informally by the big supermarkets like Sainsbury’s, Safeway and Tesco - all of which make vast profits.

Meanwhile John Selwyn Gummer, the agriculture minister, announced a model £10 a week food bill for the poor. It includes absurdities like one fresh egg every two weeks and half a fish finger a day.

Brutal new clamp on claimants

According to government statistics released last week, two-person households in the top 20 per cent income bracket spend about £84 on food and drink a week.

John Gummer earns £65,000 a year and obviously hasn’t been near a supermarket for a long time.

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No takers for Gummer’s £10 diet

TORY plans to crack down on hundreds of so-called new age travellers could lead to up to 60,000 claimants a year losing social security benefits.

Mental illness sufferers and people with disabilities could be penalised as a result of more stringent enforcement of the rule that claimants must be actively looking for work.

In place of warning letters, they could face their benefit arbitrarily suspended, pending an appeal. Not of 29,000 people in this way in one six month period, 24,000 were able to satisfy the rules and 5,000 win on appeal.

The new regulations would prevent social security officers from continuing ‘hardship’ payments to 60,000 people in a year and 60,000 people in a year and

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Frickley defies closure threats

By Joe Pass

Continual union pressure on management at Yorkshire's Frickley colliery has kept the pit open, but full disability threatens the shutdown threat, NUM branch secretary Steve Tully told Socialist Outlook.

After the Heseltine announcement, the pit closed for one week. Now it is shut to 25,000 tonnes a week, and a new seam is being developed.

"We've managed to keep open of the shift, he added. Only 70 of the 900 miners at the pit had taken voluntary redundancy.

"While he supported attempts to find new coal, he recognised it was obvious that to keep the pit situation continually on the front pages gives the number of other crises the Tory government is going through, he added.

His advice to other workers threatened with mass sackings was simple: "Get your union meetings out and campaign with the miners."

He also called for support for the unofficial lobby of special TUC coal group to be held in Doncaster on November 22.

"Lobby of the TUC general council, Wednesday November 22 at Mansion House, Doncaster".

We say:

Miners: Don't let fudge demobilise movement

The government's strategy for dealing with the pits crisis gradually came to light last week.

"Under government pressure, British Coal is concluding a one-year deal with the electricity supply industry which will slow down the rate of pit closures."

There will be no reprimade for the 10 immediately threatened pits. But execution of the other 21 will be postponed.

"If this deal is finalised, it would explain why, for example, at Frickley pit near Doncaster, one of the 21, new coal faces are being cut, and why at neighbouring Grimethorpe, one of the 10, the mine is being allowed to deteriorate despite court injunctions."

The deal has every sign of political expediency. Of course, the 21 pits are given at least a temporary reprieve. It will be a partial defeat for the government. But the scale of mass anger over the closure programme made some delay inevitable.

But in the medium term this will only the sugar the bitter pill of shutdown.

The ten target pits are due to close down in the middle of January - there's only about eight weeks left to save them.

On these pages we list some of the key protest actions taking place in the next few weeks. Don't let up the pressure.

UDM — from sellout to buyout

By Bill Sutcliffe

The Union of Democratic Mineworkers are holding at least 12 pits are still on, despite protests from the breakaway union's president, Roy Lyrik, that he is opposed to privatisation.

Its membership includes East Midlands Coal - the very electricity supply company that is at the forefront of the "deal for gas".

The union has also been talking to private sector operating outfit RJ Budge, which has allowed to by the 21 pits currently under select committee review, plus NUM stronghold Mirfield Main.

The idea is for UDM members to take an equity stake in the company. But meanwhile, RJB boss Richard Budge has been boasting in the energy trade press that he will cut back on "overmanning" in the name of "rationisation".

"Discussions privatisation at a fringe meeting at last year's Conservative Party conference, Lyrik made the disgusting comment: "If I was a maverick, you might as well be whipped and enjoy it."

UDM members that want to fight pit closures and defend their jobs should think on all this carefully. Arthur Scargill's stance during the 1984-85 pit strike has been proved right in the long run.

The UDM is absolutely correct to insist there can be no deal with private sector and no UDM leaders like Neil Gatreave. But the picture is very different at national level.

Several hundred UDM members have rallied in recent weeks. There are indications that many more would follow if the NUM campaigned to recruit members.

Scotland on the march

Scottish miners' march for justice is backed by the Scottish TUC and the National Union of Mineworkers.

The march, beginning at Airdrie, is due to arrive in Edinburgh and Glasgow on November 19.

The marchers are en route to Morpeth (November 19), Birtley (20), Newcastle (21), Sunderland (22), Durham (23), Hartlepool (24), Darlington (25), Middlesbrough (26), Teeside (27), York (28), Selby (29), Pontefract (30), Doncaster (31), Barnsley (32), Sheffield (33), Chesterfield (4), Mansfield (5), Nottingham (6), Stoke-on-Trent (7), Stafford (8), Walsall (9), Birmingham (10), Coventry (11), Stratford upon Avon (12), Oxford (14), Maidstone (15), Slough (16), Slough (17), Hammersmith (18), central London (19).

The march is due to arrive in St Helens, and a meeting to form miners' support group

The marchers are due to arrive in Chesterfield.

Contact Richard Leonard at the NUM on 0114 312 4946 or Brendan Barber at the NUM on 0171 4639 for more details.

West day of action on November 17, and building for strike action in St Helens area.

A trying to set up a co-ordinating committee of all miners support groups and leading trade union activists in the Merseyside area.

In the coming weeks we will be holding a meeting with the students' union at St Helens college.

Most importantly, we are currently trying to organise a mass meeting with council workers and the NUM to build a public sector alliance in the area. If we are able to do this it will be a big step forward in the struggle for jobs and to unite the working class.
Miners' 'regatta' brings it home to Heseltime

Fricklely miners made their views known to Michael Heseltime by dumping two tons of coal across the entrance to his country mansion. Now Oxford Miners' Support Group and Henley Labour Party are arranging a demonstration in Heseltime's constituency so his voters get the 'coal not dole' message.

Big support is expected from the NUM. So campaigns in the Hull marches for miners

Czech miners march in Prague

Five thousand Czech miners demonstrated in Prague last Wednesday against privatisation and restructuring of their industry which threatens thousands of jobs.

Already thousands of miners in the coal, iron, ore and uranium mines of Bohemia and Moravia, including 12,000 coal miners, have lost their jobs. Estimates suggest that about a quarter of the 230,000 Czech miners could lose their jobs.

The restructuring of the mining industry is part of the centralisation of state plans using the vouchers distributed to citizens. A large proportion of the vouchers has been bought up by holding companies, often representing foreign capitalist interests.

A key weakness of the miners' protests is the view that they are not opposed to privatisation as such, but just want better compensation, retaining and consultation with their NUM on closures and redundancies.

Circular opposes strikes

TUC line is 'unbelievable'

Socialist Outlook spoke to BILLY PYE from Parkside NUM - one of the ten collieries threatened with imminent closure. Billy is also a member of the union's national executive.

How well is Parkside standing up to the closure threat?

On Saturday 14 November, the Parkside branch voted unanimously to continue the struggle to fight the pit closure programme. So far, only 40 miners out of 800 have taken redundancy and we believe this is a very good sign, considering all the pressures we have faced.

The NUM have carried out its own inspections of the coal faces. Have you found any deterioration?

After several thorough inspections, we have found that one of the two faces wouldn't last much longer than a month without being worked.

However, whether we win or lose the battle in court to start turning coal again, we will continue our fight against the pit closures.

What campaigning has been carried out in the Lancashire area to defend Parkside?

We have spoken to many public meetings to promote our case and have called for miners' support groups to be set up everywhere. So far, there have been over 25 miners support groups set up in the North West area.

We have been calling for a day of action on Tuesday 17 November, a working day. Our branch has spoken to over 100 trade union branch meetings, mainly in the public sector, calling for solidarity strike action over the past two weeks. We have made it quite clear that we must unite our struggle to drive the Tories out of office.

Council workers in Manchester, Liverpool and Wirral are taking strike action, along with the Liverpool dockers. Many other workers will also be taking solidarity action.

There are two main demonstrations and rallies in the North West on the same day, in Manchester and Liverpool. Additionally, there are at least ten other demonstrations and rallies being held on the same day in other towns in the North West.

Scargill and Benn will be speaking at both the main rallies. We expect tremendous support for the day of action.

Has the North West TUC helped you to organise the day of action?

The North West TUC has promoted and widely advertised the rallies and demonstrations in Liverpool and Manchester. Additionally, they helped us to organise the demonstration at the Albert Dock on Saturday 7th, at which around 3000 people marched. Also, they are hoping to organise the torchlight procession at Liverpool docks next week.

However, the North West TUC have sent out letters to all trade union branches, stressing that they only support the Liverpool and Manchester demonstrations and do not support any strike action. That the TUC sent out these letters to trade union branches is unbelievable, because this undermined their very low standing even further. Basically the TUC is out of touch with the situation. They have no confidence in their own membership.

What steps need to be taken after the North West day of action?

We must firstly build up the confidence of the working class and build up a public sector workers' alliance to bring unity. Our next task is to at least promote regional days of action, leading to a general strike.

To build for a general strike we must use the network of miners support groups, trade union branches and the Socialist Movement Trade Union Committee. Additionally, we must unite all left groups around this one aim of kicking out the Tories.

Lastly, as a socialist, I am calling for a general strike not just for the miners' cause, but to fight against mass unemployment, falling living standards and destruction of the hospitals and council services. We should not have to pay for the crisis of capitalism and the mess the bosses have created.
Socialist Outlook

Labour's answer to Tory economics

Neither red nor radical

By John Schofield

LABOUR'S strategy to counter the twin blows of Tory slump is seemingly based on boosting Britain's national output of rhetoric alone. Last week's policy statement, Labour's Campaign for Recovery, explicitly referred to itself as 'a new Keynesian'. Shadow Chancellor Gordon Brown even heralded it as 'a British New Deal for the 1990s'.

But a massive programme of government-funded public works this was certainly not. If John Maynard Keynes or Franklin D. Roosevelt were alive today, they'd be well advised to swoon.

Rehash

Labour's Campaign for Recovery is a moderately needed-upgrade of Labour's post-Kinnock economic thinking. It makes the 1983 mantras to reassume the transitional programme.

Forget silly ideas about radical change. Break away from the beneficiaries of Thatcher's massive cuts. Even April's general election commitments to raise the top rate of income tax and the upper limit on national insurance contributions have now been dropped. Denis Healey can now be appreciated for the dangerous radical he really was.

Funding

This 'New Deal' is apparently to be funded by stamp duty on share transactions, a one-off levy on the rip-off profits made by privatized water and electric companies in the recession, and whatever money the private sector may be willing to put into infrastructural projects.

Several of policies outlined in Labour's Campaign for Recovery actually formed part of the Chancellor's Autumn Statement when it was unveiled three days later. Interest rates were duly cut, public-private sector infrastructural projects encouraged, and councils were given the opportunity to use capital receipts for new housing projects, at least for a limited period.

Minister of State, Heseltine, too, stressed his commitment to the 'new partnership' between government and industry demanded by Brown, when he spoke at the Confederation of British Industry conference.

Of the policies the Tories are not ready to enact immediately, Labour is calling for the implementation - on a scale 'substantially bigger than originally planned' - of the job creation plans which were drawn up by the Department of Employment in the expectation of a Labour victory.

No mention here of real jobs at trade union pay rates - labour movement orthodoxy not ten years ago. These 'schemes' and 'programmes' would amount to little more than dead-end workforce. Even then, Brown conceded they would not ensure full employment.

The document's philosophy is summarised by its claim: 'The difference between Labour and the Tories is not a dispute about the importance of the market, but is in our recognition that government also has clear responsibilities to act, internationally and nationally.'

This stance substantially concurs with two recent articles - an editorial in The Economist and a piece by Sir Leon Brittan's brother Samuel in The Financial Times - both stressing the benefit of limited economic interventionism.

Even the ruling classes of America and Japan have been willing to go further than Labour, with major public sector packages in prospect in both countries next year.

Growth

Revolutionary Marxists have never accepted the formulations of key theoreticians of British Labourism, from Anthony Crosland in the 1960s to Stuart Holland in the 1970s, who have argued that government action could generate permanent economic growth as the basis for continuous expansion of the welfare state.

Ultimately, the only way to avoid slumps recurring again and again is to replace the very market deflated by both Brown and Lamont with conscious democratic economic planning, based on production for use and not profit.

But in the interim, even a serious Keynesian package now could boost employment - and with it, working class confidence and conviviality. It would undermine the ideology of the market that dominated politics throughout the last decade.

That's why socialists should press the case for Keynes. What will be the Labour Party doing lagging behind mere old-timers like Bill Clinton and Kiichi Miyazawa anyhow?

Labor slams NHS

AS THIS year's NHS cuts and closures bring the new phenomenon of nursing jobs being made redundant, Norman Lamont's Autumn Statement heralds more brutal cuts to come next year.

Beyond the bravado of a mini-budget for 'growth', the grim reality is that next year's NHS budget is to be cut by £700 million from its previous target. Lamont's David Buenket has pointed out that the allocation to hospitals will now fall back by a massive £1.7 billion.

To make matters worse, the Tories are tying their cash limits on the ludicrous assumption that inflation will run at only 2.75 percent next year. Even one percent of additional inflation would use £300 million spending power from health authorities. Caught in this squeeze are next April's community care reforms: it is clear that neither health authorities nor local councils (wedding with the council tax) will have the funds needed to provide a comprehensive service for some of the most vulnerable patients.

Adding insult to injury, Virginia Bottomley has said that a share of the national NHS budget will be siphoned off to pay for the redundancies and other costs of implementing the Tomsinson plan for massive hospital closures in London.

Tory NHS job massacre

By Harry Sloan

Even before the Autumn Statement, redundancies and ward closures were the stalking horse as management sought to balance the books of Founders Trusts and units.

In NORTHAMPTON, up to 100 jobs are threatened in a brutal cuts package.

STOKE MANDEVILLE hospital is axing jobs and services.

In WHEATLEY, it is clear wards are to be closed and it is expected that 50 jobs will go.

BANBURY's Horton General hospital is to shed 35 jobs in a package of cuts.

BIRKENHEAD's Catholic hospital is making staff redundant some compulsorily before opting out.

CROSS HOSPITAL City is making staff redundant some compulsorily before opting out.

The MILL WOOD Healthcare Trust is to axe 60 jobs and close two wards at Whips

1 million NHS staff could form centre of public sector fightback

Low-paid workers hit hardest by pay freeze

THE IMPOSITION of a 1.5% pay limit is a major blow to thousands of health workers on ancillary grades - people who have suffered more under the Tories than almost anyone else. It has also been compounded by redundancies and other costs of implementing the Tomlinson plan for massive hospital closures in London.

The basic rate of pay for Scale A ancillaries is just over the level set by the Council of Europe's 'decency threshold' and the scandal over these poverty levels of pay amongst ancillary members is indicative of the discrimination felt by a largely female workforce with a high proportion of part-time workers, black workers, and people from ethnic minorities.

One hospital domestic summed up the current mood amongst ancillary workers:

"There is no way that we can put up with our wages buying less and less each year."

"Why should we be the ones to pay every time the government makes a mess of things? There are plenty of highly-paid managers who could pay for this more easily than us."

Senior NHS managers are to escape the freeze and pick up a 3.3% pay rise from September 1. In a deal sneaked through just ahead of the Chancellor's crackdown.

With many Chief Executives on salaries of £60,000 plus, this should mean an increase of at least £80 a week.

"We should demand something more then."

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Wage councils face axe
Shephard backs cowboys in war on low-paid

By Dave Osler
EMPLOYMENT secretary Gillian Shephard wants to scrap wages councils — currently the only legal protection for millions of Britain’s lowest paid workers — because they “destroy jobs”.

Shephard can perhaps be forgiven for her ignorance of the realities of life on a low income. The poor person must scrape by on £63,047 a year cabinet salary, with only a little extra income from her agricultural business interest.

But such a direct attack on the worst of is only one aspect of the Tories’ disgusting new Trade Union Reform and Employment Rights Bill. It will also give the public — in practice, outfits like the Freedom Association — the power to take “illegal strikers” to court, impose a seven day cooling-off period before ballots on industrial action, hamper the collection of union dues and extend state powers to regulate industrial disputes in most affairs.

The TUC’s so-called “Bridlington Agreement” on which unions organise which sector will be scrapped, allowing the AESU to recruit to its hard right bloc, wrecking smaller unions in the process.

We don’t ask to write the rule book at the Carlton Club or the CBI. Why should the Tories tell our class what its organisations can or cannot do?

Finding ways round the bill’s few plus points, including extension of maternity leave, and protection against dismissal for pregnancy or for carrying out safety rep duties, will be easy enough for most bosses.

Wages councils set rates of between £2.50 and £3.10 an hour for some 2.5 million workers, four-fifths of them women, in areas like retailing, hairdressing, textiles and catering.

They were set up in 1909 by Winston Churchill, then in the Liberal government of the period, specifically to prevent “good employers being under-cut by bad and bad employers by worse”.

However, Shephard insists wages councils are an example of “damaging, outdated practices” with “no role to play in the 1990s.”

If they are abolished, Britain will be the only EU country without some form of legally enforceable minimum wage protection.

Already, the average hourly minimum set by the councils has steadily declined as a percentage of the national average wage since the Conservatives took office in 1979. Since the late ‘80s, they have ceased to cover young workers.

Shephard waxes lyrical that the bill is designed to increase the competitiveness of the economy. Chris Pond, director of the Low Pay Unit, agrees: “Scraping the councils will turn Britain into the Taiwan of Europe.”

Low pay for women is justified, she seemingly argues: “Eighty per cent of people in wages council industries live in households with at least one other source of income. Never mind that this may well be a dole cheque or a second low paid job.”

Where companies pay above the pay levels laid down by wages councils, they are irrelevant. Where the wages councils force companies to pay more than they can afford, they destroy jobs.”

Between 1979 and 1991, over 100,000 employers were found to be paying beneath wages councils rates. This is illegal. Total number of prosecutions? All of 67.

Shephard goes: “I am glad to say our strike record is now at an all time low. We need to make sure that we keep it that way. This bill provides further protection against the damaging consequences of strikes.”

TUC general secretary Norman Willis branded the bill a “charter for cheating cowboy employers” and pledged Congress House to “all we can do” to oppose the measure.

“All we can do” apparently translates into leaflets, stickers and posters, “a full briefing from the TUC on our assessment of the bill” for every MP, and consideration of legal action.

However half-hearted these efforts may seem, the TUC campaign can and should be linked to the defence of the many other groups of workers whose jobs are under threat.

Rover union chiefs opt for pay standstill

By a Cowley carworker
ROVER workers have voted by 11,000 to 9,200 to accept a six month pay freeze, followed by a 3.6 per cent increase in May and November 1993.

This outcome follows the successful efforts of national trade union officials to persuade both the Rover National Joint Negotiating Committee and a depute conference to recommend a yes vote.

It is the same story as the case of the Rover Tomorrow package of new management techniques drawn up earlier this year. An overwhelming vote of the negotiators — only two of the 15 joint national committee members came out against — just scraped home in a ballot.

Sell-out
If there had been a call to reject the deal, there is no doubt it would have been thrown out by an overwhelming margin. The union leaders have yet again accepted the economic argument that workers should pay for the cuts.

Skilled workers and team leaders will get £7 more than production workers. Staff have also been given the guarantee that if they are moved over the productivity target they will maintain their wages for two years.

Both these points are contentious for production workers. In the end, the lowest paid workers are the only ones who get nothing out of the deal.

Angry — Willis

Rover’s Cowley, Oxford, plant is booming following a reduction in the workforce from 5,500 to just 4,400 over the last five years. The Maestro, Montego and Rover 400 are currently in production, and a new model, the Synchro, will join full production at the start of 1991.

20% of overtime are already being worked, yet the company expects the plant to virtually double production by July next year with no extra labour.

Instead they want complete flexibility, with every member of staff learning the work and the implementation of “team working.”

In effect, bosses are asking for a huge increase in productivity from a plant that has just received a pay freeze on top of an effective 7.5% wage cut after a bonus scheme stopped paying out earlier this year.

Rover workers are now the lowest paid workers in Europe, yet the company is still expecting best in class productivity levels. And this, bosses warn, is only the first stage.

Hostility
Rover management are strengthened in their offensive by the attitude of the union leadership. But with the prevailing levels of shopfloor hostility, it is difficult to see how they can achieve the dramatic output increases they want.

A recent Socialist Outlook leaflet for Cowley workers challenged the company’s claims about its financial position, demanding it open its books to the workers.

The leaflet also argued that if Rover cannot provide jobs — and maintain wages — it should be nationalised without compensation.
Depression heralds new phase of crisis

Chaos as capital runs out of control

The long period of capitalist boom in the 1950s and 1960s has been replaced by two decades of recession. Within that long wave of recession there have been mini-booms like the one in the 1980s, and deep depressive crises like the one today. Here we publish an edited version of the speech on this topic made by Fourth International leader ERNEST MANDEL at the Socialist Outlook rally on 23 October.

We are living in a generalised recession of world capitalism – the third since the early 1970s. It promises to be the longest depression in the history of capitalism.

When you have a depression it doesn’t mean that the normal business cycle of 7 to 10 years has stopped.

You still have recoveries. So it is not excluded there will be a recovery from this present deep recession, without any prospect of getting out of the long depressive wave.

There are two basic characteristics of such cycles within a long depressive wave which have today come to the forefront. You have to see these as basic long term trends of the capitalist economy. The most important one is the steady rise of unemployment.

Unemployment in the imperialist countries was around 10 million in the early 1970s and is around 50 million today. A very high figure which continues to rise. It may increase by between 15 and 25 per cent in two to three years. Figures in the ‘Third World’ are indescribable.

According to some estimates 500 million are unemployed. This depends on your definition of ‘unemployment’ under conditions of very grave under-development.

The second characteristic is the gradual disintegration of hegemonic imperialist powers (like Britain or America). Today there is no one hegemonic imperialist power. There is inter-imperialist competition, inter-secular war or semi-war, and there are trade wars and currency wars.

Disintegration

Something very significant has happened. Every bourgeois state, including the most powerful states – the US, Japan and Germany – is losing control over basic economic processes. There is a real disintegration of state control. There is increasing semi-chaos in the world capitalist economy.

Every working day the total amount of money capital which is traded on the currency markets is three trillion dollars. That’s a figure with 12 noughts, a figure which doesn’t mean anything any more, it goes beyond imagination.

It’s more than the total annual volume of world trade. It is many times the total currency reserves of all the world’s central banks.

Money capital is totally out of the control of any state or semi-state institution. So much so that the Bank of International Settlements in Basel, Switzerland say that nobody knows the exact amount of volatile capital. It could be up to five hundred billion dollars. Nobody knows.

This capital has totally escaped the control of the state and quasi-state institutions. When we had the recent waves of currency speculation and the near collapse of attempts to install a European Monetary System, ‘speculators’ were blamed. But look at the so called speculators.

They were not small fry. They were the big boys. They weren’t acting out of principled opposition to Maastricht or a strong European common market. They did it to make a fast buck and they made a lot of money.

What is behind this is a fundamental re-privatisation of money. This is unheard of in the history of capitalism. You have to go back to the 17th Century to find something similar. Governments have no more power over money; even central banks and the semi-continental quasi-state institutions are losing power.

Monetary power is back in the hands of private institutions – banks and multinational corporations.

This happened because the basis of ‘post-war prosperity’ was essentially debt! The international capitalist economy flowed to prosperity on a sea of debt. It was a debt economy of hyper-liquidity. With this tremendous increase in the amount of money, liquid-capital or quasi-liquid capital there is an internal logic which leads to depression – a depression similar if not worse than that of the 1930s.

Crisis of bourgeois leadership

In this vice of uncontrollable hyper-liquidity and the threat of grave depression there is a growing paralysis of decision making by bourgeois leaderships. They are too paralysed to act.

We speak about a ‘crisis of bourgeois leadership’, but the crisis of bourgeois leadership is of at least the same historical impact. The G7 meetings of the biggest imperialist powers have achieved nothing since the beginning of the present depression.

Meeting after meeting has not reached a serious collective decision. They have no capacity to make collective decisions.

This is logical. It is easy to make compromises between imperialist powers and multinationals in times of prosperity. You can give and take – everybody gets something. Cartels like OPEC can function in conditions of prosperity. The EC could be slowly built in conditions of prosperity.

But when recession and depression set in, there can be no more ‘give and take’. It’s ‘everybody for themselves’, bickering, and the increasing incapacity to compromise.

Many years ago the Fourth International said that the future of the European Community was undecided. It might go forward to more consolidated supra-national institutions or it might go backward to a type of free trade zone. We said that the next big recession would decide the outcome.

We are now at the stage where everything is put into question. For us all these economic phenomena are combined or co-related to what happens in the real economy.

Over-production

We have the very serious danger of a blow up of the Japanese banking system. The biggest bank in the US, Citibank, is in serious trouble, not essentially because of all these phenomena, but because there is a real crisis of over-production and in the realisation of surplus value – the decline of the rate of profit.

All these are essentially identical phenomena. They are just different expressions of the same reality.

The most striking example is Japan. The solidity of Japan’s economy is greatly exaggerated for obvious ideological reasons. What’s happening to Japan is very simple. They are selling less colour television! They are selling fewer cars and electronic components.

They have no new products which can replace these on the same scale. They can still sell a lot of things, but not on the same scale. The world is very simple in the final analysis.

I will now add something much more precise about use value. In the post war boom probably 40 per cent or more of that expansion was supported by just two sectors – housing (and the consumer fumbles like washing machines that go with housing) and cars. That’s all. They were the two mainstays.

How many automobiles were sold during 20-25 years on a world scale? A tremendous figure! About 550 to 700 million. How many houses were built during that period? The same – 400-500 million. What’s going to be said in the next years on that scale? Personal computers? No! A normal worker doesn’t need a PC. They will sell some, but not...
in the vast amount to spur a new boom. There have probably never been so many new products on offer as in the last ten years. This is classical. In a period of depression, technical research and initial innovation goes on favourably -- but people have to buy the goddamn things!

Who is going to buy 600 million electrical knives or PCs or other goodies being offered? Nobody! We don't have that type of demand today. Under these conditions it is extremely unlikely that the real economy, which centres on what is being produced and what is being sold, will take off.

Lenin and Trotsky said many times: there are no situations without a way out for capitalism, if the working class is prepared to pay the price. Nobody can say that in 15 to 25 years that this or that is not possible.

Tough

But, in the foreseeable future there is no chance that capitalism can extract itself from this really tough crisis, unless there is a radical change in the world. One thing would make a decisive change: the total disintegration of Russia and China and their total re-integration into the capitalist world market. That is to say -- the biggest single defeat of the working class since Hitler. In that case a lot of things could be possible for capitalism.

However, there is not going to be total integration of Russia and China in the foreseeable future. There will be a continuing crisis in the world capitalist economy with a growing risk of the collapse of the international banking system.

I don't say that a new 1931-style collapse is certain; I believe that it is possible, but not likely.

The American government cannot abandon the Chase Manhattan Bank, because the American government is the Chase Manhattan Bank!

But what is the price they must pay? If the price is galloping inflation, they might accept it, but it won't let them off the hook. They just fall from one ill to another.

Bank of England boss Leigh Pemberton

"What's happening to Japan is very simple. They are selling less colour television! They are selling fewer cars and electronic components"
By Glenn Sutherland

PROFESSIONAL football, in common with every other sector of British capitalism, is in trouble. Enormous interest rates payable on the big debts virtually every club has run up - coupled with compulsory investment in ground improvements have driven many of the smaller clubs to the verge of bankruptcy.

In a situation like this, you would expect your average capitalist to strip the company's assets, sell up and invest his capital somewhere more profitable - or simply hang on to it.

Some club owners have, in fact, done this by selling their biggest assets - the land on which the grounds stand - for development or speculation. The shump in property prices means that this is no longer an option for most clubs. Owners have to look elsewhere to maximise their income.

Several clubs launched 'bond' schemes in order to finance ground improvements and the conversion to all-seater stadia required by the Taylor report. These schemes consisted of supporters forking out large sums of money in order to guarantee the right to buy a ticket for a particular seat in the new stand. Understandably these schemes did not meet with unrestrained delight from the fans, and most have now either been dropped or changed out of recognition.

Raising admission prices is the traditional solution, and one which has been followed by many clubs. In recession-hit Britain, however, this solution can backfire too. The West Ham directors recently had to cut prices by a third after average attendance dropped by more than 10,000.

The deal between the newly-formed English Premier League and BSkyB for exclusive TV rights to live games has provided a welcome breathing space for top clubs.

Not only does the deal provide clubs with significant money for the first time from a TV deal - but because of the split of the Premier League from the Football League, a much higher percentage is retained by the biggest and richest clubs. Arsenal, Manchester United and Leeds have already benefited by hundreds of thousands of pounds this season.

Monopoly

BSkyB's side of the deal doesn't look quite so good. Murdoch was prepared to make a sizeable loss in the first season in order to pave the way for sewing up the monopoly - possibly for a future European 'Super-League' - and selling matches to viewers on a pay-as-you-watch basis. However, the tiny viewing figures for BSkyB matches this season must have made him think twice.

Channel 4's coverage of Italian Serie 'A' games has attracted more than double BSkyB's viewers. This may not be so much to do with the fact that the Italian League has attracted the world's best footballers, and so provides consistently better football, higher levels of skill and much more entertainment than the average Premier League game. The choice of viewing AC Milan vs Juventus or Arsenal vs Wimbledon is not a difficult one to make for anyone who enjoys good football.

Why should any of this be of concern to socialists and, if it is, what should we be doing about it?

Football was the first mass spectator sport in Britain. Its development closely mirrors the development of the industrial working class. In its present form, football is a relatively modern sport. Most of our major clubs were founded at the end of the last century or the beginning of this. Many of the big stadia date from around the same time, although there was a big expansion in the 1920s when huge crowds became common, due to the increases in leisure time for many workers. From then to the present day football crowds have been almost entirely working class in composition.

Working class football fans formed their own organisations early in the development of the Football League. These supporters clubs were often very democratically run. They organised travel, social and sporting events, fundraising and in some cases, elected representatives onto the boards of the football clubs.

Over the years, a lot of official supporter clubs have lost accountability to the fans, and have been co-opted into the club structures where their activities can be controlled.

Over the last ten years, however, there has been an explosion of independent self-organised supporters clubs and fanzines. Although such organisations often have a very short life, they do represent the authentic voice of a section of the organised working class.

The existence of football as a mass spectator sport and the self-organisation of football fans should be supported wholeheartedly by all socialists. In some cases football provides the only collective experience which young working class people have available to them. The collectivity of the supporters and supporters organisations represents a gain for the working class as a whole.

As with all working class social formations under capitalism, football crowds are contradictory phenomena. Forms of ruling class ideology - sexism, racism and nationalism - are deeply rooted in the mass of spectators (most of whom are white and male).

The ruling class actively encourages nationalist sentiment among football fans and smirks benevolently at racism, sexism and homophobia in working class. Their attitude to the collective experience and self-organisation of working-class people is, however, another matter.

All-seater

The compulsory introduction of all-seater stadia for all Premier and first division clubs cannot be justified on safety grounds. It will, however, have two important results. It will price many working class fans out of the game and it will speed up the transformation of football from a mass spectator sport into a spectacle produced to be passively consumed through a TV set.

Instead of ignoring these issues we should be developing a political programme for the transformation of football into something what it has always had the potential to become - the 'people's game'.

Such a programme must start from an understanding that there are no long term answers to football's problems while the game remains under the control of football clubs through their own independent organisations. As a first step, elected supporters representatives should have a majority on club boards. Clubs and grounds should be nationalised or, more likely, municipalised. All debts should be cancelled.

TV coverage should not be limited to the big Premier League clubs and proceeds from TV coverage should be distributed equitably across the game, including to women's football.

There should be women-only sections in every ground. Money from big investment to make them safe and pleasant venues. Matches should be stewarded by supporters themselves - kick the police out of grounds.

Such demands will find a very sympathetic audience among supporters. They should also be directed at and argued inside the Labour Party and trade unions. Socialists cannot continue to abstain on the important questions which are being raised by supporters themselves.
Miscast adrift on the ocean blue

1492 Conquest of paradise

Directed by Ridley Scott
Starring Gerard Depardieu, Sigourney Weaver
Reviewed by Kate Ahrens

THERE HAS been a wealth of information and entertainment about the 'discovery' of America over the last year, and Hollywood was certainly not going to miss the bandwagon.

You would think then, that Ridley Scott's version of events would have something special to make people want to go and see it rather than get their fix of Columbus-mania from elsewhere. It hasn't.

The flaws in this film are almost countless. It fails miserably as an attempt at presenting a coherent historical account of the reasons behind the trip, both from Columbus' viewpoint and that of the Spanish aristocracy.

Its attempt at examination of the tension between the state and the church is laughable. And its 'explanation' of the failure of Columbus' colonisation expedition creates far more questions than it answers.

Depardieu struggles admirably with the role for which he was hopelessly miscast as an actor whose range of strength is exploring the hidden depths and character flaws of his parts, the two-dimensional nature of the script considerably hampering his performance. Depardieu was not the only acting mistake - Sigourney Weaver as Queen Isabel-la was ridiculous. I mean, the queen of Spain with an American accent?

If, however, you forgive this miscast with the fact that this had been a straay American accent, I could have been persuaded that it had some quality. But worse is to come. Scott's version of events goes something like this: Columbus was a visionary who wanted to work with the native tribes he found and dreamt of creating a truly equal society in the New World, but was brought down by devious and corrupt elements in the Church and in the Spanish court.

He then sets about dramatising this tale by means of the worst melodramatic effects.

The end is immediately recognisable by the way the music becomes menacing the moment they walk on screen. Columbus is a man of such honour and kindness that his wife is prepared to wait patiently for him to return from this journey that no one is convinced will succeed.

Indeed, she urges him to go and doesn't even mention the fact that he is going off on some hare-brained adventure from which he will most certainly not return and leaving her to look after their two children on her own.

The queen is persuaded to give her royal blessing to the trip because 'he's not afraid of me'. What a load of rubbish!

There is also the small matter of the almost obscene amount of gratuitous blood and gore.

I must say it took me more unpleasantly by surprise and as far as I could see, most of it advanced the plot not one iota.

I want to be charitable and find a good word to say about this film (cos that's just not the type of person I am) so here goes: if you like wildly inaccurate historical films, think that Sigourney Weaver and Gerard Depardieu are wonderful actors who can do no wrong and really enjoy lots of mindless violence, then this is the film for you.

Prince 'Symbol'

REM 'Automatic for the People'

Reviewed by Ian McLarty

PRINCE has devoted one CD/long play tape/four sides of vinyl to what really appears to matter in his life... himself.

This is a concept album (read: same subject throughout) based on love (read: lust) and furthermore based on a relationship involving 'Princess of Cairo' and - would you believe it - Prince.

In the past, Prince at least managed the occasional stab at social comment, such as 'Romeo Talk to Russia' and even 'Sign O' The Times'.

Now we are offered a range of duff titles such as 'Wanna Melt With U', 'God Created Woman' and 'The Sacrifice of Victor', interspersed with mind-numbingly infantile spoken sections. When Prince asks, 'we got seven hours baby, so watcha wanna do', the obvious temptation is to reply: 'Anything but listen to this album again.'

And musically? Formula funk, pretty good but definite- ly less than innovative. In the end, I just can't get over the crass chorus of 'Sexy MF', which runs 'You sexy motherfucker'.

Verdict - worth trying if they bring out an instrument- al version, but not much more.

Just because REM have a name with three initials in it, don't be fooled into thinking they are another irrelevant Treo sect. They are now fully-fledged stadium rockers.

Their new album, 'Automatic for the People', apparently takes its name from the catch phrase of the owner of the group's favourite café haunt. It is an impressive follow-up to 'Out of Time' - anything but an easy task.

'Out of Time' was hailed by the punks as finally putting REM on the map, even as an epoch-making album. In fact it was neither, but a slightly more mainstream (less psychedelic?) version of what the band have been doing for years.

'Automatic' is more of the same in a more subdued and laid back format. The first single from the album, 'Drive', is a relatively typical track and as such a logical choice.

If the record company has any taste, or the band any control, the songs 'Money' or 'Man on the Moon' should fol- low.

REM are a distinctive taste. If you hate them before, 'Automatic' is not going to convert you. And if you have not heard their material before - what planet have you been living on?

This album reeks of success. If the next one is in the same mould, the risk is there that success will turn into complacency.

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Debate: How should we analyse Russia today?

Can Yeltsin roll back the wheel of history?

By Paul Clarke

Old socialist debates about 'the Russian question' seem positively antique in 1992. Surely, the real issue is what Russia and the other CIS countries are now and not what they were. Old categories (workers state, state capitalist, bureaucratic collectivist etc) are, surely, only of interest to historians of obscure factional conflict. This view is only partly right. How we view Russia now must depend on what we think it was before the experience of perestroika, the collapse of that project and the sequence of power vacuums Yeltsin and the pro-capitalist forces around him have, since the August 1991 attempted coup.

Authoritarian

During his London visit Yeltsin warned that 'right wing' forces may attempt to seize power; and that he might be forced into authoritarian measures to stop them (which of course would only be 'temporary'). These statements were a reflection of the huge class conflicts now raging in Russia because of the attempts to restructure capitalism.

Yeltsin's neo-liberal measures are being resisted by a wide spectrum of political forces, from the small social democrats like the new Party of Labour, to the social democratic 'Socialist Workers Party of Russia', the Stalinist and nationalist Communist Workers Party, to the much more right-wing nationalist forces that lined up with the Stalinists in the now disbanding SPSU.

But behind these political alignments is a much deeper social reality: important elements of the old bureaucracy in charge of industry and the factories are resisting the destruction of state planning, state ownership and state subsidies to industry. These forces are engaged in a bitter battle against Yeltsin's pro-marketsitisation prime minister Gaidar, they are organised in the Russian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs, part of the much wider anti-Yeltsin alliance 'Civic Union', which includes the right-wing People's Party of Free Russia.

Opposition to Yeltsin from sections of the old bureaucracy does not reflect any principled anti-capitalist approach; it is a matter of survival. While sections of the old bureaucracy can fit themselves into the new order, tens of thousands of bureaucrats and factory cadres cannot. Full marketisation means simple bankruptcy and the dole for them.

'Shock therapy'

So far, the attempt to introduce a market economy through 'shock therapy' has resulted only in shock and no 'therapy': more precisely marketisation reforms have succeeded only in dissipating the old state-planned economy while not creating a new fully capitalist one. Why is this so?

Hundreds of smaller firms have been privatised, generally by fake purchases and other pillaging by corrupt bureaucrats. But Russia and the CIS more generally, has tens of thousands of state-owned factories. To privatise these, to create full-scale capitalism needs capital; enterprises need to be bought. There is only one realistic source of that capital – the Western governments, banks and other financial institutions. But they will not invest without seeing the prospect of rapid profits and that in turn means a docile labour force, a workable infrastructure and above all a guaranteed market for the goods produced.

The IMF has agreed a $24 billion package of aid to Russia, but it depends on progress towards marketisation which has been stalled by political opposition. Only $1 billion has been forthcoming.

In desperation Yeltsin and Gaidar inverted a 'voucher' scheme for privatising the factories; it seems to have gone down like a lead balloon.

Clearly Russia and the other CIS countries have pro-capitalist, politically bourgeois, governments. But that does not equal a capitalist social system. Non-capitalist social relations predominate. Private capital is accumulated by corruption and the still relatively marginal private sector.

The character of the state depends on the fundamental question: which social relations does the state apparatus defend historically? That is the only possible theoretically coherent criterion. Thus, if Yeltsin or any left wing socialist government comes to power under capitalism, but leaves the state apparatus intact, the state is capitalist irrespective of the character of the government.

The old central Soviet state apparatus has collapsed and been replaced by the authority of the state market of the republics. Russia has however incorporated whole sectors, especially, the important security apparatus, of the old central Soviet state apparatus into a reconstituted Russian state.

The provisional answer has to be that the existing Russian state politically defends capitalist social relations, but so far lacks the power to crush social opposition to a full marketisation programme which would radically alter the character of the economy.

The social layer in power remains the bureaucracy, even if key sectors of the bureaucracy have the ambition to turn themselves into a capitalist class.

We thus have a new system, an extremely unstable, social formation. Capitalism, because of world economic crisis, is having difficult birth pangs; and maybe it will never succeed in being born.

Right wing

Without a big change in the world economy, or successful defensive struggles by the working class, the prospect for Russia is dire. But Yeltsin's authoritarian government is based on a still largely stabilised economy.

Should this configuration become stabilised, debates on the social character of Russia would be posed anew. Stabilisation of the economy, in itself, is not a decisive criterion for the absence of capitalism.

State capitalist regimes have existed in the post-war world, in a series of third world countries, where the majority of industry was nationalised, but which were militarily integrated into the world capitalist market and subject to the law of value. Nasser's Egypt is a classic example.

It would be premature to draw the conclusion that any form of capitalism is stabilised in Russia.

But in the long-term, in a capitalist world, some form of capitalism will be established, unless the working class can bring its struggle against the extreme right wing forces waiting in the wings to replace Yeltsin.
GATT Triad gangs on verge of war

THE US decision to impose tariff sanctions on European goods has paralleled EC capitalist governments.

But it was the absolutely foreseeable outcome of worsening relations between the three main trading blocs - the US-dominated American zone, Western Europe and the Japanese-dominated Asian zone (the so-called "Triad"). Two factors lie behind the current conflict: world economic recession and the long-decade of the US as the major economic and military power. As recession deepens and trade and markets decline, the US is engaged in a furious campaign to reassure its domination.

It is no surprise that the conflict has broken out over agriculture. The US and Europe are the two dominant agricultural areas (Japan only produces one tenth of its own food needs); and food exports important economic political clout to the power which controls the markets. American talk of a "level playing field" is nonsense. The fact is that the EC wishes to subsidize its farmers, while the US does not. This in turn reflects the ongoing existence of a substantial rural farming population, especially in France, Italy and Germany. The domination of large scale agribusiness, while growing, is less decisive in the US.

The real scandal over agriculture is not this or that subsidy regime but the fact that both sides produce vast amounts of food which the hundreds of millions of starving people worldwide are too poor to buy. This is folly of catastrophic proportions. It would also no overproduction at all.

The foods between these three major blocs is today heavily regulated by negotiated quotas, high tariffs, etc. This again reflects the irrationality of modern capitalism, the lack of buying power, and the productive potential of modern industry. As a result, who can tell what this to be heavily regulated.

The war over farming subsidies is just the first incident in what is bound to be escalating conflict. Two other issues are at stake in the process. First, the decline of US economic dominance is so great, that the US faces a major tactical choice, either to fight this out with every weapon at its disposal or to risk a situation in 10 or 15 years time when it is too late.

Second, the collapse of the US$ removes the necessity to moderate major economic conflicts in the name of fighting a common enemy.

Since the Reagan years the Americans have shown they intend to use every ounce of their military and political might to impose their doctrine. But a deepening of economic conflict would threaten the whole system of international capitalist alliances since 1945. This is the kind of thing people go to war over.

Clinton is no Roosevelt

No New Deal for US workers

By Louis Johnson

STEVIE BELLS cartoon characters, lying among the rubbish-strewn filth of cardboard city in the downtown area of any US city, had a perfect analysis of the result (Guardian 4 November): the bourgeoisie won again.

Given that the US workers have not conquered class independence and created their own labour party, the victory of the bourgeoisie was not exactly difficult to predict.

Every principled socialist in the US rejects any support for the Democratic Party, which is like the Republicans a party of big business led by multi-billionaires. Indeed the view that the two big US parties are basically factions of one party is not far off the mark.

Simplistic

But there are good reasons for thinking that it is simplistic to say that Bill Clinton's victory will make 'no difference'.

In the first place, the defeat of George Bush was a defeat of some of the most sinister right-wing forces in US politics.

This year's Republican convention was a showcase for the "moral majority", 'family values', anti-abortion extremist right wing. It is clear that the abortion issue rebounded on Bush; and it is likely that the Supreme Court will not now have the power to permit further state anti-abortion laws.

But the main reason for Bush's defeat was of course the economy. More than anything, Clinton's pledge to 'get America moving' won him the election. But can Clinton deliver?

Excesses

There will be some tax increases for the super, super rich. Probably there will be some attempt to alleviate the worst horrific excesses of the health insurance nightmare, where by tens of millions of Americans have to pay out thousands of dollars if they get sick and 40 million have no medical insurance cover at all. Defence spending will be cut back, and troop withdrawals from overseas speeded up.

But those things are playing around on the margins of the American crisis. To do anything to help the tens of millions of unemployed, homeless and poverty-stricken is a huge economic turn away from neo-liberal economics towards refutation would have to be taken; and Clinton will not do that.

He will not do it because US big business, which he represents, is overwhelmingly against such a project.

They are against it for class reasons; the resources for boosting state welfare and regenerating industry could only come from big taxes on the rich. The only alternative would be massive borrowing, which would collapse the US economy into a new and horrifying debt crisis.

Continuity

In the wake of his election Clinton immediately announced continuity of US foreign policy. If anything, he will be tougher in pursuing an 'America first' position, which means economic war with Japan and Europe could be stepped up.

Clinton and running-mate Al Gore made much of the fact that they were on the right wing of the Democratic Party, and were moving into the mainstream of US politics.

Since any British socialists the Democrats have always been a right-wing party, this shows the scope of what they were doing. Given the unpopularity of Bush, they felt no need to make significant welfare promises, and felt no need to make a gesture towards black voters by bringing a very willing Jesse Jackson into the campaign.

Much of urban America is dying on its feet. The US dream of the 1950s and '60s has turned into a nightmare of collapsing industries, big city squaller and grinding poverty. More than anything, the vote for Clinton reflected a thirst for change.

Clinton and Gore will attempt to start a 100 days of dramatic announcements and important-sounding legislation. But in the end nothing fundamental will change.

US politics are stuck in a logjam because throughout this century America's rulers have, through extreme violence and repression, succeeded in debilitating labour struggles and channelling trade union aspirations into the Democratic Party.

American workers are about to get another demonstration of the fact that for labour to take giant steps forward, an independent party of the working class needs to be built.

Not much to laugh about now for Bush - or US workers
Tube strike against jobs axe likely
by John Schofield
London Underground workers have almost certainly taken to action against the management's "Company Plan" proposals to axe 6,000 jobs and impose new contracts of employment.
The result of a ballot of RMT transport union members was due on Tuesday as Socialist Outlook went to press, with a heavy yes vote anticipated.
Drivers' union ASLEF has already rejected the principle of the Company Plan after a membership referendum and is now expected to hold a second ballot this time over industrial action.

The continuing series of crises facing the Conservative government and the massive turnout on recent demonstrations in support of the miners have played a significant role in boosting rank and file confidence.

Anger has also been stoked by another round of savage cutbacks for London's rapidly deteriorating tube system, announced a chancellor Norman Lamont's Autumn Statement last week.

While the Jubilee Line extension to Docklands may get the go-ahead if the private sector stump up £400 million towards the project, desperately-needed moves to modernise the Northern Line and lengthen the East London Line have now been nixed.

The action now - and linking up with the many other groups of public sector workers facing mass sackings - could result in a bloody nose for both the tube bosses and the Tories.

Crunch for NALGO strike
By Doug Thorpe
Islington NALGO

The islington council NALGO dispute is at an important turning point as Socialist Outlook goes to press.
The Labour-controlled local authority has issued sackings threats to 700 workers, so far only about 40 have buckled under this massive pressure and returned to work.

College pay sellout
By a University NALGO member
Wage strikes in the new universities - the former polytechnics - have been sold out. Fearful of the government's public sector pay freeze, the national union leaderships collapsed in the face of employers' moves to impose drastic cuts in college pay.

NALGO leaders accepted a 4.3 per cent deal, with NATFHE getting only 3.5 per cent, despite national ballots for industrial action against the cuts in both unions. The settlements are well below the equivalent cuts in other sectors.

NALGO collapsed only two days after a national strike.

Meanwhile, NALGO members are bitter at the leadership's failure to call a members-approved national three-day strike to coincide with the lecturers' action on November 17. It was also day of action by students and London local government NALGO members.

NALGO's reliance on local selective action proved a hopeless strategy in the face of the employers' determination. Despite the sell-out, battles are likely to continue.

NALGEC's members face the same threat. The national leaders refused to honour the national policy of raising pay imposed locally and all union leaders agreed that pressure on debt numbers continue to rise with extra resourcing.

Unity and a fighting leadership will be needed if the 1.5 per cent public sector pay limit is to be challenged.

Stop Ford job losses!
By Bill Stuttle
UNIONS AT Ford are a new and lively industrial action after the company announced possible compulsory job losses for the first time in almost 30 years, and repeated demands for hefty pay cuts for workers on short-time at three key plants.

Talks broke down last week after bosses backtracked on Ford's long-standing voluntary redundancy only policy. Management are seeking 4,400 redundancies, despite union fears that this implies 300 outright sackings.

Ford's biggest British volume car manufacturer has shed an average of 3,000 jobs a year since 1980. Some 2,100 redundancies were announced only last February.

The company is also seeking to reduce lay-off pay from 100 per cent of basic to 80 per cent from the new year for workers at Dagenham, Southampton and Halewood, who have been on short time since last August.

Halewood is on slump - Hunsley's British car plant. It is to be closed down in the early 1990s.

Ford bosses have already received a personal undertaking from Jack Adams, deputy general secretary of the Transport and General Workers Union, that there will be no immediate strike whenever the way the vote goes. "We certainly won't walk out on Ford over a pay dispute, it is not a Ford matter.""Unfortunately, compulsory redundancies and massive wage reduc-

Court rebuff to NUT right
By Keith Sinclair
President, Hull Trades Council

Suspected National Union of Teachers treasurer Ian Murch - a prominent left activist in the union - has been reinstated following a successful legal action.

This is the second time in recent years left-leaning unionists have won court cases against the NUT executive majority, and the victory represents another

significant setback for the right.

Ian was disciplined after commenting on union affairs on a Channel Four programme. The leadership set out to defeat a key political opponent by bureaucratic methods.

While many socialist teachers welcomed the decision to go to court, the campaign for Ian's reinstatement missed several opportunities to involve activists in the fight for reinstatement.

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Getting the low down

Making the bosses whine

Workers at the occupied Forbes de Chabrec steel plant in Belgium plan to sell off 7000 bottles of wine seized from the manager’s cellar to boost their strike fund. The occupation is against a restructuring plan that includes a 10% pay cut and the loss of 2000 jobs. A union rep said: “We’ve got 7000 bottles and we’re selling it for 200 francs (four pounds) a bottle. We’re liquidating the stock.”

Brassed off

Meanwhile workers in the bookroom at Dagenham have been forced to spend more than 200 hours, some of it at overtime rates, making a brass pet decoy for retiring computer Lindsay Halbert. Halbert is responsible for making compulsory redundancies.

Let them eat mince pies

‘My Kippling’ company Manor Bakeries have scrapped their annual gift to company pensioners – a Christmas card and a half-meat cake. The recession is cited as the reason. The cakes were badly made – ones rejected by stores. Union leaders are said to tell members to ensure the pensioners get their cakes.

New Haitylites?

What kind of organisation is the SWP becoming? Pretty obvious if the Socialist Reviewd obituary for Greek WWII veteran anything to go by. It can’t be recording that ‘Clare always had an uneasy relationship with the party’ because he ‘only fitfully understood that without the humdrum work of organisation and routine’. The world reads as: ‘Mizzed and confused’... etc. etc. Garry Healy would have loved it.

Watch your water

Anglic Water is to force four million customers to top up with 15% more water. From Monday 19th, most others will follow. For this privilege customers will have to fork out 200 g.p.d. for the privilege of paying higher water charges.

So sad

Tony ex-Chancellor Nigel Lawson has sold his Leicestershire house The Old Rectory for a knockdown £230,000. It has been up for sale for weeks. He was asked whether he would appeal or not to the local authority. ‘He has quite a long list – 27 years in the making’, was the reply.

Robert Maxwell

Bonkers

Robert Maxwell was a crook who ripped off his workers and pensioners. He was bad off and vapid, according to a new book by the former editor of the Daily Mirror Nicholas Davies. At his wife’s 70th birthday party, he made a very long speech, without mentioning his once. Before allowing her to spend a few thousand pounds from his vast fortune on furniture, he insisted she agree to sell all her jewellery – in writing. He put locks on the kitchen to stop his daughter helping herself to food. And sent a long detailed letter to one of his adult sons, containing headings like ‘How to Make Friends Amongst Young and Old’ and ‘Observing the USA and Having Fun’. National Government A BBC2 poll has found strong support for a national government with John Smith as leader. Prince Charles is mentioned as one of those who could be prime minister. Richard Branson is president of the board of trade. God help us.

Eye injuries

A staggering 300,000 working days were lost last year because of eye injuries, according to Health and Safety. A common injury was a burn, generally caused by welding or cutting without proper eye protection. As for most of these injuries, the industry which suffered most was construction.

Lobby parliament December 10

Two months to save London’s hospitals!

By Harry Sloan

Will London’s left support the miners but stand by their own local hospitals close down?

The evidence of the past two weeks suggests this could well be the case – but it is not too late to change.

The labour movement left has mobilised to produce a rapid growth of miners support groups, but done little or nothing to carry on the threatened drive of London hospitals. There have been as many as a dozen of these - the absence of conscious left-wing has fortunately not prevented many other individuals and organisations from taking up the fight, with active local campaigns now developing around Barking, Charing Cross and St Thomas’ hospitals.

Around 200 camps, including GIs, union activists; pensioners groups and others supported the London Health Emergency Rally called for by Camden Town Hall on November 10.

There was a link between the NHS and defending the miners was strongly made by the presence on the platform of Yorkshire miners’ leader Ken Capstick and of Jeremy Corbyn MP who is secretary of the National Miners Support Network.

The next London-wide focus is a Lobby of Parliament, called by London CGHSE for Thursday December 10 and is supported by SE Region TUC. The date offers a target for local groups of health workers and campaigners wishing to bring action.

Publicity leaflets for the lobby are available from the Londoner’s Needs London Hospitals hotline 081-543-9914.

300 back anti-racist conference

Pete McDonald and Jeff Lowe.

Over 300 people – nearly half of them Black – attended the Anti-Racism Action/Chains of Oppression Action/Legal Remedies conference on 14th November. The conference took place in Greenwich, an area in which racist attacks – including murders – have been increasing.

A number of users of the Diocese of London held the most moving contribution of the day. Barbara, a 15 year old murdered by white racists in nearby Thamesmead. Her personal tragedy graphically illustrates the links between institutionalised state racism and the activities of racist thugs on the streets.

There was little opportunity for discussion in the morning session so most debate took place in the afternoon workshop.

The role of the police force was attacked in the ‘Police and Racist Attacks’ workshop. The panel introduced with the comment that the title might seem strange to delegates when the single biggest perpetrator of racist attacks in the police. The meeting agreed that self-defence is the key question and that most thought there was no possibility of reforming the police.

The role of the police was again raised by a speaker from Germany in the ‘Racism and Europe’ workshop. He pointed to the confusion between the police, government, employers and neo-racists in carrying out attacks.

Conference organiser Benny Bunse argued that ‘if the AR A are going to grow it must base itself upon community actions; otherwise it will become a bureaucratic institution’.

We strongly agree with this. It can only be achieved, however, through involving organisations that already have a track-record of building local campaigns with the capability of taking on a national profile.

Any initiative around racist attacks must include organisations such as Southall Monitoring Group, Newham Monitoring Project and the Manchester Memorial Committee.

The Tories’ Asylum Bill

Fortress Europe

refugees

Peter Adderley

The Tories’ Asylum Bill is a major attack on immigrants and asylum seekers. But, argues Paul Clarke, behind the Asylum Bill is a move by all EC governments to hit refugees. Moves by Home Secretary Kenneth Clarke to exclude Bosnian refugees by ‘excessive’ visa requirements are an early application of a policy being adopted throughout the EC.

Preparations for the EC summit in Edinburgh include wide-reaching changes in European policy on asylum. These have been prepared in great secrecy, but leaks show what is going on.

Draft documents have been prepared by the Ad Hoc Group on Immigration, which includes Interior and Justice Ministers from the 12 EC states.

This body meets in secret and is not accountable to any EC body. Its proposals will be adopted by inter-governmental treaty; amendments by national parliaments are effectively impossible.

The most recent leaked draft resolution proposes grounds for categorising asylum applications as ‘manifestly unfounded’.

People who fear violations of their civil rights should be able to seek protection in their own countries, and seek protection from their own authorities if they are escaping an authoritarian and oppressive regime.

A very sinister statement is that ‘intercontinental movements of asylum seekers are solemn necessary for protective reasons’. In other words - people from the third world deep south ‘The own continent’ provision is an entirely new concept in dealing with refugees and asylum seekers.

The latest draft criteria drop an earlier suggestion that a list be drawn up of countries from which asylum applications are considered ‘permanently safe’. But it suggests there is the possibility of drawing up such criteria for assessing asylum claims remains valid.

It is one per cent of the world’s refugees live in the EC. Fortunately Europe is preparing to ensure that this percentage only goes up.

London’s HOSPITALS

London’s LIFE LINE!

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Victory to Burnsall strikers!

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