Don't leave the miners to fight alone

Solidarity
Scargill speaks at Silverdale rally

By Bob Smith

MORE THAN 2,000 miners and supporters marched from Silverdale pit to a rally in New castle under Lyme, Stafford shire on Saturday March 4.

Arthur Scargill spoke to the rally. Rallies are needed to save 51 pits from Tory indiscipline.

"Coal Pickers made it clear when we last met for talks last year that the miners are in 1972. They do not understand that today's miners were at school in 1972. Tell our MPs to do the same kind of indiscipline when they get into power.

"Just 31 pits. The Coal Board is pushing 400 employes into the pit. The Forces plan to replace them with pit fired power stations and 300 employes. Don't help the pit men to go into power. This is economic vandalism."

"They could save £1 billion a year by getting back to the coal in dustry and by stopping coal im portation!"

"I am very pleased that the min ers have voted in support of the union's recommendation to cut back on the number of men in our industry.

"Call of the UCM membership to the pickets and a public meeting on the coal strike at 7 pm on Saturday night at the min ers' hall.

"We are not on the picket line. We are not picketing in the mines.

"Get back to your labour union and get back to your Local Government. Stop the cut backs and we will get back to the pits."

By Bill Sutcliffe

MINERS HAVE said yes to a 24 hour strike against Tory plans to ax 30,000 jobs in the industry as a predicate to privatization. British Rail workers seem set to join them in what will be the most important labour movement day of action for many years.

The NUM miners' union, pit supervisors union NACODS and RMT rail workers held syn chronised ballots against re dundancies in their respective industries last Friday.

The NUM result - announced last weekend - paved the way for the first national coal stoppage since the all-out strike of 1984-85. The scale of support for industrial action surpassed the hopes of most militants, who had privately been expecting a close call.

The strongest backing came from South Wales, with 87 per cent voting yes. Northern miners in la vour were: Nottinghamshire (97 per cent), Lancashire (77%), Leicestershire (73%), Power Group (68%), Yorkshire (66 per cent), Midlands (65), Cumbrah (59) and the Northeast (50%).

Workers in: Derbyshire (46%), Scotland (36%) and Ulster (30), North Wales (23).

Overall, 12,913 miners voted to strike, with 8,468 against. Turnout was 60 per cent, low by NUM standards. NUM spokes men that voted no are expected to abide by the majority verdict.

The union's executive was due to meet on Thursday March 11 to consider its next move. With April 2 already se lected as a Europe-wide day of miners' protest, there is speculation that the strike will take place on that day.

The NACODS result was due as Socialist Outlook went to press. Action from supervisors would paralyse the pits, as it is illegal to work without them. A two-thirds majority is needed under the NACODS rule book.

The NUM victory will boost activities in RMT, where the official campaign for a yes vote has been lacklustre. The RMT ballot is over some 27,000 job losses in prospect on British Rail, and not formally linked to the NUM and NACODOS votes, even though the pits casts will also mean rail sackings.

Due to the union's balloting procedures, no outcome will be announced until at least March 19. But under Tony anti-union laws, strike mandates only hold for 28 days.

If rail bosses mount a legal challenge, arguing that RMT has illegally manufactu red the dispute, delays in getting a hearing could push the vote be yond its expiry date. Activists must be alive to the danger. The watchword has to be, name the day straightaway and then go for it, 100 per cent.

Outside of the NUM, NACODS and RMT, opportunities exist for those in other unions to link up their demands with coal and rail struggle. This is espe cially, but not exclusively, true in the public sector.

Once a date is set, we need to bring the biggest labour move ment mobilisation in decades behind it. This should mean solidarity action wherever this is possible, and lunch time and evening events where it is not.

Build the Labour left conference

By Pete Firmin

LAST JUNE, over 400 La bour Party activists met in Leeds and took some steps towards forming a national campaign in the Labour Left - the Socialist Campaign Group Supporters Network. Since that conference new Campaign Groups have been set up in many places, showing that life does still exist on the Labour left. On April 17th a re call conference takes place in Leeds. The need for a national, democratic force of the Labour left is obvious. The economy and the Tories may be in crisis, but the Labour leadership has no answers.

The moved virtually every policy and democratic measure won by the left in the 1970s and early 80s - and then lost the 1992 general elec tion. Now they are boundlessly, mostly trying to claim that they thought of Tory policies first. John Smith's 'big idea' in his recent Bournemouth speech was that Labour is the party of individual aspirations.

The best they can come up with is the new buzz word 'Clintonisation' - which amounts to little more than a vain hope that the US Demo crats' success in winning an election might rub off on La bour, and an excuse for ditching the party union link.

The Labour left is weaker than it has been for about 20 years, reduced to one repre sentative on the NEC - Tony Benn - and marginal to Party debate on nearly all issues.

It has suffered mass defections to new realisers over the years of defeats in the class struggle, and a high drop-out rate from those despairing of the policy changes and demon ised by the witch-hunt.

Forging a national demo cratic campaigning body unit ing most of the Labour left will not be enough. It is an in stant reversal of the left's for ture. A change in the state of the class struggle is needed to achieve this. However, this does not mean that nothing can be done in the meantime.

A left-wing acting together on issues where it agrees will be a much more effective and attractive force, offering an al ternative to the watered down Toryism of John Smith.

Links must be built from the beginning with the left in the unions. A seminar around retention of the union link of fers the chance to work with wider forces than the existing left.

The April 17 conference will be addressed by the Campaign Group candidates for the NEC this year, but will also discuss campaigning in the areas of anti-racism, defending public services, fighting pit closures and job losses, Maastricht and the economy, party democracy and the 'New World Order'.

This offers an opportunity to discuss linking up party activ is with campaigns outside, and short campaigning resolu tions will be taken on each of these issues.

There will also be discussion on a democratic structure for the network of supporters.

Labour left activists every where should be building this conference and working to ensure that we come out of it strengthened for the many bat tles ahead.
Morale, morals and the right wing backlash

The brutal murder of James Bulger in Kirkby has unleashed a wave of reactionary moral panic, in which all the churches and right wing MPs – from John Patten to Tony Blair – have chimed in. All of them agree in calling for stricter discipline over children, and in re-asserting the importance of ‘family values’. Long sermons about individual responsibility, and respect for the ‘community’ are being endlessly repeated.

This carnival of reaction has been topped off with repulsive scenes in Liverpool, as the homes of children questioned by police have been besieged and ugly crowds have gathered outside police stations and courts.

Junior prisons

Now Kenneth Clarke has come forward with plans for ‘secure training centres’ (i.e. junior prisons) for young offenders aged below 15. Few will be impressed by his claim that these will offer ‘love and care’ to the difficult youngsters consigned to them.

The murder of a two-year-old girl, apparently by children, of course provokes strong emotions. But the causes of such events are being dealt with at the same kind of level as ‘The Omen’; the hunt is on for ‘evil’ children, ‘evil’ parents, and anyone seen as lacking ‘morality’ and (conventional Christian) religious values.

This appeal to a renewed reactionary moral order has to be fought. That can only be done by the left explaining some of the basics, looking at some of the underlying causes. What is it which leads to a brutalisation of children? Why are thousands of kids getting involved in petty crime, drugs and various kinds of violence? Why is truancy an epidemic?

The answer to these questions, of course, is highlighted by the fact that the Bulger murder took place in Kirkby, one of the poorest areas in Europe. Brutalisation of kids comes out of the brutalisation of communities by unemployment and poverty.

It is in those circumstances of deep poverty and collapsing social services, of no prospects and schools that can’t cope, that children take on the cynicism and despair of their parents.

You don’t have to be a Marxist to understand these basic facts; anyone with a modicum of common sense will understand them.

In today’s world, in which the Labour movement is dominated by the defeatist politics of ‘new realism’, that is obviously not the case. The unemployed of Kirkby don’t see anyone – least of all the likes of Tony Blair, who appears to inhabit another planet from working class people – fighting for them.

Neither Labour nor the trade union bureaucracy shows any interest in even trying to organise them for a fightback.

So the rich, the Tories and the state rip off the poor; and the poor are more and more victims of petty hoods – loan sharks, burglars, drug dealers – who operate in their own communities. Lacking collective solutions, organisations of struggle and solidarity, personal solutions on the borders of legality predominate.

Targets

Without a challenge from the left and the labour movement, the field is now wide open to every kind of reactionary priest and witch doctor to deepen this moral panic. Order and discipline will be the themes; the poor, women, lesbians and gay men, single-parent families, black people and the unemployed will be the targets.

Yes, there is a moral crisis in Britain; the whole of the capitalist class and the political establishment are deeply affected by it. Their moral code – centred on greed, self-interest and exploitation, backed up by brute force of the state – has led to the kind of social breakdown they are now so ready to deplore.

Presiding over a collapsing economy, they have no ideas and no way out. Their only morality is to save their own skins, the best they can.

For the working class the crisis is more one of morale than morals. A few days of mass action would do more to rebuild self-confidence and social solidarity than a lifetime of sermons from cynical church-going careerists like Blair, Smith and co.

If the labour movement doesn’t step into the present vacuum, and offer workers a way forward, the law and order brigade will.
THE TENTH anniversary of the Bermansdyke by-election passed by last month, but completely unnoticed. A shock result saw a rock solid Labour seat fall massively to the Liberal Party, in whose hands it remains to this day.

But Bermansdyke was a lot more than a routine by-election hammering. In retrospect, it can clearly be seen as the turning point of the Bennett tide. The very symbolism is striking.

The seat had been making national headlines for 15 months after sitting MP Bob Mollison – a chief whip under Harold Wilson and knighted by the Pope, no less – was deselected in favour of Peter Tatchell.

A young Australian, Tatchell was not only a leftwinger but a long-standing gay rights activist. Today he is best known for his advocacy of ‘queer politics’ as part of Out-Kegel.

Scargill

This was in 1981, the year that Tony Benn only just failed to win Labour’s deputy leadership. Arthur Scargill launched his successful campaign to become president of the National Union of Mineworkers, and the new administration at the Greater London Council under ‘Red Ken’ Livingstone was implementing radical policies.

Full of wonder at these inspired developments, a kid called Dave Osler joined the Labour Party just past the river in Wapping. Bermansdyke was to be my first time on the knocker.

Threatened

Following Bermansdyke Labour Party’s democratic decision to remove him, Mollison met party leader Michael Foot in December 1981 and threatened to force a by-election unless the left was talked. With the newly formed Social Democratic Party, a right-wing split from Labour, clearly on a roll after a by-election triumph in Croydon and Crosby, Foot feared a certain defeat.

Soon afterwards, Foot stood up in the House of Commons and announced that Tatchell was “Not an endorsed candidate of the Labour Party and as far as I’m concerned never will be”.

As public justification for the outburst, Foot used an article penned by Tatchell for what was then known as London Labour Briefing, which had called for extra-parliamentary activity against the Tories. The piece was scandalously called to its resurrection; Tatchell was talking about ideologies, marches and non-violent civil disobedience.

But Foot had effectively given Foot Street the green light: The Sun leader the following day stoned: “Red Pete – otherwise known as extreme leftwinger Peter Tatchell – symbolises everything that is appealing in the Labour Party. A Marxist, who has been in the Labour Party only a few years, he has contempt for democracy.”

Endorsed

“Tatchell was openly referred to as a ‘Marxist revolutionary’. Even a BBC news bulletin referred to him as the ‘Militant Tendency candidate for Bermansdyke’.”

Within the week, Foot’s position had been endorsed by the National Executive Committee, although the body later changed its mind, allowing him to run. The Party that month also launched the investigation into Milan, which was to result in the expulsion of the paper’s editorial board the following year.

The two issues became intertwined in the press’s collective mind. Tatchell was openly referred to as a ‘Marxist revolutionary’. Even a BBC news bulletin referred to him as the ‘Militant Tendency candidate for Bermansdyke’.

“Peter Tatchell, on foot, on the knocker; Peter Tatchell’s locker (above) Michael Foot – clashed over 1983 by-election for Bermansdyke”

Best-placed

All this was nonsense. For the early eighties, Tatchell’s politics were no more than run-of-the-mill Labour leftism. Any backing he received from Militant was motivated purely by tactical considerations after Tatchell emerged as the placed leftwinger in the selection process. Indeed, Militant would clearly have preferred to run one of its own sympathisers.

Meanwhile, Mollison quit the party in August 1982. Rather than run as an independent, he put up a hack rather, John O’Grady, as a ‘Real Labour’ candidate. Private Eye alleged that the campaign was financed by Sir Nigel Brookes, chair of the London Docklands Development Corporation. A government-imposed quango that usurped much power usually in the hands of local authorities.

Abuse

Brookes strongly denied the suggestion. But it is indisputable that both Mollison and O’Grady were paid vice-chairs of the LDDC. Brookes was also head of Trafalgar House, which then owned the Daily Star, Daily Express and Sunday Express and 50 per cent of the London Standard. These newspapers joined the rest of the tabloid and middle-market press in one of the most sustained campaigns of abuse ever faced by an individual.

Much of this was based on Tatchell’s homosexuality, which he persistently refused to confirm or deny. While this was clearly his right, it was almost certainly a mistake. Given his history of gay rights activism, it was inevitable that the gutter press would extract maximum mileage by innuendo. Many gaped as the Tatchell’s ambush reinforced the idea that being gay was something to be ashamed of. Tatchell himself has since ar-

Barrage

Convincing the council estates with Clive Wood (now a Socialist Workers Party member), I found the cumulative effect of the barrage to be devastating. I imagined that working in Surrey was a doddle by comparison.

The anti-Tatchell vote gravitated around the ‘Red Ned’ Hughes, who polled 17,017 (77.6 per cent). Tatchell got just 7,086 (31.1 per cent), while O’Grady mercifully lost his de-

scendants with 2,063 (7.6 per cent). The Monster Raving Loonies studded both the Communists and the Revolutionary Communists. The result repre-
sented a 21,075 vote swing around, from the majority to a 9,519 vote defeat.

The irony is that later emerged, was that Simon Hughes – who avoided declaring his own sexuality – was found to have worked on the preparation of his own party’s gay rights manifesto.

Four months later there was a general election, with Hughes holding the seat as Labour to crashed to its worst showing since 1918, polling just 28 per cent.

Pictures

While falling short of declaring ‘it’s OK, he’s not been in 72-point type, publicity materia-

l for Labour’s Bermansdyke candidate, John Thurnham, the 1983 General Election featured his wife carrying the couple’s banner.

Islington South, meanwhile, elected Chris Smith, who later came out and is still Britain’s only out MP. He has since won front bench preeminence. But those who ever called him ‘Red Chris’...
Some 2,000 council workers in Walsall, West Midlands, held a half-day strike on March 1 protesting against their Tory employers’ plans for mass sackings and service cuts. Up to 400 jobs are on the line following a decision to slash the budget by £3m. Many of those affected work as school dinner staff.

The strikers — members of the NALGO white collar local government union, organised a mass meeting, followed by a mass lobby of Walsall Town Hall. Much of the anger was directed against council leader Mike Bird, who argued that local government unions should follow the example of Labour Sheffield and work two days without pay in a bid to save the authority money.

Knives out for pay in Sheffield
By Mark Mullion

ALMOST 20,000 Sheffield council workers last week voted to accept a 35 per cent pay cut in exchange for a bosses’ promise to put 1,400 sackings on hold.

Only the works department, which employs some 2,000 manual workers, is holding out, after stewards campaigned for a no vote. Negotiations with council chief Mike Bower are continuing. Teachers are excluded from the deal, because their terms and conditions are set nationally.

The wage slash move — at a time when the Tories are trying to impose a national 35 per cent public sector pay norm — comes after the once radical Labour council has failed to comply with a government-imposed spending limit of £300m and set a legal budget for 1993-94.

At Christmas, it warned the unions that it needed to sack 1,400 workers, in a city already suffering from 14 per cent unemployment, in order to balance the budget.

NALGO, dominated locally by Democratic Left, successfully pro-
posed the idea of all workers taking, three days unpaid leave instead. The money saved was spent on enhancing voluntary redundancy packages. The move contributed to the climate which led to the current deal.

Having secured the formal consent of 81 per cent of the workforce, em-
ployers are proceeding to impose it on everyone. The package gives everyone either an hour off the working week or seven days’ extra leave ordi-

erent.

This 35 per cent reduction in work-
hours ostensibly offsets the pay cut. But workers struggling to man-
ge on current take-home pay are un-
likely to see things this way.

The council has guaranteed to pay this year’s nationally agreed pay rise, with settlement date due in July, but said that next year’s increase depended on savings being im-
plemented.

Each union in the authority balled separately, with results revealing sig-
iificant discrepancies. NALGO voted 65 per cent in favour. NUPE 57 per cent, GMB 52 per cent and TGWU 51 per cent. Many lower paid workers said they voted against because they simply cannot afford to see their take home pay very much slashed.

Labour MP Jeremy Corbin argued that “unions are being forced to turn the clock back to the 1960s, when workers took wage cuts to save their jobs”. It did not work then and it will not work now. This is the economics of the mad-
house.”

Mr Bower has pledged to slash man-
agerial and supervisory jobs despite the sacrifice, arguing: “We need to cut the cost of services without cutting the services.”

He has received congratulations from the Sheffield Development Cor-

poration, the Chamber of Commerce, the Coopers’ CompanyCutty bussies’

club and the city’s two universities.

Councillors’ jobs toll
By Eugene Slack

SOME 5,000 local government jobs were axed last year, in addi-
tion to 7,000 which were set in 1991. And there is far worse to come.

Stephenubbo, secretary of the Association of Metropolitan Auth-

orities, claimed last week: “We be-

lieve that up to 15,000 more local government jobs will be lost in the next 18 months.”

The Financial Times early esti-

mated that there would be 50,000 council sackings in the next year alone. Whenever you figure you select, the result is a wholesale jobs massacre.

Around 5,457 local government jobs were axed in just one week last month, bringing the total number of sackings announced since the start of February alone to 25,971.

Labour environment spokes-

man Jack Straw obtained detailed figures compiled by CLEF European Research Network on behalf of the Association of Labour Councillors.

The statistics are based on plans欢呼 actual reports in the na-

tional, local and specialist press, and CERN’s own survey work.

Public Sector Alliance
A missed opportunity
By Alan Davies

A LEOPARD doesn’t change its spots. The truth of this was brought home at the Public Sector Alliance (PSA) conference at Stoke last Sat-

day.

The conference was domi-

nated by Militant and the mode of operation from the days of BLOC remained unchanged.

As in the old days when the Community Party Realists ran the Liaison Committee for Defence of Trade Unions, oppo-

nents were made to jump through hoops to get delegated or to have an influence on the conference.

Protests at the start, that properly delegate delegates had been excluded, were voted down by the Militant majority at the conference.

The stress on the delegate basis reflected a spokeswoman by the organisers that the confer-

ence could “organise tens of thousands of workers” as claimed in the opening speeches.

What was needed however, was a conference which could organise and coordinate the ac-

tivists in the individual unions in a much more effective way.

Also voted down, was a propo-
sal for a more open organising committee, with sponsoring or-

ganisations having the right to send delegates to it.

Disappointing
The conference was disap-

pointing. 550 people attended, two-thirds of them delegates, and a series of unobjectionable resolutions were adopted, backing the miners and calling for one-day national strikes to start a serious fightback against pit closures and in defence of the public sector more gener-

ally.

The purpose of the con-

ference however, was difficult to see. What effectively hap-

pened was the setting up of little more than a front organi-

sation for Militant.

The narrow basis of the conf-

fere was its biggest problem. The platform was narrow (and al-

most entirely male) and NUPE pulled out following a circular from the TUC. Directives were sent by the NU and some other unions, to every local area, warning them against attend-

ing the conference.

The only national union rep-

resented was UCATT. There were no MFs and no repre-

sentative at a national level

from the NUM.

The guest speakers included a very good account of the Times dispute, but import-

ant current initiatives such as the pit camps were absent.

A national committee for the PSA was set up which is domi-

nated by Militant and was given unlimited powers of co-

option. The regional basis of the committee (2 delegates per re-

gion) is a clue to what the Milit-

ant are doing.

United action
The real need was to organise within the individual unions to achieve what everyone wants which is united action across the public sector. There was nothing along these lines set up at the conference and the pro-

posed local bodies will not be in a position to achieve this.

There is no doubt that a real objective basis exists for united and co-ordinated action in the public sector, or that the left could play a major role in for-

giving this action.

Such a role however, could only be played by an open and inclusive initiative and not one tailored to the requirements of a particular current.

Teachers in Leicestershire staged a half-day strike on March 5 against threatened cuts in services and job losses. Over 1,000 NUM members walked out across the county, and vented their anger in a rally outside County Hall.

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Socialist Outlook candidate fights self-destruction of NUS

Students in fight to save union

By Andrew Berry and Simon Deville

SOCIALIST OUTLOOK students are standing a black candidate for NUS president. Patrick Bishop, an overseas student who is a member of the Belgian Trotskyist Jeune Garde Socialist, is standing on a platform opposing the destruction of the National Union of Students planned by its executive.

The Socialist Outlook executive slate for four, stands for left unity to tackle the Tory onslaught against students and the make-up plans of the executive.

The NUS executive, led by right-wing members of NOLS, the Labour student organisation, have put forward radical proposals to depoliticise and scale-down student organisation.

Voluntary

Their consultative paper, due to go to the Easter NUS conference, proposes two key changes - voluntary membership of the student union by individual students, and that NUS and affiliated unions have charity status.

This change would have a spectacular effect. Organisations with charity status are subject to regulation by the Charity Commissioner, and are meant to be non-political. Student movements rely on possibly campaign on issues proved to be directly relevant to students. The interpretation of this would be in the hands of the Charity Commissioner.

Safeguard positions

The proposals are a pre-emptive strike by NUS leadership in advance of what is being asked to be wide-ranging proposals by the Tories. The executive hopes to safeguard their bureaucratic positions by getting their own house in order, at the expense of the mass of students.

The long tradition of student union campaigning on issues such as racism would be destroyed at a stroke, and unions reduced to organisations providing entertainment, travel and similar services.

The�行 planning includes the abolition of union general meetings, so that students could only decide policy through elections and referendum. This goes hand in hand with changes already made, abolishing the NUS national December conference.

Uncontrollable

The bureaucratic clique at the top of NUS would be supplemented by uncontrollable little cliques at college level.

The left in NUS is hampered by the lack of effective fighting co-ordination. The largest left group, the SWP, builds itself in glorious isolation, substituting narrow party-building for political effectiveness.

'Left Unity', the Socialist Organisation front, has been compromised by widely known plans to take NUS to the capitalist course, as well as unprincipled deals with right-wing groups.

Also on the Socialist Outlook slate are Andrew Berry, Louise Whittle and Simon Deville.

Legalise abortion in six counties

Ireland's hidden toll of misery

By a Special Correspondent

AMID the furors over abortion in the Irish Republic, the fact that abortion is still illegal in the Six Counties has been overlooked. Every week at least 10 women from the North make the journey to the mainland to have abortions. But many are forced by lack of cash or social pressure to have unwanted children. Others resort to backstreet abortionists, still doing good business in this part of the "United Kingdom".

Beyond the toll of unwanted children and backstreet termination, the anti-abortion law has a dire impact on the availability of contraception advice, and on anti-natal care.

Pre-natal scans, especially amniocentesis, are generally not available, except to articulate, middle-class women who demand them. The reason is the fear that the detection of abnormalities could lead to a request for an abortion. There is even a widespread social stigma against having scans for this reason.

Bigots

The one Strathclyde clinic to have opened in Belfast has been regularly picketed by anti-abortion bigots. The clinic gives only contraception, not abortion, advice; but the anti-abortionists argue that contraception for teenagers makes them more interested in sex and thus more likely to have unwanted pregnancies.

The denial of anti-natal screening to working class women is just part of the conspiracy to prevent abortions. The Northern Ireland Office gives an extra 5000 compensation to wives victims who become pregnant in return for a written agreement not to have an abortion.

The lack of availability of regular pre-natal scans naturally leads to the birth of a disproportionate number of children with serious disabilities.

Some women who have had an early scan in which a slight abnormality was picked up, and who subsequently were not given further tests, have been shocked to find their children suffered from Down Syndrome or spina bifida, with no advance warning.

Churches united

Abortion is an issue on which all the churches in the Six Counties, Catholic and Protestant, unite.

No 'mainstream' politician has been prepared to raise his head (it's generally his) above the parapet of religious reaction and bigotry to raise a challenge on this issue. Many women activists complain that their demands are put aside while the war goes on.

It's time for the politicians in Britain to start progressive and democratic public opinion to this little-disussed corner of tyranny and misery.
Keep watch with Timex strikers!

By Bill Sutcliffe

THE TIMEX watch plant dispute in Dundee is a crucial test of strength for the entire labour movement. The effective mass picketing, high levels of militancy and widespread solidarity on display are an example to trade unionists everywhere.

Some 300 assembly workers have been sacked by bosses of the American-owned multinational, in a new wave of redundancies since the News International dispute in 1977.

The AEEU is defying a court injunction to enforce the Timex 'no picketing' rule, with convener John Kydd and deputy convener Willie L Floor arguing they would rather go to prison than cave in.

Around 70 scabs are being bussed in daily. Many of them are school leavers, while others are former temporary workers at the plant.

In addition, a small number of engineers from Portsmouth firm Yarmouth, where Timex boss Peter Hall was formerly managing director, are staying in a local hotel in order to work at the factory.

Some 90 MSF members are also crossing the picket, with supervisors thought to be training the scabs. MSF activists must demand they are called out.

In a successful bid to stop the strikers' rule, John Kydd, senior AEEU district official, deliberately stalled his car in front of the gates on Monday last week and refused to move. The scabs faced 45 minutes of heckling from the 200-strong picket line until police got them in through another entrance.

Labour movement support has been magnificent, with donations of £1,100 from Longines workers in Fife, £100 from Glasgow Rolls-Royce workers, and a £2-a-week levy from British Aerospace. Street collections are bringing in £500 a day. Collections must be organised wherever possible.

Timex convener John Kydd junior, addressing a Scottish Militant Labour conference, called on the Scottish TUC to organise a day of action to enable mass picketing at the factory. The demand should be taken across the movement.

Management commenced a lock-out on 17 February, after employees refused to accept a 10 per cent pay cut, three hours on the working week, and other changes for the worse in pensions and other benefits. The lockouts followed shortly. Donations (messages of support to AEEU office, Union Street, Dundee, tel: 0382 22460)

Don't let Tories charge for the Pill!

By Marion Brain

THE STORY government is launching another attack on women's rights and ability to choose what is best for their health is the supplies of contraceptives to Family Planning Clinics.

Last week, doctors were told that there are no more supplies until March, and even if there are, the costs will be through the roof, almost to 1978 levels.

While the health of the nation's women will be severely affected, the government seems more concerned with the health of the nation's pro-life lobby.

Women wanting to continue with their accustomed brand will have to pay the full cost - which could be £75 for three months' supply.

We must defeat this idea and join with the National Abortion Campaign and insist that the government stops this review at once.

The National Abortion Campaign has produced campaign postcards to be sent to MPs. The postcards educate people to write to their MPs, outlining the fact that to reduce the range of contraceptive information and advice on unwanted pregnancies and abortions - supposedly the opposite of the government's much-praised health of the nation policy for health promotion.

Most of the women who write will be young and poorer women who could not afford to buy their own contraception.

We have to defeat the Tory attack now before they decide they will go the whole way and make women pay for their contraception.

The principle that contraception is free is at the point of use. Send donations to NAC, 7, The Print House, 18 Ashwin Street, London E2 3OL.

Fake 'commission' is anti-abortion front

By Marion Brain

DAVID AMES, MP for Basingstoke, failed in his attempt to undermine the 1967 Abortion Act when his Ten Minute Rule Bill on opposing sex selection was defeated.

We must also organise to ensure that the anti-abortionists' fake commission is exposed.

Now anti-choice groups have set up an 'independent commission' under Lord Rawlinson of Ewell to examine the 'significance and consequences of the Abortion Act'.

This group of prominent anti-abortionists, includes David Alton, Dr Margaret White, Peggy Norris, Mary Kenny, Professor Norman Stone, Catherine Francoise and others.

Invitations to give evidence have been sent out on House of Lords headed notepaper and adverts asking women to send their experiences of abortion have been placed in the glossy women's magazine.

The National Abortion Campaign wants members and supporters who see these ads to write to the magazines concerned pointing out that this is not an independent body and should say this in the future.

If you write to the commission, send copies to the National Abortion Campaign.

Bigots aim at NAC union link

THE LATEST issue of Human Concern, SPUC's newspaper, urges its members to 'Target the union movement' and get resolutions to change trade unions' pro-choice policies.

National Abortion Campaign supporters need to be aware of this and also mount a counter offensive.

This call for redressed efforts to ensure their trade union branches and regional bodies are affiliated to NAC and therefore receiving the information needed to fight these anti-choice groups.

Outlook for Socialism '93

EUROPE'S CRISIS: SOCIALIST ANSWERS

A weekend of debate and discussion in Central London organised by supporters of the Fourth International

Saturday March 13 9.30am-7.30pm
Sunday March 14 10.30am-9pm
South Camden Community School
Charring Cross (continuation of Goulston Street) between Kings Cross and Euston

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Maastricht, socialism and the labour movement

Last year TONY BENN introduced a parliamentary Bill for a new ‘Commonwealth of Europe’ as an alternative to Maastricht. The Bill proposes a Europe including all the states, east and west, based on fundamental social rights – the right to a job, civil liberties, health care and other social benefits; a Europe which respects the environment, combats racism, committed to peace and a new relationship with the ‘third world’. DAVE PACKER talked to Tony Benn about the campaign against Maastricht and the prospects for socialist advance.

Some people on the left suspect that campaigning against Maastricht gives cover to right wing nationalism, and that only the right wing benefits from such a campaign.

BUT THAT is simply untrue. In Britain it was the left that was against the Treaty of Rome, the Tories were all in favour of it; it was the Tories who took us into the EC, using the Royal prerogative, without consulting anyone. It was the Labour Party which came out in favour of a referendunm on the issue.

The idea that because Mrs Thatcher discovered that foreigners start at Dover turns it into a right-wing campaign is ludicrous. I'm not a nationalist, and I won't appear on platforms with right-wing nationalist opponents of Maastricht.

The reason why Tory opponents of Maastricht are getting all the publicity is because only they have the power to defeat the government on the issue; if we had a Labour government it would be the left critique of Maastricht getting all the publicity.

The proponents of Maastricht want to present the anti-Maastricht campaign in a way which alienates liberal opinion, so they say, well it's led by Le Pen and Thatcher; but it's not the case at all.

Of course the opportunity to present things this way in part stems from the Labour leadership's pro-Maastricht stance. The real question is why do the three main party leaders agree about everything.

Major, Smith and Ashdown agree about NATO, about nuclear weapons, about Ireland, Maastricht, market forces and controlling the trade unions: that is the real unprincipled political coalition, not some mythical alliance of the left and right over Maastricht.

But of course there's nothing strange in politics about people taking a similar view on something for totally different reasons. We can't determine a proper socialist attitude to the bankers' Maastricht Europe simply on the basis that it's excluded in all circumstances to go into the same voting lobby as Teddy Taylor.

Not only the Labour leadership, but most of the trade union bureaucracy has come out in favour of Maastricht.

THAT'S BECAUSE after 12 years of Tory rule the trade union leaders get better treated in Brussels than they do in Downing Street. But I think it is a classic failure of analysis by the trade unions not to recognise that the Maastricht Europe will be run for profit at the expense of working people.

The recent case of the Hoover plant moved from France to Scotland is typical. Here Scotland was the beneficiary because we're becoming a low-wage sweatshop; but this is a product of the Treaty of Rome. You have free movement of capital. So capital comes to Britain where wages are low; and the free movement of labour is into the dole queues.

Does the view of the trade union leaders reflect opinion in the country?

THERE HAS been little information about the real meaning of the Maastricht. If you present opposition as a lot of Thatcherite nationalism, it's bound to be unattractive. But it has to be understood that the Maastricht Europe will be deeply undemocratic. In Britain all the laws decided in Europe have been imposed by Royal Prerogative. It's the first time since the execution of Charles I that laws have been made by ministers without consulting parliament.

Is the European Commonwealth you propose a socialist one?

THE CHARTER of Rights in the Bill is a very radical series of measures. It doesn't enforce socialism, but it certainly makes the European model of capitalism impossible. Because it lays down that everyone is entitled to work, and a home and to join a trade union, and so on. These are demands that people can rally around.

But the British establishment wants Maastricht, the City of London wants it, as does the IMF, the international financial markets, the newspaper proprietors - all of them. And for the simple reason that it would make democratic social change much more difficult.
Why is the Major government against the Maastricht social chapter?

They are against it because they think it might possibly strengthen trade unions and workers' rights. But in reality the social chapter is a bit of a fraud. It's completely unenforceable, and it won't do what it's alleged in creating minimal standards of social welfare and workers' rights.

What will happen if the Danes vote against Maastricht in the coming referendum?

By voting against Maastricht last time the Danes put themselves at the heart of Europe, not as Major says outside of Europe. If they vote 'no' again, then Britain won't go in. And Kohl said just yesterday that he has to go ahead with a 'core' 10 countries. But it won't work, and there will have to be a big rethink. Then I think that proposals like my Commonwealth of Europe Bill will come into the fold. But it has to be said that the near-unanimity of the political leaders in Denmark in favour of Maastricht makes another 'no' vote a difficult task.

Do you think that the Maastricht treaty will be realised?

It's much more difficult now, to create the kind of capitalist economic and political unity they are looking for, because of the degree of the economic crisis. Harmonisation is very difficult when there are such disparities between east and west, and the interests of different groups of capitalists conflict.

But my worries is a failure of Maastricht, because of the way it has been done, could lead to a rise of reactionary nationalism. The French will blame that British for Hoover, the British will blame that French for Thatcher. Agriculture the Americans will blame the Europeans for subsidising the Airbus.

So we've also created an atmosphere of building a substraction of working class links in Europe, and it's really Europe for the future, an alternative to the reaction of right-wing forces.

It's been described as the building of a Fifth International, a common association of working people worldwide to confront the power of capital.

What do you think is the real meaning of 'Fortress Europe'?

The real intention of the people who founded the EC, like the people who founded NATO, was to prevent socialism spreading. That's what the EC was all about, and to defend capitalism, that's what NATO was all about.

Now that the war is over NATO is extending into what is called an 'outer area', and for capitalist Europe this is an attempt to restore the dominant position it had in relation to the colonies it lost during the two world wars.

What we're witnessing is 'Euro-nationalism' preparing to challenge the United States and Japan for world dominance. And this Euro-nationalism is not internationalism at all, it's the opposite.

If the EC is about defending capitalism, then why have the main social democratic parties in Europe all adopted such enthusiastic pro-EC policies?

It's well worth reflecting on this question. In my opinion it's because of the collapse of socialist confidence, and a collapse of understanding about what socialism means. Looks at Yeltsin; he was the secretary of the Moscow Communist Party, and now he's so far to the right of Thatcher he makes him look like a progressiv. The Socialist parties became career structures. You joined a Socialist party and got into power, you became a minister. Then you expelled dissidents, distanced yourself from struggle and hoped to establishment would accept you as one of the two ruling parties.

Nobody in these parties discusses capitalism any more, let alone socialism. I can understand the Labour leadership not discussing socialism, since they don't have the remotest idea what it is, but they think you're discussing capitalism and its crisis. But all they discuss is Major, Lamont and Hewitson.

So there's this huge vacuum. Socialism is about building a society on a moral basis, about internationalism and about democracy. And those three ideas have a universal validity throughout human history.

But these values have been totally neglicted, so there's a gap which is filled by trying to strengthen capitalism, while calling it 'a more humane society'. It isn't at all. It's the same as always been, throwing workers on the floor and allowing the privileged and rich elite to run things.

What can be done to turn around the present difficult situation for the working class and socialism?

The first thing is to re-establish the socialist tradition of debate, argument and education. The media in Britain is under serious discussion, it's all in terms of personal abuse and sound bites. The first thing to do is to get people asking basic questions again - why are we in war, and why are we unemployed? Why does every family in this country spend £30 a week on weapons before they pay the rent? Why? Once you ask this basic question, you're halfway to a socialist analysis, and that's how socialism started in the first place - as a critique of the existing order.

Now everyone knows the working class has changed in this country, and internationally. Of course there are no longer 700,000 coal miners going underground. But this idea that because the occupational structure of the working class has changed, there's no hope for socialism, as Marxism Today used to say before it went bust, is an absolute illusion.

Two hundred years ago the working class were agricultural labourers. Then they became industrial workers, like the people in the shabby towns in the third world today.

Then many became employed in small businesses, in high-tech industries like computers and so on, but they're still working class. Because the definition of working class is where you get your income from; do own things or do you work? And by that definition the working class is very much alive.

But the situation of the working class is difficult today because the debt chains have been added to unemployment. Becoming unemployed can be a real personal catastrophe because, unlike the 1930s, you can lose your house and savings.

So people are worried about challenging the boss. There's a real groundswell of anger, but it's partly frozen by fear. And it's denied an outlet, because the leadership of socialist parties have stopped talking about any alternative - except 'let's give us a chance to run things'.

We'll see now what will happen in Australia, where the Hawke and Keating labour governments have simply been running capitalism in a Yeltsin-like way. Probably they won't be re-elected, and no wonder. Indeed what is the hope for working people if the only choice is between Thatcher and Kinnock?

Indeed, obliterating hope is the worst thing you can do, because that is the seedbed of fascism. And we've seen a very disturbing growth in the far right in Europe as a consequence of this.

So the left has to fill the vacuum with argument, analysis, historical understanding and future perspectives, which can win support from a wide range of people.

But still, coming back to Maastricht, isn't there a problem about outlining a socialist alternative to it? The left can identify the undemocratic and deflationary character of the Maastricht process, but what do we propose?

That's right. A negative criticism on its own is inadequate, because we don't want a capitalist Britain living outside a capitalist Europe, we want a socialist Britain in a socialist Europe. That means you've got to have a much stronger socialist association across Europe and the world, and that's why I'm fighting for this idea of a Fifth International.

But honestly if you're going to recover Britain from its current state, you have to have public ownership, planning, a more egalitarian tax system, a totally different system.

Why did you become a socialist?

My Dad was a Labour MP. I was brought up in a socialist home, I joined the Labour Party on my 17th birthday. I campaigned for Labour on the ship's troops in the last war, campaigned in 1945 and was elected to Parliament in 1955. So I've been an MP for 43 years, and a member of the Labour executive since 1959. And I was a government minister for 11 years.

Everything I've learned in this period has deepened my understanding of the nature of capitalism, and made me want to change it. It's not fundamentally a theoretical matter, it's a question of whose side you're on when the going gets rough - do you want to support people in struggle? It's about an understanding of history and perspective for the future.

And it's also about right and wrong as a guide to political behaviour. It's wrong that people are underground because that we waste money on weapons, that we have a war that may seem simplistic, but it's actually quite a revolutionary idea in contemporary politics. It's also about democracy and a world perspective.

The exciting thing is since last October when the pit dispute was announced we've seen the most tremendous political campaign, and that's what has to change. The problem is the lack of leadership given by the Labour and trade union matter, it's a question of numbers of meetings, so people won't give up and sit at home watching Inspector Morse. I try to encourage people to continue the struggle - that's my function in life.

Maastricht: The Crisis of European Integration

Interviews with Tony Benn MP and Peter Gowan (New Left Review editorial board) and an article by Dave Packer

Price £1.50 plus 50p p&p

Send to: Socialist Outlook, PO Box 1109, London N4 2LU
The rise and fall of the Black Panthers

Bitter Grain – Huey Newton and the Black Panther Party

Written by Michael Newton
Published by Holloway House, £3.50.
Reviewed by Paul Clarke

MALCOLM X had a phenomenon effect on the consciousness of Black America, but it was not until after his death that the ideas of Black Power began to take organisational shape.

The slogan of ‘Black Power’ was coined by Stealoy Carmichael, in the mid-1960s. The leader of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, working in the racist deep south.

The moves to form an organisation inspired by the ideas of Black Power took shape following the Watts, Los Angeles, riots of August 1965. Watts burned for six days; 35 people were killed and thousands arrested.

In the ferment of black politics which followed, a group of young black leaders came forward in Southern California to form the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense, which rapidly became the most prominent, most notorious, black nationalist organisation.

Because of their militancy, the Panthers were an easy target. The party was smashed up through state paramilitary violence, many of its members being murdered.

fast for the schoolkids of the ghettos. From the start the Panthers were targeted by the state, and especially the FBI under J. Edgar Hoover. Because of their militancy, the Panthers were an easy target. The party was smashed up through state paramilitary violence, many of its members being murdered in so-called ‘shootouts’ with the cops.

The very un-militant state of the black movement in the US today, with dozens of black politicians co-opted into becoming mayors and getting positions in the Democratic Party, is part of the legacy of the crushing of the Panthers and the other black nationalist organisations twenty years ago.

This book is a timely reminder of the period of the civil rights movement, and the era of militant struggle for Black Power.

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Analysing Yugoslavia’s agony

The destruction of Yugoslavia – Tracking the Break-Up

Written by Branka Magas
Published by Verso £12.95.
Reviewed by Ben Wolfe

A NEW Serbian offensive is under way in eastern Bosnia, with the familiar flight of starving refugees, the destruction of villages, random murders – the whole panoply of ethnic cleansing.

This is not the end-game of the Yugoslav tragedy. New horrors await in the majority ethnically-Albanian province of Kosovo, which will be the next arena of the Great Serb offensive.

That this should have been the fate of Yugoslavia, which until recently was the non-capitalist state in eastern and central Europe, emerged out of a genuine popular revolution, has largely been a mystery on the left.

Horror, and denunciation of all ‘reactionary nationalism’ has been the typical socialist response, while those of a more Stalinoid bent have, openly or otherwise, sympathised with the Serb forces of Milosevic and Karadzic.

More than any other writer on Yugoslavia, Branka Magas provides the basis of the Great Serb project from it very beginnings. The first chapter of her new book, writings from 1982-3, expose the nationalism and repression in Kosovo by the government in Belgrade. The cracking of the Yugoslav federation was prepared over a long period. Anyone who wants to understand the mechanisms by which the war was prepared, and made inevitable, will find Magas’ account the most illuminating available.

But more important than a chronological account is the political-theoretical understanding of the causes.

The multinational Yugoslav state emerged from the 20th century attempt by the South Slavs to create a viable federal state which would free them from the historic role of pawns of rival imperialist powers. At the end of the second world war, various figures in the international communist movement, most prominently the immensely prestigious Dimitrov, fixed the idea of a Balkan socialist federation, which would have included Bulgaria and maybe Romania.

Once this option was rejected by Stalin, the modern Yugoslav emerged as the best option, but as a state with non-Slav minorities, notably the Kosovo Albanians (perhaps 60 per cent of the Albanian nation) and the Macedonians. The national question was built in as a key question to be resolved.

However, a viable resolution of the national question, or more formally, the correct resolution of the national and democratic tasks of the revolution, depended on two conditions.

First, the creation of real equality between the nation- alities; second, the all-round development of the economy under the social hegemony of the working class, as the basic material precondition for national equality.

Bureaucratic rule in Yugoslavia is an example of a more general trend; once bureaucratic rules fall away, without a dynamic alternative available as an immediate political solution, then sections of the masses of the people, who have lost faith in the possibility of fulfilling their hopes in the nation, will look for a new, more all-embracing movement; the state apparatus that is the expression of national ideology; but recourse to nationalism by the masses can be a more or less rational option, depending on circumstances. In particular, when the nationalities of which they are part is under sustained, and even military, attack, defence of the nation is a precondition of survival.

Ex-Yugoslavia should teach us the ABC of the Leninist approach to the national question, namely that respect of national rights, up to and including self-determination, is obligatory for socialists. To denounce all nationalisms as equally reactionary is, in many conditions, to simply capitulate to national oppression; in the Yugoslav context it means to capitulate to the Great Serb project.

But Magas’ explicit support for western intervention is a major failing in this otherwise strong work. Sending in imperialist troops cannot possibly solve the crisis.

Writing during the first world war, Trotsky pointed out that there was no future for the South Slav peoples outside of a Balkan federation, which is practically viable only on a socialist basis. However, the road to federation today goes through the stage of independence for the different nationalities.

Whatever the horrors inflicted by the warriors of Greater Serb, historically it is a doomed project. There is and will be an independent Slovenia and Croatia. The Albanian people of Kosovo cannot be held down by force forever. Sooner or later Milosevic and his gang of ex-communist bureaucrats in Belgrade, will go.

The best contribution socialists can make to the eventual resolution of this tragic war is to fight for a lasting peace – a socialist federation in the Balkans – and that means the defeat of both the Great Serb project and reactionary forces in Croatia.

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Malcolm X

Directed by Spike Lee
Reviewed by Steve Smith

While welcoming the revival interest in one of the most famous revolutionaries to emerge in the post-war imperialist heartland, the arrival of Spike Lee’s long-awaited biopic Malcolm X should receive a cool response by socialists.

Something is clearly up when the Bill Clinton juggernaut is jostling around in his ‘X’ cap and when opportunistic entrepreneurs are making a quick buck selling Malcolm X crisps and Malcolm X car fresheners. Spike Lee’s film was begun with money from the Hollywood studio system and finished with the money of black America in Harlem.

The Maasi-influenced director, Jean-Luc Godard, is credited with that solid Marxist adage, ‘The economies of a film are the politics of a film.’ Malcolm X is a compromise between the commercial dictates of the Hollywood companies and the political misrepresentations of the black bourgeoisie.

Spike Lee has a reputation for being a political filmmaker. It is, for the most part, entirely undeserved. In fact, once the hype dies down, it is doubtful if he is any more of a radical than, say, Oprah Winfrey.

Mann X

The appearance of Lee’s Malcolm X can only be judged in a very particular socio-historical context. The modern political battle has been raging for years over the political legacy of Malcolm X.

At the same time, class divisions can be seen as the defining characteristics of the black community. Malcolm X has grown wider and wider. While General Colin Powell bombards Iraq with CNN broadcasts, alienated American youth, some blacks have grown wider and white.

Malcolm X’s legacy is the mass of blacks that are part of the capitalist system, a growing black bourgeoisie has been forced to its ideological limits. The uncompromising revolutionary spectre of Malcolm X haunting both white and black America has had to be condemned and normalized.

He has joined an iconography of ‘Great Afro-Americans’ – from whom a monolithic and classless black identity has been constructed. Boxer Joe Louis equals jazz singer Billie Holliday equals soul star Jackie Wilson equals Martin Luther King Jr equals Malcolm X equals the black bourgeoisie.

Spike Lee has made six films since he was a student. His first two, She’s Gotta Have It and School Daze had a fresh experimentalism and a praiseworthy (if awkward) attempt to sit through some difficult issues of sex, race, and, fleetingly, class.

On The Right Thing (1989) made Lee’s critical reputation and created his image as a black ‘enfant terrible’. It remains his only really satisfying film, employing dazzling Brechtian techniques to forecast the coming of last year’s LA riots.

But from then on, Lee’s celebrity status has had a direct effect on his output. Mo’ Better Blues (1990) was utterly incoherent, and Jungle Fever (1991) was, although technically better, displaying growing signs of a reactionary adherence to a vision of a family-based communal harmony among blacks.

Increasingly, black feminists have grown more weary of Lee’s seamless procession of wooden gunlight-coloured female characters who have betrayed the initial promise of She’s Gotta Have It’s Nora Daling.

Epic

Malcolm X, judged purely on film-making technique, is quite possibly the worst of all his output. Lacking any real dramatic electricity, the characters are flat and the script is bland, over-literal and ponderous. This is mainly due to the ‘epic’ style that Lee chose for the film (his inspirations were Dr Zhivago and Lawrence of Arabia).

But of course the film will be judged on far wider considerations than its technical merits. The legacy of Malcolm X’s life is inspirational enough to guarantee this, despite Lee’s untimely passing.

It is for this reason that black British youth (and white youth who have benefitted from an anti-racist cultural environment) will flock to see this film and respond warmly to it.

But it is the responsibility of socialists to respond more critically, and with just liberal ‘radical chic’ praise for Spike Lee. In fact, black radical socialists have been doing this for a long time now.

The hype over the funding of the film, largely obscured an earlier row. This erupted around vociferous criticism from American inner-city activists like Amiri Baraka, who was quoted as saying ‘we will not be Malcolm X’s slaves tossed to make middle-class Negroes sleep easier.’

Malcolm X’s work has been perceptively debunked by Paul Gilroy (author of There Ain’t No Black in the Union Jack), who has accused him of a middle-class colonisation, or ‘parasitism’ of working class style and art forms, eg the hip-hop culture.

Gilroy makes the crucial point that black America is increasingly fragmenting into two parts – a small middle-class that encounters prejudice in its competition with whites for a few professional job opportunities, and a permanent ‘workless’ underclass for whom racism past or present is secondary to the institutionalised effects of multiple economic disadvantage.

Gilroy concludes that the corpus of Lee’s work ‘projects a neo-nationalist ideology that mystifies the volatile relationship between the two groups. The active opposition between them is thus dissolved in a dew-eyed representation of kin, blood and communal harmony’.

Lee’s films have become progressively more and more devoid of any clear representation of class dynamics. This is remarkable given the condition of the black American working class and Lee’s role as the foremost black American film-maker.

Malcolm X carries on in this classless vein. In dealing with political themes, the film is utterly vague and unchallenging.

Malcolm X’s more famous speeches are concentrated on, but there is no context and no analysis of his impact on political trends inside the rapidly developing black political movements of the time. The absolute basics are related, his abandonment of black separatism, his continuing adherence to the legitimacy of revolution ary violence and a vague nod to CIA involvement in his assassination. No other political ideas or movements trouble the narrative.

To socialists, the last year of Malcolm’s life remains a fascinating study in his thought, particularly his embrace of political alliances and concepts containing an in-built anti-capitalist dynamic. Malcolm even began a dialogue with American Fourth Internationalists, recounted by the Trotskyist, George Breitman, in his book The Last Year of Malcolm X.

But the last year in Lee’s film portrays him as increasingly bewildered and fatalistic victim. Vom from the certainties of the Nation of Islam, Malcolm has only sparks of the old dynamism and leads a shadowy group of followers.

Instead of developing his own distinctive ideology of militant resistance, he is shown sleep-walking towards his assassination. It is clear by this point that Lee has lost all interest in Malcolm’s life – the only destiny that can be entertained is to be shot and revered as a cultural icon.

This vacuous portrayal of Malcolm has been defended many times by Lee with a reference to rebellionism – there are many Malcolm X’s. I made the film I wanted to make’ His Malcolm X is a commodity for mass appeal that perfectly complements his range of ‘X’ caps and jackets.

Of course, it is better that the ‘kids are wearing X’ paraphernalia rather than the elaborate problems of pro-Republican stars like Arnie Schwarzenegger and Steven Seagal. The fallout from the film will be highly complex it will lead many to devour the autobiography.

But the final chapter of Malcolm X’s life and the true significance of his legacy can only be fully understood with reference to a class analysis. Spike Lee is on record as saying that Malcolm’s message ‘does not exclude the middle class’.

Spike’s message certainly doesn’t - in fact it is repackaged to make them, in Barack’s words, sleep easier. It is up to socialists to cut through the hype and teach some real history.
Burning need for socialism as Rome fiddles

200,000 people marched through Rome on February 28 in protest at austerity and the shocking corruption scandals which have rocked the whole political establishment, and even implicated some members of the former Communist PDS.

The Rome demo was one more sign of the potential for struggle against the Europe being put in place by the Maastricht process – the European Union of 300 million unemployed, the Europe of growing racism and fascism, the Europe of economic crisis and austerity. This potential has now been revealed in a series of struggles across Europe last autumn, starting with a wave of protest in Italy, going on to the massive demonstrations in Britain and culminating in the huge mobilisations of over one million people against racism in Germany.

However, in the next few days we are likely to see the right sweep back to power in France. If they do, a huge programme of privatisation and Thatcherisation faces that country. And despite big anti-racist mobilisations, the threat of racism and fascism still hangs across the continent.

despite continuing struggles, the left and the workers movement in most European countries finds itself on the defensive; and whole sections of the left have been disorientated and even demoralised by the collapse of the ex-Soviet Union.

In the face of this, moves are afoot to organise a European conference of the anti-capitalist left, to debate the way forward in the struggle for an alternative to the crisis of capitalist Europe. The conference is planned for Paris on the weekend of 12/13 June. Signatories to the appeal for the conference already include leaders of the Party of Communist Refoundation in Italy, the Workers Commissions in Spain, the German Party of Democratic Socialism and the Greens.

It is expected that several thousand activists from across the continent will attend the conference.

Commitment to issues Socialist Outlook will publish details of the Appeal for the conference, as well as details of the conference agenda and travel from Britain.
Polish workers’ new solidarity rocks Walesa

By Jan Sylwestrowicz

The end of 1992 and beginning of 1993 have witnessed a significant upturn in social struggles in Poland. A spirit of protest is fast enveloping the country; still uncoordinated and fragmented, but extremely dynamic and already producing major developments.

For the first time since the move towards capitalist restoration began in 1989, the question being asked in the mass media – and above all, on the streets – is not only “how long will this process take?” but “will it survive?”

The first important element of this protest movement was the all-out strike by miners in mid-December, which rapidly became a virtual general strike in the southern region of Silesia, the most important centre of Polish industry.

The miners’ strike was spontaneous. Solidarity, currently one of three main labour federations, had been bypassed and marginalised during the strikes of the summer and early autumn.

In an attempt to restore credibility, the national leadership of Solidarity threatened it would hold its own “protest actions” against the government’s economic policy, and finally called a token two-hour stoppage on December 14.

This weak-kneed tactic backfired on the labour bureaucracy: when the two hours were over, the Silesian miners simply refused to return to work.

The miners were soon joined by other sections of Silesian workers – by the railworkers in particular. This meant that, as temperatures began to drop in Poland, the country’s predominantly coal-fired power stations looked to be grinding to a halt.

Nationalised

The miners’ demands symbolise an important change in labour struggles in Poland. The emphasis of the strike was on saving the nationalised coal industry as a whole and on ending the discriminatory tax policies of the government – which destroys the state sector financially so it can then be sold off for next to nothing.

The Silesian strike was the biggest in Poland since the collapse of the old Stalinist regime and its impact was politically significant. For a time, it even seemed possible that the government would fall, but it was saved by the Solidarity union bureaucracy, who managed to retain leadership of the strike at a national level (mainly thanks to the goodwill of the other pit unions).

The miners finally went back to work on the basis of a selfout deal that offers little more than empty assurances of noble intentions on the government’s side. However, rank-and-file opposition to ending the strike was strong, and many pits only returned to work to maintain unity when it became clear that others were going back.

This has had two important results for the union movement. First, pressure from the rank and file has produced cracks in the bureaucracy of both Solidarity and the OFZZ (the former “official” union federation under the Stalinists), both of which are in the process of concluding a nationwide “social pact” with the government.

The second effect may be of much greater significance. The sudden by Solidarity has given the impetus to a move to form a new national union federation – a clearily militant program.

Combative

Moves to set up some form of interaction coordinating structure began during the summer strikes. Now, the most combative sections of all three major federations, particularly in Silesia, are declaring their will to break with their respective bureaucracies.

At a meeting attended by 12 unions, six accepted the idea of a new “independent” federation, while six gave initial support. The first six include the whole Silesian region of Solidarity-40 (mostlly mines, steel and auto) and the old OPZZ miners’ union, the train drivers, two smaller Solidarity unions and the most militant of the farmers’ unions.

Together they would have a membership of some 700,000. Along with the other six unions that have yet ratified the agreement, the new federation would bring together around 1,500,000 workers.

This would mark a big change in the composition of the Polish union movement – and a very positive one.

Independent

A powerful and independent federation committed to a fightback against pro-capitalist policies – one lacking the stigma of previous links with the Stalinist regime (like the OPZZ) or with the country’s present anti-worker government (like Solidarity) – would rapidly become an enormous pole of attraction for workers across Poland.

Meanwhile, strikes and protest action are continuing at varying intensity in other parts of Poland.

Alone inside the growing industrial struggles is a burgeoning political movement, in particular growing demands for referenda.

A draconian law banning abortion is now going through Poland’s parliament.

At present, there is no statutory provision for referenda in Poland, but a human rights bill being discussed in parliament (and sponsored by President Walesa himself) would mandate the government to call a referendum when one is demanded by 500,000 citizens.

In the space of one month, pro-choice campaigners collected over 1,500,000 signatures on a petition for a referendum on abortion.

Whatever the final outcome, the referendum campaign has for the first time built up an organised and united pro-choice movement in Poland, which is a huge advance. Referendum committees exist in almost all towns and city districts, and a national conference is planned for early March to structure the movement nationwide.

Abortion is only one element here. At the end of December, parliament re-introduced censorship, adopting a law that says the media must “respect Christian values”. Parliament is about to give the government the power to rule by decree.

Hard right offensive

The extreme right is also organising. Since the beginning of January, the most reactionary parties not represented in the ruling coalition have been holding a campaign of demonstrations against Walesa and the government, culminating in a “protest march” to the presidential palace on January 3.

The danger of these forces acquiring a stronger following is very real. In the context and feeling betrayed by their former leaders, large sections of society, especially the impoverished middle class – could move to support the call for a “strong, no-nonsense” government of the extreme right (with the unspoken support of the Polish Catholic hierarchy).

The present situation cannot go on much longer. The pro-capitalist forces will have to launch a serious offensive to crush working-class and popular resistance.

At some point, this will necessitate the imposition of a much more severe form of authoritarian government – most probably outright dictatorship.

To prevent this scenario from becoming reality, what is needed is a united workers’ movement in defence of their own interests – in particular, in defence of democracy and the nationalised economy.

The miners’ struggle is so far has been the ideological and political significance of the miners’ movement at this time.
UNITA steps up Angola terror campaign

by Bala Kumar

ONE MILLION Angolans face starvation as a senseless war tears their country apart.

A second round of United Nations mediated peace talks between UNITA and the MPLA foundered even before they began when UNITA didn’t turn up.

Sending off at least 160,000 have died and thousands face immediate death as a result of UNITA’s aggression. FNLA troops loyal to the imperialist regime.

Presently South Africa is actively helping UNITA (see Socialist Outlook 57). Their forces are also backed by Zaire’s troops loyal to the imperialist regime.

When free elections the MPLA won the parliamentary ballot with 56% of the vote, a triumph of the people of the province of Huambo.

The conflict, however, is of symbolic importance to UNITA’s authoritarian leader, Jonas Savimbi, who is home to the Angolanzas who Savimbi claims to represent. But UNITA’s strategy is more sophisticated.

Oil and diamonds

It aims to secure control of the vital oil and diamond mines in the north and in the east. The US multinational Gulf Oil is the major player in the oil producing areas, while South African multinationals and the US firm De Beers control the diamond industry.

As Angola relies almost exclusively on these two minerals, nothing short of the paralysis of the economy is sought.

UNITA cannot hope to permanently occupy these areas. These moves are intended to strengthen its bargaining power in its quest for state power.

Over a year ago The Guardian’s Victoria Brittain warned that UNITA was making preparations for war in the run up to the September elections.

Backers

Even then Savimbi enjoyed the support of Western governments, particularly the Bush administration. Lauded by Washington as an ‘anti-communist warrior’, Savimbi was awarded US$30 million a year in covert military and financial aid for at least the last decade.

The South African Defence Force fought alongside UNITA until it was trounced at Cuito Cuanavale in 1988. This defeat by Cuban and Angolan troops rocked the apartheid regime.

LAST MONTH’s conference of the Military Council decided to generalise the ‘Scottish turn’, which has involved the Irish from the Labour Party and a policy of standing ‘Scottish Militant Labour’ about a mandate against official Labour.

The turn means that Militant will now declare itself to be an open political party, with a generalised policy of standing against Labour. The party will be formally declared at a Wembley rally on 6 June; ‘Militant Labour Party’ is hotly tipped as the new name.

Militant has been in political turmoil over the last two years, the turn resulted in a split with Socialist Appeal, which involves well known former Militant leaders like Ted Grant and Alan Woods.

Membership crumbled from a mid-1980s high of around 8,000 during the heyday of the Liverpool council and Poll Tax struggles, to not more than 1,500 last autumn – some have said dues paying membership was down to 250.

Militant have adopted an audacious ploy to break out of the post-Poll Tax campaign period of split and decline, namely the decision to launch the Public Sector Alliance.

The party declaration hopes to capitalise on Militant’s efforts to make the Alliance the dominant campaigning organisation against the attack on the public sector.

Defend Kate Magee

KATE MAGEE, an Irish woman living in Derby, is fighting back after her horrific experiences under the provisions of the racist Prevention of Terrorism Act.

Kate was detained on 14 April as a result of the killing of an army recruiting officer in Derby the previous day. Her son was put into care against her wishes, and she was not allowed to communicate with him for six days. The six-year-old was eventually released into the custody of her sister.

After nine days incommunicado detention, Kate was charged under the PTA with “failure to disclose information”, and under ordinary law with “impeding the arrest or prosecution of person or persons unknown”.

Her brother was named by police as wanted for questioning in connection with the killing, which was claimed by the Irish National Liberation Army.

Her own legal representatives have since arrested the Irish Gardaí in Limerick, where he is being held, and is contesting attempts to extradite him to Britain.

Kate was moved to Durham prison and strip-searched on many occasions, even after a visit from an Irish embassy representative.

She was allowed telephone calls only on conditions she did not reveal where she was. It was sixteen days after her arrest before an Irish prisoner’s welfare organisation discovered her whereabouts.

After 75 days she was given restricted bail on two sureties of £10,000 each and instructions to report to the police three times every day. The most serious charge has now been dropped.

On her return, Kate discovered her home had been ripped to pieces, with all the pipes pulled out and doors kicked in.

A number of trade unions, trade union branches are supporting Kate’s campaign, as are Irish organisations such as the Irish in Britain Representation Group, the Repeal the PTA Campaign and the PTA Research and Welfare Association.

Affiliations/massages of support/limitations to Kate Magee Support Group, PO Box 156, Derby DE1 9NB

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Yes, count me in!
Burnsall strikers scent victory

By Bob Smith

On the picket line for nine months, the Burnsall strikers, mainly Punjabi women, now appear to be on the verge of a breakthrough.

Burnsall customers Jaguar and Rover are apparently responding to labour movement pressure and withdrawing work from the Smithwick electropolishing factory. Meanwhile, a series of 53 industrial tribunals for unlawful deductions, equal pay and victimisation are coming up, piling financial pressure on the ruthless O'Neill family, who have been condemned by their own Irish community. This should soon ensure that they will be forced into a settlement with the GMB, the strikers' union, or face insolvency.

The strikers' demands are for: equal pay (currently the workers are paid £120 min. with women only receiving £90); health and safety—adequate ventilation and protective clothing, clean toilets and canteen facilities; an adequate wage; no forced overtime (was 65 hours, seven day week); a proper contract of employment; guaranteed basic rights and no victimisation, with workers being treated with respect and dignity. Hopefully this dispute can inspire other workers suffering such indignities and degradation at the hands of revanchist employers.

Burnsall is not unique, there are many similar companies operating in the Birmingham area, indeed all over the country. The strikers' main concern now is the GMB full time officials who have been somewhat constrained by the imagined legal restraints upon them. Their concern with staying within the trade union laws has prevented initiatives being taken.

The resilience of the strikers, especially the women who face vile abuse, mental and physical, is an inspiration. Certainly this struggle is key in convincing the black community and other oppressed groups that a struggle can be effectively fought with their own communities' backing and labour movement support.

Delegations from Houghton Main pit camp, Sheffield WAPC coaches from London and supporters from other areas will be joining the Birmingham labour movement in a rally at the picket on Tuesday March 9 to celebrate International Women's Day.

A social for the Burnsall strikers and Trentham WAPC will take place on Friday March 26th at the New Birmingham Trade Union Club, 723 Pershore Road, Entrance £2 with Banner Theatre, Dawbery Firkin, and the Kitchen Girls.

Messages of support and requests for speakers c/o GMB, Will Thorne House, 2 Birmingham Road, Hasbrouck, West Midlands. There is now a London Support Group which can be reached c/o London, Instrument House, 205-217 Kings Cross Road, WC1 9DB

Bus jobs sell-out

By a London busworker

London Transport (LT) is on the brink of inflicting a major defeat on 12,000 busworkers. Having already put out to tender the more profitable routes, the government has now withdrawn the subsidy given to all other routes, forcing LT to cut costs on these routes by approximately 20 per cent.

New contracts

The immediate result of this for the workforce has been the introduction of new employment contracts, with 20 per cent lower wages, 20 per cent longer hours and a worsening of other conditions. Workers were given until February 28 to sign or be sacked. A TGWU ballot for strike action on February 19 gave a 2:1 majority in favour of action but no action was arranged, even after the deadline of the 28th had passed. Even now, there is only a possibility of a token one-day strike.

No intention

It is clear that the union bureaucracy has never had any intention of fighting this attack. Their actions from the beginning have shown that defending their members' rights is the last thing on their minds.

Waited

They deliberately waited until individual members had been placed in the invidious position of choosing whether to sign or be sacked before the union took any action. Rank and file busworkers have shown that they are willing to fight back against the attacks being made. Now they must organise to push the union leadership into supporting them before its too late.

Anti-witch hunt mood grows

By Terry Conway

THE ONLY highlight of a dull weekend at Greater London Labour Party Conference on March 6-7 was the close call on the anti-witch hunt motion from Lambeth Women's Council.

While a stronger motion opposing all witch hunts moved by Peckham women's group was defeated by 4 to 1, the Lambeth motion, calling for a review of the NCC, for the action taken against the Lambeth 15 to be reversed and for the outstanding charges to be dropped, was lost narrowly on a hand vote after a lively debate.

The ensuing card vote was lost with 205,000 votes for and 377,500 votes against with support from RMT, MSF and NCU.

It was further interesting that many right wingers voted positively for the motion—perhaps a sign that they are now being led up with the antics of the Labour Co-ordinating Committee.

Such a margin, given the strong instructions from union leadership to vote against, represents the fact that genuine opposition to the leader-

Apology

SOCIALIST OUTLOOK regrets that an editorial blunder in production resulted in our article on the Stirling NALGO strike in the last issue failing to mention the leading role played by Debbie Whitfield as chair of the Stirling NAGS branch. Our apologies to her.

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Tories’ secret strike fears revealed

1.5% pay limit – No way!

THE TORIES are expecting widespread industrial action against the 1.5 per cent pay norm this spring, leaked Whitehall documents revealed this week. Let’s give them all they bargain for, and then some.

Details of a memo, drawn up by senior officials servicing a cabinet committee on pay which is chaired by former energy secretary Lord Wakeham, appeared in The Guardian this week.

Miners and firefighters are seen as “high risk”. Making the 1.5 per cent limit stick in the pits “threatens to be difficult... given the background of pit closure and privatisation issues”.

A relatively generous pay formula for firefighters, conceded after industrial action in the late seventies, will almost certainly be axed this year. The Fire Brigades Union has pledged to strike in its defence.

Railworkers and nuclear power workers are
graded “medium risk”. Council manual workers and airport and prison staff may also go on strike in the next six months, the document predicts.

NALGO, the white-collar local government union, is seen as possessing “the ability to organise effective selective strike action”. The union has called a day of action for March 18.