Tories in crisis
Don’t wait for Kinnock!

Just seven months after the Tories got rid of Thatcher, just a couple of months after saying the Poll Tax will go, the Tories are in deep crisis again.

Not only are Labour 10 points ahead in the opinion polls, but the Tories are beset by a deep recession, rocketing unemployment and a new faction-fight with Thatcher and Ridley over Europe.

Unlike the early 1980s unemployment is hitting deep in the Tories’ southern heartlands. NHS cuts are deeply unpopular. Even small businesses are complaining about the exorbitant interest rates being charged by the banks. Many Tory MPs are beginning to confess that the game is up, and they will probably lose the next election.

The Tories never had majority support from the electorate in all their 13 years in office. Their difficulties will be greeted with glee by millions. But, faced with the new attack of unemployment, wage restraint, huge cuts in the NHS and local government, the answer is not to sit back and wait for action from an increasingly complacent Kinnock.

Though he is basking in the reflected glory of a new anti-Tory mood in the electorate, it is quite clear that if Kinnock is elected he will do nothing to reverse the Tories’ worst measures – including privatisation or the cuts in public services. The ‘new model’ Labour Party offers nothing new. Its leaders have learned nothing and forgotten nothing from the failures and betrayal of the Wilson governments of the 1960s and 1970s. Resistance has to be built now.

The lessons of the early 1980s, when the unions did little to resist unemployment, have to be learnt. The labour movement must raise the demands for work sharing with no loss of pay, for a shorter working week, and occupations to resist closures. Waiting for Kinnock will not stop the effects of the recession pushing unemployment up to 3.5 million, and making deep inroads in living standards.
Fighting mood at NALGO conference

By Eve Turner (Ealing NALGO) and Doug Thorpe (Islington)

Last week’s NALGO conference showed a rising anger at public services and a growing resolve of the NEC to use national campaigning to defeat them. On several important issues, for example defiance of the trade union laws, the 2000 delegates inflicted crushing defeats on the National Executive (NEC). But the NEC held the line against the left, and the NEC’s national strike action to defend local government and the NHS.

After five years of job losses among local government manual workers, white collar workers face massive cutbacks. Already thousands of jobs have been lost, mainly through voluntary redundancy and redeployment. In the next five years up to 30 per cent of local government workers face the sack.

On the first day of conference, a resolution from Ealing local government branch calling for government legislation to defend the cuts was defeated by 37 to 2. The NEC was able to caricature this resolution as calling for one ‘big bang’ strike that would ‘be based on no lead from the NEC, and branches having to fight in isolation, many delegates doubted their ability to deliver a strike across the board.

But the disquiet of delegates was reflected in the adoption of the call for a national meeting of local government delegates in London. This adopted the NEC’s national strategy for fighting the cuts will be reviewed. A national demonstration on this issue was also decided.

During the conference the government announced plans to privatise the majority of local government services. This was denounced by NALGO members. The complacency of the NEC was shown by its failure to mention this fact until Islington branch demonstrated.

Whether or not NALGO’s leadership really intends to fight this attack remains to be seen.

Resolutions for national strike action against NHS cuts also fell, but a day of national solidarity with the sacked 34 Oldham hospital record clerks won support by 575, as well as a national demonstration against attacks on the NHS.

Manchester branch’s resolution was spent on the proposed merger of the NEA and CoSRE. Many delegates, supported by the left, expressed concern at the merger. A new union would retain NALGO’s relatively open and democratic structure, including branch autonomy and financing. Twenty-eight amendments to the NEC’s document were passed to ensure democracy in the new union.

The NEC got a shock when a resolution which had been revealed a huge majority to consider the Tories anti-union laws in Liverpool. NALGO’s executive introduced the Liverpool branch not to go on a one-day strike after the council got an injunction against branch secretary Judy Cotter. Although the NEC’s instruction was ignored by Liverpool branch, the conference went on its way to endorse the NEC action. The implication of the vote is that NALGO will continue to fight the anti-union laws in such cases. This is the most radical position on the anti-union laws adopted by any union.

The strength of radicalism in NALGO was also shown by the resolution passed on Palestine, calling for economic sanctions against Britain for ignoring UN resolutions on Palestinian rights. Throughout the conference strong support was shown for the struggle of council workers in Liverpool and for workers like those in Oldham defending attacks on the NHS.

This summer NALGO faces a tough battle on local government pay. The employers have offered 6.1 per cent, way below the 12 per cent or 9/33 mini- mum demanded by NALGO. Negotiations on 10 July are unlikely to see much movement from the employers. If national strike action on pay becomes necessary it will be a hard fight. The NEC will do everything it can to negotiate a compromise of about 7 per cent to hand it off.

On many social and international issues NALGO is way to the left of other unions, and much of the union takes a militant stand on issues of pay, cuts and redundancies. But NALGO’s powerful left has yet to translate this radicalism into an effective fight for leadership of the union, or into the kind of action which would really defend jobs and services.

For that, the left needs to build a fighting unity. Currently this is prevented by the fractious actions of the SWP which controls the bloodily named Broad Left. The main Broad Left meeting of the conference was turned into a forum for denouncing people for being in the Labour Party. The SWP’s November patch to seize control of the Broad Left followed several years of battles with Militant, who also used it as a front organisation. It remains to be seen whether Militant have really learnt the lessons of this type of front politics.

NALGO needs a democratic fighting left which really organises against the right wing, and fights to win leadership. Strathclyde branch has called a national meeting of branches to debate a fightback against cuts, and this should be supported. But NALGO needs a permanent democratic left organisation.

During the conference 100 copies of Socialist Outlook were given away, a fringe meeting organised by the paper. 50 supporters helped to organise successful fringe meetings on the campaign against third world debt, and against anti-union laws.

Building workers fight bosses’ union

By Alan Thornett

BATTLES continue in the construction industry following the explosion of the right wing in UCATT, the building workers union, and a swing to the left in elections for the union executive.

Following the victory of the left, a dozen new local UCATT branches, including several national officials, have left the union. They are now running the union as a confederation of federations, with the membership running them. Initial moves to take them into the General and Municipal Workers union, the GMB, came to nothing after right wing defectors joined Eric Hammond’s EETPU. Hammond announced that the union intended to create a construction section and begin to recruit in the industry.

The prospect of a new union intervening in the industry, in which it is traditionally hard to organise, has put paid to UCATT’s leadership. The danger of Hammond striking deals with employers of the type now notorious from the engineering and printing industries is all too clear.

The construction union’s leaders have now set out to build a ‘unity alliance’ with other building industry unions to counter the threat of the EETPU. UCATT chairperson Peter Lennon said ‘we are trying to bring all construction unions together to protect our agreements and the rights of building workers everywhere’.

The alliance, backed by a number of NEC-based unions, including TGWU and the furniture and timber workers (FATU), launched a new drive among workers at the EETPU at the Seftonfield nuclear plant was thwarted. Both the company refused to reverse its policy and the union was refused to recognise the breakaway.
Confronting Kinnockism in Liverpool

After a lot of soul-searching the Militant-backed Liverpool Broad Left is standing its own candidate, Lesley Mahmood, against Neil Kinnock in Walton. The responsibility for there being two 'Labour' candidates in Walton lies entirely with the Kinnock camp nationally and locally.

Liverpool has been the city which has put up the biggest fight against the destruction of local government jobs and services. Kilfoyle is the local witch-finder general, hand-in-hand with the Haslam-Rimmer council leadership, in devastating local services and driving socialists out of the Labour Party. Large sections of the local community and workforce see it as an insult that a person like Kilfoyle is the 'official' Labour candidate in Eric Heffer's seat.

Socialist Outlook did not condemn the Broad Left for standing local council candidate against improved Labour candidates. But we warned that standing in the by-election would be full of risks and dangers for the left.

In the local elections the Broad Left was trying to change the balance of forces on the council against Rimmer and his mafia. But this by-election is a national political event. The Tories are in deep crisis; millions of people want the earliest opportunity to drive them out. Many workers, even those who hate Kinnockism and all its works, will vote for the 'official' Labour candidate to ensure that the Lib Dems don’t win the seat. Standing Lesley Mahmood risks splitting the Labour vote and allowing the Liberals in.

There are other risks. The Mahmood candidacy has made it certain that a gigantic witch-hunt will be unleashed in Liverpool and elsewhere. Should the Liberals win, it will be incredibly difficult to resist this witch hunt.

The Broad Left has a significant base in Liverpool, but not nationally - they are not a credible national political alternative. Standing in the by-election, a national political event, gives a signal that they regard themselves as a national political alternative.

Despite our reservations about the Mahmood candidacy, we place the blame for there being two candidates on Kinnock and the right wing. We will defend Lesley Mahmood and her supporters against the right wing witch-hunters. But we think this candidacy is a mistake; it blows up in the Broad Left’s face, then the whole of the Labour left will pay the price.

Unlike some others on the left, we do not regard it as a matter of principle to always support ‘official’ Labour candidates. It is a question of tactics.

Kilfoyle is a vicious witch-hunter; but that makes him no better or worse than hundreds of Labour candidates in other constituencies who are routinely given (critical) support by Marxists in elections.

In this case it is seen that a Labour vote is a class vote. By backing the Party against the Tories, we create better conditions to take the fight to social list alternative into the official Labour movement by putting a Labour government into office and focussing workers’ demands upon it.

The same logic applies to Liverpool Walton. The key task is to push the fight against the witch hunt deep into the trade unions and Labour Party, not to evade this fight by engaging in a diversionary candidacy.

Socialists for Labour

IT LOOKS as if the election will now be in 1992, but the campaign is well under way. Major calculators the Tories have no chance of winning this year and are hoping against hope that the economy will turn round by next June. It is probably a forlorn hope. Despite getting rid of the poll tax and Margaret Thatcher, Labour’s lead in the polls is building.

Iyer there was an opinion poll lead built by default, this is it. The official leadership of the Labour Party and the labour movement in general have put up nil fight against the Tory attacks. They promise no significant reforms if they come to power, with the sole exception of a national minimum wage. They do not intend to reverse the ‘Thatcher revolution’ of privatisation and cuts in benefits and services to workers. A Kinnock government will be the most right wing Labour government ever.

For all that Kinnock offers nothing to the working class, a Labour victory in the next election is vital. Three terms of Tory rule have done grave damage to the labour movement and its ability to defend working class interests.

While a Kinnock victory won’t automatically mean an immediate working class fightback, it will create a completely new mood of expectation and self-confidence. Conflict between a Kinnock government and the base of the labour movement would break out in short order.

Socialists have to do what they can to ensure a Labour victory, and prepare, here and now, to maximise on the new mood of combativeity it would create. Socialists have to use the long election campaign to put forward their own policies and proposals, to maximise the opposition to Kinnockism in the unions and the Labour Party. For this reason Labour Party Socialists has launched Socialists for Labour as a socialist campaign for a Labour victory. Socialist Outlook encourages its readers to build this campaign as broadly as possible.

*Copies of the 'Socialists for Labour' statement and sponsorship forms can be obtained from 1 Gorgeshield House, Canterbury Rd., London NW6 5TA.

Whose victory?

AFTER the grotesque chest-beating 'victory' parades in Washington and New York, London is being treated, this weekend, to its own dose of imperial flag-waving. The whole affair is sick. The aftermath of the Gulf war can only be regarded as a victory by a political system devoid of civilised values.

What exactly is the balance-sheet of the Gulf war? Iraq is devastated, and its people facing hunger and disease. Saddam Hussein is still in power, ready to unleash a new murderous onslaught on the Kurds and Shias, as Western troops pull out. Hundreds of thousands have died in this obscene spectacle of high-tech butchery. That is a victory only for those steeped in racist imperial ideology, for people who give thanks for the safety of Western multinational corporations and the poverty and suffering of millions.

At the end of the Gulf war, the US military entertained itself by slaughtering tens of thousands of Iraqi conscripts as they fled Kuwait. Cluster-bombed, napalmed, fuel-air bombed, they - like tens of thousands of civilians in the war - suffered terrifying, cruel deaths to demonstrate America's might. The Kurds, the Iraqis and Palestinians in Kuwait are still suffering.

So when you see this sick celebration on TV, remember what is being glorified. Not just war, but the morality of the big stick, the morality of racism, the morality of those who want to keep the third world in bondage.

*Details of events protesting the victory parade are on page 14.
Tory reform threat to colleges

John Major recently announced the Tories’ plans for the most far-reaching changes in post-school education for many years. Starting in 1993 the distinction between polytechnics, colleges of higher education and universities is to go. Colleges of further education will, like polytechnics, be restructured in the same way as universities were in 1989, be removed from local authority control and funded centrally.

Polytechnics are clearly seen by the Tories as the model for the whole post-school sector. CIVIL ANDREWS looks at how this massive restructuring has affected the poly sector, particularly since 1989, and shows what the Tories’ latest plans will really mean for college education as a whole.

The most obvious feature of the last decade has been the escalating attack on staff and student conditions. Student to staff ratios have risen on average from 1.1 in 1981/82 to 1.24 in 1986/87. Now they are much higher and getting worse.

Brighton Poly claims that its ratio will have to rise from the current 1.15 to 1 over 20 to 1 in the mid 1990s in order to balance the books. It has £17 million deficit by 1995 unless staffing levels are cut by a third. It is already cutting part-time staff and lecturers on fixed-term contracts.

The cause of the crisis? The system of competitive bidding for funds introduced in the Education Reform Act (1989). Polytechnics are funded for courses on a basis of running them cheaply. At Oxford Poly some lecture courses now have over 400 students.

Employers have responded by trying to impose new contracts on teaching staff. This led to two industrial disputes last year. While the result may not be as good as the first, it still allows for significant increases in teaching loads. Meanwhile the threat of competitive tendering is constant and is being used against cleaning, catering and caretaking staff.

Polys are being privatised from the inside. The shortfall in government funding is made up increasingy from students being assessed on a fee-paying basis, from Britain and abroad.

Staff who recruit these students are in effect running private educational businesses within polytechnics. They obtain large fees for themselves and negotiate deals with the college for use of facilities and for having the college’s name on their courses. Almost always a portion of external funds is often a factor in new staff appraisal schemes.

The door is open for polytechnics to become diversified businesses. Property dealing is becoming increasingly popular. One of the highest profile deals is Thames Poly is the Property Manager. As the Times reported, with its ‘Feast competitive’ institutions in London it sells off the latter’s buildings. This was attempted with South West London College but stopped by the Polytechnics to Colleges Funding Council (PCCF). Instead the PCCF has been forced to Eject competition and make 200 staff facing redundancy.

Predictably outside activities which are critical of corporate interests are not favoured highly. Researchers at Sunderland and Polytechnic of Wales are forced to give up running an investigation into working conditions at Nissan’s North East plant. Peter Wickens, Director of Nissan, is a member of the poly’s board of governors.

Any fightback in the poly will have to take on not just the cuts, but the ‘ambitious’ nature in the nature of polytechnics. Institutions have been forced to cut costs and compete against one another. In this way they present a picture of the loss of the health service and for the rest of the welfare system and it is not a pretty one.

Hypocrisy of ‘equal opportunities’

Like all aspects of post-compulsory education, Return-to-Study (RTS) and Access courses are under financial and ideological attack from the Tories. DEE VOLIN explains what this means in practice — particularly for women who make up the majority of RTS/access students.

ACCESS courses enable mature students, without academic qualifications, to gain the skills and confidence to embark on a degree course. In the late 1980s they were hailed as the ‘ultimate in equal opportunities’. The reality of such claims has melted quickly in the heat of the Tory onslaught.

Centralisation of all adult courses is now underway. The London Open College Federation (LOCF), part of the National Open College Network, has been set up to certify courses ranging from basic literacy and numeracy to A-level equivalents.

This process of centralisation has parallels with the National Curriculum in schools. It operates to control and restrict subject matter. It also occupies teachers with administrative paper work, and so leaves little time to develop course content and teaching methods that can challenge traditional assumptions on race, gender and class.

Transferable credits from the LOCF mean that students can move from one college to another in the region. With the abolition of the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA) many hundreds of courses have applied for certification with the LOCF. Administrators and course directors realise that money follows students.

To be uncertified by the LOCF will soon mean certain course closure. Because Local Education Authorities (LEAs) are not legally mandated to provide post-compulsory education, this sector has already been subjected to devastating cuts. Nursery and creche provision has also been cut massively. As many of the women who attend RTS/Access courses also have children, this only serves to further restrict their ‘access’. Many women with young children are now forced to postpone their Access/degree places until the children are in school.

Further restrictions are made through the rising cost of such courses. Since 1989 fees have risen from £220 (1989) to £420 (1990) per cent for unwaged people. Changes in DSE regulations regarding what constitutes ‘actively seeking work’ have also restricted the number of people able to study. An increasing number of students struggle to find part-time work to get them through courses. Many now have to postpone their degree courses, hoping that after a period of full-time work they will have enough money to study. With rising unemployment many will be disappointed.

The hypocrisy of ‘equal opportunity’ Access courses is stark. It masks the exploitation of part-time women staff, the closure of outreach, education and advice centres, and falling enrolment figures. It hides the slashing of childcare provision, escalating fees, and the centralisation of adult education that results in a myriad of direct and indirect cuts.

The left has to move beyond the rhetoric of ‘widening access to education’. What is needed is a coherent national campaigning policy. This has to take up the issue of student financial support. But fundamentally it has to recognise that students, teaching staff and their communities need effective control over course funding and curriculum, and not centralised elites.
Preparing for battle on health rationing

By Harry Sloan

'We have to accept that the NHS cannot cope with demands for free health care.'

'A realist assessment of the world as it is shows that people with various chronic illnesses stay on the waiting list for ever in the hope that their condition will improve. Is it ethical to promise them a service which will never be delivered?'

'The question is not whether we ration services, but the priorities in the health service, but who does it...'

'The problem is about the age-old right to claim that health care is a 'bottomless pit' which can never be properly resourced. Is it Health Secretary William Waldegrave? A heartless NHS manager? No, it is the lead article in the April issue of the Socialist Health Association's journal, Socialism and Health, written by 'trendy' freelance health policy researcher Christine Hogg.

Thatchersism

It shows how far the nostrums of the Thatcherite right have penetrated the outer reaches of the labour movement.

Many SHA members will have been unpleasantly surprised by the last spending years battling the 'bottomless pit' argument. Those who have socialists has to argue against Thatcher and the right wing that demand for health care is manageable - and capable of being adequately resourced. A finite number of people suffer from a finite range of illnesses which require a measurable amount of appointments and hospital beds, but that does not mean that the health service is not in desperate need of reform - which LABour governments - and Labour governments - to allocate the necessary resources.

Most of Europe shows that where health spending is given a greater share of GNP than Britain, it is not necessary to have a waiting list: they have bridged the 'bottomless pit', and their economies have certainly not collapsed as a result.

New realism

Ms Hogg, however, is part of a 'new realist' movement among health academics. Her article followed on the controversial decision of North Thames Regional Health Authority (NETHA) (which covers 3.5m people) that a list of five 'minor' operations would no longer be provided under the NHS.

The NETHA announcement provoked a storm of outrage. Even the Guardian, which broke the news editorialised in protest. The threat of a two-tier health service - with a comprehensive and up-to-date service available only to the wealthy, with skill short service for the rest of us - was obviously beginning to become a reality.

The message was clear: if you live in NE Thames and suffer from a 'minor' condition - need wisdom teeth extracted, suffer from diabetes, develop 'dilapidant' lumps, want IVF fertility treatment or need tattoos removed you would have only two choices: go private, or go without.

How did Ms Hogg respond?

A pilot project in Oregon, USA along these lines, urging the general public to vote on health 'priorities' produced some frightening results.

Privatisation

For Socialism and Health to allow itself to slide into debates on how best to ration health care, rather than how to plan the development of services to meet demands, will offer comfort and delight only to the theorists of the extreme right - whose real interests lie in reducing the NHS to a skid row supplement to a privatised American-style system.

What is more worrying is that these concessions take place even as the likelihood of a Labour government increases. Socialists could well wind up fighting these arguments for rationing under Labour as some of us did in the 1970s. Already we can see Kinnock adumbrating that increased public spending will come only from economic growth, while Shadow Chancellor John Smith insists there will be 'no dash for growth' once they take office.

Focal point

The NHS could well be an early focal point of conflict between an expectant electorate and the timid conservationism of a Kinnock government.

Instead of cutting back the aspirations of the labour movement and restricting the debate to ways in which we share our inadequate resources for health care, the left must elaborate and win support for a comprehensive package of demands to be made of a Labour government.

This should begin with a 60 billion cash injection to reverse ten years of cuts and closures, with the reopening of closed wards and services in acute hospitals and a major investment in community care services for the elderly and people with mental illness.

It should lead on to a planned expansion and democratisation of the NHS. The S7 opt-out Trusts must be disbandition and public trust, and the use of private contractors abolished.

Elected authorities

As an interim measure towards an elected structure to plan and run all health services, local councils should take over responsibility for the purchasing of health care. The policy commitment to the NHS has been made unmistakably clear in the last few years: a fighting policy outlined by the Labour move-ment could turn this into electoral defeat for the Tories and a real rallying point for pressure on a Kinnock government.

Prepared for battle on health rationing

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World order

Yeltsin Boost

Boris Yeltsin’s campaign to become the joint President of the Soviet Union received a powerful boost with his victory in the June 12 elections for the President of Russia. Despite four years from Pravda and other Communist newspapers, Yeltsin’s victory was a convincing one. Conservative candidates won less than a third of his districts, and the people in the US’s strongest republic will now put Yeltsin in a powerful position in the approaching negotiations over the new union treaty.

Mikhail Gorbachev will now have to concede a considerable margin of power to his rival. As he tries to persuade the West to provide a new programme of Marshall Aid in return for marketisation, Yeltsin is a danger to all competitors. While his consistent record of support for radical marketisation, as well as control over a large slice of the USSR’s resources, Boris Yeltsin will prove to be an attractive leader to whom to negotiate.

But the success of the Yeltsin-led group is likely to regret his prediction that the state of the Soviet economy will begin to improve by the end of next year.

Pope greeted by strikes

THE RECENT visit of the Pope to his native Poland saw numerous papal masses, as well as attacks by the Pope on abortion rights. ‘Thou shalt not kill’ he said — with a sense of irony, perhaps, given the record of Catholicism over the centuries.

However, the Pope’s celebrations were far from the only ‘mass action’ taking place in Poland. During his visit, reports of papal statements were interspersed with frequent strike reports. As workers in eastern Europe, consciousness of the dangers of privatisation is spreading.

Solidarnosc leaders in Bydgoszcz declared a strike alert... and urged the union to extend the action ‘to the whole of Poland’. In Szczecin, workers went on strike demanding full compensation for price increases.

 Strikes have increasingly taken up political demands — in Tarnow, union leaders warned that ‘they would not allow the union to be ignored’, while in Jasko workers walked out in protest at the government’s ‘arrogant attitude’. Air traffic controllers threatened action, calling for wage parity with their western counterparts — a rise of over 1,000%.

Premier Lech Walesa’s response was swift: a threat to put the air traffic controllers under military discipline, and an appeal to union leaders to stop all ‘illegal strikes’.

GIs face death penalty

AMERICAN GIs who refused to serve in the Gulf war continue to face repressions, and in some cases, the death penalty. Eighteen of the war resisters are now incarcerated in US military prisons for up to two years.

Two of the resisters are Jones— one of the most prominent in the campaign against the war— who has been threatened with the death penalty. After turning himself in on May 15, Jones was charged with ‘desertion in time of war’ without warning.

Jones is one of three faced with this threat — of an estimated 2,500 GIs who resisted participation in Operation Desert Storm. It is now quite clear that those singled out for the harshest treatment are those who were vocal in their opposition to the US war drive. The penalties are entirely unrelated to the ‘gravity of the action taken’.

Anti-war activists in the US have been mobilising in defence of the ‘conscientious objection’ demonstrators, in an attempt to counter the consistent denial of the GIs’s rights by the military authorities. Recent protests have included a letter signed by 33 Catholic bishops supporting not only ‘religious’ conscientious objections, but all those opposed to ‘unjust war’.

Two years after Tiananmen — the fight goes on

by Zhang Kai

Two years after the 1989 democracy movement, repression from the Chinese authorities continues to meet underground resistance.

According to official sources, more than 750 people have now been tried for their participation in the Democracy Movement. 72 were charged with plotting to destabilise the government. But claims that the trials have ‘basically finished’ — a part of the regime’s attempt to con- close the whole movement to the history books — are not true.

Pro-democracy activists continue to face harassment. In Beijing, where anti-government posters and leaflets have appeared frequently, students have set up underground organisations on campus. Liu Yeliun, a student at the People’s University, has recently been arrested for publishing the reformist journal Democratic Discus-

In addition, students from four colleges in Beijing have signed a statement pledging continued resistance. And in Shang- hai, China’s first human rights organisation has been detained. But two of the organisers, Gu Bin and Yang Zhou, have been detained as a result.

The continued repression not only led to the stability predicted by Chen Li, a major critic of Liu Peng. Even China’s Finance Min-

ister was forced to admit that the economy had deteriorated to ‘a very grave situation’, with a real budget deficit in 1990 of nearly $10 billion.

Passive resistance from workers has contributed to a decline in business — in both debtiness increased by over 120% in 1990. Crime has also increased.

Government austerity has led to unforeseen unemployment, prompting appeals for action from the usually docile All China Federation of Trade Unions. The workers’ resistance have emerged. Zhou Ming, a Hong Kong-based journalist,

reports over 42,000 cases of sabotage and resistance in industrial and trading enterprises in 1990. In addition, a number of autonomous workers’ organisations were dis-

covered and strikes were reported.

Such reports, along with the unprecedented actions of the official trade unions, suggest both greater and level of resistance to the regime than had been previously suspected. In this context, Li Peng’s protestations of social and economic stability look like a bid to hold on power. Some have suggested that the premier may soon face a factional struggle for power.

Li Peng’s recent appointment of two supporters as Prime Ministers look like an attempt to bolster his position. He justified this move on the grounds that they were ‘firm and un-

equivocal in their position on the economy and held strong the counter-revolutionary riot in 1991’. It is clear that dissent within the party continues.

Government and economic crises are accumulating in China. The Democracy Movement has been crushed by repression, but the anti-systemic voice can appear in the facade of Li Peng’s regime.

Czechoslovakia — increase in Nazi violence

by Slavyna and

Adam Novak

POLICE recently attacked a demonstration against the General Exhibition in Czechoslovakia, and arrested two young anarchists after an argument. Many of the young demonstrators were injured.

The police were called to the scene by the organisers of the exhibition, keen to get rid of these trouble some demonstrators.

The demonstrators saw the exhibition as an expensive shop-window display of the new Czechoslovakia — but the emperor has no clothes.

This demonstration of around a hundred school students and young workers was called by Prague anarchist groups. They reject propaganda in favour of the restoration of capitalism, as well as the current, pathetic attempt to attract foreign capital.

Further demonstration, protecting against police violence as well as the Exhibition, was called a week later. The protesters also demanded the withdrawal of all charges against those arrested a week earlier.

The vast majority had respected the organisers advice: don’t come armed, don’t give the cops any excuses! But any hope of a peaceful rally disappeared after a few minutes. 150 skinheads armed with beer bottles and batons charged at the demonstrators in what was clearly an organised assault. They dis- persed in panic. Large numbers were injured. The police, normally all in evidence on anarchist demonstrations were late in turning out this time. When they did, they aimed straight for the anarchists, arresting quite a number.

Even Jiří Exner, deputy mayor of Prague, said that he’d seen such a thing two years ago. I’d have concluded that the skinheads were paid by the police. The police took this role of the police confirms a tendency that has been building up of late.

This involves ignoring racist, anti-gay and anti-left skinheads, while victimising anarchist groups.

Allowing the skinheads to attack these largely inexperienced young people is intended to give a clear

message to the left that any such group going beyond small discussion meetings will be stopped. The police are acting as a fascist police force, employing the unemployed, the left, lesbians and gay men, ap-

partachnics.

The young anarchists need to draw the conclusions from these attacks and engage in a policy of self-

The left also needs to defend the anarchists’ right, and by extension their own right, to demonstrate their views in the face of a rise in the far right and police brutality.
**International News**

**Outlook**

**We are trying to organise a workers’ party throughout Kurdistan**

The Kurdish national struggle has achieved considerable progress in recent months. But as the refugee crisis gradually fades from the public eye, the Kurds continue to be a dispossessed people.

Patrick Baker of Socialist Outlook asked SEFYI CENGIZ of the Kurdistan Communist Movement how the struggle for national liberation could be organised.

Patrick Baker: Imperialism allowed Saddam’s regime to break the Kurdish uprising, though the peshmergas still control some of that area. What effect has this had on the Kurdish struggle in Iraq?

Sefyi Cengiz: Let me explain imperialism’s attitude towards the Kurdish question and the latest uprising. In the past it tried to use the Kurds against Iraqis and to draw the Kurdish people away from the Soviet Union, unlike the Shah’s Iran or Turkey.

They only supported the Kurds with the wish of weakening Saddam, and bringing him closer to the West. Neither Turkey nor Germany want any kind of ‘Kurdish solution’ — whether a federation or autonomy — because they’re frightened it would be an example to the Kurds in the region.

During the war, the US tried to use the Kurds as a threat, to get the Ba’ath regime and the army to oust Saddam. They wanted a movement from above, not below. But the Kurds took Bush at his word. The US then let them be defeated — when no military coup occurred, the defeated Saddam found help to the Kurds.

So Saddam has restored his regime. Are the Kurds more or less controlled by Saddam today?

SC: The Iraqi Kurds have gained nothing from this defeat. Their level of organisation has not improved, and their morale is low. The situation is now completely under Saddam’s control. The fate of the Kurds is in their hands.

Both the KDP and the PUK, the main components of the Iraqi Kurdish Front, are bourgeois parties; they do not rely on the masses of Kurdish or the revolutionary forces. They always try to use one government against another — whether it’s Iran against Iraq or the US against Saddam. This is why they supported the West in the Gulf war.

PB: So what is the significance of the talks between Barzani and Saddam?

SC: Saddam has said that he has recognised Kurdish autonomy since 1970 — and he said that no talks of autonomy or agreement appears to be oil — whether Kirkuk is to be included in the autonomous region or not.

The talks will not lead to any real autonomy. Saddam is only negotiating because he is still in a relatively weak position. There have been many previous peace talks between the two sides — when they are weak, they promise something.

PB: Can the defeat of the rise have on the struggle in Turkey, after Ocalan’s reforms and the recent struggles against his regime?

SC: An uprising began spontaneously in Turkish Kurdistan but it was immediately suppressed in the war, independently of the plans of the PKK or anyone else. This rising continued and spread until the Newroz festival on 21 March.

The effect was considerable. Commercial traffic throughout the area was disrupted, and shops had to close down.

But the rising died away when the Iraqi rebellion was defeated, and was put down by Turkish troops. The last town to fall to the troops was Suleymanci, on April 4. The Kurds in Turkey were left with nothing but their bazaar imperialism, after the US sat back and allowed Saddam to massacre the Kurds in Iraq.

PB: How do the Kurds go forward from here? Do the reforms offered by Ocalan and Saddam offer a solution?

SC: The problem is that the perspective of both the PKK and the KDP is always limited to the current state boundaries. Thus Taksimde appealed to Ocalan for support for autonomy in Iraq, while Ocalan was suppressing the Kurdish uprising in Turkey.

But this method — always appealing for agreement on a reform of the status quo through autonomy or federations — gets nowhere. Each state will always play off one group of Kurds against another.

The only possibility of a solution lies in independence and unification, and this requires a strategy which aims at the overthrow of the present status quo throughout the region.

Kurdish Communist Movement as the first Kurdish marxist organisation which aims to organise across the whole of the nation, though it is currently based mainly in Turkey.

We came out of a split in 1980 of the autonomous organisation. The Struggle, which waged the first guerilla struggle against the Kurdish state in the early 1980s. We are trying to organise a workers party throughout Kurdistan, to prevent the ‘divide and rule’ which has blocked our struggle in the past.

For more information about the KCM contact: Sefyi Cengiz, 10 West 6 St, London, W1N 5S.

**The unknown intifahad**

**by Pinar Selinoy**

**SINCE THE GULF WAR THE plight of the Kurds has become internationalised. After a year before the war the Kurds in Turkey had been in revolt against president Turgut Ozal’s government in their own ‘schi’em uprising.** This explains why Ozal’s government was so brutal in its treatment of the Iraqi Kurds seeking refuge from Saddam, refusing to let them down from the freezing mountains and interrupting supplies destined for them.

It is fundamental to the ideology of the Turkish state that the Kurds in Turkey are ‘mountain Turks’, who speak a ‘Turkish-based’ — and thus not officially exist. In response to decades of repression, the Kurdish Workers Party (PKK) waged a struggle against the Turkish state in 1984.

**Independence**

Their aim was to liberate the Kurds from imperialism and colonialism in the name of Turkish unity and independent Kurdistan.

The government then tried to isolate the PKK through a system of ‘village guards’, whereby villagers were paid to act as informers against the PKK and those who helped them.

In villages where no one would do this, people were tortured and murdered and deaths blamed on the PKK separatists. As the PKK continued to grow, the government responded with special counterinsurgency squads, who murdered, raped, exiled the villages, and intimidated the villagers.

When it went on growing, villagers were forced out of their homes altogether, and faced to make the harsh winters in make-shift tents.

March 1990 marked the turning point — the struggle was brought from the mountainous to the towns.

Thousands marched in defiance of police blockades. Shops and businesses closed in protest. The government’s response was the ‘Censorship and Exile’ law, aimed at isolating the Kurds by preventing communications with the outside world.

By 1991 the government could no longer deny it had lost. The constant round of protest and repression reached its climax with the open celebrations of the Newroz, the Kurdish new year, on March 21. Tens of thousands openly celebrated this banned festival. Then suddenly Ozal made an about-face and decided to open negotiations with the PKK.

His motive is clear. He is keen to promote Turkey in the ‘new order’ as a second Israel, promoting US interests. But he has also decided to act as ‘protector’ of the helpless Kurds.

**Constitution**

This break with tradition caused considerable confusion amongst the government party, ANAP, and the opposition. But in meeting Talatcan’s Parliaementary Union of Kurds (PUK) and Barzani’s Iraqi Kurdistcan Democratic Party (KDP), Ozal had a purpose. He wanted to marginalise the PKK and to cover his back, should the Kurdish struggle prove successful.

Another important step in the ‘new order’ was the promise of linguistic and cultural freedom, provoking a storm of opposition from Turkish politicians, and a wave of excitement among the Kur-
dish people. But though the most extreme law repressing use of the Kurdish language has been repealed, others remain. Ozal clearly has fur-

**Torturers**

Time allowed for intifadah without access to defence or trial has been extended, giving free reign to a police state that is the law. Another aspect of the reforms is the release of thousands of prisoners — 3,000 of whom were sentenced on political charges. But PKK members, among others, are excluded.

The Gulf war was convenient for the Turkish bourgeoisie, providing an excuse for a clampdown. A ban on strikes was declared, and miners were forced back to work. Thousands of workers were sacked, including striking strike leaders, and replaced by newly-hired workers at lesser wages.

But no sooner did the war end than action began, with airline and petrochemical workers leading the way. Miners were threatened with loss of the ‘right’ to strike. But the intensity of the movements in January in the Zonguldak region are fresh in their minds as a symbol not of defeat, but potential power.

Ozal’s rhetoric may have changed, but for Turkish and Kur-
dish workers, the ‘new order’ is the same as the old. Villagers continue to be thrown off their land, torture remains rampant, and police still beat strikers.

DR. HAMAD: A Kurdish guerrilla

**No. 4** June 22, 1991 Page 7
Lesbians, gay men and the law

‘Will we be legal?’

Twenty years after the first Lesbian and Gay Pride march in Britain and the beginning of the lesbian and gay liberation movement, full legal equality for lesbians and gay men is a distinct possibility. This would be the first positive change in the law since the 1967 Act partially decriminalised male homosexuality.

PETER PURTON, Socialist Outlook supporter and activist in the Labour Campaign for Lesbian and Gay Rights (LCLGR), explains both the possibilities opened up by and the limitations of legal reform.

IF LABOUR forms the next government it is likely, thanks to the work of LCLGR, that we will at least see the outlawing of discrimination on grounds of homosexuality, the repeal of Section 28, and a free vote on the age of consent, with government backing for full equality.

While this will represent a victory for those who have fought long and lonely battles on this issue, it will not in itself bring about the end of oppression. There are those who believe that the law is the source of lesbian and gay oppression and, conversely, those on the left who argue that changing the law will alter nothing, are both wrong. An effective fight for lesbian and gay liberation needs to understand that fighting for law reform is very important – but it is not sufficient.

Laws which oppress lesbians and gay men serve a number of functions. Behaviour that is legal for heterosexuals is criminalised. Lesbians and gay men are discriminated against in services, rights as parents, rights as partners, and in many other ways. But oppression also serves to maintain the ideology that homosexuality is inferior to heterosexuality – heterosexism.

1967 Act

The 1967 Act helped create the possibility for campaigning publicly and openly for our rights. But it left intact the public policy of the state that homosexuality was still inferior and in many cases illegal. If one positive result was a partial lifting of the hideous consequences of total illegality, one negative result was that many more people have been dragged before the courts under the remaining provisions of the Sexual Offences Acts. This happened again when the Torrington finally extended the 67 Act to Scotland and the North of Ireland.

Section 28 is a classic example of how the law functions. Whilst not all of the worst fears of sections of the Stop the Clause campaign have been realised, it is wrong to conclude that Section 28 didn’t matter, or that its repeal is irrelevant.

As LCLGR repeatedly pointed out at the time, there are two disastrous effects. Local authorities have abandoned equality initiatives, censoring themselves for fear of challenging the law. The deliberate reaffirmation by the Section that lesbian and gay relationships are ‘preferred’ was part of a concerted ideological offensive by the Tories to re-assert their social values.

In the same process they legitimised the targeting of lesbians and gay men for prejudice, ridicule, discrimination and violent assault. The renewed rate of murderous attacks in 1989 bears witness to that. So does the continuing popular prejudice against lesbians and, particularly, gay men as the cause of the ‘AIDS’ plague.

The repeal of these discriminatory laws will have dramatic benefits. First will be the immediate material gains. Gay men will no longer risk imprisonment for having sexual relationships. Lesbians and gay men will be able to take employers to tribunals for harassment or discriminatory sacking. Homosexual couples will obtain the same rights as heterosexuals. Lesbian mothers will not be denied their children on grounds of sexuality. Local authorities will be able to pursue equality policies.

Equality

In order to implement such changes, a government must publicly assert that there is no basis for discrimination – that lesbians and gay men are equal citizens. This will undermine the belief that we are not, and remove one of the central props of prejudice. Full legal equality creates a precondition for full social equality. But only as a possibility.

The state has removed legal discrimination in France, in the Netherlands and elsewhere. But there still remains massive social discrimination, negative portrayal, and violent attacks. The campaign to change laws on grounds of race or sex. This doesn’t stop the fact that racism is rampant and sexism still runs deep. However, this does not mean that these are merely questions of the inevitable length of time it takes to change popular consciousness.

Heterosexism is not just a foil of some lawmaker. It is not a hangover from some historical accident. Nor is it merely ignorant prejudice which could be resolved by a little rational discussion. Heterosexism is the expression of the way society is organised around a family structure, essential to capitalism, and consequently a society of compulsory heterosexuality.

Oppression is deeply rooted and the ruling class will defend it vigorously. To change it means challenging society. The privileged status of the family and the inferior status of lesbian and gay relations have to be ended. The human capacity for genuine sexual choice has to be freed.

Such changes – by no means an overnight transformation – are part of a socialist revolution. Neither parliamentary enactment nor legislation decree will end the oppression of lesbians and gay men. However, while legal reform improves our chances of fighting oppression, the revolutionary victory of socialism will create the conditions for eliminating it.

Labour Must Deliver!

What needs to be done now is the fight for lesbian and gay liberation is clear. We have to organise the biggest possible pressure for legal reform on an incoming Labour government. In practice this means getting wide support for LCLGR’s Labour Must Deliver campaign.

Three things have to go hand in hand with this. Firstly, it is vital that a fighting resistance to all attacks is organised. Secondly, we have to continually counter-attack with demands for lesbian and gay equality. But finally, lesbians and gay men have to participate, in alliance with the working class and other oppressed groups in society, in struggles to end the rule of capital.

Campaign poster from Hong Kong

Page 8 June 22, 1991 No. 4
OUTLOOK
This is Section 28...

THE NOTORIOUS clause of the 1988 Local Government Act, prohibiting the 'intentional promotion of homosexuality', continues to affect the provision of a wide range of services in many parts of the country.

Often its effects are hidden and unspoken, taking the form of self-censorship by local government officers, teachers, social workers and others. Often Section 28 is not directly cited. It is clear, though, that it has influenced the general atmosphere in which lesbian and gay issues are discussed.

One case in point is that of the 1 in 10 youth group in Skelmersdale, Lancashire. The group is part of a network of youth groups which provide a much-needed service for young lesbians and gay men. It has been under sustained attack from Lancashire County Council since last October, with Section 28 used as justification.

The council has forbidden 1 in 10 and other lesbian and gay groups from publicising their activities. As well as stopping research projects, youth magazines and a visit by a German lesbian and gay youth group have been banned.

This is a story that is repeated all over the country and closely mirrored in the education system. In most cases those under attack don’t feel safe enough to appeal for public support, so the suppression continues in secret.

1 in 10 have had enough. They are preparing to fight back in the courts if necessary. If they get legal representation this could be an historic test case for Section 28. It is vital they get financial help and solidarity not just from lesbians and gay groups and individuals but from all over the labour movement. Already they have sold support from the recent conference of the Community and Youth Workers’ Union. Other trade union and Labour Party bodies should do the same.

Dani Ahrens

- Send protest letters to: Mrs Louise Elliott, Leader of the Council, County Council Offices, County Hall, Preston, Lancs. For information, model resolutions, etc., contact 1 in 10, Yewdale Centre, 300 Yewdale, Tanhouse, Skelmersdale, Lancs. Tel: 0695 25685. Please send them copies of protest letters.

Out but not down in the old Empire

ONE LITTLE MENTIONED legacy of the British Empire is the imposition of repressive legislation on homosexuality across the world. Nowhere is this more apparent than in South and South East Asia, where all British colonies include harsh measures in their penal codes prohibiting 'carnal intercourse against the order of nature', frequently punishable by life imprisonment and/or flogging. A secondary offence of 'gross indecency between men', in the words of the infamous Labouchere amendment of 1885, is usually included too. REBECCA FLEMMING investigates.

THE DRACONIAN LAWS in both the ex-colonies and the still-British colony of Hong Kong contrast with the lack of legal sanctions against homosexual activity in neighbouring states. Countries which were ruled by Holland, Spain and the US such as Indonesia and the Philippines, have no specific legislation.

The precise contents of the penal code do not, of course, determine the overall status of lesbians and gay men in a particular state. There is fierce police repression in Indonesia against the flourishing lesbian bar culture in Djakarta and the gay community, and general 'public morality' laws are utilised in the Philippines. In contrast, there has effectively been a decriminalisation of the law in India. Fledgling gay groups are developing in the major cities, particularly Bombay. Lesbians, active in the feminist movement for some time, are now also establishing their own organisation.

Failure

The failure of some imperialist powers to legislate on the matter does not mean they had an enlightened view on sexuality. Rather it is the British insistence on outlawing homosexual activity, wherever they planted the Union Jack, which must be explained.

In many cultures outside the industrialised West, the category of homosexual or lesbian had no meaning. Same-sex sexual activity was ever present, but occurred in the context of, and never excluded, a 'normal family life'.

Sexual relationships between same-sex males have been celebrated in verse and prose in the contemporary Japan and homosexual love in China had a long history... But there was no concept of the 'lesbian' as a category distinct from 'normal' person.

Thus the argument that homosexuality or lesbianism is a 'foreign' or 'white' problem, has a grain of truth within it, despite its reactionary intent. The development of lesbian and gay communities in South and South East Asia has been inextricably bound up with the intervention of Western powers. But the processes of economic change, urbanisation, the establishment of a sex industry, all played a central role in the development of lesbian and gay communities in big cities.

The key factor propelling the embryonic gay movement forward in countries such as Malaysia and Thailand (where 'sex tourism', including by gay men in particular prevails) is HIV and AIDS. The spread of the disease has spurred the communities into action.

Wider issues

Groups have been established in Thailand, Singapore and in Malaysia. The Malaysian Ministry of Health quietly supports the Pink Triangle group in the country, despite the complete illegality of all homosexual activity. The groups are now beginning to address wider issues of legal and social reform.

It is the issue of legal reform which has created controversy and campaigning in Hong Kong over recent years. Both the island's Feminist Association and the gay 10% Club have been working for a change in Hong Kong's vicious laws on homosexuality.

A Bill proposing the removal of criminal penalties relating to homosexual acts committed in private by consenting adult males and a gay age of consent at 21 is to be put to the Legislative Council later this month, and it is expected to be passed. The death penalty would remain however, even for cases involving men under 21, though the Bill adds that 'in normal circumstances, it is unlikely that proceedings would be taken'. It is unclear what the future of Hong Kong's substantial lesbian and gay community will be after the Chinese Government takes control in 1997.

The vast majority of these organisations are male, dealing with issues of central concern to gay men. A pattern generally found when lesbian and gay organisations are born, it changes as the groups grow and develop.

It is largely men who have the economic freedom to make sexual choices, and the social and political freedom to organise and campaign. The existence of a feminist movement, such as in India, makes a key difference to women's ability to come out and be active as lesbians.

Internationalism

All of this underlines the necessity for internationalism in the lesbian and gay movement in Britain, for solidarity with lesbians and gay men throughout the world. It is vital that this solidarity reaches outside the safe and well-defended boundaries of Western Europe and North America... Simply importantly the West should not impose its own preconceptions on these developing movements. The key to this is understanding their histories and struggles.
KEN LOACH is one of Britain's foremost film directors. His career spans such work as Kes and Cathy Come Home, onto the more recent Hidden Agenda. What links all his work is an unwavering commitment to socialism. With the release of Hidden Agenda on video, Sean Tunney and John Liston talked to him about his work and the ideas that lie behind them.

SO: Cathy Come Home was an agita-
tional film wasn't it, widely credited for helping to launch Shel-
ter?

Loach: It was there to make people angry rather than just upset. I did try to say that campaigning against homelessness did matter.

With Shelter, the two things were going side by side. There was a cam-
paign, which Jeremy Sandford who wrote it was part of, and they both led off each other.

It was very instructive as an illustra-
tion of what TV could do at the time. If there was a really popular programme the whole nation would watch. You were certainly speaking to twenty, maybe thirty million people. Also, TV was very innocent. We hadn't been saturated with images.

SO: Were there any attacks from the right on your new film, Cathy Come Home about the use of the drama-
documentary style?

Loach: Yes, the whole development of the Wednesday Play was to make films which did confuse people as to whether they were fact or fiction.

So they would take it as seriously as if it had been documentary.

That whole debate always arises when there is a disagreement about content. On Hidden Agenda when it all surfaced again, there was a leader in the Times, no less, attacking it as 'fiction'.

On the same week, the Claus Von Bulow film was released which was clearly a factual event recreated in fiction, and it did have a bad Time's film review. Yet of course, the leader didn't see the irony of this. Clearly, it is entirely politi-
cally motivated.

SO: Is there any correlation between the amount of left wing work that gets shown and the level of class struggle?

Loach: Yes, the time when you saw the documentary most clearly was in the early eighties.

When there was a great potential for fighting back and when TV was most in the grip of the idea that what was progressi-
ve was on the right. That was why it was very difficult to get commissions.

There were three or four wasted years. I was involved in making a documentary called Questions of Leadership which was about the Thatcher government and the opposition to it. And how the leaders of the trade union movement had failed to organise that resistance.

However, it would have been much more effective to do the two or two substan-
tial pieces of fiction which had a political purpose, but wouldn't have been quite so upfront politically, because the TV heads don't expect fiction to be balanced in quite the same mechanical way.

That's what screwed us. If I had been persistent enough I should have realised that the documentaries would never have been shown.

SO: Could you say more about the banning of Questions of Leadership?

Loach: I subjected the role of the trade union leaders to some criticism, and also tried to provide a coherent analysis in opposition to theirs. This is when the TV bureaucrats have a field day.

SO: After Questions of Leadership you returned to fiction with Fatherland.

Loach: The text for Fatherland by Trevor Griffiths was based on Milan Kundera. Both are very non-literal, whereas your work has a very straightforward approach.

Loach: Yes, the film just didn't work. Trevor Griffiths' way of working and mine are very different.

Also, we had the problem of doing half of it in German. Struggling to understand what people are saying when you are directing a film is a problem.

In addition Trevor's literary style meant that when his work was trans-
lated, we had the Germans saying to me that it didn't read right. I tried to get the language to emerge through their ex-
erience of the plot. But this does in-
evitably dig it towards what people call naturalism, or what you try and just make authentic and real.

Overall, the narrative was too con-
voluted and long. And too much had to be revealed at the end. It was too much to try and pull off, in retrospect. People didn't go to see it, which in the end is the ultimate test.

SO: Can you say more about the original text of Fatherland which was based around three sexual relationships. You cut all the sex scenes which formed the basis of the original and so made a very dif-
ferent film?

Loach: I always find those sort of scenes just embarrassing when you're shooting them because it's very intimate, and you are rather intrusive.

I guess it just needs someone who doesn't have that difficulty shooting it. And the man playing it didn't respond. I found it all rather mechanical. I'm sure it was my fault.

Heavy breathing scenes are not some-
thing I think I would do again. There is something tacky about it. There is some-
thing rather curious about doing that kind of thing at 8 in the morning. That's not to say I necessarily object to it in others' work, if it is done with con-

SO: You have been involved in the production, and therefore financ-
ing, of some of your films. Does it fea-
tual difficulty having to change the scripts for financial reasons?

Loach: Well, I'm hopeless at it, and that is why I can't get many films made.

Also I'm not taken seriously when I go into an office to try to raise some money. They don't recognise one of their own.

Also, part of the problem of raising money from different countries is that they always have to have an input. The original script of Hidden Agenda had a German female lead. But to get American money, she had to be American.

However, this means that the person that says the most right-on things is American, and this certainly did change the film. Being German in the original, for instance, gives her saying. That's how I think of it.

SO: What is the film's im-
pact?

Loach: Oddly enough, I think its impact has been much stronger abroad than here.

I'm still being called about it. It would never had that international impact if it had been, as originally planned, for TV.

It was backed by TV money but everyone turned it down. Channel 4 flirted with it but they never were serious.

SO: Finally, in order to reach a wider audience, have you any inter-
rest, say, in doing a left wing soap?

Loach: There are forms which do become self-defeating. I think the problem is that after a time, all the soap operas become about the same thing. However, I do think nar-
ration as a medium is very useful because it reaches a lot of people, people like others.

They always want to know what happens next. But I think it is dangerous if you wrap everything up. You have to leave it in the audiences lap in some way. And you have to leave the audience feel-
ing the possibility of their own strength, which is difficult to do.

"In Questions of Leadership I subjected the role of the trade union leaders to some criticism, and also tried to provide a coherent analysis in opposition to theirs. This is when the TV bureaucrats have a field day..."
Method axing

The Silence of the Lambs

Book: Written by Thomas Harris (Mandarin) £24.99
Film: Directed by Jonathan Demme

American Psycho

Written by Bret Easton Ellis (Picador) £6.99
Reviewed by Jodley Paton

Silence of the Lambs and American Psycho form part of the most controversial trend in American literature and film of recent years, that of the slash-killer thriller.

Silence of the Lambs is a battle of wits between Hannibal 'the Cannibal' Lecter (Anthony Hopkins), a 'sociopathic' psychopath locked up in a high-security asylum, and Clarice Starling (Jodie Foster) an FBI trainee. She needs the information he can give her to catch another serial killer, Buffalo Bill, before Bill kills again.

Not violent

Therefore it is the relationship between the two central characters which gives the film its tension and pace, rather than resorting to the high-speed car chases that usually dominate 'cop thrillers'.

The film is not violent, the three killings that we see are functional rather than sadistic, and filmed to show the minimum of gore.

Also, the acting of the main players is brilliant, the script well written and beautifully filmed, from the wide landscape shots to the close ups. All this would make Silence of the Lambs a film well worth seeing, but what takes it beyond that is the social questions woven into the main plot.

Sympathetic

Both book and film deal intelligently with the problems of women working in traditionally male environments. Starling challenges her boss, Crawford (Scott Glenn) over his sexist behaviour saying, 'It matters... Cops look at you to see how to act.'

Equally, the portrayal of Buffalo Bill's victims, using photographs and an autopsy scene, is sensitively handled and never gratuitous and never allowing the audience to treat them as anonyma.

Catherine Martin (Brooke Smith), Buffalo Bill's sixth victim, isn't a passive Hollywood stereotype either, overcoming fear and using her wits to try to save her own life. However, Clarice's compassion for, and anger on behalf of the victims is more clearly expressed in Harris's book.

In addition, the book deals with the hypocrisy of a 'system' which cares little if working class women are killed, but jumps to attention when the woman in danger is a senator's daughter. Unfortunately, the film hardly touches on this aspect of the plot. Similarly, although the FBI and SWAT teams come out of the film with little credibility, the critique of their bureaucracy, made in the book, is not translated onto the screen.

Transvestites

Despite many positive aspects, anyone concerned about the presentation of oppressed and minority groups will be uncomfortable with the portrayal of Buffalo Bill as a gay, transvestite, pseudo-transsexual.

The book puts forward a number of theories for Bill's behaviour, but never allows the reader to presume that it is connected with his sexuality. Unfortunately, the film reduces Bill's psyche to one scene in which the application of lipstick takes on chilling connotations and equating male sexuality outside of 'the norm' as dangerous. Transsexuals are very weakly defended by Starling's assertion that 'Transsexuals are passive types!'

Because psychopaths are outside society, beyond explanation or understanding, they are fascinating. Whereas more common violence is disturbing because its roots are more obviously within society, psychopaths are disturbing because it can be reduced to nature, god or innate evil.

Even speaking at domestic violence, Hollywood portrays the violent husband as some kind of madman, as in Sleeping With The Enemy, rather than admit that violence in the home is normality for large numbers of society.

Films about psychopaths tend not to throw up these contradictions and provide a scapegoat for everyone's fears and fantasies of violence.

What is interesting about American Psycho is that the position of the psychopath is used to analyse some of these contradictions.

Therefore, it caused a huge controversy when it came out in the US, with the scenes of violence, especially towards women being called pornographic.

Certainly, if those scenes alone were published they would be read by some for sexual gratification. This is not, though, the form in which they appear.

American Psycho is narrated by a yuppie (Patrick Basmian), giving a detailed description of his life, where he eats, what he wears and how he kills. It would make no sense for the horrific killings to be glossed over when we are treated to everything else in such detail.

The horror of American Psycho is that as long as Basman kills prostitutes and tramps nobody cares. The closest he comes to being caught is when he kills someone of his own social status. But he avoids detection, showing that with charm, manners, and class as long as it's the right class, you can literally get away with murder.

This book has no hero. Basmian is not caught, and the author's voice doesn't intervene to explain Basman's actions. But by putting Basmian in a real environment, Ellis forces the reader to examine society's values - a rare thing in a book about a psychopath.

For instance, has yuppie Brad bacal Basmian to believe that killing is acceptable because he enjoys it? Are his killings of the 'incapable' an extreme version of the hatred his friends have for beggars who encroach on their 'perfect' consumerist lifestyle?

American Psycho asks more questions than it answers, but at least it asks the questions that other books and films don't touch.

Putting the boot into the left?

G.B.H

Written by Alan Blesdale
Starring Robert Lindsay, Michael Palin and Julie Walters

Reviewed by Julia Stevens
Given Alan Blesdale's past form, one would have expected G.B.H to be yet again a savage indictment of the establishment as we saw in Boys from the Blackstuff.

The first two episodes, we have been treated to a gross distortion of the left. A lot of the time, the fragile Trotskyist activists indulge in acts of thuggery that even the state would think twice about.

All the hype and trumpeting surrounding this new seven part series is very disappointing.

Although the acting, direction and script were very professional, the whole premise of the story is an outrageous fabrication of the truth about the real organised left, so that it totally overshadowed any salient points that may conceivably be found in the plot.

In the battle of wits between the central characters, it is always the left that comes off looking like unscrupulous bastards, while the new realist right appear to be the reasonable, sensible people - the people who really want the best for everyone.

Jen Neilson (Michael Palin) gets a good deal of strong political dialogue:
Don't you ever dare suggest that what you're doing has anything to do with socialism, springs to mind as a statement. I would love to have the opportunity to throw at Kinnock (although it must be said that he rarely does suggest that these days). And Robert Lindsay as Michael Murray (the charismatic council leader) captures beautifully the not very-veiled threat.

'There was a time, when you impressed me - to a line I can still imagine Thatcher mumbling as she dispatched one of her many victims back to the backbenches. But Murray, apparently the only one with the people on his side, the one really fighting for new council housing, the one supporting the non-payment campaign, the one pushing for action against the Tory government. And Neilson is the in-active Labour Party member, who goes to work on a general day of action.

Even worse, we now meet Merlyn Sloan, the leader of a Trotskyist sect who has claimed Murray at their own. But they are pushing Murray into attacking the black and Asian community in the city in order to provoke a rethink.

'I would hate to be... dark-skinned myself in this racist society' says Sloan when Murray, to his credit, protests. But the ace up the sleeve for Sloan's group is their connections high up in the Labour Party apparatus, who know of Murray's small child and it seems they have no compunction in using this knowledge to force Murray into agreeing with their plans.

Before the first episode was screened, Blesdale vigorously defended his left credentials, and claimed that G.B.H was not intended to portray the left in general in a bad light. But that is clearly what it does.

Regardless of whether there are examples of thuggery on the left, as Blesdale well knows, that is neither the main message, nor even a significant part of the British left scene.

It's hard enough to gain space for left views in this country, without people ostensibly on our side portraying the left as thugs who can attack a class of young children without a qualm.

As a piece of drama, G.B.H has some merit. As a commentary on a segment of society, it has an incredible dangerous, reactionary message, and distorts reality in the extreme.

From the witter of Boys from the Blackstuff - in my view one of the best pieces of social commentary for many years - G.B.H is a sad and worrying disappointment. I hope Blesdale soon returns to the form he showed he could produce with Blackstuff and can reclaim his position as one of Britain's great left writers.
Reformism's century of failure and betrayals

by Dave Packer

The common general election and the possibility of a Labour government raises questions about 'democracy.' What are the differences between marxists and reformists over the nature of the capitalist state? Is gradual progress towards socialism possible?

The basic premise of reformism was explained by Konrad Schmidt in the early 1980s. He wrote that 'the trade union struggle for hours and wages and the political struggle for reforms will lead to a progressively more effective control over the conditions of production'. And so 'as the rights of the capitalist proprietor will be diminished through legislation, he will be reduced to the role of simple administrator'. The result? 'The direction and administration of exploitation will be taken away from him entirely'.

Monopolies

After nearly a century of reformism in Western Europe, the opposite has happened. Capital has centralised into powerful and unaccountable monopolies and multinationalities which determine policy far more than the unions or parliament.

The Labour Party has always been a liberal reformer (fe bourgeois) party which bases itself on the working class. This bureaucracy has always been seen as being loyal to the working classes, but no one can say it is loyal to its institutions.

They exhibit parliament as progressive and democratic, and see it as the instrument of social reform. Because of this tradition, the Labour bureaucracy is recognised by the bourgeoisie as an acceptable, even useful, player in parliament and the bourgeois democratic state.

Kinnock's idea of 'democratic socialism' is a new kind of embodiment of bourgeois democracy, designed to cover up its hypocrisy and limitations. Marxists maintain that behind this facade of democracy lies the dictatorship of the bourgeois.

Every bourgeois democratic state limits - constitutionally, legally, or in practice - the rights of assembly, strike and the freedom of press. It has mechanisms of repression, using police and troops, to use against the working class in cases of 'violation of public order'.

Machine

'In reality' explained Frederick Engels, 'the state is nothing but a machine for the oppression of one class by another, and indeed in the democratic republic no less than in the monarchy. Bourgeois ideologies have understood this too. In the famous book 'The Wealth of Nations', Adam Smith wrote 'Civil government...is in reality instituted for the defence of the rich against the poor, or of those who have some property against those who have none at all'.

But, argue the reformists, things have changed since then, society is more democratic. Unfortunately, present day 'democracy' is still a class society controlled by the rich. The 1984 miners' strike showed how the state is used to change over to the rich, but defends one class against another.

Universal suffrage does not alter this. For most people, 'democracy' lasts five minutes every five years - the time it takes to get in and out of the voting booth! Nor are the representatives we elect accountable, and voters have no way of ensurin that policies will be implemented. Both the Tories and Labour frequently flout their mandate.

Conditions of crisis and war can move the majority of the working class to launch a determined fight for radical change. But upheaval and revolution are not in the reformist model. Under these conditions, the ruling class will always defend itself with every means available: state repression and terror.

Socialist Outlook

Residential Summer School

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* The Foundation of the Fourth International
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* Women's Liberation debates
* The armed struggle
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The momentous political events of the last year have raised many new issues. This school will provide an opportunity to discuss these issues in a relaxed and open atmosphere.

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* £320 for waged, £30 for unwaged and students. (£50 and £35 for bookings on a daily basis)
* Accommodation

Single rooms with self-catering facilities. Children will be catered for, let us know their ages in advance.

* Costs *

£320 for waged, £30 for unwaged and students. (£50 and £35 for bookings on a daily basis)

The school is open to supporters of Socialist Outlook and those interested in our political ideas.
Madonna – just standing up for herself

I find much of the ‘Madonna’ debate perplexing.

She has done nothing more than modernise a form of ‘feme male’ sexual imagery that existed in the mid-1930s by bringing stars like Max Web and Marlene Dietrich.

No one would have been misguided enough to call these women feminists – although they explored sexual and gender roles in provocative ways.

These film stars flaunted their sexuality and reflected changing attitudes to women in a post-suffragette era, very much as Madonna has done in the 1980s. They reflected changing attitudes to women, but they did not campaign for real changes.

To be even a bourgeois feminist you have to campaign for women’s rights. Madonna stands up for herself. She doesn’t campaign for women as a group. It’s a shame that Socialist Outlook didn’t come out a bit clearer before it became entangled in this debate. If ‘feminism’ simply meant strong or successful independent women with lots of money then we had to have included Thatcher in the line-up.

Nor can I agree that Madonna’s ‘sexual radicalism’ is a particular challenge to men or women. Far from subverting male fantasies of women we would suggest she is actually reinforcing them.

Can’t we move on to more interesting female performers like French and Saunders, and Annie Lennox? At least they have the merit of some artistic originality.

Valérie Coultas

London E13

Letters

Nothing to fear

HARRY SLOAN’s article ‘Don’t blame Lenin for Stalinism’ (SO 2) overlooks the relationship between Leninism and Stalinism.

I think Sloan partly secures the theme of hoping for a better tomorrow and ‘other defenders of Leninist principles’ prior to the rise of Stalin, always essential (except when they made the odd mistake like banning internal factions) fundamentalists of socialist democracy.

But the idea of a small unit of revolutionary militants unswayed by alien class pressures or, for that matter, Sloan’s ‘shortages and queues’, in a largely peasant society is, I think, an idealisation.

Marx called for a ruthless critique of everything existing. Sloan urges us not to throw the baby out with the bathwater. If ‘angry intellectuals and workers’ in Eastern Europe are subject to the same temptations as Leninists to the same ruthless critique that Trotskyists traditionally reserve for the decisions of Stalinists, what have revolutionary militants to fear?

Sloan says ‘In consolidating his grip on the Party and state apparatus, (Lenin) transferred Lenin’s party into a monolithic parody of itself, [Stalin] was forced to wipe out every vestige that had not already been erected a façade of statuses’. But the history of the real state of emergency, the 20th century, shows that human beings have as deep a desire to tear down the existing statuses as they have to erect them.

Lenin erected statuses of dead revolutionaries to raise the cultural mass but the masses have broken those cultural levées have been raised, those same masses seem intent on tearing down all the statues of Lenin.

The lesson for revolutionary Marxists is a simple one. The fate, not of Lenin, but of statuses is not yet decided by history.

Terry Murphy

Oxford

Misleading on students?

Your coverage of NUS Conference (April 9/1 May 1) was misleading either by inaccuracy or omission.

Firstly, you accuse Socialist Organisation of supporting the ban on Return, the anti-Israeli magazine. This is untrue. At the ‘Eastern 1996’ NUS Conference, the Union of Jewish Students circulated a petition calling for Return to be banned.

Two Left Unity (LU) supporters signed neither LU nor Socialist Organisation backed the ban. Since then, LU has campaigned for Return to be lifted. You should withdraw the accusation.

Secondly, your coverage of policy debates was wrong. Palestine was not up for debate, except in the Gulf war debate. And GMS, a Palestinian student group, does not argue for a democratic, secular state, but a ‘two state’ solution. You also failed to adduce as many students as the restructuring of the NUS executive.

Thirdly, you took the wrong position on the NUS elections.

Welcome

I’d like to say how much I welcome the appearance of a paper on the left which appears to have a genuine commitment to lesbian and gay equality. The regular appearance of articles about lesbian and gay issues in the paper is an important sign of real change in this respect – keep it up!

On a minor point, the way in which your article on the trial of the former colliery worker was edited to a short article and then cropping in. I did not speak at National Party Conference four years ago (but I did have a bit very much). If my memory serves me correctly, it was you who actually proposed a resolution at conference in 1989.

Debbie Epstein

Birmingham

Letters

Get into the groove

Ironically I found myself in total agreement with Rachel Wingfield’s concern about male-dominated conventions in the Labour Party (SO 3) but I still think it’s our intention to trivialise feminist politics. We mean very different things.

It has to be said though, it did come from the discussion about our morality & ‘Madonna’ (SO 1) would stir up a hornets’ nest. Both answers are sexist and I was fully aware that such an article would lay us open to the charge of political heresy. For myself, if I have been sinned at all, it’s for the inhumane, depoliticising tendency to political masochism.

But then we’re not really in the same boat, I sense from the tone of Rachel’s, Kathy’s (SO 2) and Ann’s (SO 3) letters, an atmosphere of despairing disapproval. How can socialist feminists even consider that Madonna may be anything other than a gender traitor?

There are many different ways in which this debate could continue. What has certainly been brought home is that women are no more than one way on the left of looking at sexual politics. For that reason we have to put a new campaign on. Socialist feminists have not all undergone identical processes of politicisation. Everyone can learn at least something from our differences. This has obviously got to go hand in hand with working together to build a strong and vibrant socialist feminist movement.

Going back to the ‘Madonna’ debate, I think it’s wrong to argue that bourgeois individualism, sexual liberalism and sexual assertiveness are anything like the same. So we have nothing in common with feminist, let alone freedom, political‘ revolutionaries’. There is no base, no language, no community for us, that we will not be used to argue the same. The truth is that not all feminists are right-on.

Given the fragmentation of the women’s movement today and the marginalisation of socialist feminism, this is not surprising. The fact remains that feminism today is a term that means all things to all people. Yet at the same time we are faced with this double offensive. How can this be fought successfully?

Madonna does consider herself a feminist. We can all agree that her brand of the same will not in itself result in the ending of women’s oppression. That is true for all brands of bourgeois feminism.

But as the deepening crisis of capitalism unfolds it is accompanied by a deepening alienation experienced by individuals in the working class. This is particularly true for young working class women. What Madonna’s brand of feminism, that she consciously expresses and is an active part of, reproduces. No one would be more likely to be the cause of this.

Paul McCarr

Socialist Organisation

Students

No. 4

June 22, 1991 Page 13

Letters
Debt action

French conference against Debt.

Several hundred people heard Bernie Grant, MP, on behalf of the British Cancel the Debt campaign, and a number of other international speakers, address a conference in Paris on June 8 called by the French campaign against the Debt. The campaign, along with militants from Belgium and Germany, will be sending sizeable delegations to London for the July 15 protest.

Accommodation needed

International visitors to the Cancel the Debt demonstration will need places to stay - most only for one night. If you can help, please write to Cancel the Debt, IFAA 23, Bawdon Street, London NW.

Resolution

The debt burden in the Third World is deepening with every passing day. In 1991, the lives of millions of men, women and children in the third world will be devastated because their countries are forced to neglect the basic human needs of their people - such as health and education - because of debt repayments and IMF and World Bank policies.

Debt is a product of an unequal world economic system and not the responsibility of those in the developing world who live with its consequences.

This branch therefore calls for the cancellation of the debt, whether bank debt, government debt or IMF or World Bank Debt, without conditions.

Further we resolve to campaign in solidarity with those women and men in the developing countries who are struggling for the cancellation of the debt.

We therefore undertake to:

a) Sponsor the Cancel the Debt Campaign and make a donation of £…..
b) Publicise the demonstration on July 13 and the other activities of the campaign
c) Make links with local activists from the campaign to discuss holding local meetings to build the demonstration and to organise transport for it.

Support WOSAI

SOCIALISTS IN SOUTH AFRICA

NEED YOUR SUPPORT.

The Workers Organisation for Socialist Action, WOSAI, was founded after the unbanning of political organisations in 1990. It is living proof that the struggle committed to class struggle within the liberation movement.

As a political organisation in a large country, WOSAI needs your support to continue to put the arguments for working class political organisation. You can make a donation either directly to WOSAI's bank account, or by sending your cheque to: WOSAI, PO Box 905, Pietermaritzburg 3200, South Africa.

Bank: Standard Bank, Branch: Longridge Street, Pietermaritzburg
Account name: Pietermaritzburg Educational Committee
Account Number: 052192322

Socialist Outlook

The Gulf war: no peace no victory

Rolly; Thursday 20th June: 7pm; Friends Meeting House

Debate action

branches to ensure that it is discussed at the next NEC at the end of this month. In the meantime work must be done at branch level to ensure the maximum possible turnout for July 13 from Naigo members.

Debate discussed in Parliament

A number of MPs are pledged to ensure that the scandal of Britain's continuing theft of resources from the poorest countries through debt repayment is raised at Westminster before the summit takes place. The campaign will be holding a press conference at the same time which will include some of its most prominent sponsors and representatives from other countries and will be accompanied by an exhibition on the causes and effects of debt.

A public meeting, jointly organised by the Campaign Group of MPs and the Cancel the Debt Campaign will be held in the Grand Committee Room on July 13. This will be the main focus in London in the lead up to the demonstrations in Paris and needs to be well supported.


Teachers strike against cuts

Lewisham teachers, parents and school-students are involved in a wave of protest over squeezing education cuts. Lewisham NUT and NAS/UWT called a day of strike action on 13 June. Most schools in the borough were either closed or seriously disrupted.

Teachers were joined by school-students and parents in a march through Lewisham and in a picket of the Town Hall. Attempting to intimidate teachers, the council asked teachers to inform them if there were more than ten pickets outside schools. They also threatened members of other unions with disciplinary action if they refused to cross picket lines.

On the eve of the strike, the education committee had to abandon its meeting after 500 angry teachers, parents and school-students found that the council chamber door had been locked to them.

Lewisham had already announced massive cuts in education for 1991/92. Going over the unions' heads, the council had implemented a redeployment freeze this year, in the aftermath of a hard-hitting redundancies programme. The council's plans mean that 450 teachers will have to find new jobs and work in other boroughs.

In fact one SA supporter actually said that it would be mancally to try organising anything.

Women Against War in the Gulf, along with broad sections of the anti-war movement to the right and outside of the Committee for a Just Peace, has been demanding a 'Nothing to Celebrate' candlelit vigil in Trafalgar Square on the eve of the 15th of July.

Socialist Outlook supporters in Lewisham should actively support both the vigil and also the rally organised by the Committeefor a Just Peace.

In the current climate there is always the possibility that one, racist policy may ignore the fact that the purpose of the vigil is to focus for fascist mobilisation. It is irresponsible in the extreme for anyone to use the left to let sectarianism stand in the way of unity in action.

Alex Fenex

Haringey blames cuts on Kurds

Haringey's cash crisis has been blamed, by the Labour group, heading the council, on the influx of Turkish Kurds into the borough in the last two years.

This comes as a major pressure on the council as time when Haringey is making sweeping cuts in services, including nightshifted over 100,000 council workers in the process. The most serious cuts have come in the education sector, where spending £11 million less than the figure recommended by the Council for 1991/92.

The problem is said to be a loophole in the 1991/92 budget which allows the borough to take in a so-called socialist borough. One Sunday last month, letters were delivered to hundreds of school cleaners telling them to do 30 per cent more work for no extra money. Those who refused to cooperate were promptly sacked.

Secondary schools have been worst hit in the latest round of cuts. Four schools are to lose 30 to 40 teachers. In one school almost ten per cent of the staff will be lost. These job losses cause a further deterioration in working conditions and in the school atmosphere.

As it wasn't enough, almost the entire team of education advisors and inspectors has been cut. The education office has lost many staff that it will be hard pushed to even implement the cuts.

Haringey's school meals - once the council's pride and joy - are to be reduced to sandwiches androzen blemgers. Eighty teacher's aides have already lost their jobs, and 30 lunchtime supervisors are about to lose theirs, with no redundancy pay. The lunchtime supervisors have just started an indefinite strike with backing from NUEPE.

Despite summer-term demoralisation, the mood of Haringey teachers remains militant. In a recent ballot NUT members voted 70 to 1 in favour of a three-day strike. Under this pressure, the council and the government both continued to refuse to negotiate the cuts, and CENace talks.

CENace talks.

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Lewisham had already announced massive cuts in education for 1991/92. Going over the unions' heads, the council had
Pergamon Press dispute – Labour Party conference resolution

Labour Party conference notes the independent inquiry into the Pergamon Press dispute initiated with the assistance of the Labour Party General Secretary. Conference notes, in particular, the findings, particularly the notices of dismissal served on the Pergamon 20 on May 24 1979, could only be described as shocking and that the principle of re-employment should be conceded by the Company. Conference deplores the fact that the company has not accepted the demanding for the sacking of the 23 and the sale of Pergamon to Elsevier. Mr. Robert Maxwell refused to re-employ the 23 despite the findings of the Thatcher report and in the face of appeals from the TUC, the Labour Party conference 1990 and from the International Federation of Journalists and the International Organisation of Journalists and many journalists and other unions around the world.

Conference believes that at the very least, Mr. Robert Maxwell must recognise the error of the decision and the justice and the credibility of the Labour Party’s statement commits to trade unions, were one of its members to fail to make such a reparation.

Conference believes Elsevier must take full responsibility for the dispute and meet the demands of the NUJ for re-employment of all the strikers and full recognition for the union.

Breakthrough in Hull strike

THERE ARE SIGNS of a breakthrough in the six-week strike at the Parsons plant of the American柚dian company of the AEU, led campaign for a reduction in the working week in the engineering industry.

The plant management have now offered a five percent increase as a further offer, a further offer, 50 percent in October and an hour in early 1992. But the offer has been refused to a number of conditions.

Morale among strikers has increased following a successful mass picket on June 7. The picket, organised jointly by the strikers and the local Trade Unions, attracted support from motor workers in the area.

The new offer clearly demonstrates that the strike is having an impact inside the factory, though production has been maintained. Now the key issue is that of the strings attached to the management offer.

Though the offer for a speedy settlement is understandable, the real danger in giving up hard-won conditions must be discussed.

If a settlement is not reached, immediate steps must be taken to increase strike inside the factory, as well as in the area.

Tube strike undermined

The calling off of strike action on the London Underground was not confined to its leadership.

It may be unpalatable for some readers, but many rank and file ASLEF representatives were deliberately collaborating with their management to undermine the strike.

Their elitism and hostility to the RMT and other grades of workers has led them to develop an unwritten, but acknowledged arrangement with management: ASLEF to ensure that the tube drivers’ strike during attacks on other workers, in return for a benefit deal for the drivers. The main problem with this is that half the train drivers are organised by the RMT.

The recent dispute was seen as an occasion to recruit, to openly duplicate the management’s argument that the strike would create a crisis in the situation. However, the original article was wrong or misleading.

Rail leaders block chance of unity

TWO YEARS AGO the main rail union, the RMT, balloted for industrial action and organised six one-day strikes in defence of their negotiating machinery. They brought the rail network to a halt. The extent of support for the action surprised British Rail management, which was forced to retreat as a result of the action. But the management did not give up. Instead, they changed tactics.

In preparation for privatisation, the government increased flexibility, contractual rostering, to break the power of the Local Departmental Committees, and to separate the network into ‘business sectors’. The aim was clear – to break the potential unity of the workforce.

Instead of taking on the union frontally, a tactic which had failed, they chose to break up the negotiating machinery and conditions via ‘restructuring’, negotiating sector by sector.

The advantage of this was that it enabled the management to use Tory and union laws to the traditional one sector in one action against management proposals in another would be illegal.

Even after action had forced the Board to retreat, the RMT leadership let them regal the initiative, allowing them to pick off one section of the workforce at a time. They chose the Signals and Telecoms section first – one of the least organised sectors.

Instead of preparing and campaigning for action, the RMT leadership batted section members out of action, or a ‘referendum’ to see if they accepted the package. Though the vote showed opposition to the plan, the fact that there was no ballot for action was seen by the RMT as a sign of weakness. Intimidation was stepped up, with individuals pressed to sign a document accepting RMT’s plans.

The package included a 25% rise in basic pay – a sweetheart for those that did not rely on overtime. But for those that worked long hours to earn a decent wage, it meant a cut in take-home pay of as much as £50 a week. Moreover, it scrapped existing working conditions.

Over-time rates for weekends were ended; eight hours of overtime was required, at normal rates; a flexible working day was introduced; and performance pay in banded scales, creating pressure for conformity, was begun.

Following the introduction of the package, management sought to isolate those who rejected it. For British Rail this makes good economic sense – those who signed the deal are now being hooked in for Sunday working.

Alongside this, British Rail has refused to negotiate using the previous, higher levels. The RMT leadership’s response was to instruct District Councils to organise mass meetings. This was to be a pay a call a campaign, ending in a ballot of all BR members for industrial action against the management ‘abrogation’ of the negotiating machinery.

At those meetings, insofar as wages were discussed, wages were secondary. It was this with some and some amazement that activists learned that the ballot was on wages alone. There was no explanation from RMT leaders as to why the question of the negotiating machinery was dropped.

It was this vacillation that led to the eleventh-hour decision to call off strike action over wages.

The explanation will, no doubt, be that there was no support for action amongst the membership. Activists were concerned at the danger of losing out and that linking the issues offered the best chance of victory.

It has since emerged, from a management circular that all rail unions have agreed to an ACAS proposal for a ‘working party’ to look at new negotiating machinery ‘taking into account’ changes in the business structure. This appears to be half way to accepting an end to national pay bargaining.

The RMT’s ability to achieve unity of its membership across grades and businesses was the source of its strength in the 1989 strike.

Throughout the union it is necessary to fight against concessions on national pay bargaining and the need for common conditions, irrespective of the business sector that workers are in.

by Sam Stacey

Put the ‘socialist back into socialism!’

AFTER FOUR ISSUES the new Socialist Outlook is steaming ahead. Even those who were most critical of our founding fortnightly and[

not only admit that the newspaper will be run by the paper’s readers and contributors, but have set up a shop to run it as a business, put it on the market, and allow it to fight for the Socialist movement with the same independence of mind that an independent Labour paper fought for.

That was it. The tactical defeat and thecorporate victory over a local paper in a local election were no more than the opening shots in a war that is already spreading to the largest city in the country.

No. 4 June 22, 1991 Page 15

Socialist Outlook is always welcome too.

Some supporters are already raising money in other ways. House parties are a good way of raising money while spending the night out.

People are more willing to spend money if they are enjoying themselves as well as raising what you're raising and we'll try and let others know.

Send cheques to Socialist Outlook, PO Box 1195, London N4 2UW.
13 July – march against Debt!

In a couple of weeks time the leaders of the world’s seven richest nations will meet in London. George Bush, H. 
mut Kohl, Francois Mitterrand and the rest will drive with their finance ministers for their annual review of the world’s economy.

Part of their meeting, as usual, will be a cynical discussion about the price the people of the third world have to pay for the debt crisis.

The Cancel the Debt campaign is using the opportunity provided by the summit to mount demonstrations in London and Scotland calling for the cancellation of the debt. It will be a crucial opportunity, at a time of massive international publicity, to strike a blow for the millions of hungry and oppressed in the third world.

The debt originates from the 1970s, when the western banks, bailed with ‘petro-dollars’, urged bigger and bigger loans on poor third world countries. But as economic recession hit the ability of the third world to pay the huge interest on the debt diminished.

The result has been the famous IMF austerity programmes. Dozens of countries now have their economies policed by the IMF and the World Bank, which impose savage cuts back on state spending, wage freezes and anti-inflation programmes which have thrown millions into unemployment, hunger and despair.

The irony is that many third world countries have already paid back the debt in interest payments, several times over. Cancellation of the debt would have a minimal effect on Western banks and governments. But still the West continues to pump billions of dollars out of the third world and into the coffers of western banks each year.

As long as China and especially Latin America the debt is a fundamental political concern. But it is very difficult to break out of debt bondage. The debt could only be repaid if a number of large third world countries acted together. But most governments in the South are reactionary and tied to imperialism. They have no interest in confronting their western masters.

Those fighting against the effects of the debt need the solidarity of the workers movement in the advanced capitalist countries.

But although the issue of the debt is well known in the West, little has been done to combat it politically. What action there has been has usually been undertaken by third world charity and campaigning organisations. With the exception of the mass demonstration at the 1989 ‘G7’ summit in Paris, the left has done little.

The London summit in July is an opportunity to turn this around. Campaigns are getting off the ground in several European countries. Already plans are being made to demonstrate at next year’s G7 summit in Germany, but unless there is a big demonstration in London, next year’s plans will be set back.

The Cancel the Debt campaign has widespread sponsorship from labour movement and campaigning organisations. But that support has to be turned into action. There has to be the maximum possible turnout at the 13 July demonstrations. Strike a blow for the people of the third world - make sure that the world’s media and political bosses know that the British labour movement stands with the people of the third world!

*See page 14 for further details.

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