Support the struggle against the debt!

In a little over a week, the leaders of the seven richest capitalist nations assemble in London to review the world economy. Bush, Kohl, Mitterrand and the rest will gloat over their Gulf war 'triumph'. They will lay down demands to Gorbachev to speed up privatisation and marketisation in the USSR.

They will not do anything, however, to relieve the victims of what Brazilian Workers Party leader Lula has called the 'undeclared world war'. That war is the ferocious impoverishment of less-developed countries through pumping out money to pay off the debt to Western banks and governments.

Unlike the 1950s and '60s, the less developed countries are getting poorer — both absolutely and in comparison with the West. The human consequences are the millions who starve each year, the millions forced out of employment to become street peddlers or beggars, the street children in Brazil murdered by police and gangsters because they are an embarrassment.

Every aspect of life in the poor countries is worsened by the debt. Health and the environment deteriorate, leading to new epidemics like the horrible cholera outbreak in Latin America. The burden on women increases, as they struggle to support families thrown into desperate poverty. Millions starve in Africa because the aid they get is a pittance compared with the tribute paid to the West.

On 13 July the Campaign against Debt will mobilise to say to the West's leaders that this war against the people of the poorer countries must stop. And this is just the beginning, part of an international campaign. Contingents from other European countries will be there. Show the capitalist leaders that, while they gorge themselves and pat one another on the back, the hundreds of millions they condemn to misery will not be forgotten.
Women and the debt

Debt affects both women and men in 'Third World' countries, but the impact of that burden is unequal. The poverty caused by debt reinforces the existing sexual division of labour. But the role of women in anti-imperialist struggles—and their struggles within 'Third World' societies—is often overlooked.

While it is true that the position of many women has improved since the days of direct colonial rule, the oppression of women is still deeply rooted in 'Third World' societies. And in many ways, the situation is worsening.

An understanding of the relations between the oppression of women and indebtedness, or of the development of capitalism following struggles for independence, is necessary.

In Africa, white settlers relied on cheap, male labour as farmworkers and later in manufacturing industries. Women's labour was only required towards the end of colonial rule—as domestic workers. Migrant workers generally lived hundreds of miles from their families. Women would be left in the countryside with children, surviving on subsis- tence crops.

In Zimbabwe by no means is the poorest or most indebted African country the colonial expropriation of land resulted in the establishment of 'reserves', where women, children and the elderly were forced to live. Traditional systems of agriculture broke down, and the pattern of environmental degradation began, leading to widespread impoverishment.

The debt led to women playing a prominent role in the fight for independence. After the war, the position of black women in the labour market improved. In 1981, white women comprised 54% of the female workforce, and black women 46%. By 1985 the position had reversed, so that black women comprised some 85% of female workers.

However, the worsening economic situation—a product of indebtedness—meant that the proportion of women in the workforce as a whole fell from 50% in the early 1970s to 35% in the early 1980s.

The relation between the exploitation of women and the debt is starkly demonstrated in the case of Thailand. In 1984 the country's debt totalled $14 billion, equal to that of Peru. A major source of foreign currency for the country is the 'hidden economy'—its thriving prostitution industry.

Young girls and boys are sold to brothels for rich tourists by families desperate for money. Prostitution in Thailand is super-exploited, and exposed to a high level of danger from violence and disease.

And in the Philippines, the remittances paid from the domestic labour of Philippino women working as servants in the West, make up a large proportion of the hard currency that goes to pay the country's foreign debt.

Latin American women have countered their marginalisation with the development of a major movement. Through taking up 'women's issues' such as abortion, forced sterilisation and domestic violence, women have been able to make an impact on trade unions and other workers' organisations.

Women in 'Third World' countries frequently find that they face battles on many fronts. The rise of religious fundamentalism—Christian, Muslim, hindu or Jewish—that is accompanying the world recession, demonstrates the importance of linking the struggle against debt with the fight for women's liberation.

What debt does to the environment

The debt has imposed environmental destruction on the less-developed countries throughout the world. The pattern of development which grind poverty imposes. While the details of how this happens differ from country to country, there are common factors throughout much of the 'third world'.

First, there is water pollution, air pollution and toxic emissions—linked to the use of chemical products and pesticides. Water pollution often stems from rapid industrialisation; pollution of the land by subsoil has been forced into large, large areas. In the Philippines the multinational chemical companies have forced the local people into the use of toxic chemicals to control pests, while the water is poisoned with toxic chemicals.

Because of the closeness of water and soil, there is constant bacteriological contamination of the water. The effects of the chemical used has been dramatized in the last few months in the cholera epidemic which has broken out in Latin America. Starting in Peru, where thousands have already died, the epidemic has spread to Chile, Bolivia, Colombia, and Brazil. The epidemic is directly caused by the lack of clean water; it is not just a health problem, it is an environmental problem, caused by poverty.

Because industrial processes in the less-developed countries are more antiquated and, because of the lack of government regulation, urban industries give rise to more pollution than in the advanced countries, disrupting normal ecological cycles. Toxic metals like mercury and lead are regularly pumped into water supplies; cases of poisoning from drinking metal-contaminated water abound.

This devastation anywhere is in the major third world cities like Sao Paulo and Mexico City. In Sao Paulo the daily toll of pollution is enormous; amongst the poisons pumped into the atmosphere are 90 tons of sulphur dioxide, 5000 tons of carbon monoxide, 500 tons of particle materials, and 1200 tons of hydrocarbons and hydrogen dioxide.

The overall effect of this contamination goes well beyond the cities. City pollution in Latin America has created smog that expands over the countryside and even as far as the coast of the Caribbean.

Toxic contamination in the third world is also intensified by the use of pesticides forbidden in more developed countries. Such pesticides enter the food chain, in particular affecting cows milk, with inevitable effects on babies.

Every year the world loses twice the amount of agricultural land as is added. An area the size of Britain is disappearing annually. The UN Environmental Programme has estimated that in the next 20 years some 60 million hectares of agricultural land will be lost due to pollution and other forms of soil degradation.

The desert is advancing in many areas, but especially in Africa, the Sahel and the Sahara. This is not solely due to climatic factors, but also to deforestation, overgrazing and improper land management. During the last eight decades of this century more than half of the forests in developing nations has been destroyed. In the desertification is an ecological problem, for providing firewood or simply for clearing land would, at the present rate, completely destroy the forest in fifty years from now.

Deforestation causes soil erosion, because the natural protection against rain is lost; the torrential rains in tropical areas wash the topsoil off into rivers, irrigation canals and then into the sea. In turn, obstruction of drainage facilities causes progressive salination of the soil. The wind then completes the destructive pattern.

Part of the forest destruction can be directly attributed to the greed of big companies. It is also the consequence of the extreme poverty of many rural groups, who have constantly cut down the forest for firewood to cook and keep warm, and also so they can clear the land and plant subsistence crops.

With the advance of commercial agriculture and ranching, large numbers of the impoverished rural population are pushed towards the forest and mountains, and the destruction of the world forest continues. Just part of the spectrum of degradation of the third world environment has been outlined here. The root cause of all it is poverty. The masses of the third world need land, not being driven off land by urbanisation and big ranchers. They need fresh clean water. They need industries that do not wreck the environment. They need an end to toxic pesticides and the dumping of waste from the advanced countries. That means an end to the debt and a new pattern of economic development.
The Great Money Trick

Next week the leaders of the seven richest nations (G7) arrive in London to discuss the management of the world economy. High on their agenda will be assessing how much more they can squeeze from the world’s indebted nations – in Asia, Africa, and above all Latin America. How were the chains of debt bondage forged?

The origin of the debt crisis is in the explosion of oil prices following the 1973 Arab-Israeli war. Western banks were flooded with ‘petro-dollars’ from the oil-rich states. Desperate to recoup these deposits at maximum profit, the banks scoured the world to lend money.

For the ruling elites in the so-called ‘third world’ countries, this seemed a golden opportunity to boost their economies, or at least their own bank balances. As an orgy of borrowing took place, vast amounts were saddled away in Swiss bank accounts and wasted on ‘prestige’ projects. Very little found its way to the people of the poorer nations.

Borrowing heavily, for states and individuals, is no problem so long as you can keep up the repayments. But economic developments in the West sabotaged the ability of the debtor countries to pay. First, between 1980 and 1982 the US economy was sharply deflated. Imports of raw materials from the poorer nations slumped. Commodity prices fell sharply. The result was a collapse in export earnings to finance debt repayment.

When the US economy turned around on the basis of massive borrowing and a huge budget deficit after 1983, US interest rates shot up. But the third world debt was tied to US interest rates. The repayment of the interest on the debt grew to staggering proportions.

The next act in the tragedy was rescheduling the debt. In effect, this meant the debtors had to borrow yet more money – but at a massive cost. Not only banks were involved in rescheduling but the world’s ‘lenders of last resort’ – the international money cops of the IMF and the World Bank. In exchange for rescheduling the debt they demanded grinding austerity.

The great money trick of the debt has imposed a Catch-22 situation on the borrowers. For the first time in the post-war world the less-developed countries have become net exporters of capital. The transfer of funds in debt repayment from the poor to the rich nations increased from $7 billion in 1981 to $74 billion in 1985. But this conceals the real figure because the rich in the debtor countries have exported huge amounts of capital back to bank accounts in London, New York and Switzerland.

Like home owners stuck with variable mortgage rates in Britain, the less-developed countries are the victims of floating interest rates. High interest rates since the early 1980s ensure that the debt will be repaid many times over without any substantial inroads being made into the capital sum owing. The figures are staggering. It has been estimated that Brazil paid a total of $33 billion in ‘interest’ between 1973 and 1985.

The debtor nations have been nipped. They are victims of a loan-sharking operation, which does not differ in any way from the operation of loan shark mafias in New York or Manchester. But more than that they are the victims of economic recession and financial instability in the advanced capitalist countries.

How should the debt be fought?

Why don’t the debtor nations refuse to pay the vast interest rates which condemn their countries to indefinite poverty? Surely the obvious solution for Brazil, Argentina, Mexico, Nigeria and other large debtor nations is to simply default? Indeed, this would be the best solution, turning the tables on the IMF, World Bank and the corporate loan sharks like Citicorp and Barclays.

The reason they don’t is political. It is not possible to default for an individual country to default. Foreign credits and loan repaying are vitally needed to maintain the foreign currency – especially dollars – needed to finance imports. If one country defaulted, the response from the West would be immediate and massive. When former Peruvian president Alan Garcia declared a 90-day moratorium on debt payment, Peru was hit by devastating financial sanctions.

As it is politically effective, default would be better carried out by several countries acting together. The issue is one of political will – the willingness to have a head-on battle with imperialism.

If a revolutionary working class government came to power in one country, especially in a strong country like Brazil, refusal to pay the debt, at least in its present form, would be essential. But the consequence would be an immediate confrontation with the imperialists. It would mean having to fight to mobilise support in other debtor countries, and fighting for political solidarity from the workers movement in the West.

The least the floating-class debtors or countries dare not contemplate is a fight with imperialism over the debt, because they are dependent on imperialism themselves. In any case it is not the rich elites who suffer from the debt crisis, but the poor. The rich can get their money out of the country. Their whole livelihood is linked to trade and financial deals with the United States and other imperialist nations. Repudiation of the debt, which means a revolutionary mobilisation, is directly in their own interests.

Refusal to pay the debt is therefore highly unlikely without the revolutionary conquest of power by the popular masses in the debtor nations. What role is there then for an anti-debt campaign in the West? It would take a truly gigantic campaign to force cancellation of the debt, when so much is involved for the banks and financial institutions. But campaigning against the debt, raising it as a central issue in the labour movement, will create the conditions to support movements for fighting the debt burden in the third world. A big campaign against the debt will pressure the G7 loan sharks, making it more difficult to impose harsh new conditions.

The fight against the debt has to be a dual fight - against the ruling elites in the third world and against the IMF debt squads in the West. TheCancel the Debt campaign in Britain is a small step towards what must become a much larger campaign. Next year’s G7 summit in Germany, and already preparations are being made for an international demonstration.

Support Brazilian plantation workers

Rubber giant Michelin has dismissed 45 workers at its plantation at Camamu in Brazil. Camamu was the site of a strike in April and May, and many of the workers dismissed were leading activists in the strike. All the dismissed workers have been told to vacate their houses on the plantation, and they will now have to find housing in nearby slums.

The plantation workers union has condemned the dismissals as illegal, and has decided to take Michelin to court. The union has appealed to workers internationally to put pressure on Michelin to reinstate the sacked workers. Send letters of protest to:

- Michelin Exenta Três Picos
- Rodovia Itaberaba - Camamu Km 5
- Caixa Postal 2, CEP 45442
- Itaberaba, Brazil

Send copies to:
- Sindicato de Trabalhadores Rurais de Camamu
- CEP 45444 Camamu, Bahia
- Brazil

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Walton by-election

Why we're not backing Mahmood

The decision of the Broad Left to stand Lesley Mahmood in the Walton by-election against official Labour candidate Peter Kilfoyle has caused intense controversy on the left. Socialist Outlook, while blaming the Kinnock and the Liverpool council leadership for the division, says the decision is a mistake. Liverpool TUNNEY, speaking to a number of Liverpool Labour Party members who are also in the Broad Left, but who opposed the decision to stand Mahmood, says this is his explanation.

The decision to stand Mahmood was the result of the victory of five Broad Left candidates in the council elections. The five were successful for a number of reasons. First, it was a clash of the council's cuts and redundancies strategy with the views of the left. Second, the SWP and TUC were important in the election. Third, the Labour vote was divided and the candidates offered a reformist alternative.

I think the council victories went to the hands of the Broad Left. What they have done is: "Wonderful, we have won five seats in the local elections. Now we are going to use this victory to take on the Labour Party locally. We are going to demand the reinstatement of the suspended Labour councillors. We are going to link up with those Labour councillors who are not in the Broad Left but who oppose cuts and redundancies. We are going to fight for a Labour majority against the right's strategy".

Instead of doing that the Broad Left went for forming their own council group and then tried to make the decision to stand in Walton. They drew the wrong conclusions from their council election victory. In Wrexham a fight to reinstate suspended Labour councillors has been successful.

One argument used in favour of supporting Mahmood is that Kilfoyle is an imposed candidate. But he is not - he beat Mahmood in a selection contest. As for winning unfairly, lots of candidates have 'unfair' advantages. Jeremy Corbyn has a strong advantage in Islington as a sitting MP. No serious charges of irregularity have been made about Kilfoyle's selection.

It is important to understand the character of the Broad Left locally. It is an invitation-only organisation; it has about 420 people in its city-wide group. Though Militant is not dominant numerically, it is politically. Many people outside Liverpool have the illusion that the Broad Left is massively popular among trade unionists fighting the redundancies, or that Mahmood's candidacy is deeply linked to that. But that is really an illusion. The Broad Left has some support in GMP but in other unions it's much weaker. For example, Morning Star supporters lead NALGO but by default because the Broad Left/Militant have had such a sectarian attitude, for a long time regarding NALGO as some kind of middle class outfit.

The attempt to make an identity between the council fightback and the Mahmood candidacy weakens the united front which was necessary to build the maximum unity in the workplace against the cuts and redundancies.

It remains an open question whether Militant supporters will try to extend what they've done in Liverpool across the country. At a Broad Left meeting they explained that there would be a temporary break form the Labour Party nationally in Liverpool, but they would soon be joined by other areas nationally, to form a new Labour Party which would replace the old one - the rest of the Labour Party would just become a shell.

If this is really what they want to do, then it's a complete misreading of the present situation and of history. Socialists are in the Labour Party not because of what it currently has a left wing or a right wing policy - anyway that can change. They are there because it is the main party of the working class, and because of its links with the unions.

When the ILP split from Labour in the 1930s, they had about 16,000 members, and a few MPs - and in five years they had virtually disappeared. So if the Broad Left are really going to try to make this a national development, then they are misunderstanding the situation today. We are nowhere near a split which could create a new and viable socialist party.

The programme and concerns of the Broad Left are politically limited and parochial. All they put forward is opposition to redundancies and the poll tax, with occasional references to the NHS. And all of it is limited to Liverpool. In particular they don't raise at all the issue of racism. The black community in Liverpool has not been totally destroyed in Tostee, and Walton is a nearly all-white constituency. Militant has a really bad record on this issue, especially in Liverpool where many white people remain for thesam Bond issue and Militant's opposition to Black Sections. When Martha Channer stood for selection in Riverside constituency Militant supported the sitting MP Bob Fowler as the 'class struggle' candidate; immediately after his selection he turned his back on the Broad Left.

When it was first talked about, the SWP dismissed standing candidates as irrelevant, but they were taken back by the size of the Broad Left vote in the council elections. Now they've gone gung ho for the Mahmood campaign, which is logical from their viewpoint - counterpointing an alternative left to Labour.

I think Socialist Outlook should be saying to Militant supporters across the country that this candidacy is a mistake, and that they're going to get their fingers badly burned by it. Of course for socialists this is a tactical question, but this candidacy is a very bad tactic. Instead of demonstrating the strength of opposition to Kinnock they are promoting a tactic which will minimise it.

I think we should be arguing that the key task is to prepare, in the union and in the Labour Party for the next general election. Either Kinnock wins and we have a right wing Labour government, or he loses, and Kinnockism has been a failure. The other mistake is, at this point, to believe a national alternative/socialist party can be set up. And because it lacks national credibility, it lacks credibility in Liverpool as well.

After the election there will be mass expulsions from the Labour Party in Liverpool. We shall have a really united left, and the Labour Party will be in the hands to fight this witch hunt.
Still in crisis over Europe

Margaret Thatcher's intervention in last week's parliamentary debate on Europe showed the Tories' divisions on this issue are getting worse. ditching Thatcher has not solved the divisions in Tory ranks. Britain's isolation over the further integration of capitalist Europe never stemmed from Thatcher's personal hostility to all things European: it is based on the dilemma in which British capitalism faces over its fundamental orientation in foreign policy.

Talk of a 'federal' Europe scours the pants off Major and his sections of the capitalist class, because it involves moves towards not just a common currency, but a common defence and foreign policy as well. This is a dagger at the heart of the priority which Britain has accorded for decades to 'Atlanticism' - the alliance with the United States.

The dilemma facing British capitalism is this. The capitalist world is moving towards a three bloc system - a North American bloc, a Japanese-dominated Asian bloc and a European bloc. But British capitalism's role doesn't fit easily into any of these blocs. An increasing proportion of Britain's manufactured goods are exported to Europe, Britain's world role, which underpins its substantial overseas investments, depends on its relationship with the United States.

Britain has access to many forums, and much world influence, on the basis of being a nuclear power. But that is solely because of the good will of the US; it is the Americans who supply Britain's nuclear hardware.

The foreign policy concerns of Britain differ from those of most of the rest of Europe because of the world outreach of British capitalism. Between 20 and 25 per cent of profits of major British corporations come from investment abroad - way out of proportion to every other European economy. The strongest European nation, Germany, has its defence and foreign policy concerns concentrated on central and eastern Europe, at complete variance with those of Britain.

The proposal for a common European defence policy is absolutely dynamite for the US. Since the second world war NATO been a central channel for US influence and political domination in Europe. A European defence network would render NATO redundant, something the Americans would fight against with all possible means.

A further conflict between Britain and the Franco-German axis is Europe is over the role of sterling. The role of the City of London as Europe's major financial centre is based on sterling being an international trading currency. A common European currency would undermine the standing of the City. The financial centre of Europe would shift to Germany.

The dilemma for British capitalism is chronic and infeasible. Trying to straddle Europe and the north American axis is ultimately an impossible balancing act - if the Europeans succeed in forging the kind of united economy and policies which the Germans and French would like.

The problem facing the Europeans in their long-term economic battle with America and Japan is that Europe is a collection of imperialist nations with partially conflicting interests. Japan is absolutely dominant in the Asian capitalist economies, and the USA towers over the North and Latin American economies. The role of European leader falls naturally to Germany, by far the biggest European economy. But Germany's capital resources are bogged down in the re-unification process. Capitalist integration in Europe is vital to fight off the USSR and Japan. But it will be a long and difficult process to achieve it. The Tories will remain crisis-racked on the issue, because there is no easy solution which will serve all the needs of British bosses. Europeanism and Atlanticism both offer a future of further decline for British capitalism.

The myth which needs to be fought in the labour movement is that capitalist Europeanism is in some way more progressive than capitalist Atlanticism. Fortress Europe under German domination would be just as reactionary as the 'special relationship' with the US. Workers have no interest in supporting either.

Victory for Randle and Pottle

Congratulations to Michael Randle and Pat Pottle, who last week were found 'not guilty' by an Old Bailey jury for helping super-spy George Blake to escape from Wormwood Scrubs in 1966. The prosecution of the two occurred because of a vindictive campaign by the right-wing Freedom Association, backed by 100 Tory MPs.

The case, reviewed by Socialist Outlook last year Pat Pottle was pessimistic about being acquitted. He said: 'Sometimes I dream about it. I get this idea that we trials the jury what we did and why we did it, the judge is going to tell us to shut up. I think we will be found guilty.'

Which all go to show that dreams do come true, even for left winged.

The outcome of the trial, in which the two defendants admitted their part in the escape, shows the importance of fighting to maintain the jury system. In this trial the judge virtually ordered the jury to find Randle and Pottle guilty - but they openly defied him. Instead of thanking the jury at the end of the trial, he dismissed them with a curt 'These clear those seats - I've got another case to try'.

The case casts an interesting sidelight on the genuine radicalism which somehow peace movement displayed in the 1960s. Randle and Pottle were both founders of the Committee of 100 which organised mass sit downs against the threat of nuclear war. They were imprisoned under the Official Secrets Act for organising sit downs at US nuclear bases.

Bruce Kent, who only came to prominence in CND in the 1980s, commented that the actions of people like Randle and Pottle were a 'diversion' from the issue of nuclear disarmament, and that he would 'never have dreamed of doing anything like freeing George Blake. Quite.

No justice yet for the Maguire 7

After 16 years fighting for justice, the Maguire family are still in the way in which the Court of Appeal recently overturned their convictions.

The three judges threw out all but one of the six grounds of appeal presented forward by the Maguires. The only one conceded was that their lawyers may have been 'innocently contaminated' by government evidence.

Still leaving a star over the Maguire's name, the judgement also contradicts Sir John May's findings from last year's public inquiry. His conclusions focused on the basis of the appeal. His report was (highly critical) not just of government scientists - who concealed evidence - but also of lawyers, the trial judge (Lord Donaldson, now Master of the Rolls) and the judges at the first appeal in 1977.

May is reconvening the inquiry into the miscarriages of justice involved in both the Maguire and Guildford Four cases. In September, there is no doubt that last week's judgement will be welcomed by May, who is also involved in the Royal Commission established to examine the criminal justice system, no doubt concerned to avoid any discrediting of the inquiry. But it is also a warning to campaigners fighting to overturn these miscarriages of justice - 'don't expect too much'.

The 'Write it off event!

- Conway Hall, Red Lion Square (Nth Holborn tube)
- 13 July, 7-11pm

Entry: £4 Waged, £2 OAP/Student/UB40

Speakers: Bernie Grant MP, Caroline Lucas (Green Party), Martha Osamor Chair: Theresa Hayter

Stalls, food and drink, African and Latin American music

O Organised by the Socialist Movement

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PRAKASH CHANDRASINGOOP and her 8 year old son Prem are fighting against deportation. Prakash married a British citizen and came to Britain with her husband in February 1989. Having suffered domestic violence, Prakash sought safety with her brother in Birmingham. But the Home Office turned down her application for permanent stay on compassionate grounds, despite the fact that she had employment as a home care worker. A picket of the Immigration Appeal Hearing on 18th June was organised by the West Midlands Anti Deportation Campaign.
Sandinistas face tough questions

by Gareth Mostyn

From 19-21 July, 400 FSLN delegates voted for the first congress in the party's history. The reasons for their defeat plus the new, harsh and complex situation have led to considerable soul-searching. There are no clear answers, though there is a wide, sometimes contradictory, spectrum of opinion.

There is a left and a right, though many leaders feel they are not sure to aim for the centre. Tomas Borge, a member of the seven man National Directorate, is a radical. Rosario Murillo in charge of the Sandinista Cultural Workers is seen as the leader of the 'pragmatists'.

Pragmatists

The right wing known as 'pragmatists' or 'modernists', is led by National Directorate Vice President, though some believe that General Humberto Ortega (now in exile) is the real relieved of his post as Com- mander in Chief of the army. At present he absents himself from both the National Directorate and Sandinista politics.

The events of 19-21 July are limit- less - the result of a first con- gress taking place in a period of change and struggle issues include whether the party should be ideologically anti-imperialist and whether it should be a vanguard party of the working class or an electoral front attempting to win votes and represent the majority of society.

Questions of the economic power base of the FSLN, including ethical questions of personal property, are also being dis- cussed. Finally, the debate in- cludes the question of the de- gree of support to give to the present government.

The leadership itself will be debating two texts - the prin- ciples and program of the FSLN and the stance of the Front. Given the debates that are raging, they have gone for a damage limitation process.

The authors of the 'Principles and Program' and the new planks do not deny that it focuses on the present and does not define the FSLN's strategic goals. The FSLN's strategic goals for social change depend on property changes associated with the revolution. Hundred of thousands of smallholders and the poor - particularly FSLN sup- porters - face eviction from their homes or repossession of their factories or homes by the Front. The Sandina- stas have been willing to push their base if they cannot defend them, as well as seeing a massive shift in wealth and power to the rich.

Corruption

Was this corruption or com- munist sense? Sandinista leaders suddenly became wealthy, driving luxury and strictly en- ver transport workers owned their vehicles and peasants the state cooperatives in which they worked. Others got nothing and slid further deeper hunger and poverty.

Chamorro has legally revealed many of these measures. But the Sandinistas believe their survival depends on property changes associated with the revolution. The thousands of smallholders and the poor - particularly FSLN sup- porters - face eviction from their homes or repossession of their factories. The Sandinistas see the possibility of struggle against Chamorro's government, to curb its excesses, continued. At the same time, support for UNO against the extreme right is likely to be maintained.

The Sandinistas are keen that the congress should not see a split. But the tensions are con- siderable, given that the pro- Sandinista police and army are being ordered by the FSLN and supporters and break up strikes, while leading deputies oppose self-defence against Chamorro's government.

However, increased democracy in the FSLN may lead to a greater response to rank and file demands. This should strengthen the chances of maintaining a bourgeois anti- imperialist framework for the Front, whatever the hedges and pre-capitalist structures of the congress.

No imperialist road to women's liberation

by Rebecca Fleming

The sharply contrasting images of the female GIs in combat gear and veiled Arab women presented during the UN_Guantanamo Bay crisis are the continuation of an old imperialist theme. The juxtaposition of women in the West and in the colonial and semi-colonial world has long been used as a justification for maintaining foreign domination.

The British claimed to be a progressive force in India, particularly for women, and pointed to legal reforms such as the prohibition of sati and India's recent independence from British colonialism as evidence that Britain was better than the imperialist countries, not the reverse.

Women comprise 11% of the US military, almost 50% are Black. They have joined up, not from a sense of liberation, but largely in a desperate attempt to escape traditional female jobs - low paid and demeaning - and to avoid unemployment, poverty and homelessness.

However, the gender segregation of jobs extends through the military - women do clerical work or nursing. A recent survey showed that sexual harassment and assault are rampant. Even those women who enter as officers are not always given the respect that they deserve.

European women are also discriminated against - only 0.9% of the 600 top officers are women.

Imperialist claims to have advanced the position of women in India also collapse under scrutiny. Even such examples as the suppression of sati and other atrocities, are in reality, ambiguous and contradictory by the British authorities. Sati was only outlawed in 1829 after a battle against the British army in the 19th century. The ban had limited effect and did not apply to all described in the text.

The British destruction of the traditions maintained by the Nayars in Kerala provides an example of the contradictions in the Indian colonial power with the local ruling class on questions of social organisation.

An opposing alliance was sometimes made between women from the oppressor state and those under colonial rule. The first three Indian women's organisations were established largely by British women. Most of them supported women's suffrage, which brought them into opposition with the British government.

The emergence of nationalism across the colonial world had a contradictory impact. The struggle against imperialism involved millions of women, not only for self-deter- mination, but also for equal rights for women and the participation in the rebuilding of their countries.

These examples belie the supposedly emancipatory nature of imperialism. They belie the claims to liberate women and illustrate the frequent alliance of the colonial power with the local ruling class on questions of social organisation. An opposing alliance was
Apartheid - the last hurdle?

by Charlie van Gelderen

The repeal on June 17 of the Population Registration Act, the law under which each South African had to be racially classified at birth, has been hailed by De Klerk and his imperialist backers as marking the end of apartheid.

This was the last of the draconian laws put on the statute book by the National Party government after it came to power in 1948. It was purely legislative terms it could be said that there was now no legal basis for apartheid.

But the vast majority of South Africans suffered racial discrimination from the day the first white non-race representatives of the Dutch trading oligarchy, the Dutch East India Company - established their repressive station at the Cape for ships on the way to India. This was long before the word 'apartheid' attained its present international notoriety.

In the years of a more 'liberal' administration, what is now Cape Province was a British colony, and the franchise was based on educational and economic attainments. But though a few thousand Blacks managed to get the vote, they were subject to restrictions of movement (Pass Laws), right of residence and employment.

There were separate facilities for Blacks in restaurants and cafes, in bars and other licences, hotels and other places. In employment they were subject to vicious exploitation.

The repeal of the apartheid legislation undoubtedly marks a step forward. It will be that much easier now to organise political activities, although the security forces still operate as if nothing has changed.

But De Klerk's declaration that the vast majority of the population would be rejoicing will not be believed by the black people shivering in their unheated shacks in Khayelitsha, not many miles away from the white parliament which passed those laws. Nor will there be celebrations among the inhabitants of the townships on the Rand, racked by inter-tribal violence, encouraged and assisted by the security forces.

Real power in South Africa, political and economic power, remains firmly in the hands of the six million whites where De Klerk is determined that it should remain. Blacks will not be allowed to vote in any by-election that may come along prior to a new constitution. Nor can they be conscripted into the defence forces, which remain exclusively for whites. The educational system is also still structured along racist lines.

The liberation forces will now be concentrating their efforts on the fight for a Constituent Assembly to draft a new, non-racial constitution. Nearly all the parties in the liberation movement now call for a Constituent Assembly, but there are nuances in their approach.

There is still some ambiguity in the ANC's position. If agreed at the recent meeting with the Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC) in Harare to reject any further negotiations with the regime until all obstacles to talks - the freeing of political prisoners, return of exiles, repeal of security legislation - have been removed.

But it still seems to be prepared to enter all-party talks in the hope that it can win the other parties over to the wisdom of holding elections to a constitution-making body. The ANC and its allies are also calling for an interim government, once obstacles to negotiations have been removed and serious negotiations begin. Such an interim government, drawn from the major parties, would be governed by rule and decree and be responsible for drawing up the procedures for the election of a constituent assembly.

The PAC, along with the Azanian Peoples Organisation (AZAPO) and the Workers Organisation for Socialist Action (WOSA), reject this idea. They reject it on the grounds that they do not want to be responsible for administering apartheid, even for an interim period.

The South African Communist Party is also said to be uneasy about this, though it does not want to clash openly with it's ANC allies. There is some fear in Communist Party circles that the ANC leadership is conceding too much to the government, a view shared by the ANC Youth League. AZAPO and WOSA believe that a constituent assembly can only be won in struggle.

De Klerk knows that to keep up the momentum of reforms, which his imperialist allies will insist on, he must make some move towards emancipating the Blacks, some time in the not too distant future. He probably has in mind the Namibian model, where the constituent assembly, once elected, sat behind closed doors to work out the constitution, and lost all contact with the electorate.

The ball is now at the foot of the parties in the liberation movement. It has anything to play for, and very little to lose.
Gorbachev grovels towards a market economy

by John Arnold

The past 18 months in the Soviet Union have witnessed an amazing juggling act by Mikhail Gorbachev as he manoeuvred between the forces pressing for the maintenance of central control and radicals bent on as rapid a transition as possible to a capitalist economy.

At times it has appeared that Gorbachev has personally embodied the contradictory pressures exerted on the Soviet bureaucracy—continued maintenance of its privileges deriving from the nationalized economy or transformation into a class through the re introduction of capitalism.

Worsening economic crisis

Despite all the discussions over alternatives, the Soviet economy is effectively rudderless. Against a background of republics seeking independence from the centre, hints of previous reforms have been implemented, elements of autonomy have been introduced, and Gosplan, the State Planning Agency, has been replaced by a new Economics Ministry. The result has been institutional chaos.

According to official figures, Soviet industrial production declined 5.4 per cent between April 1990 and 1991, although many estimates put the figure at closer to 10 per cent. In the same period, coal production was down 20 per cent—hardly surprising given the coal strikes in March and April this year—oil production, one of the leading hard currency earners, was down 9 per cent, timber 13 per cent, and non-ferrous metals 18 per cent. Perhaps more alarming for the short-term stability of the country, meat production fell by 13 per cent in the four months from January to April.

The level of Soviet foreign debt is also dramatically increasing. As a risk, the USSR has shifted from being one of the world’s most secure, to being on a par with Mexico or Venezuela and is sinking fast. Hard currency liabilities were 124 per cent of exports in 1990, making the Soviet Union totally dependent on the west for hard currency.

Gorbachev’s new scheme

Gorbachev laid out his stall more than a year ago when he talked about utilising his newly gained Presidential powers to push through the formation of a normal full-blooded market and a ‘controlled transition to market relations’. There then followed a period in which competing plans for the transition to a market economy were bandied about.

The most well-known of these was Stanislav Shatalin’s ‘500 days’ programme which envisaged a staged transition over that period to a market economy.

The ‘500 days’ programme was opposed by the then Prime Minister, Nikolai Ryzhkov, backed by the still powerful central–municipal bureaucracy. Gorbachev ended up cobbling together elements of both Shatalin’s and Ryzhkov’s plans—a move which led Yeltsin to compare such an operation as trying to ‘make a horse into a snake’. The resulting compromise bore a stronger resemblance to the ‘500 days’ but its implementation never got under way.

Despite the undeniable personal antagonism between Gorbachev and Yeltsin, the basic compatibility of their views has become more apparent. In May they issued a joint declaration which constituted a step towards granting the six most critical republics (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Georgia, Armenia and Moldavia) independence, while at the same time indicating that such a step would lead the republics open to paying world prices for all commodities, including energy.

The new plan involves a ‘win–track’ approach of domestic ‘anti-crisis’ measures and appeals to the G7 group of most developed capitalist countries for a major inspection of Western aid over five years, to enable the transition to a market economy to be achieved.

‘Anti-Crisis’ measures

Unlike the previous programme, the ‘anti-crisis’ measures have received the support of Yeltsin and the leaders of the other republics likely to sign the new Union Treaty.

The measures aim to establish a ‘special regime’ in key economic sectors. This involves the prosecution of strikes while providing compensation for loss of the right to strike, improving management rights over the workforce and increasing enterprise autonomy.

The bureaucracy’s inability to push through such a programme in the face of working-class resistance was almost immediately revealed however. Civil aviation personnel threatened to strike for better wages and conditions. The government only averted the action by almost immediately conceding a 60 per cent pay rise and improved benefits.

The ability of workers to elect management was severely curtailed in the 1990 Law on the State Enterprise, but a Supreme Soviet proposal to give managers the right to use fire at will without consulting the factory trade union committee, was vetoed by Gorbachev and amended to include only workers guilty of indiscipline. The second element is more controversial.

Gorbachev had to use all his political skill to defeat an attempt to transfer all his powers to Prime Minister, Valentin Pavlov. As yet there is no agreement on the precise details of a reform programme, although such agreement will be crucial to obtaining Western credit.

One programme to attract Western aid has been formulated by Grigory Yavlinsky, one of the main beneficiaries of the Russian Federation’s version of the ‘500 days’.

‘Buddy can you spare a dime’

Yavlinsky is currently enmeshed in that bastion of socialist economic thought, Harvard University, with a number of leading US economists such as Jeffrey Sachs, who appear to be the inspiration for virtually every privatization programme now being implemented in Eastern Europe, although he denies this whenever anything goes wrong.

Yavlinsky’s plan is a two-stage affair. It is envisaged that in the first stage the Soviet Union will become an associate member of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. Over the course of five years prices will be liberalised, there will be a transition from small-scale to large-scale privatization, and currency will become completely convertible. During the whole five years, Western aid from a combination of governments and commercial banks will run at $20–35 billion per year subject to such participation.

The vaccinations of Western governments over how much they are to give to the Soviet Union and under what conditions remain a careful weighing up of different options.

On the one hand the desire to impose the most stringent conditions on the Soviet Union, so that Western capital can obtain the most favourable circumstances to take advantage of the comparatively cheap labour supply also potentially vast Soviet market. On the other is the danger, if aid is too late in coming or insufficient, of the emergence of an anti-Western regime which would once again close off the Soviet Union to capitalist penetration. Another factor, not directly related to the Soviet Union, concerns the different interests of the competing imperialist powers over who controls the Soviet market. Germany and France have been much more responsive to aid because they tend to make quicker gains than the more recalcitrant United States.

The popular attitude to market reforms

It is undeniable that in both the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe since 1990—
here has been a popular desire for some ill-defined ‘market’ to solve all the problems associated with the legacy of bureaucratic command planning. In conditions of shortage any solutions which promise shoes full of goods and of superior quality to the indigenous Soviet variety have a strong appeal. But this desire is immensely contradictory.

To coal miners struggling in conditions of appalling neglect and lack of basic facilities, where it is impossible to obtain the necessary wherewithal from the centre and the ruble has become virtually worthless, it seems natural to call for the right to compete on the world market to obtain the necessary hard currency to buy food and basic goods and to be able to invest in the future of the industry. At the same time, however, the miners have been singularly unwilling to put up with the inevitable consequences of facing world competition. Rationalisation, unemployment and the decimation of whole mining communities are not high on their list of priorities when it comes to demands on the central authorities. Instead they have demanded the doubling of wages, even though production has declined in past years and in certain instances the increase has been stagnant. In October 1989, 12 per cent of Production have been guaranteed buy their producer.

Undoubtedly, much faith is placed in Tsieln and his en-}

ure of neo-
liberal advisers. Tsieln is seen as if the man who has fought the party bureaucracy and won and someone who will release the Russian people from the stifling hand of the centre. Yeltzin’s continued hold over the miners and, by extension, the independently working miners’ movement is not, however, guaranteed.

In the Russian Presidential elections, despite its crushing victory, Yeltzin failed to retain a majority in Kemerovo, the heart of the Kuzbass coalfield. There he beat into second place by the chair of the local soviet, Aman Tulev, who accused Yeltzin of betraying the radical electorate by signing Gorbachev’s anti-crises

result poll results show that those in Kemerovo favoured ownership of large factories, with 78 per cent of the population, in contrast to 35 per cent in November

Yugoslavian tragedy

THE CIVIL war in Yugoslavia, as army units smashed their way into Slovenia and fighting erupted in Croatia, is the culmination of a long process of the disintegration of Yugoslavia.

These figures of numbers killed offer little comfort to Gor-

bachev (or Yeltalin) in his efforts to attract Western investment which could be seen by many people as placing the Soviet Union in hock to foreign capital.

The socialist response

The use of the terms ‘left’ and ‘right’ in the Soviet Union does more to confuse than to clarify. Depending on one’s viewpoint neo-liberals, Stalinists and revolutionaries socialists can all be placed on the left. I therefore prefer to refer, although this schema is also open to criticism, to conservatives (those favouring the retention of the old system), radicals (those wishing to transform the system through the introduction of a market economy) and socialists (those wishing to establish a democratic socialist system).

The most important current development among socialists is the formation of a bloc, calling itself ‘People’s Self-management’ between the Socialist Party, anarchosyndicalists, greens and the Mar-

xist Platform within the CPSU. The evident disaffection between these currents is being submerged under the urgent need to develop a basic programme to meet the needs of the crisis.

Placing support for workers’ struggles at the forefront of its activity, ‘People’s Self-management’ argues for the main-

tenance of the power over the reorganisation of the factory. The bloc considers that the formation of a labour market in the Soviet Union is inevitable and that control by the trade unions is therefore essential. To com-

bat goods shortages and the control of supply networks by the ‘media’, consumer associations should control distribution and, as a transitional measure, rationing should be introduced.

The ability of Soviet socialists to advance their views is severely limited. So-called ‘liberal’ journals are often as loath to publish socialist articles as were the old Stalinist ones. The Socialist Party’s current project is to produce its own regular newspaper and Western hard currency is crucial to its success. Details of where you can send aid with definitely no strings attached will be in a future Socialist Outlook.

Crisis

In a period of economic crisis, and against the background of the collapse of the East European regimes, the Yugoslav federation has been thrown into crisis by the response of the leadership of the former Communist Party in Serbia, led by Slobodan Milosevic. Milosevic has attempted to consolidate his power by whipping up Serbian nationalism, and attempting to build a ‘Greater Serbia’ which would dominate most of the provinces and regions and perhaps drive Slovenia out of the federation.

Presidency

The Serbian leadership threw the whole federation into crisis by blocking the normal rotation of the collective presidency, which would have given the chair for 1991 to a Croatian, Stipe Manic. Milosevic encouraged armed rebellion by Serbs in Croatia and Bosnia-Hercegovina.

In the province of Kosovo, which is ruled by Serbia but has a majority ethnic-Albanian population, repeated rebellions have been savagely put down by Milosevic. This year’s army has been dis-

tributed to ethnic Serbs in the province.

The current situation there are three fundamental forces in the political leader-

ship of the republics and provinces. First there is Milosevic, and his stooges in the leadership of Vojvodina and Montenego. Their project is the creation of Greater Serbia.

Then there is the central government of federal prime minister Aite Markovic, trying to maintain the federation and the power of the central government against Milosevic. For the moment Markovic appears to have the support of the army. But he is buffeted between Serbia and the new nationalist governments in Croatia and Slovenia, bent on independence.

Croatia

Next to Serbia, the largest and most powerful republic is Croatia. It has a right-wing nationalist government, the product of the Serbian onslaught. Indeed the prospects for a new settlement between the republics has largely been under-

nominised by Serbian intransigence.

Despite his nationalist demagoguery Milosevic is faced with a powerful op-

position inside Serbia. Last March there were huge demonstrations and a strike of 700,000 workers. But the Serbian opposition unfortunately has given its complete support to Milosevic’s nationalist hysteresis, a fatal weakness which has un-

nominised its positive impact.

Socialist response

What now should socialists say about the invasion of Slovenia and the fighting in Croatia? Socialists support the right to national self-determination. This does not however mean we advocate inde-

pendence as the solution in every case. There are powerful reasons to support a unified Yugoslavia, on the basis of equality between republics, as the socialist way forward. The small republics and tiny provinces are hardly viable as separate states. However, no socialist can support the forcible incorpo-

ration of any nationality into a federation against its will.

In the current conflict socialists should demand the withdrawal of the army from Slovenia and Croatia. Tito will only en-

sure the break up of Yugoslavia, and play into the hands of Milosevic’s increasingly right wing government in Serbia.
Defending Marxism

Divided Societies

By Ralph Miliband

Oxford University Press, £7.99

Reviewed by Paul Clarke

IDEOLOGICAL turmoil on the left has followed the East European revolutions, the fall of the Berlin wall and the crisis in the Soviet Union. Revolutionary socialism, any form of 'class politics' and Marxism itself have come under intense fire not only from the right, but from within the left.

In fact, the ideological swing rightwards in Britain had been going on for a long time before the Eastern European events. From the late 1970s onwards an assault, spearheaded by Marxism Today, has been launched which has attempted to break the left from 'dogmatic' and 'fundamentalist' Marxist notions.

Restrictive

Miliband rightly rejects restrictive definitions of the working class, like those of Foucault, which only include those 'directly producing surplus value'. Instead he counterposes Marx's notion of the 'collective labourer' - those forced to sell their labour power, and whose work is directly or indirectly essential for the production of surplus value. Foucault's definition would exclude both the owners or low-paid local government workers. Miliband's (and Marx's) does not (although I'm not sure that Miliband is entirely consistent about this - in the 'class map' diagram he includes).

The definition of the working class has important strategic implications. If the working class is a small minority then its ability to become the leading class in society, the motor force of radical social change, is restricted. There is often a hidden agenda behind those who want to theoretically minimise the weight of the working class in late capitalism.

Miliband's position is implicitly counterposed to the theorists of 'radical democracy' - in this country most notoriously Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe. These authors in their book 'Hegemony and Socialist Strategy' argue that the Marxist project is marked by 'classism' - the irrational prejudice of the left in favour of the working class as opposed to others. They argue that the real contradiction in capitalism is that of 'power', authority and hierarchy which suffices society and is relatively independent of class.

Under fire

Under fire have been the ideas that the central contradiction in capitalism is that between classes; the notion of socialism as involving the overthrow of capitalism; and commitment to social ownership and national planning as central to a socialist and egalitarian economy.

Ralph Miliband, one of the founders of the Socialist Movement, and long-time editor of the weekly Socialist Register, has stood out against this trend with commendable determination, dubbing the whole rightward move on the left as the 'new revisionism'. The paperback publication of Divided Societies is a welcome and eloquent defence of Marxist basics.

Miliband's book is a wide survey of class conflict in advanced capitalist countries. First he refutes claims that class contradictions are lessening, or that the working class is disappearing.

Much attention has been paid in recent years to the 'recomposition of the working class'. In most advanced societies the proportion of workers involved in industrial, manual labour has declined. Extravagant ideas saying 'goodbye to the working class' have based themselves on this.

The increase of the number of workers in the service, distribution and white collar sectors of the economy has not fundamentally altered the size of the working class. What is true is that new sectors of workers are often poorly unionised and lack the militant traditions of the older established industrial sectors like miners and dockers.

Irony

One of the ironies of this is that revolutionary Marxists long opposed the type of bureaucratised economy which existed in eastern Europe, and bureaucratic nationalisation in capitalist countries. Yet while many non-Marxist radicals had illusions.

The market has at its root an extraordinary social and historical pessimism. It says in effect that the economy cannot be planned; there is no conscious human control; that greed and self-interest must remain the motor forces of innovation and progress; and that the profit motive is the highest form of development of human civilisation. This is a classic 'illusion of the epoch'; the self-consciousness of a particular historical period being projected onto the whole of future human history.

Miliband has some tough words for the Communist parties in advanced capitalist countries, seeing them, especially since the advent of Eurocommunism, as essentially reformist parties who have made their peace with the status quo. Ironically, in many of these parties the crisis of reformism has deepened the rightward shift, reproducing within them many of the rightist attacks on the left mentioned above.

Weakness

Miliband's weakness is his own discussion of strategy and agency. Miliband has long been the advocate of building a new socialist party, and of a 'revolutionary-reformer' strategy which rejects the idea of the revolutionary overthrow of the capitalist state as hopelessly utopian.

Miliband regards existing far left organisations as 'sectarian' and 'too narrow'. Be that as it may, they are more radical than the new socialist party, which also doesn't exist. The point is of course that even if Miliband was right, even if he could only come about as a result of giant uprisings in the class struggle. Outside of such developments Miliband's strategy is just as easy to move forward by Lukinists. Then when and if we get that kind of class upsurge, we shall see who is right on strategy.

Despite these disagreements, Miliband's general approach is a model of common sense. In periods of intellectual reaction it is vital that those who stand by classical Marxism stand up to the barrage of right-wing gibes and intellectual quackery and fight their corner. Every socialist will benefit from reading this book.
Coming out in Nicaragua

Sex and the Sandinistas

Written and Directed by Lucinda Broadbent
Showings on Out on Church Street Four, Wednesday 17 July 1991 at 9pm
Reviewed by Rebecca Flemming

‘Homosexuality in Nicaragua is about courage’, one gay man says in Sex and the Sandinistas, and courage certainly overflows from this video documentation along with the strength, vibrancy and creativity of the Nicaraguan lesbian and gay movement.

It tells a simple and inspiring story – the story of the Nicaraguan revolution told by lesbians and gay men who have been a part of that revolution from the outset and who continue to fight for the freedom it stands for, constantly reminding us of their struggle for liberation is an integral and central part of the revolutionary process.

The voices of Nicaraguan lesbian and gay activists speak loud and clear through the video. They joined the FSLN very early on – making Molotov cocktails in their back rooms, fighting in guerrilla cells – motivated by the desperate poverty and oppression all around them under the US-backed Somoza dictatorship.

Some were expelled when they came out as lesbian or gay, others hid their sexuality, considering it a secondary issue after the urgent and overriding task of national liberation.

But after the victory of 1979, lesbians and gay men found a new space to explore and give time to themselves and their specific concerns amongst all the dramatic economic, social and political upheavals of the time. There was no sudden transformation in their situation.

Lesbians and gay men did not wake up one morning to find that they had been liberated. The weight of the Roman Catholic Church and the traditional machista culture remained entrenched and powerful, but not unchallenged, and small, informal lesbian and gay activist and social groups began to meet and organize.

Ironically, but not without precedent, it was the AIDS crisis which provided an opening both for the more public and formal development of lesbian and gay organization and for the beginning of a coming out of the Sex and the Sandinistas leadership. Throughout the majority of the HIV and AIDS crisis, it has been women, and remain, amongst the heterosexual population, it was lesbians and gay men, after contact with lesbian brigadistas from San Francisco, who first took up the issue and who began to hold salas sexuales workshops.

These developments prompted an immediate and supportive response from the Sandinista Ministry for Health, leading to the setting up of CEP – SIMA, the Collective of Popular Educators on AIDS.

Of course it is impossible to talk about HIV and AIDS without discussing sexuality, including lesbian and gay sexuality. And as activists gained experience and confidence they started to establish separate lesbian and gay collective, going beyond the ambit of the AIDS education work and increasing their efforts to put lesbian and gay politics specifically and clearly on the Sandinista programme.

This battle has not been easy, but it has borne fruit as the interview with Sandinista leader Daniel Ortega in the video testifies. The struggle must include the whole of society he repeatedly states.

And as Rita Arauz, one of the lesbian activists featured in the film explains ‘The big advantage we have is that we are able to sit down with our own leaders and at least speak the same language of freedom.’

Recognition of the achievements under the Sandinistas in the arena of sexual politics was also made in the course of the documentary by Cardinal Miguel Obando y Bravo, Archbishop of Managua, who said in condemning tones that the Sandinista era had been a time of ‘excessive sexuality and family breakdown’ as well as witnessing an explosion of ‘illicit pleasure’.

After the electoral defeat in 1990 it is his voice and the reaction to the FSLN church hierarchy that the UNO government listens to. Measures, including police raids, have been brought in to try and ‘clean up’ the cruising areas in the centre of Managua, and through the video was shot a Nicaraguan cress from the independent Managua video production company Vidovic, it will not be publicly shown in Nicaragua.

However, the strength and progress gained from the revolution and the period of Sandinista rule remains. The lesbian and gay movement is confident, not crushed. It continues to grow and demand international solidarity.

The documentary presents the diversity of lesbian and gay culture from the gay cruising ground in the shell of Managua Cathedral, ruined by an earthquake, to the historical heritage of an indigenous lesbian warrior goddess, from the drag queens working in the market in Managua, to safer sex workshops involving condoms and bananas. It gives an uplifting picture of a fledgling lesbian and gay movement born out of and firmly situated in the centre of the revolutionary process with which their struggle for liberation is inseparably entwined.

It is an experience the western movements have much to learn from – make sure you see it!

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Big Ben does it again!

Gridlock

Written by Ben Elton
Reviewed by Kate Alhens

Ben Elton's new book, 'Gridlock,' is based on a plot in the mould of its excellent predecessor 'Stark.' It revolves around a new hydrogen engine, which it's inventor, Geoffrey Peason, hopes will revolutionise public transport.

In addition Geoffrey, a central pacific sufferer, hopes that it will help him to chase his heartthrob, Debra. But, as in Stark, the forces of evil quickly begin to plot to thwart his plans. When Geoffrey attempts to patent his invention, the plans are passed to the Transport ministry, and hence to Sam Turk, a car manufacturer. Debra, who is in a jealous rage, believes this to be an attempt by oil companies and others to return for keeping the invention quiet.

A struggle then begins for control of the plans. Geoffrey, Debra, and her flatmate 'Toss' – a black traffic warden, begin a slapstick race against time to recover the plans before the badies find them.

At the same time, the Tory government is scheming to win support for a massive expansion of road building. When Geoffrey is shot, Debra who is quadriplegic, ends up in a wheelchair-cage in a colossal traffic jam (engineered by the Tories) to win back the plans. And in the process, they are destroyed.

There are some hilarious scenes and some shocking ones, and the book does a commendable job at focusing on characters with disabilities, without those being the main facet of the characters. And Geoffrey's positive self-assurance is handled convincingly, from his Hells Angel love for 'Spamoo' to his 'He I'm Geoffrey, I'm a pacista'. But the joke, laid-back response of 'Toss' to racism is perhaps a little over-played.

In the end, Stark was a much better effort in a number of ways. As a comic plot, Gridlock gets just a bit too close to reality to have the same comic impact as Stark, where the evil plot was so ludicrous as to be incredible. And as a result, the total defeat of Geoffrey and his allies leaves the reader with a feeling of hopelessness. This contrasts with Stark, where at least the evil bosses get theirs, even if the plan to avert catastrophe does fail.

In addition, the fact the invention around which the plot is based is not so far from reality (it has in fact just been produced), means that the plot's credibility is rather thin.

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Presente!

The British lesbian and gay group in solidarity with the Nicaraguan lesbian and gay movement can be contacted via the London Lesbian and Gay Centre, Cowcross St, London EC1, and can provide copies of the video for hire. Their next meeting is on Thursday July 11th, 7.30pm at the LLGC.
What Marxists mean by ‘imperialism’

In popular language the term ‘imperialism’ often simply means powerful nations oppressing weaker ones, generally by invasion and conquest.

Marxists use the term in a more specific way, to denote the structure of the world economy and world politics which emerged from the end of the 19th century onwards. This involves the world economy being based on the exploitation of the poor countries by the few rich nations.

How did modern imperialism emerge? After the industrial revolution, which took place in Europe between the 17th and 18th centuries, the development of the capitalist economies was concentrated at home.

Pillage

It is true that, starting in the Middle Ages, Britain, France, Holland and Spain pillaged Africa, Latin America and Asia - for gold and silver, slaves and spices. That pillage created part of the wealth used for the industrial revolution. Still, up until the late 19th century the big expansion of the capitalist economies was at home. Through industries based on coal, the railways and the steam engine, capitalist Britain, America, France and Germany generated huge amounts of money and capital.

The ‘race for empire’ which started in the late 19th century was based on a simple fact: the recognition by capitalism that higher profits could be made on this capital by investing it abroad, in the colonies, where the cost of labour power was much lower.

Britain, France and Germany vied with one another to conquer new colonies, especially in Africa and Asia. The capitalists realised that profits depended not just on the strength of industry at home, but on the super-profits to be gained in the ‘third world’.

Multinationals

Starting in the 1960s, multinational corporations began to relocate some of their production in poorer countries. The world system of importing raw materials, producing them, and then exporting manufactured goods to the colonies began to be modified.

For example, it became cheaper for some American car manufacturers to export kits of car parts to Brazil or Argentina for the final assembly than to do it in Detroit. Because the price of labour power is much lower in those countries.

This underlies the emergence of a few ‘semi-colonialised’ countries. But even these countries are not independent centres of capital accumulation. They are still economically dominated countries.

The oppression of the semi-colonial countries is multi-faceted. They suffer not just economic depression, by the violence of direct exploitation, but are forced to be dumping grounds of the toxic waste of the imperialist countries, and are forced to export labour in the form of immigrants and suffer all the consequences of racism. The debt crisis and the Gulf war are just two of the latest examples of imperialism oppression.

To break out of this cycle of imperialist domination, it is not enough to have formal independence - a national flag, a home-grown government and a seat at the UN. It is necessary to break the imperial domination of the economy. That is a truly revolutionary task, which involves socialist revolution.

Only countries like Cuba and China where the anti-imperialist struggle has grown over into conquest of political power by the working class has the imperialist strangulation begun to be broken.

Formal independence has been granted to most former colonies. But control of the world economy still rests with the major multi-national corporations. This new arrangement is described by Marx as ‘semi-colonialism’.

In most ex-colonies the local capitalist class, which gains its own rake-off from imperialist profits through trade, subsidies and bribery, forms the government. With the exception of a tiny group of countries like Korea and Singapore, imperialist control of the world economy has ensured that the so-called ‘third world’ remains under-developed economically.

Red

Whole sections of the world map were coloured red (or pink) as Britain conquered far the biggest empire. From the beginning imperialism was based on the import of cheap raw materials from the colonies, and the export of manufactured goods from the imperialist heartlands. Native industries, like the Indian textile industry, were destroyed in the interests of the imperialist nations.

Imperialism governs not just to the exploitation of colonies, but to inter-imperialist conflict as the major powers battled for control of world markets. The first world war was stemmed directly from this new stage of capitalism.

In the last century imperialism has been through major economic and political changes. The upsurges of anti-colonial struggles in Africa, Asia and Latin America, forced the major capitalist powers to change their form of domination.

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Plaid’s challenge

Readers may have gained the wrong impression of our view of Welsh nationalism. It is not that we are against Plaid Cymru as such, but the Welsh nationalist movement, of which Plaid Cymru is a part, represents a new challenge to the British left. While we believe that Plaid Cymru is not an alternative to Labour, it is not enough to budge state this is some source of the Birming-

Walton: should left just accept the ‘accomplished fact’?

Like Liam MacVlaud I would disagree with the recent election results. In Walton by-election, it is true that serious tactical objections could be made against the Broad Left’s decision to stand but by themselves the objections raised by the others indicate a strong adaptation to Bảological conditions.

The question is whether the result was tactically correct or not. The struggle within the left clearly cannot be reduced to how many votes Maoists might win or whether they could create a pretext to intensify the situation. The question is whether this represented the possibility of establishing a relatively independent left, against the forces of reaction.

I consider it incorrect to argue against a general policy of supporting independent labour candidates but no-one has argued this and the argument as such has no relevance.

Replacing the family unit

Matt Leu argues for a working-class social or socialist version of the family, on the grounds that it produces social, emotional and economic support. Rebecca Flemming replies that the family must be ‘abolished’ because it oppresses women, youth, lesbians and gay men.

I disagree with both Matt and Rebecca Flemming. That principle is at the base of the movement through which the family is constructed.

There are strong material reasons why people form and stay in families in present day society. It is argued that emotional practice of caring for others can provide emotional insurance, financial backup when you’re unemployed, and they provide stable, financial support.

This is the strength of Matt’s point. People don’t simply form families because they have been ruled by class ideology, but because the support on which life and emotional insurance is based.

Nor do people get support from the family merely ‘as individuals’. If you live in a communal family, the family systematically, as an institution, provides emotional support. However, what Matt misses is that people need their needs through relationships within a wider institutional setting. The absence of collective child care is crucial. The instability and competition of the job market forces people to move, thus breaks up non-family networks.

The nuptiality of society puts a premium on apparent social stability, in-fact it is an essential part of emotional relationships. Its crushing of creativity puts a premium on the creativity of parenthood. Socialism can get rid of, or drastically reduce, these constraints. It can thus enable the family to be met in other ways, and if it does not have the oppressive characteristics associated by Rebecca. Matt’s vision of a socialist family is therefore conceivable.

Socialist strategy should then be to replace the family. We should not propose to abolish it, as Rebecca does, since this would mean that many vital human relationships would be abolished. To talk of abolition is sectarian towards the powerful, valid reasons that people have for present constraints – to live within families.

A coherent case for a vote for Killory was to argue that the Broad Left was an ultra-left formation with no significant base but this was not the analysis of the editors and context.

Socialist Outlook can be as critical as it likes of the Broad Left’s leadership in pushing through the suspicions and suspicions of the left in Liverpool and enthusiasm as it likes in defence of the Militant’s leadership against any future witch hunt.

Despite this it will be an unfortunate day when Socialist Outlook finds itself to the right of a significant number of working class who will be supporting the Broad Left in Walton.

Patrick Scott Enfield

Partial view of G.B.H.

I was saddened to see that you have faltered into the trap as the rest of the left press in your review of Alan Beadle’s ‘G.B.H.’ (SO).

For socialists, reviewing fiction has a treacherous path to tread, and far too often in the past, as in this case, the quality of the work has been ignored in the pursuit of judging its political ‘right-er-

Although I would not suggest for one moment that the answer therefore is to take no account of the political viewpoint and that fictional piece puts across, the method of only addressing this aspect of the work given a partial and often misleading view of that value such a piece may have.

I don’t agree with the political messages that have so far been presented in G.B.H but I do think that it is a very well written, directed and acted piece of drama. I will continue to watch it, not so that I can be suitably outraged by the latest inane portrayal of the left, but because I enjoyed it, and I am interested in what happens to the characters.

Socialists do, and should, keep their political eyes open but don’t necessarily present only an orthodox marxist view of the world. The whole of the left would be more miserable if that was not the case.

But all too often, left journals, this one unfortunately included (not as often as the rest, thankfully), seem to feel obliged in their reviews, to condemn or deny any way of thinking that the smallest deviation from that orthodox.

Let’s have a little more honesty

Alain Nettle

No. 5 July 6, 1991 Page 13
What’s going on in MSF?

By Alison Miles and Glenn Sutherland (MSF London Region)

THE CONFERENCE of the Manufacturing, Science and Finance Union (MSF) in May graphically revealed a real struggle for power which is going on in the apparatus of the union.

At the conference, results of the election for the new General Secretary to replace Ken Gill were announced. Roger Lyons, Assistant General Secretary and ex-ASTMS ‘left winger’ beat Barbara Switzer, ex-TASS ‘left winger’ by 75,000 votes to 42,000.

What did this result reveal?

Roger Lyons was the candidate of MSF for Labour – a coalition of ex-ASTMS full-timers and MSF members, who want to bring MSF firmly into the Kinnock camp. Switzer was the candidate of ‘Unity Left’, which is the successor of the old TASS Broad Left.

The fact that Switzer was seen by the media and by many MSF members as the ‘left’ candidate is called into question by her record on the Labour Party National Executive. Only once has she voted with the left – on the Gulf war.

If MSF for Labour want to move the union firmly to a pro-Kinnock line, there should be no illusions about what the Ken Gill ‘Unity left’ leadership has meant to the union. Its Broad Left predecessor was formed originally in DATA, the Draughtsmen’s (sic) union, in order to fight for leadership against the right wing which then controlled DATA. Having succeeded in this objective by elected Ken Gill and winning the majority of the conference, the Broad Left battled down the hatches.

Electoral machine

The Broad Left became an electoral machine, leaving little or no room for real political debate. Taking up generally left wing positions after the union became TASS, the BL operated in an extreme bureaucratic way, with little rank and file participation.

The legacy of an extremely bureaucratised, but ‘left’ union leadership, found its expression in the election outcome. For many MSF members there seemed little choice between the two candidates.

At the May conference while many of the main planks of left policy supported by the union remained intact, the character of the Ken Gill leadership was shown by its inability to respond to the real challenges facing the union. Massive jobs losses have been declared in virtually every sector in which MSF recruits in engineering (with redundancies and closures threatening in Rolls Royce and British Aerospace), the finance sector, with many banks and insurance houses cutting jobs and freezing pay as well as shedding union representation.

In response to the bureaucratised and lack of leadership in the union, a small group to fight for unity democracy – Network 90 – has been set up. It is opening a fight for accountability (in MSF) of the NEC and full-timers leading up to the next rule change conference in 1994. It will also campaign for the implementation of important policy initiatives taken at this year’s conference.

Rail workers defy Tory anti-union laws

THE MAIN rail workers union, the RMT, has decisively rejected Tory anti-union laws at its conference. Delegates agreed that there should be a strike to fight the right to strike and to secondary picketing.

Not only was this taken later on, the conference decided to maintain the union’s policy of refusing to accept government funds for postal balloting.

And when the rail delegates came to vote on the issue of backing the government’s plan to re-nationalise the railway, motion was lost by just two votes.

In a move that will dismay the Labour leadership, the union leadership suffered a massive defeat on the issue of unilateral dismissals. Now the conference will go on to discuss the issue of pay, in the aftermath of recent cuts made by the government and the union leadership over strike action.

Shell runs illegal blacklist

by Dave Osler

Shell UK is running a computerised blacklist of participants in last summer’s South Sea oil rig sit-ins. Offshore Industry Liaison Committee (OILC) activists have told MPs the company is even making information available to its rivals, stopping some workers finding employment anywhere else after they have been blacklisted. If true, this would contravene the Data Protection Act.

Survey

Initial results of a survey of applicants to the unofficial inter-union body’s hardship fund were tabulated as written evidence to the Commons energy select committee last month.

Out of 32 respondents unemployed since the dispute, 47 had been working fields operated by Shell, mainly indirectly through contractors. Left majorities are reported in P&O, Shell and Explorer Offshore.

All but one felt they were being victimised for their activities during the industrial unrest, motivated largely by demands for improved safety in the wake of the Piper Alpha disaster, which killed 226 people in July 1988.

OILC allege blacklisting occurs through Shell’s Offshore Personnel Information System (ORPIS) set up, which allocates an identification number to all offshore employees.

Tabs

ORPIS is used to keep computerised tabs on exactly who is an OILC activist and who is not, which is both a legal requirement and essential for health and safety purposes.

But the system obviously identifies all those taking part in last year’s occupations. In an industry where most work comes on short term contracts, activists can soon find themselves unemployed.

OILC suspects that Shell is sharing industrial relations information with competitors, who often ask potential employees for their ORPIS numbers if their CV indicates employment with Shell. Other companies have no obvious use for such details. ORPIS points out, as the system is entirely internal to Shell.

Seven years after the death of the NUM, that stands up to the violence. This was just days after the case against miners’ leaders Arthur Scargill and Peter Heathfield was dropped.

Instead of continuing to try to jail 39 miners for life for their part in the Orgreave picket, the police have paid them £25,000 in an ‘ex gratia’ payment. A South Yorkshire cop admitted that things ‘we did in those days... make me shudder even now... I can still hear the screams’.

What was the reaction of Labour leader Neil Kinnock? A final admission that he should have backed the miners against the police, after years of vitriol against the NUM?

Instead Kinnock, true to form, compounded his lack of support for the miners in the past by presenting the Daily Mirror journalists that hooded and vilified the NUM leadership with a ‘Reporters of the Year’ award.

The Yorkshire NUM Council promised a new campaign. They will certainly be joined in their reaction by any socialist newspaper.
New attack on reproductive rights

One of the only two organisations to provide direct inhumation to women on a non-discriminatory basis - the British Pregnancy Advisory Service (BPAS) - has just announced that this service will close later this year.

The withdrawal of these services does not affect lesbians and single women who are denied access to DI in the NHS and the vast majority of the private sector. It marks a particularly significant blow to women's reproductive rights in the wake of the debates around the Embryology Act, and the ongoing court battles over the rights of lesbians to foster and adopt.

Though Ian Jones, director of BPAS, has stated that the abolition of the service is not related to the 'virgin births' controversy, there is a discriminatory policy underlying the move.

This was revealed by a BPAS spokeswoman who said: 'Abortion is a fundamental human right, but access to reproductive technology - although it is desirable and should be freely available - is not.'

The decision was also clearly influenced by market forces and the economic structures that BPAS is currently operating under. It was felt by the steering group of the management committee that the number of women using the DI services was not justifying the human and financial resources that they require. This is a situation which would be worsened by the regulatory demands of the Embryology Act.

Free Patrick McLaughlin

A campaign has been started in support of Patrick McLaughlin, an Irish prisoner framed on 'conspicuous' charges in 1980. McLaughlin was sentenced to life imprisonment, despite very contradictory evidence and considerable confusion on the part of the judge. McLaughlin was convicted of 'conspiracy to cause explosions' after an 'unexplained' fire set outside a bus in the Christian-run community in Northern Ireland.

The evidence against him rested on three points: that a fingerprint was found on a bag inside the bomb; that his name was found on a magazine in a van allegedly used to transport the bomb; and that he had a conversation with a police officer in which he said that he was aware that a bomb was being made at a flat in North London.

But other fingerprints were also found, though the police refused to identify them. McLaughlin claimed that the magazine was planted in the van. And he denied that any incriminating conversation took place. In addition, one police officer said that he never spoke to McLaughlin about anything about a bomb.

Consistency charges are frequently used against Irish people, particularly when the charges are political and there is a lack of real evidence.

Leicester Trades Council are now urging that the Labour movement should campaign for McLaughlin's release.

Teachers force retreat on cuts

by Bob Whitehead

Teachers have forced Sandwell Labour council in Birmingham to retreat from threatened redundancies, following a strong vote for strike action.

Sandwell has long portrayed itself as a caring Labour authority, but this image was destroyed with the recent threat of ten redundancies among teachers, last autumn.

Fortunately, this was met with a strong response from the National Union of Teachers. A well attended general meeting voted unanimously for strike action. This was followed by an 82% majority for a three day strike in a ballot.

This produced a U-turn from the local education authority - all remaining redundancy notices were withdrawn. After years of poorly attended union meetings, such as a rapid and decisive move in defence of all teachers' job security sign.

The role of the local left Socialists Teachers Alliance in the local union leadership was a key factor in the campaign.

Tide of struggles against NHS opt-outs

by Harry Sloan

The July 5 Day of Action called by NALGO in solidarity with sacked NHS clerical staff victimised for taking strike action against Oldham health authority coincides with a rising tide of local activity in defence of the health service.

Rallies are being held in many hospitals, challenging the Tories' reactionary NHS 'reform'.

Campaigns

Campaigns against the second wave of over 100 would-be hospital opt-outs across the country have gathered strength and urgency from the revelation that hundreds of jobs were axed in April by two of the Tories' flagships - 'Self Governing Trusts' - Day's and Bradford.

Now the plans to cut more nursing posts - including for nurses and midwives - by the opted-out North Middlesex Hospital will add further im- petus to already active campaign groups.

In London, health workers and local community organisations are linking up to fight opt-outs, with especially active campaigns in Ealing. In Nottingham, with Walsall Parkside and Forest Parkside.

The Hands Off Our NHS

Nazis attack left

The National Front have stepped up attempts to establish a presence in West Lon- don. A group of from the 'Flag' faction of the National Front organised an attack on left-wing newspaper seller in Hounslow on June 22.

The attack was halted after the nazi tried to blow up the newspaper seller's van with a determined mobilisation of the left and the Black community.

Fascists have not attempted to organise on the streets in the area in five years, although they have a history of standing in council elections.

Inaction from the police means that continued vigilance from the left and the Black com- munity will be necessary.

Bitter reality

With Trusts now a concrete, bitter reality rather than an abstract future threat, and with many of the first-wave Trusts already facing financial problems, the battle against 'opting out' is likely to continue throughout the year.

Now is the time for the unions to raise the profile of the campaign: if the Oldham NALGO strikers are to be defended, and Trust managers deterred from attempting similar union-busting tactics, the unions must show themselves ready to fight back in defence of jobs, condi- tions and union recognition.

Hands Off Our NHS can be contacted at 446, Uxbridge Rd, London W12 0NS.
Hands off Slovenia and Croatia!

The attack on Slovenia by the Yugoslav federal army threatens to throw Yugoslavia into an uncontrollable civil war. If it continues it will inevitably spread to Croatia and then the whole federation.

As we go to press reports suggest the Yugoslav army is continuing attacks, including terrorist attacks in the Slovene capital Ljubljana, despite the ceasefire.

Slovenia and Croatia have been provoked into the declaration of independence by the strong-arms tactics of the ex-Communist leadership in the Serbian republic.

Serbia’s thuggish boss, Slobodan Milosevic, aims to create a ‘Greater Serbia’ – dominated by Serbian interests and repressing national minorities like the Albanians in Kosovo.

Dirty work

Federal prime minister Ante Markovic is carrying out the dirty work of Milosevic by sending in the army. The army itself, although keeping its distance from Milosevic so far, is dominated by Serbian interests.

The emergence of right-wing nationalism in Croatia and Slovenia is directly the responsibility of the Serbian leadership. Milosevic himself has no intention of defending even Stalinist-style ‘socialism’.

His regime is increasingly right-wing, allying itself with semi-fascist Serbian militias.

The Yugoslav crisis cannot be solved in the interests of the working class by military action against Slovenia or any other republic demanding independence.

The attacks by the Yugoslav army have included terrorist air raids against civilian targets, trying to intimidate the republic to drop its demands.

A socialist federation in Yugoslavia can only be built on the basis of equality between the republics. Equality implies the right of independence, which is currently the will of the overwhelming majority of Croats and Slovenes.

A new federation could only be built via recognising the right to independence for all republics and provinces, and by the overthrow of the Milosevic regime in Serbia.

The immediate task for socialists is to demand that the Yugoslav army gets out of Slovenia, before a terrorist attack is turned into a bloodbath.

Yugoslav tragedy – see page 9

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