As ‘Back to Basics’ fraud collapses

SAVE OUR WELFARE STATE

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Break the economic consensus

Defend the welfare state

**Editorial**

IN A COUNCIL by-election in Barry-in-Pembess last week the Tories suffered a mammoth 23 per cent swing against them, to lose a safe seat. It was just a small indication of the extent of Tory unpopularity and the electoral defeats being stored up for the Tories in the council and European elections this year.

John Major's cynical and ill-fated 'back to basics' campaign was perhaps designed to give the Tories a popular cutting edge when their economic policies in tax cuts and living standards falling.

VAT on fuel, the new council tax assessments, mass unemployment, and the huge tax rises and benefit cuts to come in April are all feeding widespread popular resentment.

The unmistakable evidence of general social decay and breakdown—culminating in a popular revolt against the Tory Government—is the government that has been detailed by its own ideology.

But Major's attempts to divert attention from these problems by a nonaggression strategy—by the memory lane of a mythical golden age have gone seriously wrong. The 'iron lung' element of the 'back to basics' campaign has been overtaken by the hypocrisy of the other major ministers and their parliamentary aides.

As the Tim Yeo affair and Patten's prominence on the national curriculum shows, 'back to basics' morality collides with deep social changes which have occurred over more than 30 years.

**Hysterical**

As a result, Major's 'big idea' to restore the Tory ranks last October has been reduced to little more than hysteria—calls for a crackdown on crime—so long as it is petty crime rather than multi-million pound fraud—and a renewed onslaught on social welfare.

That's the reason for the Tory attack on single mothers, involving a battery of measures including the child support agency.

Yet despite their deep unpopularity, despite evidence of the long term social damage they are doing, and despite the unravelling of 'back to basics' the Tory anti-welfare steamroller is driving on relentlessly.

They are determined to undermine key foundations of the welfare state. This is a long term process, but as the budget measures showed, it is gathering pace.

Every aspect of the welfare state is in peril: unemployment and social security benefits, pensions, the NHS, housing and the right to free higher and secondary education.

Defence of the welfare state is now a key task for the labour movement for a wide and difficult fight, though one in which the workers' movement starts out with a large majority of public opinion already in support.

But instead of taking up this support and recognising the need to step up the fight, the Labour leadership is once again quiescent and quiescent in the face of this attack.

**Consensus**

One reason is the tacit economic consensus between Labour and Tory leaders, so rigidly exposed by Bryan Gould in the past two weeks.

Labour's John Smith and Gordon Brown are so scared of saying anything which might be seen as a spending commitment for a future Labour government that they are plunged into silence.

The Labour leadership has effectively given up the fight for full employment and the welfare state because it has renounced any economic alternative to the crude free market ideology of the Tories.

The economic policies of the Labour leadership are a major obstacle to a sustained fightback against the attack on the welfare state.

Although it will be the struggle of public service workers and users of welfare services which will determine the outcome, the political and ideological fight over the economy is an important determinant of how that struggle proceeds.

A forthright socialist challenge to the capitalist market system will reinforce those fighting the Tory offensive.

It is now a key task for the left of the Labour movement, inside and outside the Labour Party, to break the economic consensus over deflationary, anti-welfare policies.

There is widespread anger and frustration over Labour's feckless performance at every level of the labour movement.

The fight against the economic consensus must be taken both into the unions and the Labour Party, where even in this period, a broad audience for an alternative to free market economics can be found.

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**Teachers defeat Tory schools testing**

By Chris Brooks

The government has made a humiliating climb-down over the compulsory tests built into their reactionary National Curriculum.

The curriculum will be limited in English, maths and science up to the age of 14. Compulsory history and geography will be eliminated.

A widely supported teachers' boycott of the tests has forced Isaiah Education Secretary John Patten to accept Sir Ron Dearing's report criticising the proposals.

The report said that the scheme had 'gone over the top', reducing the amount of time teachers can spend helping children to learn.

Knuckles rapped: Patten

The collapse over the tests is a big blow against the National Curriculum, introduced in 1987. The curriculum stresses grammar, arithmetic and the role learning of facts against previous attempts to give children the skills to critically assess the world around them. The collapse also registers a big victory for leftwingers in the teaching unions. One mark of the new confidence teachers have acquired is the election of Carole Regan, a leader of the Socialist Teachers Alliance and Vice-Presi dent of the National Union of Teachers.

The NUT members have also voted almost unanimously to keep up the boycott of the tests.

It seems likely however that teachers will have to fight for the united boycott to remain. The NUSAWT and non-TUC ATL leaders will be eager to get back to normal. Socialists must support the teachers fight for the education our children deserve.

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**RMT left notches up key victory**

By Jake Farrier

Long-time revolutionary Marxist Patrick Sikorski and two other class struggle leaders won positions on the National Executive of the RMT trade union in London last week.

Elected secretary of the union's London Transport District Council, Sikorski's victory comes shortly after underground bosses attempted to sack him following a verbal altercation with a local manager after putting up a notice for a union meeting to discuss the sacking of another member.

Support for Pat and another victimised tube worker, Ray Stimson, was widespread.

The RMT's appeal in their defence was circulated to working-class organisations worldwide by Socialist Outlook and the support of the TUC's general council members won by RMT leader Jimmy Knapp.

Stimson and Sikorski were reinstated on the tube only after a four-to-one ballot victory led to a one-day strike on the Underground line they worked on, and the threat to ballot the whole network.

This is a welcome victory for the left at a time when victories are few and far between.
Close down Campsfield! The racist face of Fortress Britain

By Bill MacKeith and Paul Clarke

ANTI-RACIST campaigners in the Oxford area warned at the end of last year that the opening of the new Campsfield detention centre was part of a new offensive against immigrants and asylum seekers.

Last year one month later their warnings were dramatically confirmed when officials detained 100 people out of 256 on a flight from Jamaica - and promptly shipped many of them to Campsfield.

But what surprised many was that the swoop was not against asylum seekers, but against more Christmas visitors! The 190 detained and the dozens later deported were accused not of what they had done, but what they might do - an "intention" to overstay their visit.

Instead of spending Christmas with families and friends more than 100 spent it in detention. Welcome to Britain!

Visitors

The function of Campsfield was the detention system was thus revealed. It is to intimidate potential visitors and asylum seekers, especially from black countries.

If you are black and you try to come to Britain you have a good chance of being deported or detained. Imagine the future if the plane had been full of Americans, Canadians or even white South Africans.

The new "Fortress Britain" policy is linked to the new "Fortress Europe" strategy of the European Union.

Major and Home Secretary Howard are doing a double act with French interior minister Charles Pasqua, who has declared "not a euro" to immigration and asylum seekers.

According to Pasqua, people should stay "in their own country" and (what a joke) France should "lead the crusade" to economically develop the third world.

The problem is the future hyperbolic economic development of the third world is not much use to someone fleeing persecution in the here and now.

In November 1992 the government declared its intention to create 330 new places in detention centres for its stepped-up immigration campaign.

Profit-making

In addition to the 100 places at Harmondsworth and 190 at Harlar near Southampton, the 200 new places at Campsfield, near Kidlington, Oxford, include places for men women and children. Built at a cost of £5m it will run for profit by Group 4.

Just so people know what kind of people the centre is designed for, compasses have been installed so that Muslims will know that they are facing Mecca.

The first detainees arrived at the new immigration prison on 29 November.

By the time the second minibus arrived, demonstrators were at the gates with placards saying "Refugees Are Not Criminals" and "Stop the Detentions!"

On 25 November a torchlit demonstration by some 50 people took place in central Oxford and 1000 leaflets saying "Stop the Refugee Prisons" distributed.

Support the campaign against Campsfield and the government's racist immigration policies. The Campaign against Campsfield can be contacted on 0865 724452.

Walls go up around Fortress Europe

NEW REGULATIONS are being brought in by the European Union in a drive to keep out people from black African and Caribbean countries and Asia.

EU countries are establishing a negative list of countries whose nationals will have to apply for a three-month visa in advance.

Whites exempt

Only a tiny number of pre-dominantly white Commonwealth countries will be exempt.

The total number of countries on the negative list is 177, high on the list are all black African countries and most Caribbean countries, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

The move confirms the twin-track strategy of the Schengen agreement signed by nine EC states in 1985.

This provides for much greater freedom of movement within the EU but a determined attempt to keep out immigrants and black asylum seekers.

Study exposes how Tories fiddle figures

Jobless Britain

THE GOVERNMENT is lying about the real unemployment level. That was the conclusion of a detailed study made by Cambridge economics lecturer John Wells, published on 1 January.

Based on official statistics, including those of the International Labour Organisation, Wells showed that the number of people actively seeking work but unable to claim benefits is 1.86 million.

The government's "official" unemployment figure is 2.92 million. So the real figure is around 4 million.

But says Wells, if people who have not sought work in the last four weeks are included, the figure is closer to 5 million.

Those extra million are workers who did not seek work, quite reasonably, they believe there is none at their level of skills.

The 5 million figure included 300,000 people on government "work" schemes, designed to massage the unemployment figures.

Since 1979 there have been 29 (!) changes in the way that unemployment figures are calculated, all of them designed to reduce the number of people officially classified as unemployed.

Five million unemployed does not equate the toll of human misery caused by the recession and Tory policies however. Millions of people are now on part-time or doing short-term casual work.

Between 8-10 people face permanent insecurity, either unemployed or only precariously employed.

Hard on the heels of Wells' report came another, again by a Cambridge economist, which showed an almost 100 per cent match between the levels of crime and the levels of unemployment.

In particular, the number of burglaries exactly matches the changes in the level of unemployment among young men between 17 and 25.

This new study is a dramatic refutation of John Major's claims that crime is caused by individual wickedness and has no social causes. It shows the hypocrisy of the "soft help" and "back to basics" campaign.

Crime is going up and the Tory solution is not to tackle its causes, but to put more people in prison.

Scandal

The scandal in current situation is the passivity and resignation of the labour and trade union leaders in the face of this new toll of human misery. Even on the left there is no big battle.

In various European countries there is an active debate on the reduction of the working week to 35, or 32 hours with no loss of pay.

In France a massive campaign ("Agir ensemble contre le chomage") has been launched, fighting for a 35-hour week, with the perspective of an eventual 30-hour week.

Capitalism has proven repeatedly it is unable to provide solutions, which causes and ends unemployment. Only a socialist-planned economy can overcome it.

The task for the labour movement now is to fight back against it, around demands for the reduction of the working week with no loss of pay.
Defending the machinery: the Parkside women held a rally in the pump room

**Pit camp fights on**

By Steve Hall

(Leigh, Atherton and Tyldesley Miners' Support Group)

OCTOBER 18 1994 LANCASTERSW Women Against Pit Closure will be staging a special Open Day to celebrate their year long twenty four hour, seven days a week presence at Lancashire's last remaining deep mine colliery at Parkside, Newton-le-Willows.

Throughout this period their pit camp has received tremendous support from rank and file miners, NUM and the working class in general.

Indeed such has been the breadth of this support, that it has received delegations from the Sandinstas in Nicaragua as well as greetings from the Navajo nation of North American Indians.

Though Parkside's workforce has now gone, the Parkside Pit Camp has nevertheless become an active symbol of working class resistance to the Torjes' bosses' onslaught on jobs, services and living standards in general, representing the determination of working people not to be bullied into submission and to fight on regardless of the difficulties.

**Machinery**

The Pit Camp's most important achievement has been to prevent the dismantling and removal of much of the expensive mine machinery and the capping of the pit shaft which would have ended the life of the Colliery. This means Parkside may still resume coaling despite having been formally 'shut' for over six weeks.

**Undefeatable**

Lane WAPC however, as well as the continuing support movement expert renewed efforts to close the pit for good in the very near future, since the present situation is untenable from a safety standpoint and cannot be allowed to continue. Lane WAPC have issued an appeal to the wider trade union and working class movement to help prevent this from happening. As well as continuing to raise money (the camp costs over £300 per week to maintain) they are asking for support for their vigil via workplace delegations etc.

If you can help in any way please come along to the Open Day on 18 January and get in touch with the camp on 0925 291799.

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**Tories dumped in Barrow**

By Jake Farrier

TWO Barrow-in-Furness by-elections have recorded massive swings against the Tory-run council. As well as suffering from the Tory decline nationally, the council did nothing to prevent the closure of the town's shipyards.

**Tenants**

The council's plan to hand over council housing to a housing association was rejected by a tenants' ballot. An attempt to close the town's women's refuge produced a 10,000-strong petition organised by women who had previously been active in politics.

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**Linking up to fight fascism**

By Paul Woyny, Secretary, Southampton TUC

The TUC call for a national demonstration in the East End of London, on March 19 is a major step forward. The full weight of the labour movement must be mobilised against racism and fascism. But we cannot rely on the TUC bureaucracy to organise anything larger than a press conference.

Activists in union branches and Trade Union Councils will have to rally support for the demonstration.

Saturday 4 December saw the second 'Labour and Trade Union Conference: Fighting Racism and Fascism', it was organised by Beckett Trades Unit Council, which covers Wellng, the site of the BNPP HQ.

The conference, held at the TUC's Congress House, launched a new 'Labour and Trade Union Campaign against Racism and Fascism' (LTUC). This is very welcome, if long overdue. There were approximately 100 delegates and observers, most representing local union branches and Trade Union Councils. Speakers included Joe Gordon (TGWU Region 1), Nick Stone (Anti-Fascist Action) and spokespeople from the South East Region TUC, the Campaign Against Racism and Fascism and Women United Against Racism. Speakers who failed to show were representatives of the Labour Party, TUC General Council and Anti-Racist Alliance.

The conference was refreshingly non sectarian. No group dominated or tried to dominate the proceedings. Places were reserved on the Steering Committee for representatives of the other main campaigns (e.g. ANL, YAF, AFA and ARA).

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**Labour Party**

The campaign is open to affiliation from both Labour Party and trade union bodies.

The proposed submission of the committee places, elected at conference, for Labour Party delegates. This generated the most controversy. The proposal was agreed, but only two Labour delegates were willing to take up the positions.

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**London Chauvinism**

The conference was dominated by local London Trade Union Councils. TUCs in the South East Region were allowed to affiliate and send a delegate to the steering committee.

A proposed amendment to open affiliation to TUCs throughout the country was rejected out of hand, the chair would not even put the proposal to the vote. Several delegates referred to SERTUC as the 'London Region' of the TUC. It seemed that many delegates saw the BNPP and racial violence as a local 'London problem'.

The campaign will be seeking affiliations from national trade unions. Delegates at the conference came from as far as Sheffield and Nottingham. The paranoia of conservatives in the metropolis came as a big surprise.

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**March 19 demo**

The key test of the new campaign will be in mobilising for the national demo. It must co ordinate and support the work of local organisations. If it succeeds, it can go on to initiate further activities.

This campaign is too important to fail. Its success, no matter how limited, must be built on.

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**Age of consent: urgent campaign launched**

By Peter Purton

THERE IS likely to be a vote on a proposal to equalise the age of consent for gay men in the week starting 17 January. There will be an amendment to the government's Criminal Justice Bill launched by Edwina Currie and other Tories, backed by an all-party group of MPs, which will bring down the age of consent for gay men from its present 21 (as a result of the 1967 Sexual Offences Act) to equality with heterosexuals at 16.

This follows months of preparation and lobbying by the lesbian and gay rights organisation Stonewall.

An urgent campaign has been launched to attempt to win the vote. To generate pressure and publicity, there will be a lobby of Parliament and public meeting in the Grand Committee Room on the evening of Monday 17 January. All supporters of equality are being urged to take part.

**Advance**

Though the issue itself is of immediate concern only to gay men, it is a specific argument for the campaign for the lesbian and gay rights struggle.

Crucial to victory will be solid support from Labour MPs. Despite absolutely categorical Party Conference Policy in support of equality at 16, the essential number of Labour MPs - including some on the left - are known to be shaly on the issue.

It is therefore important that pressure is brought to bear from within the Labour movement to ensure that there is a maximum turn out from all Labour MPs, in support of full equality.

The Labour Campaign for Lesbian and Gay Rights has thrown itself into this task - but success can only be achieved by ALL socialists mobilising in the next few days to try to bring about what would be a remarkable victory against the current reactionary consensus.
Union chiefs step in to Labour policy vacuum

Gould campaign confronts Smith’s Trappist tendency

By Harry Sloan

FED UP with Labour’s abject failure to present any coherent challenge to Tony ‘market’ economics, union chiefs, MPs and CLPs have thrown their support behind John Gould’s new pressure group, the Full Employment Forum.

Gould, heavily defeated in his 1992 bid for the Labour leadership, has clearly struck a chord of popular anger and resentment at the constrained silence which constitutes Labour’s present economic policy.

His call for an end to the damaging economic ‘consensus’ with the Tories will be as widely echoed in the party and trade union rank and file as it is feared by the Trappist tendency that surrounds John Smith.

Under the banner of ‘closed for modernisation’, this group has pursued a tactic of constant retreat on all economic questions since the general election defeat.

Silenced

The extent of the yawning gulf that has supplanted any serious economic policy can be deduced from the sudden silence of Labour’s new Employment spokesman John Prescott, who has discovered how hard it is to challenge Tory policy when you have none of your own.

The modernisers’ stance is best typified by Peter Mandelson MP, who as Kinnsrock’s right-hand served as the architect of two successive electoral disasters.

He has written to the Guardian to warn that any discussion of possible alternative economic policies should be gaged, since the Tories could latch on to suggestions for increased borrowing or public spending and use them against Labour.

The response from Smith’s circle of ‘modernisers’ to the initial manifesto issued by the Full Employment Forum was equally non-political, blandly stating that any kind of personal attack on John Smith.

What is the heresy of Gould’s new pressure group? Far from a Marxist manifesto or any challenge to reformist politics, it is in a sense a ‘back to basics’ call, urging a Labour government to use ‘all the instruments of macro-economic policy in order to promote full employment’.

The scale of the response to Gould’s relatively modest policy initiative shows that even on this front, confidence in John Smith’s team of ditherers is waning fast.

Amongst the early recruits to the FEPS are 35 Labour MPs including leading members of the Campaign Group and three members of the shadow cabinet. 50 CLPs have lent their backing and on Christmas Eve the FEPS funds were boosted by the official support of Britain’s third biggest union, the GMB, which joined three other national unions in affiliating.

OMOV could result in a union response of ‘no say, no pay’, in which they take a more independent line on the funding of the Labour Party. Since that conference, the traditionally right wing and staunchly ‘new realism’ GMB has expressed its displeasure by withdrawing its £500,000 year support for the Trade Unions For Labour electoral machine.

It has also joined with the TUCW and UNISON to back a November conference in defence of the welfare state called by left MP Ken Livingstone, before now throwing its support Party members and trade unionists.

Neither way, the fact that the silence has at last been broken, and the issue of an alternative policy put at the centre of discussion must improve the prospects for the beleaguered left, fighting on for socialism in the Labour Party.

Intervening the Trappist conspiracy – Bryan Gould

This move by GMB leader John Edmonds is just the latest symptom of the tug and friction at Labour’s feeble performance that is running through the whole trade union movement.

Edmonds, like TGWU General Secretary Bill Morris, is furious that after defeating the union on the OMOV issue at last year’s Labour conference, John Smith’s leadership has handed none of the pointed criticisms about its lack of profile, and continued to retreat before the Tories.

No say, no pay

Unite chiefs last summer warned that a Smith victory on and cash backing into an unoff...
Downing Street Declaration

Irish struggle in danger

By David Coon

IN BOTH Britain and Irish Republic the 'thirty year rule' governs the revelation of secret documents. So about this time every year we are fed carefully edited snippets about events in both countries 30 years ago. In Britain it's the Profumo affair in Ireland, the visit of John F. Kennedy, who until fairly recently shared a plaque of honour on many an Irish masterpiece with the Pope.

One of Kennedy's worries when he visited in 1963, according to the latest postings from Dublin, was the pressure he was being put under by the Fianna Fail Government to get the British to state publicly that 'they were not opposed to the unity of Ireland'.

The Major/Reynolds Downing Street declaration barely goes beyond the position which Kennedy told Dublin that he could not deliver in 1963.

Island

True, the British now state they have no 'selfish strategic or economic interest in Ireland' and apparently concede for the first time that it is for 'the people of the island of Ireland' to decide on the future of the whole country.

But the declaration paves the way for the Unionists to self-determination above the rights of the majority on the island. The Unionist veto is the lockstep on Britain's continued rule in part of Ireland.

It is for this reason that Sinn Fein spokes and, in a more muffled way, Dublin, have been trying to edge the British towards taking a more persuasive role in bringing about Irish unity.

There is absolutely no chance that the British will do so and this is the reason why Dublin has been offering some additional sweetnesses to the republicans to get them to stop fighting, including talk of an amnesty and de-militarisation.

The repeat of the notorious Section 31 which banned Sinn Fein from the media in the South is another enticement. The Hume/Adams talks and the process leading to the Downing Street declaration undoubtedly spring out so much from a war wearyness on the part of republicans as the perception that it was impossible to force the British out militarily.

Weakest

The problem is that the republicans are politically at their weakest in 10 years and are relying on Dublin to negotiate with the British on their behalf.

This is only partly due to the fact that Hume/Adams Agreement was hijacked by Dick Spring for Dublin's own purposes.

In every decade since Partition in 1921 there has been a military uprising against what Charles Haughey called a 'faked political entity' - the Six County statelet. Both the IRA and the British recognised early in the present phase that a decisive military victory by either side was impossible.

The IRA have traditionally been distrustful of politics and considered the military campaign as the 'cutting edge' against the British. But the present predicament needlessly exposes this political weakness.

Whatever the bravery, resourcefulness and determination of the IRA fighters, they can't drive the British out through military means alone; recognition of that is one of the reasons for the current talks.

A correct political strategy would have involved attempting to mobilise sufficient forces in Ireland (and Britain) which could achieve that. The military campaign too often clashed with the needs of politics, especially when civilians were killed or injured.

Sinn Fein has not developed a programme for the whole island, which would appeal to workers in the South as well as to loyalist workers in the North.

On social questions, such as divorce, contraception and abortion, the republicans allow themselves to be portrayed as conservative and backward nationales and they didn't offer a rounded solution to the crisis which would appeal to workers, the unemployed and emigrants.

Little support

Their share of the vote in recent general elections in the South never rose above two per cent.

The worst mistake was the failure to challenge Flanma Fail because they assumed that, in the end, Fianna Fail or, at least its base, was on their side. A leading Sinn Fein member spoke in London recently of the 'nationalist family', embracing, presumably, everyone from the IRA to Fianna Fail and sections of the Catholic Church.

The implication of this kind of thinking is that family members look after each other and that betrayal by Albert Reynolds would be unthinkable.

The signs of Flanma Fail capitulation have been there for a long time. Former Fianna Fail leader Haughey's silence on the hunger strikes, his implementation of the Anglo-Irish agreement having opposed it in opposition, his changes in extradition law to placate the British, his inaction on the Birmingham Six, Guildford Four and other such cases were sufficent warning that, despite his republican reputation, he would not confron the British.

Distraction

Haughey was willing when necessary to make republican noises but that was only to distract attention from the economic crisis. Because they didn't address that issue, Sinn Fein were treated as being irrelevant to the concerns of the working class.

A strategy it is a disaster for Sinn Fein to entrench the Dublin Government in negotiations with the British on its behalf.

The class interests of the Dublin Government are totally opposed to those of the working class people in the nationalist areas in the North.

The as yet unpublished Hume/Adams Agreement seems to contain Adam's agreement on some version of the Unionists veto, probably along the lines of John Hume's position that the most important division in Ireland is among its people and that the British veto and the ending of partition depends on the prior agreement of the Unionists.

The logic of this position leads Hume to argue that where it is not for the British, the British army would have no reason to remain.

Further, he claims that if the IRA laid down its arms, the British would dismantle their fortified border posts and the border would disappear. Partition itself is down to the republicans!

At best, this kind of thinking would be excusable the British-Ireland, when provision would obviously have to be made for the proper representation of the Ulsterans at
"Partly because of the historic weakening of Irish nationalism, the British seem to be on a 'win/ win' roll. If the republicans reject the Downing Street declaration the British have at least got Dublin on side. If they accept, then the price paid by Britain - a mere form of words - is far less than they originally reckoned on paying."

Mass movement in support of hunger strikers marked last serious republican attempt to build in southern working class weakness of Irish nationalism the British seem to be on a 'win/ win' roll. If the republicans reject the Downing Street declaration the British have at least got Dublin on side. If they accept, then the price paid by Britain - a mere form of words - is far less than they originally reckoned on paying.

No interest

While the Downing Street declaration claimed the British had no strategic or economic interest in Ireland, there was no mention of their political interest - a point made by several Tory backbenchers in the House of Commons.

Policy towards Ireland is dictated by a number of key, political, considerations. Firstly, a forced withdrawal is unthink- able - there would be uncom- fortable parallels with Portugal after its retreat from Africa. While the Cold War means that the strategic reasons for occupation are less important, any retreat could be treated as weakness and therefore impede Britain's standing as a world power.

And while the economic rea- sons for staying are in fact nega- tive, holding the Six Counties enables the British to exert a degree of control over the whole island.

Rumblings

The rumblings on the Tory right have so far been muffled but should Unionist support start to waver there is a fair chance they will start shouting 'betrayal'.

The orientation of the withdrawal movement in Britain could now cause serious prob- lems. It has generally oriented towards Irish unity than to British politics.

The slogans may have been different to those of the republic- ans but the politics was often similar.

The danger now is that such a close identification with Sinn Fein could now divert the core of activists around the Troops Out Movement away from a main purpose which is to build support for Irish withdrawal and for self determination for Ireland.

Spanish workers prepare for general strike

From Patrick Baker in Barcelona

SOUNDS familiar. Thou- sands of workers boiled out every day, their rights disap- pearing like snow out of a ditch.

This was the generous pre- sent that workers in the Spanish state could expect from multi- nationals such as Volkswa- gen/Seat as they headed for the festive season, only aided by our Socialist government.

But are they sitting back and taking it? Far from it.

But first a little back- ground. Last year's elec- tions returned a minority Socialist (PSOE) admini- stration, with the cryptic- tionary being the key to their major, though on the rare occasions when they implement a progressive measure they don't object to support from the Izquierda Unida (United Left, of which more later).

Despite much scepticism born of bitter experience, most on the left breathed a sigh of relief after the elections. Spain was, at least, not going to get a dose of Thatcherism a la Amor (the PP's leader).

And the Izquierda Unida, a hard-left regroupment domi- nated by the Communist Party, did get 15 odd per cent of the vote.

Since then the Socialist ad- ministration has fulfilled the worst nightmares of the left, launching a bitter offensive against workers' rights.

And the justification for these attacks would warm the cockles of John Major's heart. Spain is deep in recession, with 23 per cent unemployed - so obviously the only way out is to make it much easier to sack workers, to employ workers with no rights to social security, to employ young workers for a pittance.

Yes, in that respect there are marked similarities with Britain. But there they end. Because rather than the feeble moan that one could expect from John

Comisiones Obreras (Workers' Commissions, Communist-led) and the IU (previously Socialist).

A day of action called by the two federations in December was massively followed, with demonstrations of tens, and sometimes over a hundred, of thousands right across the Spanish state.

Since then the unions, along with the UL, have been conduct- ing a mass campaign for a gen- eral strike on January 27 - the only way to get these attacks withdrawn.

Polls shortly before Christ- mas revealed that supporters of all parties, PP included, thought that the strike would be a big success.

So what lies ahead? Well, the campaign of ac- tion and the general strike are clearly a very positive response from the workers' movement to Gonzalez's at- tack.

Whether they will be suf- ficient to beat back the aus- terity offensive is hard to say. But what is as plain as the nose on your face is that attacks from both government and employers and would come thicker and faster if the workers' move- ment sat back and did noth- ing.

The unfortunate aspect of the situation is that there is now no state-wide left organisation to build politically on these struggles.

Though the UL have played a very positive role thus far, the recent self-dissolution of most of the Izquierda Alternative, the largest, substantial left organi- sation that organised across the Spanish state, was particularly ill-timed.

Socialist PM Felipe Gonzalez

Smith et al in response to such mea- sures, there have been a wave of mass demonstrations which are shortly be followed by a one-day general strike.

Strike call

The first call for such a re- sponse was issued back in Autumn by Julio Anguita, leader of the United Left (UL). This call was rapidly taken up by both main union federations - the
"We can’t tell you how important these three lorries are for us"

JENNY MEES, member of the Workers Socialist Party, Belgian section of the Fourth International, recently returned from Bosnia. She had reached Tuzla as part of the International Workers Aid for Bosnia convoy. She will be visiting Britain in the next few weeks to speak at a series of International Workers Aid meetings. We publish here an interview she conducted with SELIM BESLAGIC, mayor of Tuzla.

Jenny Mees: What do you think about the current situation in Bosnia?

Selim Beslagic: The world refuses to face the truth. The world refuses to call attention to the aggressors and war criminals, and the world avoids speaking out against Radovan Karadzic (leader of the Bosnian Serbs) and Mato Boban (leader of the Bosnian Croats) are fascists who want to nail the Bosnian people to the stake.

No public opinion puts the aggressor and the victim on the same level. The Bosnian people, and especially the Bosnian Muslims, are threatened with death. They are the victims, not one of the three warring factions which are referred to.

Selim Beslagic: What is the biggest problem for the region?

SB: Hunger. People are hungry and, if the situation does not improve, the weak and the poor are going to die through a combination of hunger and cold. Because of the blockade no convoys are getting through. You starved out with fifteen lorries and only three reached our city. No other civilian convoy has been able to go through.

We have no diesel and therefore no transport, which also makes the situation very difficult.

Jmi: Our convoy led a campaign to open the so-called Northern Route (the Pasovica corridor). Do you think that this route is possible?

SB: Yes, it is a logical route! But there are other possibilities, through Banja Luka or Belgrade for example. But everything comes down to a question of political will and the relationship of military forces. The best way of saving our people now is, however, to open up our airport in Tuzla.

British campaigning stepped up

An Open planning meeting of International Workers Aid in Britain was held on December 18 in the Lambeth Trade Union Resource Centre. The aim of the meeting was to elect a committee to run the work in Britain and publish a full conference of the campaign. The meeting took a report from the international meeting in Copenhagen and discussed various proposals. It was agreed:

1. To organise a second Tuzla Airport protest in Britain - 6th January 93.
2. In London the protest will be on Friday evening (70) because of the clash with the Bloody Sunday demonstration.
3. Campaigns outside London will take their own decision on this date.
4. To organise a speaking tour in Britain with Jenny Mees from IWA in Belgium who reached Tuzla
5. To organise tours onto the IWA convoy scheduled to leave in March.
6. To raise money for one of the vehicles to be based in Slipt.
7. To support Education Student Aid.
8. To ensure that International Workers Aid has a strong women’s perspective and campaigns around issues which effect women in ex-Yugoslavia.

Committee

The meeting elected an interim steering committee and appointed a series of working groups to take responsibility for the various aspects of the campaign. The next meeting of the steering committee will be held on January 22 at the IWA office.

"Our conception is that all the refugees must be able to return to their own region. We do not accept that frontiers can be drawn by force, we don't accept a peace which deprives people of their home"
We do not accept that frontiers can be drawn by force, we don’t accept a peace which deprives people of their homes!

**JM:** What do you think of the way in which the peace negotiations are progressing?

**SB:** Well, no war has ever been stopped because of a slip of paper. What matters are the military relationship of forces. No lasting peace is possible if it is unjust.

We don’t accept having to negotiate with war criminals, we don’t want to find ourselves on an equal footing with war criminals because we are legally elected. We want peace, we are in favour of negotiations, but we don’t want to sign a peace which will mean the death of our Bosnian population.

**JM:** You mentioned the airport at Tuzla which is usable but cannot be opened.

International Workers Aid led an action in several countries on 11 November to demand its opening. What are your views on this?

**SB:** I am very pleased. Everyone here has been waiting for more than a year for the opening of our airport. I hope that you can put political pressure on your MPs and governments, and that this question can reverberate throughout your media and so become a burning political issue. I also want to say this.

You arrived here with three lorries. It’s not much and will in no way relieve our distress here. But the quantity isn’t important. What counts is moral support. We cannot tell you enough how important these three lorries are for us.

For everything you have done I thank you from the bottom of my heart. I wish you a good journey home and hope it will be easier than getting here. Goodbye until better times.

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**International plans for next convoy**

INTERNATIONAL Workers Aid held its first international meeting in Copenhagen on December 11.

Attended by delegations from Britain, Belgium, Denmark, Germany and Sweden, the meeting also received messages of support from campaigns and supporters in Holland, France, Italy and the Czech republic.

Delegates heard a report from the successful IWA convoy which reached Tuzla in November and reports on campaigning in the individual countries.

Jenny Mees from Belgium, who was with the convoy through to Tuzla, reported on the meetings she had had with women’s organisations. Women make up the majority of refugees and have faced rape as a method of ethnic cleansing. IWA resolved to campaign on the effects of the war on women.

There were detailed discussions on the logistics of further convoys over the next few months.

The campaign will establish an office in Croatia to organise aid convoys and to monitor possible aid routes. Initially this will be in Split because the Southern route from Split will probably offer the best opportunity for non-military convoys towards the end of the winter.

Other routes will be used if there are changes in the political/military situation or if an opening to get through comes earlier.

**Special vehicles**

The meeting discussed detailed costing of getting aid through to central Bosnia. Specialised vehicles which can cope with the terrain and weather conditions are being purchased for the journey across the mountains. This means raising a lot of money.

Resources are being raised in a number of countries for convoys to leave for Split in March. Even after the vehicles are purchased, transporting each tonne of aid from Split to Tuzla will cost about £10.

The campaign is appealing for £22,000 to meet these logistical requirements.

Other aspects of the campaign for working class solidarity with the Bosnian people were also discussed.

Central to this is the role of the UN - which, as has become increasingly clear, is a part of Western efforts to force the Bosnians into an unjust carve-up of their country. Their continuing refusal to open Tuzla airport to humanitarian aid shipments being the clearest example.

The airport is the fastest and most effective route for aid into central Bosnia in the present conditions and there is a growing awareness that it remains closed by a political decision and from a practical point of view could be opened at any time.

With this in mind the meeting called a second European wide day of action on the opening of Tuzla airport for Saturday January 29 (in Britain this will be on Friday 28).

Also planned is a conference of trade unions, women’s and anti-war organisations from ex-Yugoslavia and other parts of Europe in the spring or early summer to be preceded, if possible, by a European speaking tour of trade unionists from ex-Yugoslavia.

Watch Socialist Outlook for further details.

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**BOSNIA CONVOY**

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**TUZLA STUDENTS APPEAL FOR HELP**

STUDENT'S ASSOCIATION
MINING - GEOLOGICAL FACULTY
TUZLA UNIVERSITY

We address you from Tuzla, the centre of north-eastern Bosnia, which is at the same time the most powerful mining centre of our country.

Now, the whole two years will pass since the war had begun in this area. The war affected all of us, including students and we still work hard and learn in order to use their acquired knowledge in the postwar industrial development of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

In this difficult time, our work is getting to be worse, because we see hard with a lot of problems.

Our town and country are large in blockades from all sides, so we are not in the position to make a contact with the outside world.

In this way we would like to accomplish all kinds of co-operation with you.

As we are not able to provide the new books and literature journals we kindly ask you to help us as much as you can.

Our financial situation is tragic, so we ask you for support.

Our address is: Student's Association,
Mining - Geological Faculty,
Rastarska 1, Tuzla,
75 000 Tuzla,
phone: (070) 228 652
228 492
US victory prepares trade war

**GATTastrophe?**

By Chris Marks

THE APPROVAL of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) marks a great victory for America's billionaire families in their fight to defend their share of the global market. Because of the economic decline of the US, US share of world trade has declined dramatically.

In 1970, the US produced 13 per cent more than Japan and the countries now in the European Union (EU). Today, the US produces one-third less than those competitors, leaving US trade with its highest trade deficit for several years.

Over the last decade, new trade blocs have built up. Japan's investments in Asia have tripled. In 1983, it invested $2 billion, mainly in Korea, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Singapore. Last year, it invested $6 billion, mainly in Indonesia, southern China and Malaysia.

At the same time, the now-unified Germany is the heart of the EU and has influence throughout Europe. The EU and the Japanese-dominated Asian bloc are the major challenges to the US-dominated North American bloc.

The battle over world trade is a product of instability of big capitalist powers to find a way out of the economic recession which has now lasted for 20 years. The recession has hit Europe hard. Germany exports fell 10 per cent last year, and production fell six per cent.

Devaluation of EU currencies has hit its US and Japanese exports, but the failure of European Monetary Union has put the EU countries at a disadvantage.

Without the unified economic bloc needed for, the European-wide corporations lack institutions strong enough to defend their interests. This has encouraged nationalist and protectionist responses in Europe to the US trade offensive.

The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) has sown the opening guns of a US offensive against European and Japanese protectionism. Clinton's Democratic Party administration has also overseen a massive offensive against working people in the US.

Understandably, the US has been forced to cut back on imports. Productivity is 17 per cent higher than Japan and 21 per cent higher than Germany. But millions of jobs have been cut in the US since 1980.

America's defensive billion dollar strategies have now opened a world trade offensive. NAFTA aids the deepening integration of Mexico by US and Canadian capital, giving the US more leverage in attempting to open up markets abroad.

At November's conference of Pacific Rim countries, NAFTA was used to advance the US's successful campaign to open markets for rice in Japan and Korea.

NAFTA also puts up barriers to competition with Mexico from EU countries and Japan.

There is no suggestion of free trade with Cuba

increase agricultural exports and sales of TV and films through the GATT deal. The GATT negotiations had been running since 1990. European politicians especially emphasized the threat from US culture. Hollywood earns $4 billion each year from European sales and the head of the US news network CNN said it intended to 'conquer' Europe.

**Civilisation**

The response to the US campaign was startling. Belgian premier Willy Claes argued the threat to American opening up of Europe to US TV and films means 'the defence of our civilisation is at stake'.

In France, the Socialists and the Front National organised attacks on the presence of McDonald's restaurant chain, Spanish Culture Minister Carmen Arboc also free to open markets to almost one day of European films for every two or three days of US-made pictures, prompting a 'strike' by owners of Spain's 1,800 cinemas.

TV and movies were also excluded from the GATT deal at the insistence of French Prime Minister Edouard Balladur who said the 'cultural identity of Europe is protected'.

In exchange however the French government agreed to cut its agricultural production by 21 per cent over the next six years. This is a major gain for US agriculture, which will remain protected at home by 'anti-dumping' laws.

**Cuba**

The effects of the GATT deal - like this cut in agricultural production - show that the real aim of the US offensive is not free trade but managed trade. There is no suggestion of free trade with Cuba. 35 years after the country took the road to socialism.

NAFTA has the words 'Free Trade' in its name, but it includes tariffs on wheat and peanut butter from Canada and on orange juice from Mexico. US trade barriers are being lowered only over 15 years.

Adding to the existing depression, the GATT deal and coming protectionist trade war is bad news for the developing countries. Already the recession means that demand for primary materials is very low. That cuts export earnings and increases the poverty built up by the massive third world debts. Trade blocs will also create difficulties for the working class in the imperialist countries. Blocs carve up those who work in the cities and on the land internationally, making easier for the ruling rich to weaken international solidarity.

Protectionism also encourages restrictions of immigration and travel.

Some of the capitalist carve-ups of world trade are in the interests of working people and their self defence.

Our task is to build the international collaboration of the oppressed, for the cancellation of the third world debt, for a cut in the working week without pay cuts to provide employment for all, to make the ruling rich pay for their crisis.

Russia

Unemployment too low, wages too high - IMF

UNDER the pressure of the drive to restore capitalism, Russia has lost its all-embracing system of crches, Kindergartens and after-school supervision. Many crches have been closed down. Others have been privatised so that only the rich can afford them.

Having to look after children is part of the explanation of why unemployment is increasing. Women are 51 per cent of the workforce, yet 75 per cent of the unemployed.

Women's jobs

But the labour force is cut, and people are put out of work first. Why should women be employed when men are unemployed, asked Russian employment minister G. Mil'yashvili three months ago.

The IMF is demanding much higher levels of unemployment in push through its market reforms. The Fund says: 'in either East European countries or in the former Soviet Union, unemployment has reached 12.7 per cent (whereas in Russia it is about 3.9 per cent)-'circuit.

Working collectives are still too stable, and although the standard of living has fallen sharply, it has not fallen as sharply as the fall in wages. There is still therefore still too high...'.

The brutal logic of restoring capitalism could not be explained better. Under the old bureaucratic system, despite its inequalities, there were real gains for the working class in terms of social and health services, security of employment and the price of basic necessities like rent and food.

Now all that is going. The 'vitality of the work collectives' which the IMF refers to is the resilience of the nationalised industries. A key target of the pro-market reforms is to bankrupt them and 'shake out' their labour force.

Nicaraguan health service fights for life

KILLER diseases such as polio and German measles are returning to Nicaragua, because of cutting being imposed by the government and the IMF. These diseases were eliminated by the health campaigns of the former Sandinista (FSLN) government.

But the IMF is demanding cuts to 'revive' the economy and the Chamorro UNO government is hell bent on privatising the health service.

Vaccines are in short supply and even parents are reluctant to take them where they are needed because of the high cost. The health gains of the revolution are being undone.

Infant mortality has risen from 81 per 1,000 to 7.8 per cent. The health service has been forced back to an expenditure of $1.8 billion per person per year.

Wages do not even cover the food needs of most ordinary families and unemployment is an incredible 60 per cent.

Health centres are closing down. Many people do not go to the doctor any longer because they know they will not be able to afford the drugs. As health workers' jobs are cut, those who remain suffer an intolerable strain.

Eighty per cent of health workers are women. They work 12 hours a day. In a Catholic country they have on average between 3-5 children, and the crches are also closing, putting them under further strain.

It is virtually impossible to take holidays because of the pressure of work. Losing a day's pay and leaving 56 patients untreated is not an option.

The Health Minister not wants to totally privatise health care, putting it out of the reach of ordinary Nicaraguans.
South Africa: ‘struggle must continue’

By Charlie van Gelderen

On 6 December, for the first time in South Africa’s 400-year history, blacks and whites sat down together in the parliament buildings in Cape Town.

It has been hailed as the beginning of a new era, of ‘power-sharing’ and, once again, the end of apartheid. What is the reality behind this rhetoric?

The historic meeting — and it would be stupid to deny its importance — is only the culmination of two years of negotiations between the ruling National Party and the representatives of some 20 organisations.

Un-elected

None of these delegates were elected and some are quite unrepresentative of the constituencies which they claim to represent.

It could hardly be called a democratic constitution.

The provisional constitution agreed sets up a Transitional Executive Council which will work with the present government, which remains in power until the elections in April.

In the process the African National Congress (ANC) and the South African Communist Party (SACP) have made many concessions.

It has been agreed that certain pre-determined constitutional principles cannot be overturned by the Constitutional Assembly which will be elected by universal franchise in April of next year.

To take one example, property rights cannot be questioned.

The nationalisation demands of the ANC’s long-time central partners, the Freedom Charter, have been thrown overboard.

South Africa may be a racist state, but it will remain capitalist.

The De Klerk government has also won the opposition from the ANC in the form of the only racial provision to be carried by the new constitution.

In a bilateral deal with the ANC, it was informally agreed that whites should be given a guaranteed 30 percent of seats on municipal councils and a budgetary block- ing mechanism.

This was to placate right-wing white extremists who had made a stand on this issue, threatening not to allow town councils to be taken over by blacks.

Council executive committees, responsible for the day-to-day running of municipalities, will have to take decisions by a two-thirds majority, effectively handing the power of veto over to the one-third white representation.

Separate state

Of course even these major concessions are not going to satisfy the extreme right-wing groups, such as the Conservative Party and the AWB, who are demanding a ‘Volksstaat’, a separate white state, where blacks would be voiceless.

But if that is a single area of South Africa where the races are not inter-mingled. This will not stop the extension trying to impose a “Yugoslav” solution — their own ethnic cleansing.

And there are thousands of armed and embittered whites who are prepared to fight. Much will depend on the disposition of the armed forces, still predominantly in white control.

It is of course farcical to talk of a peaceful transition to a democratic, non-racial South Africa. Since De Klerk announced his plan to dismantle apartheid in 1990, more than 10,000 people have died in political violence. This is going to get worse.

It would be fatal to underestimate the threat for the white extremist, and from Bushel’s Inkatha Freedom Party.

The only force which can save South Africa from the impending chaos is the working class. But they will have to break with the present ANC-SACP leadership. This is why the Workers Organisation for Socialist Action (WOSA) is supporting the call for a Workers Party.

In the words of WOSA spokesperson Neville Alexander: ‘We socialists are saying that the struggle must continue. We have to find new ways of promoting the struggle against exploitation and oppression.

‘You are going to have to fight for your rights just as you have capitalised. You have got to get rid of the capitalist system.’

Viva Zapata!

Why the Chiapas peasants rebelled

The hundreds of tourists in San Cristobal got more than they bargained when the guerrillas of the Zapatista Revolutionary Army (EZLN) hit the streets. Only the shop selling film and camcorder cassettes stayed open, doing a roaring trade.

Incredibly the peasant army had been training for 10 years without the Mexican government knowing.

As the government of Carlos Salinas moved to crush the insurgency with misuse and plans, explanations concentrated on the endemic poverty of the region, and the ruthless exploitation of the peasants by local landholders.

Landless

Poverty and trade exploitation certainly is endemic in Chiapas. Landless peasants are forced to work for a pittance for long hours, and then compelled to spend a large part of their earnings on the landlords’ shops.

But the timing of the revolt is connected to the imposition of the North American Free Trade Alliance (NAFTA). The deal is catastrophic for Mexico’s peasants.

Free trade means free movement of goods and capital. But the US has the biggest agri-business in the world and will flood Mexico with cheap maize, threatening the livelihoods of the 1.6 million people.

But more than that, the basic need of all peasant producers — access to the land — is being threatened.

New law

Salinas’ government has en-acted a new law to take ownership of land encased under the Cardenas presidency during the 1930s. The land will be ‘given to the peasants’ — an apparently generous move.

But the plots of land given to peasants will not be able to survive economically. Eventually the peasants will be forced to sell, probably to US-owned, agribusiness. That’s what the free market and free trade are all about.

Social ownership of the land is the basis of the numerous peasant co-operatives. The co-operatives will die. Agri-business will move in with high-tech farming. And landless peasants will move to the city slums for a marginal existence as peddlers or rubbish collectors.

The revolt of the peasans is overlaid with the oppression of Indians. Indian populations in Central America; many of the Chiapas peasants are of Indian origin.

In taking up arms the people of Chiapas have imitated the Indian-based revolutionary guerrilla movement in Guatemala, just a few miles away over the border. And of course they have been inspired by the guerrilla movements in Nicaragua and El Salvador.

The government in Mexico is that of the PRI - the Institutional Revolutionary Party. It was the party of the 1910-1920 Mexican revolution.

First time around: Zapata with soldiers

peasant revolution, of which Emiliano Zapata and Pancho Villa were key leaders.

But the revolutionary wing of the government was defeated, leaving behind a bourgeois nationalistic government.

The Cardenas PRI govern-ment in the 1930s was a radical form of nationalism which nationalised key industries, including oil, and nationalised the land.

Debated

But the present government is a degenerate and debased form of this nationalism. By a system of patronage and gang-sterism, rapped off with a consider-able amount of electoral fraud, they have stayed in power uninterred, dominating even the labour unions.

The EZLN uprising had no chance of success and its crushing has been brutal. In next year’s election the main challenge to the PRI incumbents will be the radical populists of the Revolutionary Democratic Party (PRD) led by Cardenas, son of the 1930s president. The whole of the Mexican left will have to fight back.
Kurdish hunger strikers protest repression

On December 13, 90 Kurdish refugees in North London joined a European wide hunger strike to protest against Turkish state atrocities including massive depopulation of villages, the detention and torture of thousands of Kurds and torture and murder of journalists from Özgür Gündem, the pro-Kurdish daily newspaper. SOCIALIST OUTLOOK spoke to a young Kurdish woman student from the Kurdish Workers Association and colleagues who are on hunger strike.

SO: Why are you on hunger strike?
Bahr: The first reason is the raid on Özgür Gündem office on 10 December. It was United Nations International Human Rights Day. I think it was very important because of the day – its human rights day and you can see how the Turkish state doesn’t allow democratic rights and doesn’t even tolerate a newspaper which is the only voice of the Kurdish people and is the only oppositional paper which is against the Turkish State.

SO: What has happened to the staff of Özgür Gündem?
Adar: We hear that about 30 people are under torture – they have not been heard of and there is no explanation by the government authorities. The Directorate of accountancy of the paper has been released and he said the others are under torture.

SO: What else is the protest about?
Bahr: The strike is also against the genocide of the Kurdish people. We are protesting against what the Turkish state is doing in the villages and also against the banning of Kurdish organisations in France and Germany.

SO: Why have France and Germany banned Kurdish organisations?
Flair: Because Germany is one of the most important allies of Turkey – they don’t agree with the self-determination of the Kurdish people. They are working with the Turkish state against the freedom struggle of the Kurds.

Bahr: Also they have an historical relationship: Germany has one of the best relationships with Turkey. It is not in their interests for the Kurds to secede, and by banning the Kurdish organisations they will stop the support of the Kurdish people for the PKK – or so they think.

Bahr: Can I say something else about the war? An example – over 400 people were killed in Bani – during the last two years and they don’t have enough room in the cemetery anymore. Those people are civilians – unarmed people – killed by death squads. During the house raids and air attacks a large number of youth are taken into custody every day and tortured. Many of them disappear – there are hundreds of disappearances.

SO: How do you see a way forward?
Bahr: I think the only solution is a political solution and it depends not just on the Turkish state but also on the European states – this is one of the demands of the hunger strike.

SO: How do you think it will come about?
Bahr: By pressure from the Kurdish people and the European governments.

The hunger strike finished on December 23. It was followed by a protest march from Bonn to Brussels which arrived in early January. There is still no more news about the Editor of Özgür Gündem except that she has not been released or charged and that she has allegedly been tortured.

For further information contact: Kurdish Solidarity Committee, 44 Ainger Road, London, NW3 3AF. Tel: 071-586 5982. Public meeting to Defend Özgür Gündem Feb 12. "What’s Happening for Details.

Sudan: roots of poverty and famine

by Balu Kumar

Neither the simmering diplomatic row between Britain and Sudan nor the simplistic analysis in the mainstream media should obscure the complex crisis in Africa’s largest country. In the showdown of the conflict as being ‘North against South’ and ‘Islam against Christianity and Animism’ is only part of a larger story. For 28 years there has been a bitter war between the central government and the Sudanese People’s Liberation Army (SPLA).

Farcible

The largely Arab and Muslim North has seen the African and non-Muslim heritage of the peoples of the South as inferior for a long time. From the 1970s onwards there has been the farcical imposition of the Arabic code and the teaching of Arabic and Islamic studies in the South. However Mohamed Suliman has convincingly argued in Africa World Review (November 1993 - April 1994) that wars are now less a product of ethnic/religious tensions and more the outcome of resource conflicts triggered by environmental degradation. This has caused great population movements leading to conflict in the Nuba mountains of central Sudan and Darfur in the West. The people affected are themselves muslim but this hasn’t spared them from state sponsored atrocities.

Suliman observes, 'Abandoned by both North and market, people begin to suffer from famine, poverty and total neglect. When life becomes almost meaningless the society is then ripe for dislocation, turbulence and ultimately war.'

Islamisation policies were introduced by the military dictator, Ja’afar Nimeiry, in a bid to court the Gulf states. After a brief period of multi-party government in the mid 1980s it was the coup led by General Omar Hassan al-Bashir in June 1989 that ushered in the severest phase of the Arabisation and Islamisation of Sudan. Opposition parties, independent trade unions, secular women’s organisations and even professional associations are banned. A few Islamists opposition parties enjoy a semi-legitimate existence but their members are often harassed, tortured or worse. Internal opposition is all but dead. The Sudanese Communist Party has been illegal for much of its existence. However its members are prominent activists in the National Democratic Alliance which groups the secular and progressive opposition. The NDA operates in exile because of state repression and is declared as being weak and ineffective.

The government’s economic programme is a shambles. Inflation is running at 200 per cent and the devaluations of the Sudanese pound have made foreign goods luxury items.

In spite of its Islamic credentials, the Khartoum regime is pursuing a neo-liberal economic course including privatisation of the public sector, liberalisation of prices and exchange rates and the liberalisation of foreign trade.

One oppositionist quoted in The Guardian points out that none of these market reforms have won the confidence of the business community whom he estimates have stashed $47 billion in foreign banks.

In a remarkable admission, the Sudanese Minister of Finance was told by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) that Sudan had the right policies but 'had to solve their political problems before implying austerity measures and the IMF and World Bank loans.

The political problems are not the violation of human rights or the lack of democratic freedoms or the brutality of the war in the South. It is Sudan’s emerging role as a centre for Islamic fundamentalism that worries the West. Iran is a major source of military and ideological support. The Sudan is a ‘safe haven for muslim militants. For example, from Algiers, Egypt and Tunisia acting itself as ‘an Islamic model’ and a centre for the export of the Islamic revolution. A split in the SPLA in August 1991 has weakened resistance to the military regime with fierce clashes between rival factions. At the end of 1993 rather than unity against their common oppressors.

The 'Fostir' faction, led by long-time leader, John Garang, has supported devolution and autonomy for the Southern Sudanese but association with the North.

Alliance

Under his leadership, the SPLA was a member of the National Democratic Alliance and saw the struggle for self-determination as part of the wider struggle for securitisation and democratisation of Sudan as a whole.

The 'Nadi' faction denounces all talk of federalism with the North. 'No raking the class, group or caste in history has ever surrendered in its power or privileges out of human sympathy', they reason and their favoured model is full independence.

Attempts to heal the rift between the two factions have been fruitless. Yet the Sudanese influence among the Southern Sudanes are the need for unity within the liberation army.

This experience proves once more the importance of internal democracy within liberation movements and the need for accountability to the people they claim to represent.
Hasta la vista, Tinsel Town!

FUELLED by the growth of multiplexes, British cinema audiences were up to 115 million last year. The years when TV and VCRs knocked the bottom out of the film industry are gone, in Britain and the USA. But what exactly are people watching? PAUL CLARKE takes a look.

Some recent British films, for example Mike Leigh's Naked and Ken Loach's Raining Stones, have enjoyed enormous success in France, a country which takes its cinema rather seriously. But people in that country are amazed when they hear that although those films will do well in Britain, but have no chance of a widespread showing.

Such films will not get a general release because of the stranglehold of a few key distributors and the criteria they have established for what makes a 'commercial' film.

The predominantly young film-going audience responds to films which conform to the 'formula' which Hollywood and the distribution networks in its thrall have established.

Hollywood today is a shining example of cultural decay imposed by the 'free' market. Key aspects of that market are the corrupt 'star' system and the huge outlay needed to make a Hollywood movie, and hence the huge audiences needed to roll in substantial profits.

Juggernaut

The quest for profits creates a juggernaut which crushes creativity and anything controversial or challenging in its path.

The Hollywood distributors' stranglehold is neatly demonstrated by the fate of the independent British film company Palace Pictures. After a series of commercially unsuccessful films Palace set out to make the enormously successful Crying Game.

Because of financial difficulties, to complete the film Palace sold the royalties to the US distributors in advance. The net result was that when the film was a smash hit in the US, the distributors scooped $50m in profit, and Palace Pictures went bust.

Subversive

According to Dan Quayle and the US new right, Hollywood is the centre of dangerous and subversive liberalism (and this accusation is often overlaid with implicit anti-semitism). But with notable exceptions this doesn't work its way into the movies.

The stock-in-trade is a sign of the times: escapism, militarism, disasters, fantasy, horror, sexism, unbridled and infantile sentimentality. Oh yes, and a world in which everyone is a thirty-something yuppie (generally a lawyer) who lives in one of those huge apartments in a former warehouse (Fatal Attraction, Ghosts, Wall Street).

Well what's wrong with fantasy and escapism? What's wrong with horror movies? Of course there's nothing wrong with Jurassic Park. But there's something morbid about a film industry which produces merely a means of escape.

The star system has reached obscene proportions. Bruce Willis was paid $18 million for Die Hard 3. $50m plus is common nowadays for big stars. The huge cost of stars and hi-tech special-effect movies creates a vicious circle. To be a big hit, a movie is expected to gross $120m on its first release week-end.

But to guarantee that you have to have a surefire big name star: Kevin Costner, Michael Douglas, Arnold Swarzenegger, Clint Eastwood, Tom Cruise or maybe Stallone (yes, all men). And you have to have a lowest common denominator story.

The 'big bucks movie' and star syndrome creates a spiral of a tiny mega-rich elite inside the system, with thousands of aspirant actors, writers, directors outside it or trying to get in.

In every field - acting, directing, producing - the movie industry is one of the most male-dominated. And women are paid less at every level.

So can the Hollywood stranglehold be broken? Small independent film and video distributors are trying to takeovers by the big fish - Palace started out distributing videos, and then sold out to Virgin.

Challenging Hollywood, or at least creating independent centres of film production, has to tackle the central issue of financing.

Channel 4

In Britain some support comes from Channel 4 and the BBC for independent films. But the issue of state subsidies is the key one for maintaining film production almost anywhere outside the US.

To do that means breaking with 'free market' logic. America's final showdown with France in the last stages of the GATT negotiations hinged in part on France's box-office subsidies for French-made films - which is the sole reason why France retains a vibrant and creative film industry.

The global media market - the giant communications corporations like Warner and Sony which control film studios, the popular music business, TV, Cable, video, satellite, newspapers and magazines - want to smash any state subsidies which challenge their monopolies.

This monopoly borders on a semi-totalitarian control of all kinds of recorded information and popular artistic production. It is moreover a monopoly which produces a stifling homogenisation of cultural production internationally, with everyone from Buenos Aires to Bangkok watching RoboCop at the same time.

Which is why the left should have no qualms at all about supporting the demand for substantial subsidies to the British film industry.

Of course the same Hollywood which produces Top Gun, Wayne's World and Honey, I Shrunk the Kids produced Thelma and Louise and the succession of radical Oliver Stone movies like Salvador and Born on the Fourth of July.

Abject

It even produces Warren Beatty's Red, a great movie notwithstanding Beatty's objections at the Oscars and the grotesque caricature of poor Zorro.

Hollywood liberalism is not dead, but it is liberalised. Hollywood has a way of turning its radicals and subversives to the real, and their productions are a tiny minority.

While independent producers struggle on, there is no long-term solution other than the democratisation of the means of information and artistic production.

Access always poses the question of control, and in our society that means ownership. Cultural diversity will continue to be crushed so long as artistic production is first and foremost a business.

Hollywood makes films, but its most powerful figures are accountants, and they have the final say.

Which is why there is another media critic, starling Clint Eastwood and Kevin Costner at a cinema near you (whenever you are in the world) soon.
WHERE WE STAND

Facing mass unemployment, rampant employers equipped with legal union-busting services, and a war on hard-won education, health and welfare services, the working class in Britain faces a real crisis - an avoidable crisis created by the historic failure of its official leadership.

Socialist Outlook exists to fight for a new type of working class leadership, based on the politics of class struggle and revolutionary socialism, to tackle this crisis.

The capitalist class, driven and activated by its own crisis, its requirement to maximise profits at the expense of the workers, has been given de-militarized, vanguard leadership by a brutal-class war Tory high command.

The Tory strategy has been to shock the unions with legislation, to fragment and weaken the resistance of the working-class and oppressed, allowing them to pick off isolated sections one at a time, using the full powers of the state.

In response, most TUC and Labour leaders have embraced the defeatist politics of ‘new realism’, effectively proclaiming total surrender on every front, while diligently announcing that they offer a socialist alternative. Every retreat and concession they have made to the employers and the government has simply fuelled and encouraged the offensive against jobs, wages, conditions and union rights.

New realism is the latest form taken by the politics of reformism, seeking no more than improved conditions within the framework of capitalist rule.

Socialist Outlook rejects reformism, not because we are against fighting for reforms, but because we know that the needs of the working class - for full employment, decent living standards, a clean environment, peace and democracy - can never be achieved under capitalism.

Nor, as we argued long before the collapse of Stalinism, could these demands ever be achieved under the bureaucratically determined workers states and de-militarized CSSR, whose own regimes survived only by repressing their own working class.

We are a Marxist current, based not on the British totalitarian parodies of a Stalinist past, but on the same, toothless version of ‘marxism’ beloved by armchair academics, but the revolutionary tradition of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky.

Our socialist alternative is not based on particular historic solutions or illusions of peaceful legislative changes. We fight to mobilise and unleash the power of the working class - the overwhelming majority of society - to topple the corrupt and reactionary rule of capitalist and establish our own class rule.

We struggle against fragmentation by building solidarity, working to unite and link the various struggles of workers, the unemployed, of women, of pensioners, of the black communities and other minority groups, of lesbians and gay men, of students, of youth - and of those fighting imperialism in Ireland and throughout the world. Socialist Outlook is about all an internationalist current, in solidarity with the Trotskyist Fourth International, which organises co-thinkers in 40 countries worldwide.

Unlike some other groupings on the British left, we do not believe a mass revolutionary party can be built simply by proclaiming ourselves to be one. Too often this degenerates into sectarian posturing and abstention from the actual struggle that shapes the movement, playing into the hands of the right wing.

Nor do we believe that the demands of women, black people, lesbians and gays and the rational demands of people in Scotland and Wales should be left to await the outcomes of a socialist revolution. The oppressed must organise themselves and fight now around their own demands, which are a part of the struggle for social revolution.

But propaganda alone, however good, will not bring socialism. The fight for policies which can mobilise and politically educate workers in struggle, must be carried out as part of the campaigns of the Labour Party and every campaign and struggle in which workers and the oppressed fight for their rights.

To strengthen this fight we press for unified oppositional campaigns on key issues such as fighting racism and fascism - in which various left currents can work together for common objectives while remaining free to debate their differences.

If you agree with what you see in Socialist Outlook, and want to join us in the fight for socialism, readers’ groups meet in towns across the country. Contact us now, get organised, and get active!

>>> Please tell me more about Socialist Outlook <<<

[End of page]
PUBLIC MEETINGS

**HAPPENING**

**SATURDAY 22 JANUARY**
Conway Hall, 20 Red Lion Sq (Holborn tube), London 11am - 6pm

**CRITIQUE CONFERENCE**
the decline of capitalism and the new world disorder
... organised jointly with radical chains

**Invited Speakers:** Bob Avakian, Chris Arthur, Peter Burslem, John Colligan, Simon Chiche, Michael Crow, William Dorn, Frank Fareh, David Hiley, Robin John, Holmby, Geoff Kay, Joe Kernen, Mothie McHose, Peter McAuley, Scott McFllke, John Denver, Geoff Pilling, Sandy Smith, Bani Tzur, Brian Titchet.

Financial on: Is capitalism in decline?, Eastern Europe & international relations, plus numerous workshops.

**UNREGD £5, suggested £8, For further details please contact 0171 339 8555 ext.4577 or 041 331 3312, or write to Critique, The Institute for Russian and East European Studies, Bute Gardens, Glasgow University, Glasgow G12.

**SUNDAY 26 JANUARY**
7.45 Queens Head pub 66 Acton St WC1 Kings Cross CR

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**WANT YOUR event included?**
Send details by January 21 to What's Happening?, P.O. Box 1109, London N4 2UU.

**JANUARY**

**THURSDAY 13**
DEFEND the bloody Sunday march 6.30pm Red Rose Club 129 Seven Sisters Rd N7 Finsbury Park tube

**SATURDAY 15**
Lobby of NATO FE Sector Conference called by Welsh region

**TUESDAY 18**
Demonstrate to defend jobs! 5pm Bath College main entrance

**MONDAY 24**
International Workers Aid public meeting 7.45pm Ealing Town Hall London W5

**TUESDAY 19**
International Workers Aid public meeting Leeds

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**FEBRUARY**

**TUESDAY 1**
INTERNATIONAL Workers Aid public meeting 1.30pm Debuting Chamber, Falmer House, Sussex University INTERNATIONAL Workers Aid public meeting 7.45pm Brighouse Centre North Road, Birmingham

**WEDNESDAY 3**
International Workers Aid public meeting Southampton

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**SATURDAY 2**
Friends of Özgür Gündem launch meeting with Harold Pinter and Jake Ecclesstone (NUL) 2-4pm School of Oriental and Oriental Studies Russell Square WC1 details 071 588 4592

**MONDAY 14**
Anti-imperialist Strategy Today Socialist Outlook discussion Speaker: Sarah Parker 7.30pm Stationers' Park Community Centre Mayfield Road off Weston Park N8

**FRI 18 & SAT 19**
Re-thinking Worker Democracy Conference Centre Congress House Great Russell Street WC1 details CAITS 494 Camden Road London N7 0SJ

**WEDNESDAY 23**
Europe between Recessions and Revolt Socialist Outlook forum

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**SUNDAY 27**
Roger and Mie LONDON Socialist Film Co-op showing 1.30pm for 2pm Conway Hall Red Lion Square WC1 tickets £3.50/£2.00

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**MARCH**

**SATURDAY 19**
NATIONAL demonstration against racism in East London called by UJC General Council

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**SUNDAY 20**
THE PATRIOT Game London Socialist Film Co-op showing 1.30pm for 2pm Conway Hall Red Lion Square WC1 tickets £3.50/£2.00

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**Should newspapers take sides?**

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Heave-ho for Yeo starts Tory rout

Back to the drawing board!

The Tory 'Back to Basics' crusade lies in tatters as the Tim Yeo scandal reached its height with the revelation of his fathering another child outside marriage.

Following hot on Yeo's heels is the resignation of MP Alan Duncan as parliamentary private secretary to Health Minister, Brian Mawhinney, after revelations of dubious morality in a property deal involving two ex-Westminster Council houses.

The issues in themselves are not the point. The Tories have been caught out by a monster of their own creation. Bereft of any policy solutions to the crisis, their solution, to attack single mothers and bemoan the lack of basic 'moral' values has backfired.

'Back to Basics' follows two other discredited con tricks – the ill-fated Citizens Charter and consumer choice – in the dustbin of history. All three were designed to provide a distraction from the inadequacy of Tory policies, the mess they have made of the economy, and the devastation they have wreaked on the welfare state.

But this fraud has been going on for years – the natural successor to Thatcher's 'Victorian Values', Major's 'Back to Basics' covers similar terrain. Whilst expounding the importance of individual moral values the state attempts to intervene more than ever into people's personal lives.

Crime

The Tory policies of the market are their true 'basics': they have brought us soaring unemployment and crime, while the Thatcherite cult of individualism, rejecting any concept of society and collectivity, has caused the problems. Major now claims to be so keen to put right.

This government announces 'Back to Basics' – but at the first whiff of scandal denies it has anything to do with morality; it proclaims the virtues of the family – then denies them in practice, with a Budget which slashes support for poor families.

Pamphlet

Then they spend £2 million sending round a 30-page pamphlet telling parents that they should create spare space and unpressured time to coddle their children!

Single mothers on income support don't need £2 million spent on John Patten's moral homilies on the virtue of giving kids breakfast: they need enough money to be able to give them breakfast.

The fiasco of Back to Basics underlines once more the painful truth: this Tory government has run out of luck as well as ideas: it is kept in office now largely through the ineptitude of a spineless opposition.