Serbian hands off Croatia!
Yugoslavia

Milosevic prepares massacre

The civil war which has simmered in Yugoslavia all summer is coming to a climax. It is the finale of the plans by Serbian president Slobodan Milosevic to create a ‘Greater Serbia’ by subjugating the other republics by a combination of military force and propaganda. It seems inevitable that a devastating military onslaught by the federal army against Croatia will occur.

Yugoslavia has been in a spiral of crisis for the past three years. The collapse of Serbia, the largest republic, has under Milosevic tried to maintain its power by playing the Serbian nationalist card. The Albanian people in the Serbian province of Kosovo have been mercilessly repressed. Since the middle of the summer Milosevic, and the Serbian generals who command the federal army, have used the Croatian and Slovenian declarations of independence to launch their murderous war of repression.

The governments of Croatia and Slovenia are anti-communist reactionaries. But the peoples of these republics have responded to repression with the demand of independence. Independence is their right. No socialist can support the maintenance of a united Yugoslavia by massacre.

The outcome of the conflict is hardly in doubt. The Yugoslav army is overwhelmingly more powerful than the lightly-armed Croatian militia; and the army and the Serb nationalist ‘chemists’ have shown themselves prepared to use the most ruthless methods, bombing Croat towns and villages, and driving out their populations.

It is hardly surprising, given their desperate situation, that Croatian leaders have called for armed intervention by the European Community. But the EC is concerned about stability – especially a stable framework for restoration of capitalism – and not the rights of peoples. Imperialist forces in Yugoslavia are no solution. What the Croats desperately need is the arms to defend themselves; the EC, despite its crocodile tears, will do nothing to provide this kind of material aid.

Milosevic and his ex-communist government are concerned with keeping and extending their power. Doubtless some Yugoslav generals are genuinely committed to a united Yugoslavia. But the massacre under way shows what happens when the Stalinists and ex-Stalinists resort to force to maintain their power – and what would have happened in the Socialist Union if the CP leaders had kept their nerve.

Socialists all over the world must stand with the Croats and their right of self-determination.

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New Socialist Outlook prize draw

Better than Bingo!

Socialist Outlook may be bolder than any other paper on the left – no false modesty, it is undoubtedly the most radical of the major papers – but we share a common problem with every other left-wing newspaper: we need money.

We can’t maintain the high standards that our readers have come to expect just through the sales of the paper. We have no rich backers to provide the necessary financial resources; we can only rely on the generosity of our supporters.

Other papers would have just set up a ‘fighting fund’ but we thought you, our readers, deserved something a little better. We want to give you the chance not only to contribute to our paper but also to get something back.

For only £5 a month (the cost of a pint of beer or 10 fags a week) you will be able to take part in our fortnightly draw. Every fortnight we will be giving away £50 to a lucky reader. We will also have a different second prize every fortnight – a free subscription to Socialist Outlook; a book; a T-shirt; a bottle of booze. Who knows what exciting prizes you may win?

To further show our appreciation for your support (and to capitulate to the rampart bourgeois commercialism of the season?) we will be making even greater offers at Xmas. The first prize will be doubled to £100 and there will be lots of other prizes on offer.

The first draw will take place shortly before the publication of Socialist Outlook #10 so make sure you fill in the form below and get it back to us as soon as possible.

We are limiting this offer to the first 300 readers who send us their completed Standing Order forms so remember – the earlier you get your Standing Order to us the better your chances of winning.

Please include me in the Socialist Outlook 300 club

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Please pay to the Co-operative Bank PLC 78/80 Cornhill, London EC3V 3N] (sorting code 08-02-281) for the account of Socialist Outlook Supporters fund (account number 70816297) the sum of:

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Swedish Tories win power after 63 years

by Dick Forslund, (Swedish Socialist Party)

SWEDENS social democratic government has fallen in the heaviest defeat suffered by the workers movement since 1928.

The heaviest defeat was suffered by the social democrats, whose vote fell by more than 5% since the 1986 elections. The market-oriented right will now form the government for the first time in more than 60 years. It was also a defeat for the Left Party (LP). The former Left Party of Communist sympathizers – with 77,000 votes, but the principal defeat was political – their ability to attract those workers disillusioned by social democratic austerity.

‘Reasonable’

Instead, MPs have been pressing the party to be more ‘reasonable’ and ‘responsible’, arguing that this must be the conclusion of the fall of ‘actually existing socialism’.

In the few days immediately before the election, on September 15, this developed into a full-blown witch hunt, aimed at ‘driving the communists out of parliament’. Despite their public opposition to the coup, LP leaders were unable to challenge the identification of socialism with Stalinism. Confronted with a right wing campaign against ‘stone dead socialism’, LP leaders tried to avoid the debate.

No answer

Thus in 45 minutes of questioning on revolutionary parties, the party chair was unable to provide a clear answer to the question ‘How do you support the ideal of communism?’

The clear winners were the Conservative Party, Christer Demertzis (New Democracy – Conservative leader Carl Bildt). Bildt in turn will form the next government. The election also saw a rise in the racist vote, where an election campaign on the slogan ‘Stop immigration’ won 7% of the vote in some areas.

This was also a theme of the far right New Democracy, most notably as a way of tapping into the Swedish media. Their populist campaign, focusing attacks on the left, and on the social democrat bureaucracy, attracted audience.

Inroads made by New Democracy into the working class vote, combined with a high abstention rate, cut considerably into the base of the social democrat/Left vote.

Locals repeated what has been dubbed ‘the right wing revolution’ by the Swedish press: the Left was left with a few towns, where local favourite Democrats had criticised their party from the left.

Unity candidates

The Socialist Party, Swedish section of the Fourth Interna-
tional, ran unity candidates with the LP in half a dozen towns. SP candidates were elected in Umeå and Nacka outside Stockholm.

But the overall balance is clear. This is the biggest defeat of the labour movement in Sweden for over 50 years, qualitatively different from the bourgeois ‘watershed’ of 1970-80. The SP has called on the Left to unite in defiance to the rise at the hard right.

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Where is Britain going?

Only a hermit could have been surprised by the recent wave of youth rioting. The wonder is that the 1980s have not shown more inner-city riots, given the levels of poverty and unemployment. Rioting in Britain has a long and illustrious history, from Peterloo to the Chartists to the 1920s. It's always a sign of deep crisis in the system.

As Britain heads towards a general election what is the shape of this crisis? And is there a solution in sight?

During the mid-1980s the economy went through an inflationary boom, which gave rise to the 'yuppie' phenomenon. Borne aloft by the debt-led boom of the US economy, the Lawson boom in Britain was a false dawn.

Britain is heading inexorably towards becoming a third rate capitalist power. The partial collapse of the country's industrial base, the poverty and squalor and the concentration on quick profits among the rich, as opposed to long-term investment, are sure signs. There is no huge upswing around the corner, just the drift into further decline.

If the 1980s did not see any fundamental advance in capitalist fortunes, they did see a major restructuring of the economy, and huge attacks on the working class. The ruling class was able to inflict major defeats on the workers movement without thereby solving its own problems.

Rioting youth of course are not the least bit interested in Kinnock's Labour Party. Indeed the belligerency of the Labour movement as a whole to offer any perspective to the most disaffected in society is a massive indictment.

The one major defeat inflicted on the Tories in recent years, over the poll tax, was imposed by a campaign largely outside the labour movement. In the 1980s the labour movement, with the exception of the miners' titanic struggle against redundancies, did precious little to resist unemployment.

The heritage of the defeat of the miners strike is a labour movement suffocated by right-wing inertia and tawdriness. All Roy Hattersley could do during the recent rise was demand more police and more arrests.

A straightforward Tory victory in November will deepen demoralisation and set back the left; the Labour leadership and trade union bureaucracy would push for much more right-wing policies and a further witch-hunt.

If Labour loses its credibility as a potential government party will slide. Sections of the ruling class who already smell blood, might go on the offensive to try to marginalise Labour and promote the Liberal Democrats as the second party, in an attempt to create a US-style system with two capitalist parties predominant.

This is no easy job, and would be a long process. It would in turn create a massive battle over Labour's soul as a panicked leadership flailed furiously for ever more rightward policies.

No one can predict with certainty, but the whole experience of politics in the 1980s is building to a crescendo. Sooner or later workers' militancy will be rebuilt. And sooner or later—probably sooner—Labour's endless crisis will explode again.

Protests mark riot anniversary

PRESSURE is mounting now for the release of the Tottenham Three, jailed for their alleged involvement in the killing of PC Blakelock in the Broadwater Farm disturbances.

Up to 5000 people are expected to join the families of the three men - Winston Silcott, Engin Raghip and Mark Brathwaite - and the Birmingham Six on a 'March for Justice' on Saturday 5 October.

Revelations that crucial evidence was tampered with by police have vindicated the Three and their supporters. But

JUSTICE

MARCH

SAT 5TH OCTOBER

AUTHORITY INVITED AGENCY

Road, Tottenham, London, N17 SE9. Tel 081 859 4683
Hackney Public Meeting: 1 October, 7.30pm; Hackney Town Hall, Mare St, E8. More information: T3 Campaign Office or Tash Shifrin: 081 442 4692

Paddy Hill (one of the Birmingham Six) speaking at a Birmingham meeting to launch the 'Justice for All Campaign', which is championing the cause of people wrongly imprisoned. Next to Paddy is Sharon Raghip, wife of Engin Raghip, one of the Tottenham Three. Also on the platform was Anne Wheeler, mother of Michael Hickey, one of the Bridgewater.

The Justice for All Campaign can be contacted by phone on 081-859-6483.


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Sexual harassment is no joke

In this second article in our 'Women in the Unions' series, MARIAN BRAIN, member of the Women's Advisory Committee of the National Communications Union, looks at the issue of sexual harassment and explains why it is a trade union issue. Marian writes in a personal capacity.

Sexual harassment is one of the topics for discussion at the Women for Socialism/Socialist Movement Trade Unions' Committee 'Women in the Unions' national meeting in November. It is also a subject rarely discussed in the workplace, despite being a common experience for literally millions of working women.

The labour and trade union movement has only very recently begun to take the issue of sexual harassment seriously. Like many other issues important to them, women trade unionists have had to battle hard to establish the problem as a trade union issue and not just a personal issue for the woman in question.

Indeed, the TUC only established its committee in 1983. Its document, 'Sexual Harassment at Work' has been used by many unions for establishing policy. But what is sexual harassment? It is any unwanted sexual comment, look, suggestion or physical contact that a woman finds objectionable or offensive.

Offensive pranks

Many forms of men's behaviour can be included: inventive jokes or pranks, unnecessary touching or physical contact, suggestive remarks or verbal abuse, personal comments about appearance, size or clothes, leering, pin-ups, displays of pornographic pictures, demands for sexual favours, physical assault or explicit sexual violence. All constitute sexual harassment when the behaviour is not asked for and not wanted.

Why is sexual harassment a trade union issue? Because it imposes conditions of work on women which are not usually inflicted on men, sexual harassment is one of the most serious forms of sex discrimination. It creates a hostile and intimidatory working environment. It affects women wherever they work, and is often presented as a form of intimidation in jobs that are traditionally done by men.

Many women who are victims of sexual harassment suffer from the knowledge that virtually no one has nervous breakdowns, and many are forced to resolve the problem by transferring or resigning.

Sexual harassment seriously undermines a woman's job security. It can present a danger to health in the same way as asbestos or defective work equipment. Women should not be forced to work in unhealthy conditions, in an atmosphere polluted by sexual harassment.

Real problem

In the National Communications Union (NCU), women have had to fight hard to get the union to take this issue seriously. Many trade unionists do not believe either that sexual harassment existed or that it is a real problem to be dealt with.

It was one of the first issues that the NCU's Women's Support Group took up. They produced an information pack describing what sexual harassment is and how to combat it. They also looked at the problems experienced by women at conference socials and how sexual harassment occurred.

Leaflats

The NCU has now produced leaflets to distribute to members, and also guidelines for branch officers on how to deal with sexual harassment when it occurs.

Women in the NCU were fighting to establish policy on the issue, they were greatly helped by the material curated at these conferences.

For the past three years now, the Women's Advisory Committee has been organising socials where people could have a good time in an atmosphere that is encouraged to be free from sexism, racism and homophobia.

Left must combat rising fascist threat

By Liam Mac Uaid

When the British National Party (BNP) won 25 per cent of the white working class vote in a by-election in East London's Tower Hamlets last year, it was the first firm sign that new political opportunities were opening up for fascist groups. The fascists seem to have used their years in the wilderness to re-define their tactics and methods of work.

In Tower Hamlets the BNP used the stabbing of a white youth by young Bangladeshis as a platform to launch their 'Rights for Whites' campaign. This is a brainchild of the fascists, for its high levels of attacks on Bangladeshis and other ethnic minorities.

Tapped anger

But the fascists tapped into a real anger in the white working class population of one of the most deprived areas of London. They manipulated the blame for inadequate housing, lack of jobs and all the other difficulties facing many young people in Britain to black immigration.

The election result shows that the BNP have succeeded in finding a layer in the white working class, where long term unemployment and those who make their living by a bit of this and a bit of that are under pressure. For other political forces was addressing with numbers relevant to their daily lives.

This is the party-building model the fascists are now using in London and the rest of England. They have also started a serious campaign of harassing left-wing activists. A black SWP member, living in East London, had his house fire-bombed in August. Supporters of Socialist Outlook have been attacked in London, Leicester and Manchester and reports of attacks on Socialist Worker sellers are becoming common, particularly in Scotland.

Harassment

These are precisely the sort of people who will be among the first to organise anti-fascist activity in their areas. The fascists calculate that with sufficiently high levels of harassment, they will erode the numbers of people prepared to combat them.

Defending a threatened social paper from attack is a simple enough matter of mobilising the local labour movement and far left. Fighting the increase in fascist and racist attacks is a more complex problem which is not being adequately dealt with by anyone, anywhere.

Tories

But it is a problem that is getting increasingly serious. John Major is a much less appealing leader for the racist right-winger than Thatcher was. The convergence of Labour's policies and rhetoric with that of the Tories will leave increasing numbers of working class people vulnerable to the fascists' answers.

This is why it is essential to keep up the fight inside the Labour Party around politics that fight the new realist, pro-capitalist mainstream. The party should be forced to organise campaigns with organisations representing the communities under attack.

Socialists must challenge the fascist assumption that they alone have the right to agitate in the white working class around the question of race. As soon as racist attacks or fascist propaganda appear in an area, socialists must respond with anti-racist/fascist propaganda and meetings.

Links

Even in areas where the fascists are not yet organised, links should be made between black organisations and local community groups that are in opposition to racism. Maybe the left must now consider whether the time has arrived for a new anti-fascist and anti-racist umbrella organisation, like the Anti-Nazi League, to drive the fascist slot back into the sewers.
Labour Conference
Is Labour heading for disaster?

The Tories winning the next election would be disaster enough. But, argues DAVID PACKER, a much bigger disaster for Labour could lie beyond defeat at the next election.

IT IS still touch and go on a November election. Underlying the possibility that Major might go for November is the poor performance of Labour and the SDP. Its support has dropped to below 40 per cent in the polls. Either the parties and the Tories have a slight lead, with the Liberal Democrats around 17 per cent.

True, the gutter press has been tough on Neil Kinnock. And it’s also true that John Major got a lot of media coverage during the summer over the defeated Soviet coup.

But, many loyal Labour supporters, desperate to put an end to 12 years of Tory government, must be asking how this situation has come about.

Failure

The opinion polls are not necessarily accurate, but they do highlight Labour’s political failure.

To simply blame the right wing tabloids (when aren’t they anti-Labour?) or essentially TV-tipped to boost Major is, to avoid facing up to a hard truth which lies at the very core of Kinnock’s new realism.

In the end, a ‘key donor in the middle of the road and pretend to be dead,’ strategy, inspires neither hope nor confidence. Even in Scotland the Labour party is losing support because of its appalling line on the poll tax and self-government.

Hung parliament

All this means that a modest lead in the opinion polls by either of the main parties is likely to lead to a hung parliament. If proportional repre- sentation were introduced, the Liberal Democrats would emerge as a major electoral party even now. But whatever the electoral system this party can be crushed by Labour.

History shows that the mid- 1960s, layers and less conscious sectors of the working class, upon which the Liberal Democrats base themselves, can be mobilised for the left. This can be achieved by a confident and radicalised working class movement on the offensive - something that is clearly anaesthetic to Kinnock.

But there are even bigger issues at stake than victory or defeat at the next general election. The question is this: will the new realism lead the Labour Party to back its position at an election which existed before the first world war, when a small Labour Party was confronted by two big capitalistic parties which dominated politics - in a way that it still does in the United States?

US Democrats

The question is not that posed by some in the ‘new realism’, who maintain that the Labour Party itself is becoming the same as the American Democratic Party. The real question is whether the ruling class, with the help of the ‘new realism’ labour bureaucracy, can engineer a major electoral shift away from the Labour Party to the Liberal Democrats - thus in- flicting a major defeat to inde- pendent working class politics.

This may seem like an overly optimistic, with the collapse of the old Alliance and the blood feuds between the erstwhile Gang of Four.

But the underlying trends, mentioned above, shows that the ‘model’ of British politics could still be broken. The move by the Liberal Democrats at Bournemouth to outflank the Labour Party as the radical al- ternative ‘in the post-socialist epoch’, has achieved some credibility, and clearly indicates their intentions.

If, in the likely event of a hung parliament, Labour engaged with them in a bourgeois and inevitably right wing coalition (rather than attempt to form a minority government and then go for a second election) then a disaster scenario for the workers’ movement could be set in motion.

A coalition could only dis- credit Labour and work to the advantage of the Bourgeoisie in general, and the Liberal Democrats in particular. In any event, a Labour catastrophe, of either an outright defeat, or a coalition, after twelve years of Thatcherism, is unlikely to leave the present political scenario in tact.

The left in the workers’ move- ment cannot resist this trend in British politics by passively clinging on to a ‘first past the post’ electoral system, a peculiar and undemocratic constitutional arrangements of an archaic British State.

Left alternative

Only a vigorous left alternative can inspire the working class and its allies amongst the opposed and in the middle layers. This strategy of class struggle and for the maximum extension of democratic rights, is the only way to crush the politics of con- sensus and the parties based on them.

The task of the left at this Labour Party conference is to sound warnings about coalition, irrespective of Kinnock’s present disclaimers, and to warn against the fundamental historical dangers posed to our movement by the strategy of the ‘new realism’ bureaucracy.

We must also project and build the Socialist Movement, which is the only national cur- rent which wants to fight the Tories, but also wants to chal- lenge the betrayal of the new realists on the streets, in the unions, and in the Labour Party itself.

Women in the unions

Fighting for our rights!

Sat 23rd Nov, 10-5
Wesley House, 4 Wild Court, London WC1
What’s wrong with the British left far left?  
by Harry Sloan

Compared with many advanced capitalist countries, the far left in Britain is relatively organisationally powerful. But in terms of its impact on the class struggle, the far left remains weak. Why?

Part of the answer is the political situation, with “new realism” on the right and the left on the defensive. But that is just part of the problem.

It is not so much the diversity of the 70-odd groups on the British left that is the problem so much as the errors that almost all of them hold in common. Almost all of them are undemocratic and sectarian in their political practices. Most in practice reject the united front, and seek to by-pass the problem of winning working class political consciousness by strident propaganda, and frenetic effort.

This article will look only at those groupings which aim to build a mass revolutionary alternative to reformism, and leave aside the varied currents - such as Tribune - which have thrown in their lot with the Nuffield camp, and those small tendencies, such as Labour Briefing which seek only to act as a pressure group within the Labour Party.

Regime

The propensity of British left groups to go over what may seem relatively minor tactical issues is a political disease which reflects a general failure to establish democratic internal regimes which allow different viewpoints to coexist constructively.

One immediate effect of this is that since the early 1960s the left has been divided into a proliferating range of relatively small groupings, none of which has been able to grow even to the 10,000 member mark.

There has been an almost universal failure to implement Leninist democratic centralism, in which implementation of major decisions is coupled with full freedom within the organisation for minority groupings to organise and debate out their differences.

Lenin’s Bolshevik Party was always full of lively debate, with the full right of minority tendencies and factions to organise. Lenin himself was often a minority of one. This is a far cry from the British “Leninists” sects, with their harsh and bureaucratic centralised internal regime.

Caricature

A consequence of this is that many thousands of good militant leaders have been repelled by the caricature of “Leninism” and rejected it.

In the context of a relatively weak Communist Party, some of the British sects in the post-war period have gone to time to time grown to become relatively large, some with thousands of members mobilised around an essentially unchanging core leadership.

However numerical growth on this basis cannot compensate for the qualitative development of the potential for explosive factional divisions and splits at any time should their inner core leadership fall out, or if a layer of members decide to challenge the received wisdom they have been fed.

Workers’ movement

It is not only the internal regime that have been sectarian. The other main feature of the British left has been its generally sectarian political stance towards the organised working class movement.

In Britain the trade union movement has always been central to workers’ political development. Uniquely in Britain it was the unions that built the mass reformist Labour Party, and Trotsky argued that the apparent separation of the trade union and Labour bureaucratic was simply a technical “division of labour”, making it extremely difficult for Marxists to separate out “trade union work” from work in the Labour Party.

The key strategic issue has always been how under these conditions they should relate to the mass of workers, and find ways politically to break decisive sections from their illusions in reformist trade union and Labour leaders to create the basis for a genuine mass revolutionary party.

In the 1950s Trotsky argued that British Trotskyists, too small in numbers to mount any serious challenge to Labour, should work inside the Labour Party and build from there, as well as relating to other layers of the working class. Any perspective of building a mass revolutionary current one by one through propaganda in some abstract way, has always been hopelessly sectarian: no mass party has ever been built in this way.

The key to the development of a revolutionary party in Britain has always been the possibility of a substantial left-right political split within the existing mass organisations of the working class, and for this reason Marxists have always been obliged to follow and find ways to intervene in struggles within them.

Strategy

The question of the united front is not just a matter of a serious orientation to the mass organisations of the working class. It also involves the attitude Marxists adopt to the mass campaigns which arise in periods of capitalist crisis, and to the movements for the self-organisation of the oppressed.

Too often on the far left campaigns like that against the poll tax, anti-cuts struggles and anti-racist movements, are seen simply as an area for recruiting sales and recruitment.

The priority of building united campaigns on the basis of mass action is, for organisations like the SWP, completely subordinate to “building the party”. Serious and experienced working class militants are rapidly repelled by this kind of sectarian propaganda.

Of course, Marxists must seek to win new forces through propaganda. But if that becomes the sole objective of their activity they end up counterposing their own interests to those of advancing working class struggle.

Factionalism

Too often inside the unions, for example, serious attempts to build unity of the militant left to wage a fight to disrupt the right wing are disrupted by petty organisational warfare of left groupings.

The scandalous failure to build a viable Broad Left NALGO, where the left is strong, is entirely due to the disruptive factionalism of the SWP and Militant. These examples show that the problem of democracy goes beyond the internal regime of left groupings; sectarian factionalism extends to disrupting workers’ democracy in the labour movement itself.

Those sections of the far left have this weakness on the basis of their sectarianism, a terrible indictment. Workers’ democracy is a vital question in the struggle against the right wing in the unions and the Labour Party, against Kinnock and new realism.

Once the far left becomes tainted with manipulative and bureaucratic practices than it repels an important part of its potential audience, and begins to surrender the moral high ground in the fight against the right wing.

Liberation movements

A fundamental factor in the contemporary fight for socialism is the emergence of movements and currents fighting for their own organisation and liberation of those specially oppressed under capitalism – the women’s movement, black liberation movements, the lesbian and gay movement and the movement of people with disabilities.

These movements pose a challenge to the whole labour movement, and particularly to the far left in particular. The fight for socialism requires a strategic alliance between the labour movement and these movements of the oppressed.

Socialists then have a dual task: to champion the self-organisation of workers, to advance the movements of the working class.

“Of course, marxists should seek to win new forces through propaganda. But if that becomes the sole objective of their activity they end up counterposing their own interests to those of the working class.”
organisation and struggle of the specifically opposed and fight for the adoption of their demands in the labour movement, and inside these movements to argue for a socialist alternative.

The prolonged failure of the labour movement to adequately take up these questions creates enormous difficulties and makes the project. But this is compounded by the sustaining of the media's anti-left currents, especially Militant and the SWP, to cope with these issues. Jerry's call for the left currents of the British labour movement in the SWP and other groups, it has reflected a deeper problem: the model of socialist transition and the revolutionary party which they adhere to.

A flawed tradition

There can be no argument with the need for an organised Marxist force to give leadership to the struggle for socialism. Britain has been through so many silly left currents that any easy shortcuts. The Russian revolution was a bloody revolutionary crisis generated huge splits in the revolutionary workers movement, opening the door for new mass communist parties; it failed to generate any such split in Britain.

When in 1933 Trotsky concluded that the official communists' movement was 'dead for the purpose of revolution' and a new international had to be built, the British forces rallied to this call even in a small minority. In relation to the already small Communist Party.

From the beginning British revolutionary socialists were divided on tactics towards the Labour Party, while their small propagandist groupings tended to be dominated by individual personalities, intrigues and gossip.

In 1944 came the move to found British Trotskyists in one organisation, the Revolutionary Communist Party. From this organisation came the three personalities who were to be the main groupings of the British left far left for three decades: Gerry Healy, Tony Cliff and Ted Grant.

Fierce debate broke out on two questions: whether the Trotskyists should go into the Labour Party, as well as the unions, to fight for their political line and win support, and on the analysis of the huge events taking place in eastern Europe, as Stalin's offensive passed over the upsurge of the old capitalist regime.

By 1951 when the British Communist Party broke de-finitely from every previous act of revolutionary politics, to embrace the parliamentary perspective of the British Road to Socialism the far left was divided into three traditions, each one in the Labour Party. Grenadier's Labour was the first to come out of the Labour Party in 1958-60 following the prescription of the Socialist Labour League. Cliff's International Socialists did not emerge until the 1960s, while Grant's political line, thoroughly adapted to the Labour Party milieu, is still one of transforming the party from within.

Much of the British far left comes from the tradition described above. It is a tradition which fundamentally underestimates the project of socialist transition as being based on the self-organisation and self-actualisation of the workers' working-class and the oppressed. In effect, it rejects the real Leninist tradition of respect for political pluralism in the workers' movement and the left itself.

In this siege-militarist 'Leoninism' there are only those of the true faith and those to be led (the masses); other left organisations become 'revisionists', enemies to be treated with utter scorn and contempt.

The irony is that the Socialist Workers Party and its predecessors base themselves theoretically on the struggle of 'the workers'. In the 1960s, SWP leader Tony Cliff rejected Leninism, and his group was heavily influenced by studentism and syndicalism. When in 1968 Cliff became a member of the International Socialists it was rather a modified form of the Gerry Healy variety that he adopted.

What is to be Done?

The British far left has not just got to prove its ability to win small numbers of militants (generally for short periods) or sell hundreds of papers; it has to prove its leadership to the class, in its ability to win the leadership of the labour movement away from the right wing and new emergent right-wing inclinations.

To make this change means a fundamental re-tooling of our support network and the opportunity to make this, with the partial crisis in the Labour Party's leadership (see article on these pages). But this has to break away from the long slog of building an alternative.

Who are we to talk to?

So what is so different about Socialist Outlook? Our supporters come from a variety of political traditions and currents, and are united on four fundamental issues that make us distinct from others:

- A rejection of undemocratic organisational methods and a insistence that only thorough freedom of discussion can a correct Marxist analysis be derived, defended and developed.

- A commitment to defending and building the self-organisation of the oppressed.

- A commitment to genuine internationalism as against the building of small, dependent and conformist groupings and circles of co-thinkers on the lines of the WRP, SWP and Militant.

- Defence of the method of the united front, recognising that in the concrete context of the British labour movement this means working within the Labour Party as well as with forces outside it, building campaigns and promoting struggle that can show workers the need to break from reformism and build a mass alternative.

Rejection of any notion which subordinates the actual struggles of the working class to the narrow sectional interests of a particular left group.

Our current is by no means the most consistent on the British left, and still has much to prove. But we have a record in constructively building labour movement campaigns and promoting socialist initiatives such as the Socialist Movement which consistently argues our own political line offers a welcome break from the sectarian legacy of the left British.

After all, it is not enough to defend what is wrong with the British left: our task is to do something about it.

Walton

The outcome was the decision to stand Lesley Mahmood in the Walton by-election. Her 2,613 votes in a Militant stronghold did not vindicate the new 'outside the Labour Party' perspective. It showed that the base for a new 'real Labour Party' is not present.

Peter Taaffe has argued in successive Guardian letters that Kinnock cannot be given the 'free rein' - and therefore the tendency will prioritise activity outside the Labour Party. But this is illogical. Deciding to carry a new party with no significant support and abandoning the struggle in the Labour Party precisely gives Kinnock 'free rein'.

The problem for Militant is that the type of Labour Party activity it has traditionally conducted is very difficult in today's conditions. The tendency has always conducted essentially propaganda activity in the party, aiming at winning people to socialist ideas, selling papers, and recruiting to the tendency. No real attempt to utilise the weight of Militant supporters to build the left as a real and effective force against reaction.

That is the weakness of Ted Grant's position. If the sole option for Labour Party work is supporters recruiting and papers sold, then the party is indeed an 'outside activity' in all but name. But once Labour Party work is put in the perspective of united front activity, building the left, and preparing for the new crises which are inevitable, the importance of this work becomes clear.

New realism

This does not imply that the sole work of socialists today should be debating resolutions in Labour Party branches - but then it should never have been. The fight against new realism in the unions and building mass campaigns on a range of issues including the NHS, local government cuts and the upsurge of racism are vital components of socialist activity.

The key question is whether this activity needs the building of a new party, and in any case whether a new party is possible at this time.

In his historical analysis the senseration of the Labour movement to win socialism will necessitate a party qualitatively different from today's Labour Party.

The current crisis in Militant should be the occasion for serious Marxist in the tendency to stand back and take a long look at their activity. To justify its existence a militant tendency has to go beyond being able to explain socialist ideas, but be useful in the fight to defeat the right wing, promote workers struggles, build the movements of the specially oppressed and - not countenance its narrow interests to those of the workers movement - and the left as a whole.

An organised movement of militants is certainly necessary today. Militant's sectarian propagandism, marked by narrow nationalism and numerous concessions to Labourism, belongs in a museum of antiquities.

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USSR after the coup

A rocky road to market

Though the majority of the left was united in denouncing the recent attempted coup in the Soviet Union, opinion has varied widely as to what the future will bring for Soviet workers. PATRICK BAKER asked OLIVER MACDONALD of New Left Review for his views on the prospects for the Soviet state.

What do you think has happened in the Soviet Union - a step forward for democracy, a gain for the working class; or is this the first step of the 'new world order', the beginning of unbridled capitalism in the Soviet Union?

What has happened with the attempted coup and its reversal is the speeding up of a process that was already underway, which would have worked itself through, but much more slowly.

Namely the disintegration of the Soviet Union and support for the Communist Party, the growing powers of the republics and so on.

The coup was prompted by the threatened union treaty, which was perceived by the coup-makers to be a catastrophic break-up of the USSR.

This shows who the coup-makers were: those who were extremely worried about a break-up of the union - those tied into the union apparatus, the KGB, the military, the diplomatic corps - and also representatives of the central ministries and the big-all-Soviet enterprises. What it was not was a coup inspired by Stalinist ideals.

This was ideal order. It was not at all a coup for a return to Stalinism, the glory of communism and the CPSU. Indeed it’s significant that some of the most prominent Stalinists opposed the coup.

So it was more a case of the market with a heavy hand?

Whether they were for the ‘market’ - more precisely, a capitalist market - or not is another question. They were for the existing power of the Soviet state and its apparatus - in other words, the nomenclatura.

Then there was a reaction against the coup and it’s important to see what sort of reaction it was. There was a substantial mobilisation in Moscow and Leningrad, but there was no great popular seizure of power across the country. So why did it fail?

It failed because the mobilisation led by Yeltsin was insufficient to break the unity of the coup-makers, and their repressive force. The disintegration of the bureaucratic command system had already gone far too far - there was very little political energy behind it. So we’re talking about the collapse of the old system, rather than a popular revolution.

But it does now call the coffin lid on the old system...

Well, it gets the body two thirds in anyway. So when the system collapses what do you have left? Republican governments. It’s clear that Yeltsin and those around him were not expecting this.

What is important is to characterise Yeltsin’s politics, now he has the power. This is difficult to do, because Yeltsinism has until now been a negative force. He has a huge, but heterogenous, support in anti-communism.

It’s only now he has to decide what he stands for, and then make it happen. Yeltsin has not put forward and defended a positive political programme as yet. So we must interpret his postures and tactics.

For example, at the beginning of the year he strongly supported the Baltic republics, and this led some to say: ‘Yeltsin taken a strong stand on the national question’. Others say that this was entirely tactical, and had much more to do with undermining Gorbatchev.

Then if we come to Yeltsin’s socioeconomic programme, he has been championing the capitalist market - but some would say this is another stick to beat Gorbatchev, not a matter of principle. So things are unclear.

So what is Yeltsin’s trajectory?

It’s too early to say whether Yeltsin is preparing an authoritarian regime. He is the product of a very primitive political differentiation in Russia - we don’t have properly formed parties, let alone parties linked to different social groups.

This pushes Yeltsin in authoritarian directions - because when you have big popular movements that aren’t properly structured, this shifts all the power into the hands of the leader, and he then tries to solve the internal contradictions by acquiring more and more power.

What about the USA? They’ve said they’ll only deal with a Soviet supersate, with Gorbatchev.

Well, they’re trying to put the union together again, as is Yeltsin. Rebuilding the Soviet state is the only way the republics will be kept in the orbit of Russia.

Yeltsin and Gorbatchev aren’t fighting - he is backing Gorbatchev, and Gorbatchev is deriving his authority from Yeltsin.

Now Yeltsin has the political authority, and is trying to drag in as many of the instruments of power into his control as possible. Gorbatchev is in no position to resist.

But he still has one card to play - the support of imperialism.

True - but the US is quite capable of living without the Soviet Union.

On the economic level, the pressure will be for immediate solutions to consumption problems. These are not the circumstances to engage in wild marketisation experiments - particularly with the big industrial enterprises.

Yeltsin has declared himself in favour, but he won’t do much in the next 18 months if he’s got any sense. I suspect they’ll try to privatise small business.

What will happen to the Communist Party?

It’s been banned, and we don’t know what the popular perception of its role in the coup is. Important people in the CP were involved in the coup, but its leading organs didn’t back it and large elements at the base opposed it. Significant numbers still support the CP - when asked in a poll if communism would survive as a force in the USSR, 30% said ‘yes’.

A substantial number also said Gorbatchev would survive as President. We should expect continuous, if not real political support in Russia. As an example, if you take all elections in Europe in the last 18 months, the biggest communist vote wasn’t in Italy, it was in Czechoslovakia, where the CP got over 18% - and it had resisted a popular revolution.

The fact the CP is banned means their influence on various layers is massively diminished. Direct political pressure towards rebuilding a socialised economy is very slight.

But there could be real problems if those that support some form of socialism can’t express their view. I suspect Yeltsin will allow a re-formed party - perhaps 2 CPs, one hardline, one social-democratic.

Gorbatchev’s project was to integrate the USSR into the world market, while preserving some sort of market socialism, and restoring the CP’s popularity.

So would it have been better if the coup hadn’t happened at all? Have the social guarantees that went with Gorbatchev’s market socialism been destroyed in the defeat of the coup?

The crucial point is that forces identified by the population with communism were seen to be trying to smash democracy. That was a terrible blow to the left.

Does that mean the people who emerged victorious from the coup are on the left? No. Does it mean that now the coup is defeated, there is a radiant future for the left in the USSR? Certainly not - I think there’s a very bleak future for the next period. But our criterion for judging politics isn’t what’s good for us - that would be machiavellian, the sort of politics the coup-makers had.

We should be saying what thousands of east European communists said: ‘We must never be military opponents of the people’ - even if they’re being led in a direction we don’t agree with. But we’ll go on telling people what we think.

And we think that the coup was a despicable attempt to reimpose a dictatorship. But we must also say that the idea that the heterogeneous forces of anti-communism around Yeltsin have got good solutions to the USSR’s problems is also wrong.

But there is a tendency for people here to think that what the Soviet people are rejecting is simply symbols, not socialist ideas. We must be very cautious about that.

So what are they rejecting?

Experience from eastern Europe suggests that most workers think they have experienced socialism, and it failed. What they’re rejecting is what they have been told is socialism, and the ideological baggage with it. Their idea of socialism is primarily an economic system - which they reject.

Economic failure leads them to believe that the socialist solution is not possible, and there is only one other mechanism - capitalism - and that seems to work.

Anybody in Yeltsin’s position, who wasn’t very sure of where they stood, and trying to stabilise their position, would answer blame communism. This is politically very powerful - we’ve seen it in Poland. The Polish workers were
proposed to go through two years of hell with the Balcerowicz Plan.

They blamed it on the communists, despite them being hardly any left. It is only now that this anti-communist basis of politics is wearing thin.

So we should have no illusions that the USSR is going to be rebuilt. It is very unlikely that, say, the Ukraine will be part of the Soviet Union in two years.

Though it may be in a Soviet economic bloc of some sort.

OK. But the most likely development is the creation of a number of states out of the Soviet Union. In the Ukraine now, the basis of the political fight is who is in the strongest leader of a separate Ukrainian identity - it is entirely geared around separation from Russia.

So are we going to see a 'Europe of nations' - but possibly warring nations in the USSR, as we're seeing at the moment in Yugoslavia?

This is a big danger. And there are not small nations we're talking about - the Ukraine is well over 50 million people. Without question we will be in a highly volatile and fragmented situation in the ex-Soviet Union.

Maybe we'll see a united Europe, under the umbrella of the EC?

But the EC hasn't got an umbrella. Usually by people mean a military umbrella and the only umbrella of this sort is sitting in the Soviet Union, but I'm not clear who is holding the handle.

The EC hasn't got an umbrella of its own - look at what is happening in Yugoslavia. Some of the states in it would dearly love the EC to have one, but others have no such intention. And the Americans have no intention of the EC having a military umbrella.

A federal Europe is what some undoubtedly want - but as time goes on, it becomes increasingly difficult.

So the Soviet Union is disintegrating. The question is whether it is possible to peace out conflict between the republics and move towards economic revival.

These are questions the left has to focus on.

On the first question, the left has to face the fact that the USSR has broken down. Therefore, whoever is running the show in Russia has to accept the right of these nationalities to statehood. Yeltsin's remarks about boundaries are catastrophic if they are an indication of his ideas. They were withdrawn, but there are those in his entourage who are very dubious on this.

One consequence of the collapse of the Soviet state and the coup is that great power sentiment in Russia will no longer be expressed through the old institutions of the USSR and the CP, but as Great Russian sentiments.

Desperate

All of these economies of the ex-Soviet Union are now desperate to be integrated into the world market, but whether that happens is up to the West. Gorbachev tried this great gamble - he realised that it is impossible for the USSR to develop in isolation - a socialised economy in one country. The more the economy advances, the more impossible it is.

He was trying to push into the world economy, without going over to capitalism. Things came to crisis point at the G7 Summit. Pressure was put on Bush, but he didn't budge - partly because he doesn't have the resources (though others do). So Gorbachev's attempts to use all his carrots to get into the world economy failed. That was another background to the coup.

He could not say 'We are now going to be treated as a normal economy, with no barriers to trade, capital transfers and so on.' The West's response was 'No way are we allowing you in until you go down the capitalist road.'

So we're not on track towards a united Europe - but one divided West/East, like the world is North/South?

Yes. The problem is not aid - that's a red herring. The real question is free entry into the institutions and division of labour of the world economy. There's a huge campaign for a free market in eastern Europe, but this goes hand in hand with isolating opposition to free international trade.

So Poland has abolished all tariffs on Western imports - but the West refuses to do the same for Polish exports. Also, most of the aid is designated for privatisation - it's not designed to improve output. What is really important is private investment - but that's not aid, it's business.

Newspapers say that eastern industry is so backward they have nothing to sell us, but that's not what the EC steel or chemicals cartels say. They are up in arms against free trade, because it threatens their market.

If the east Europeans could sell goods without tariffs or quotas, that would make a real difference. It would improve their balance of payments positions, they could get hard currency, then buy equipment.

"One consequence of the collapse of the Soviet state is that great power sentiment in Russia will be expressed as Great Russian sentiments"

And so on.

Also, Western capital won't invest while barriers are up. Capital invests to get cheap labour, then sell the products back to the West. If they are barred from selling to the West, there is no point investing.

Does the new situation mean an end to Soviet support for third world struggles, and so US world dominance?

It means an end to Soviet support for those struggles. The USA may be militarily strong enough to destroy everyone, but it doesn't have the economic strength for world leadership. There are strong, counter-Asian forces in the West, as well as enormous pressure towards a single European economic space of the EC, EFTA, and perhaps Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary. Both of these factors point towards a more powerful Germany, now that the USSR is gone as a power in Europe, and Russia greatly weakened.

What should we say to the new governments of eastern Europe?

'If you want strong national economies, don't privatise.' The textbook 'big bang' plan of privatisation and, so on.

Also, Western capital won't invest while barriers are up. Capital invests to get cheap labour, then sell the products back to the West. If they are barred from selling to the West, there is no point investing.

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What happened to the Iranian revolution?

By Peter Burton

IRAN TODAY is run by a reactionary Islamic regime. Using the language of seventeenth-century religion as the basis for its laws and social programme, the Islamic Republic suppresses all hints of socialism, liberalism or women's rights, rights of national minorities and freedom of speech (remember Rushdie?). The struggle for a democratic solution was bailed out by the left as a revolution against feudalism.

The Shah of Iran, with huge financial and military backing from the US, reinforced imperialist domination of the economy, based on agriculture and one main industry - oil. Traditional agriculture and the large class of small merchants in the bazaar were pacified. While vast shahy towns arose, only a tiny bourgeoisie profited.

Of the rest of the population were from national minorities, and denoted national rights; a vast army and secret police (SAVAR) suppressed all opposition; the Shah was imperialism's Gulf policeman.

Millions

The Shah was overthrown by the people in a long struggle which started in 1978. The response was repression, but each massacre led to even greater mobilisations, based on the 40-day mourning cycle. Four million people demonstrated in September 1978, chanting 'death to the Shah!'. Strike action by the 1.6 million strong working class sealed the fate of the regime.

The armed forces cracked, and 'the final action' took place on 9 February 1979. Left parties were active, armed and growing in influence among students and workers. Strike committees turned into workers councils (shahras). Women demonstrated on International Women's Day. The new bourgeois government looked fragile. Would Iran's February revolution be followed by a socialist October?

The question of leadership of the struggle proved to be decisive and it was easy to see why the US's 'war with terror' had failed.

Nationally-known

The Shi'e clergy filled the gap left by the failure of the rest of the opposition. The bourgeoisie nationalists were weak and divided. The Communist (Tudeh) party had long tail-ended the Shah's regime. Only Ayatollah Khominei, in exile since 1963, was a nationally-known figure who consistently fought the regime.

In the absence of alternatives, the network of 80,000 mosques and their dedicated army of imamas and religious leaders provided the organisational base of the revolution. The revolutionary guards (Pouadara), the revolutionary committees, the revolutionary councils, were all heavily influenced by the mullahs.

The victory of Khominei's Islamic Republic Party was not inevitable. While the IRP had a strong base in the bazaar and among the dispossessed who resented its thuggery (the Hezbollah), its programme was openly anti-trade union, against the interests of the workers (trade unions were 'unIslamic'), the poor, the peasants, national minorities and of course women.

But convinced that Khominei represented the anti-imperialist revolution, the left was silent when he rushed through a referendum establishing the Islamic republic, with final power for the clergy. When Khominei launched the occupation of the US embassy, the left either ignored the mass mobilisation which followed or tail-ended it unwillingly. When Iraq invaded Iran in September 1980, left parties became entirely critics of the regime's orders rather than demanding a real mobilisation of the masses linked to political demands. As the IRP carefully consolidated its position through 1980/1, banning the press, purging the

Feedback

We welcome letters on any subject but please keep them brief. Letters over 350 words will be cut. Send your letters to: Socialist Outlook PO Box 1109, London, N4 2U0

Workers' democracy and the ex-USSR

After introducing the demand for a Constituent Assembly to resolve the question of independence for each republic in the Soviet Union your editorial (6/7) informs us that Yeltsin and his supporters are 'at best supporters of Western-style parliamentary democracy'.

What unfortunately is not made clear is that a constituent assembly is, in its essentials, nothing other than a 'Western style parliamentary democracy'.

Despite this, Soviets must support a constituent assembly, but must demand that any government based on soviets can really achieve the democratic aspirations of the exploited and oppressed in the republics.

Soviets are organisations of the exploited and oppressed structured across town, town and national level that emerge in open revolutionary periods. It is one of the reasons for the organised and oppressed and therefore rightly exclude representation of bourgeois elements and bureaucracy. Soviets represent a qualitatively more participative and democratic form of government than any form of parliamentary democracy. Despite illusions held by some socialists, a constituent assembly, excluding the mass of people from any effective participation, essential to become a limited group of rulers.

In the case of the 'sovereign' republics it is, for instance, possible that 'national' sections of the bureaucracy that have previously appropriated all power can form a bloc of its own internal warring factions (together with bourgeois and petty bourgeoisie interest groups) that have sufficient cohesion to ensure that a constituent assembly continues the exclusion of the exploited and oppressed.

It would be wrong today to counterpose soviets to a constituent assembly precisely because the masses of workers has to go through its own experience of fighting the limitations of parliamentary democracy for the superiority of soviet democracy to become clear.

However, at the same time as supporting the demand for a constituent assembly it is essential to champion every expression of workers self organisation; factory committees, price committees, independent trade unions, formation of political parties, worker control and self-management; organisations of the oppressed, workers militia as opposed to a standing army committees elected by small farmers and of course parties if they appear. It is also essential to demand that the constituent assembly operates proportional representation based on parties with the right of recall of elected delegates.

Our internationalist duty as socialists is to put forward a clear perspective of struggle which will receive the tasks of the democratic revolution through consolidating the present process of political revolution by the formation of a government based on newly regenerated soviets, led by a party that attempts to unite all class-conscious workers.

Roy Ruddell
NW London

Should we defend the Cuban revolution?

I am somewhat puzzled why your editorial on the collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe sees as one of the main dangers the possible overthrow of the Castro regime in Cuba.

Of course the replacement of the current system with an American market economy would not represent any improvement for Cuban workers.

However, when I read Alain Krivine's and Jeanette Habel's account of their visit to Cuba and find that produce is being directed to the tourist hard currency sector which Cubans are banned from I conclude this represents something worse than the old system.

Rather Cuba is a society just like those in eastern Europe before 1989 where workers are not in control.

Cuban workers will, hopefully, wish to defend theirselves against American imperialism more than ever before. The left is rather different to defending a revolution which is over when that has never had any control.

Keith Fitz
London N17
Cuba in the firing line

Gorbachev has unilaterally announced the impending withdrawal of Soviet troops from Cuba, amid intense speculation that the US administration might even be contemplating a military offensive to overturn Fidel Castro's regime. Defence of the Cuban revolution could again be placed on the agenda for Marxists. But what kind of regime is it today? In July, ALAIN KRIVINE and JEANÉTTE HABEL, leaders of the French Trotskyist organisation, the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire, visited Cuba. We reprint here the second part of an interview with them published in the LCR's newspaper 'Rouge'. The translation is by Patrick Baker.

Q: What is happening in terms of the bureaucratisation of the regime?

AK: It is clearly visible. Obviously neither the leadership nor the party are comparable to eastern Europe—they did not develop out of a real counter-revolution.

Among the 600,000 CP members the situation is contradictory. Some of them are amongst those who have worked the hardest—voluntary work, the war in Angola—while corruption has hit other layers.

It's the existence of a single party, tied into the state apparatus, and into the sapping of grass roots popular power, which provides the basis for a robber bureaucracy.

We were often received by the 'party secretary', the only one who speaks, who knows everything and can go anywhere... And it is the same official who will tell you that the new line aims to give a voice to the people...

In a cigar factory it took me some time to discover that among those who said nothing and left the party secretary to talk, there was the factory director!

These methods are frequently denounced by leaders, but they don't put forward any concrete solution. For example, we went to a barracks, along with the general secretary of the Young Communists.

He made a two hour speech against bureaucracy to 50 members. This was often perceptive: 'At the base we have popular power, which is very popular, and has absolutely no power. At the top, we have an Assembly of the People which has considerable power but is cut off from the people...'

In fact, the functioning of the Cuban regime is based on a mixture of traditions inherited from the armed struggle, and a Cuban copy of Soviet Stalinism, with a considerable amount of intransience and critical spirit thrown in. The leadership knows how to listen, but governs in a paternalistic way.

So there is a real problem with democracy, even if the Cuban government has never used the gap. The demand for democratisation and debate is very strong. Surprisingly, there is not the same demand for pluralism. The hatred of the USA, the feeling of being the only country to resist imperialism, and the rejection of any idea of allowing a 'pre-american' party to form perhaps explain this.

Q: The CP party congress has been set for October. What political and institutional changes have been proposed?

AK: The seriousness of the situation risks slowing down, if not preventing, essential political changes. And economic and social problems haven't yet been translated into politics. Everyone agrees that the dissident groups are not representative.

"to resist the imperialist offensive, real changes are vital. Popular power must become real power, which is not limited to local government, but allows real workers' self-management"

The big debates are taking place inside the 'Front of Young Communists', as well as some mass organisations.

The main discussions are on economic policy and political reform. The functioning of the party is also being questioned, particularly the way that leaders are elected. They are trying to debureaucratise, but not going to the root of the problem.

The 'bad years', when they 'copied' the USSR, are being questioned—while emphasising that the regime has always had a base incomparable with eastern Europe. But the problem is that they mention the basic causes of bureaucratisation and corruption—the monopoly on power, the single party system, and the privileges associated with it.

The single party system is justified by the need to defend the revolution and the understanding that 'divide and rule' is the USA's favourite tactic. But to resist the imperialist offensive, real changes are vital. Popular power must become real power, which is not limited to local government, but allows real workers' self-management.

Second, political pluralism is an absolute necessity. Debates and confrontations between different currents and policies are essential for political health.

This is the only way that the corruption linked to a monopoly of power can be avoided. It could allow politicalisation and combat passivity and demoralisation, or even a dangerous depoliticisation of young people.

Q: From what you've been saying, a nose is tightening around the neck of the Cuban revolution...

AK: It is at a turning point. The combination of external pressures, in a transformed, unfavourable international situation, is a considerable threat.

In 1983, there was the intervention in Grenada; in 1989, it was Panama; this year there was the Gulf war... Today the 'American' main aim is the defeat of the Cuban revolution.

Q: That poses decisive choices for the Cuban leadership—they form the backbone of the CP. How is the debate going?

JH: The main theme of Bush's campaign, supported by the Cuban emigrants in Miami, is to say to Castro's leadership "you say that your regime has enormous popular support. Prove it by holding free elections..."

Not only will Washington not relax the blockade, but it makes any economic aid conditional on the holding of 'free elections'. The Cuban leadership must respond to this 'democratic' challenge.

The main decisions, which will be made at the Congress, obviously need to combine an economic response with a political and structural perspective. First of all, it seems likely that in the current difficult situation, the Cuban leadership will have to retreat.

That could take the form of economic reforms which allow mixed enterprises to develop—which is already happening, in fact—going further than what was allowed by the 1982 law, which allowed up to 50% ownership by foreign capital.

This could involve farming and small business, which would improve the chances of increasing the popular standard of living. But it would also give rise to social differentiation and concentration.

The alternative would be a sort of 'war communism'—but it's difficult to say how that would be viable for long. If you move towards economic openness, towards the penetration of foreign capital and privatisation, that poses the problem of the policies that inevitably accompany those measures.

One possibility would be a similar road to that taken in China and Vietnam. This is definitely the policy of some leaders.

Another possibility would be to grasp the nettle of measures acceptable to the Mau Mau emigrants. This would mean an openness which was not based on increased popular control. On the contrary, it would allow the intervention of parties linked to the emigrants—which means, in the long term, the liquidation of the gains of the revolution.

At the moment, this is unthinkable. But it is openly supported by Gorbachev and might win support from the Cubans who are looking for a new way to preserve their power.

A third possibility would be an increase in social control of the towns and the factories, with the aim of limiting prices and corruption.

The dilemma facing the sections of society who are most conscious of the problems facing the revolution is that they fear that opening up means risking US intervention.

But on the other hand, isn't allowing the Cuban people to intervene directly into this crisis essential for the unity which is needed to defend our country?

The other options are much more dangerous. Also, even though the Vietnamese or 'Chinese' road are asking what such a policy can mean from the USA, Tiananmen Square in Havana would be the end of the revolution.

But let's be modest. No-one has a ready recipe for a third way, but one out of 10 million people, trying to build socialism in such an unfavourable international situation. This is why there is such a need for solidarity.

Q: How can we help?

JH: At the same time as questioning political choices and certain policies, we shouldn't forget our primary duty—solidarity. The Cuban revolution is a real revolution which still needs our support, even if it's decreasing.

Taking into account the gravity of the situation, the question is how long that support will last. It is where solidarity comes in. Obviously, it will be easier to extend that support when the limits of democracy are lifted.

AK: As you can see, we are not uncritical supporters of the Cuban regime and Janette is right to emphasise the seriousness of the situation.

That's why we can't play the Pontius Pilate in the battle between the Cuban revolution and its opponents, East and West. An imperialist victory in Cuba would be a defeat for people everywhere, not just Latin America.

We have many things to say about democracy in Cuba, but it's for the Cuban people to sort those things out—not certainly the US administration.
Shakespeare in a way he could never have imagined

Prospero's Books
Directed by Peter Greenaway.
Reviewed by Louise Holloway
It is surprising to learn that even prior to another history of China in the twentieth century but rather a socialist explanation of that history - a difficult task in itself for the author.

Nonetheless, the strength of this book lies in its excellent and accessible accounts of working class struggles from 1925-7 and since 1979. Especially good is the highlighting of the role of the workers and peasants' movement in the 1989 spring, so absent in the mainstream press.

However, the book fails to look at what was distinctive about Maoism, as a variant of Stalinism, and why it still holds sway among many third world revolutionaries. Indeed, the book argues that all socialist illusions in Maoism have been shattered - a very Western-centric view.

Distinctive

What was distinctive about Maoism? It was contradicted. Firstly, it was born out of the worker's defeat in the second 1925-1927 revolution, due largely to the disastrous role of the Stalinist Comintern. However, it also represented the theorizing of a reaction to Stalin's ultra-left postures after that defeat. Maoism preserved the peasants to fundamental importance in the revolution. Mao's strategy was that of the protracted peasant-backed guerrilla war, culminating in the countryside encircling the cities. Alongside this, he continued to use Stalinist bureaucratic methods of organization and leadership. Against this, Charlie Hore claims that the Chinese revolution was not fought as a guerrilla war, but as a set-piece battle against two regular armies, with the mass of the population as mere spectator. I find little evidence for such a claim.

While the Red Army was built on a few fragments of the working class, it was mainly a peasant army. It won the peasantry's active support through resistance in the redoubt of land to land and through being the only force fighting against the Japanese invasion. These struggles were a vital component in the success of the CCP.

Again Hore exaggerates when he deals with Mao's theory of the United Front. This too has contradictions. In one sense it operated like a typical popular front so that during the war against Japan even the down-treading classes and the British-US comprador bourgeoisie were included in it.

However, because Mao's strategy subordinated other forces to the revolutionary party, Hore overstates the moderation the front imposed on CCP policies in North Korea, where many places once the land reform had begun it was difficult to put the brakes on.

Also, it is equally wrong to say, as Hore does, that because Mao prioritized the revolutionary party this means that the CCP stood above all classes, acting in their own interest as a future ruling class. Here - a member of the Socialist Workers Party and echoing its 'state capitalist' analysis - claims the CCP became a ruling class after the 1949 revolution dissolves. Yet, as we have already seen, what marked Maoism was its legacy to peasant struggles. He says nothing about the change in property relations that the revolution brought about and has sweeping claims about the poverty of the CCP cadre.

Indeed one wonders whether Mao sees the revolution in a positive light. He states, 'the elimination of the landlords, moneylenders, warlords and all the other parasites of the old order made possible the more efficient exploitation of the workers and peasants by the CCP.'

What can be said is that the Chinese revolution initiated a world historic defeat on the imperialist system.

Blinkered view of Beijing bureaucracy

The Road to Tiananmen Square
Reviewed by Louise Holloway
The Road to Tiananmen Square claims to be the only account in the West of the events leading up to the massacre of April 1989, and from this perspective, it is a detailed and valuable study of the events.

However, the book is marred by a number of weaknesses. Firstly, it is written from a Western-centric perspective, and as such, it fails to capture the full complexity of the events. Secondly, it is based on interviews with Western journalists and officials, and as such, it fails to capture the full complexity of the events.

Despite this, the book remains a valuable resource for those seeking to understand the events of April 1989. It provides a detailed account of the events and the political climate leading up to them. It also provides insights into the perspectives of the officials and journalists involved.

The book is divided into two main parts. The first part deals with the events leading up to the massacre, while the second part deals with the aftermath.

In the first part, the author provides a detailed account of the events leading up to the massacre. He does this through a series of interviews with Western journalists and officials, and as such, the book provides a valuable insight into the perspectives of those involved.

The second part of the book deals with the aftermath of the massacre. The author provides a detailed account of the subsequent political changes and the impact of the massacre on Chinese society.

Overall, the book provides a valuable resource for those seeking to understand the events of April 1989. It provides a detailed account of the events and the political climate leading up to them. It also provides insights into the perspectives of the officials and journalists involved.

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Overall, the book provides a valuable resource for those seeking to understand the events of April 1989. It provides a detailed account of the events and the political climate leading up to them. It also provides insights into the perspectives of the officials and journalists involved.
In the last issue Steven Taylor accused Socialist Outlook and the left in general of overhasty condemnation of Alan Bleasdale’s GBH television series, and of a too-narrow political assessment of art in general. Here Paul Clarke replies.

Steve Taylor thought our article on GBH was too severe; I thought it was soft. In the series Bleasdale does portray state intelligence forces and some right wingers as sinister; but GBH was full of caricatured venom for the socialist left.

The supporters of the thinly-disguised Derek Hatton character are pictured as moronic thugs, ready to resort routinely to violence. They intimidate schoolchildren and beat up blacks to provoke street violence. Is that what the Militant tendency or the rest of the far-left really does? Do me a favour.

Bleasdale’s hero is the school teacher played by Michael Palin. He stands up to the left bully-boys, and mobilizes normal, decent working class people against them. In a crucial speech he tells the militants - 'the problem with you is that you’ve only read one book'. (Marx’s Capital).

The message is clear. The far left are loud-mouthed ignoramuses, their heads filled with half-baked dogma. Ordinary working class people will sort them out and see them off.

Can anyone doubt that this is the Neil Kinnock-Eric Hammonnd view of socialism and the working class? Steve’s argument that GBH was condemned on a couple of episodes is beside the point. A lot of people saw one or two episodes, and the rest of the episodes were just as bad.

Steve’s accusation that painting these things out amounts to a neo-Stalinist view, or more generally that the left has a view of culture and art similar to that of Stalinism during the Proletkult era is far-fetched. The view that art is either politically ‘correct’ or rubbish is totally discarded on the left. Of course art is a ‘highly mediated’ product which cannot be simply assessed in terms of political correctness. Steve doesn’t have to lecture anybody about that.

But neither can any political criteria be discarded when assessing artistic products. British drama is highly political. It is impermissible, an example of Stalinist dogmatism, to think that Ken Loach is reactionary or Arvind Gaur is a crypto-fascist. Or that the book and movie on the Greek civil war, Elew, while having many merits, gives a one-sided picture of ELAS and the Greek Communists? Or that Hidden Agenda has political as well as artistic merits? Or that the work of Madonna or Arnold Schwarzenegger has some political implications? What’s the problem of including political assessments in an overall account of artistic production?

A piece of drama can be politically right-on an appallingly done. Or artistically clever and politically drivved. GBH was very sick. In overall political message was utter poison, not just in its portrayal of the far left but in its patronizing view of the working class. To be accused of neo-Stalinism for pointing this out is ridiculous.

In treating the murder in a totally racist, homophobic and dismissive way.

Tensions

Chris and Caz become entangled in the search to find the killer. This is at the same time as they are frantically preparing for their alternative to the nationalistic celebrations - a ‘Funk the Jubilee’ special pirate broadcast. The tension between and their friendship is stretched by Chris’s individualism and Caz’s love affair with a rather naive white punk SWP member.

While the film can be praised for dealing with issues not normally explored in the cinema (although the film does not have, predictably, mass distribution), there were weaknesses.

The female characters in the film are, by and large, restricted to Caz’s mum, his sister, and the woman who later becomes his girlfriend, Tracy (Sopgie Okonkolo). All, including Tracy - the main woman character - are presented in a way that makes them subordinate to ‘the boys’.

Lesbians

There was also not a lesbian in sight! Even if there was no central lesbian character in the script, surely in the mixed club scenes (where gay men were being kissed), there could have been some positive images for lesbians.

On a more positive note though, through looking at the issues of racism and homophobia largely within a youth culture context, the film does well to contrast the hope that was very much in evidence in the Black soul scene, with the nihilistic, almost self-destructive, largely white punk generation.

One final point. I hope that Julian’s next feature film will avoid the pitfall of snuff, cutie-pie endings. A bit more vomit please!

Funking the Jubilee

Young Soul Rebels

Reviewed by Sam Inman

If, like me, your recollections of the 1977 Silver Jubilee are of painting countless Union Jacks to brighten up the drab London Brick Company walls of the housing estate where you lived, then this is the film to see.

Isaac Julien’s Young Soul Rebels sings a different song. There’s not too many commercial films that combine a murder story with an exploration of black youth culture in the era of punk, black gay mens’, sexuality, the SWP and the Anti-Nazi League, all against the backdrop of a patriarchal red, white and blue London Borough of Hackney council estate. The ambition alone is reason enough to pay the cinema a visit.

Sexuality

Chris (Valentine Nonyezi) and Caz (Mo Soay) are two 17 year old Black soul DJs, who run a pirate soul radio station, ‘Soul Patrol’. Chris is straight, Caz is gay. Throughout the film Caz’s sexuality is dealt with wholly positively (Julien himself is a Black gay man) and certainly not seen by Chris as a barrier to their friendship.

The murder that the film is set around is that of another Black gay man, TJ, at the local cottage. (For the uninitiated, cottages are areas that gay men frequent for casual sex). TJ’s murder is seen differently through different eyes. The murder of a Black man is seen as a racist attack on the Black community as a whole, at a time of feverish British nationalism. For the gay men who hang out at the cottage, there is the feeling that it could have been any one of them – yet another example of murderous homophobia. The police are fairly accurately presented as
Defending jobs, improving services?

Jeff Lowe

With United at the top of the First Division (at least at the time of writing) and the media finally reprieved all could be thought to be well in Manchester. Matters are a little different, however, both for those who provide Manchester Central Manchester City Council's services and those who make use of them.

It certainly requires an extremely distorted logic to see hope in clashing by-elections, Hayfield Ward and Brierfields Elderly Persons' Homes can be equated with the City Council's boast of Defending Services. Similarly with turning Hillside, Weylands and Woodville EFPPs into day centres. Some of the residents have lived in these homes for over 20 years.

Community centres

In addition to community centres threatened with closure: Aquarius, Central Manchester Fairfield St, and Ladyburn.

Now it is only elderly who are being hit. The Dommet St centre for disabled young people and the Regent's day centre (for mentally disabled young people) are also under threat whilst another centre for mentally disabled young people (Ross Place) is subject to review.

With only a very few exceptions all funding from the council to voluntary agencies is to be cut. While the average reduction in 5.15% for some groups will lose their entire capital funding.

There is a certain irony in some of the cuts. Brierfields EFPP and the Aquarius Centre are both in Hulme, which has just won 'category competition' for increased funds from central government.

Battle

Whether this money will help enough cash to provide every councillor with a leatherbound Filofax. No doubt it is to ensure they don't forget to call the out-of-hours service to the elderly, close swimming pools to cut down on expenses or call for redundancies.

To make sure opposition to its policies is limited to the 'left' Council leadership is carrying out a 'crusade' against all those councillors who refuse to implement Tory policies.

Seven councillors have already been removed from all committees and banned from representing the City in any capacity - in one instance of them being invited along when the Council leaders go on to their next expense-paid jaunt in a further fruitless bid to hold the Olympic Games in Manchester?

Two of the seven are facing expulsion because they attended an anti-Poll Tax picnic in Liverpool at the same time as Lesley Mahon.

Final warning

By the same logic everyone who attended Eric Heffer's funeral at the same time as Lesley Mahon could be open to expulsion. Brierfields councillors are on their 'final warning'.

The Council funded GM Buses has threatened 500 job losses. Over the last few months there have been disruction with staff in Social Services, Housing, Leisure Services and Libraries - at the very least.

Filofax

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Greens lurch to the right

by Sam Inman

Sara Parkin and Jonathon Porritt are now effectively the first individual leaders in the history of the British Green Party. They were elected as the party’s national speakers after the “professionalist-centrist” Green 2000 motion won the day at the party’s AGM in Wolverhampton.

The Green 2000 current, as reported in SOS, campaigned hard to win a large number of proxy votes. This included publishing an impressive list of supporters. The “big names” not commonly associated with the party itself included David Coe (director of Friends of the Earth), Edward Goldsmith (editor, The Ecologist), and Satish Kumar (editor, Resurgence).

Now that the Green 2000 current have won control of the party, they face the awesome project of transforming it into a viable electoral concern with politics virtually indistinguishable from the Liberal Democrats.

The left in the party put up a spirited, if unsuccessful, fight. They warned that if passed, Green 2000 would result in the active base of the party dropping out of party work. It is this layer that has held the party together over crisis-ridden recent months.

The lurch to the right was also seen in the most acrimonious debate at the AGM, outside of Green 2000, around Workers’ Rights. Developed by trade unionists in the Green Party, the motion would be a pretty uncontroversial in left circles, but the right-wing hated it. They didn’t like the way it posed the relationship between the boss and the worker as a disharmonious one.

The AGM also voted down a resolution calling for a minimum wage. Opponents argued that the present Green Party policy, a Basic Income Scheme (BIS), did away with the need for such a safety net by guaranteeing a basic income for all, regardless of work status. Supporters argued that since no-one had adequately explained the transition to the BIS, the minimum wage had to be enforced. (David Coe, in fact, that the Green Party has obviously swung rightwards, there remains a small number of committed socialists inside. Socialists in the Labour Party and in the Socialist Movement should be discussing with them ways in which we can work together.

Women for Socialism is attempting to do that, and this year held a fringe meeting for the first time at the AGM. There was general and frank discussion about the problems that socialist feminists face as women in working class politics. There was also agreement that we needed to do more in terms of working together, particularly drawing on the positive experiences of the anti-Gulf War movement. Interestingly, the problems that women in the Green Party face are by no means dissimilar to those of us elsewhere.

Health workers strike back

By Harry Sloan

MILITANCY among health workers is rising as the Tories’ health “reform” runs into over-grown crisis.

In London, a successful ballot for a one-day strike against ward closures and job losses at the Elizabeth Garrett Anderson Hospital for Men was followed by roll action from COHSE and NUPE members.

Around 50 people joined the picket line at lunchtime, while leaflets warning of the threat to the very existence of the hospital, as Bloomsbury and Islington health authority searches frantically for cash savings.

NUPE and COHSE are calling for women and labour movement organisations throughout London to help in the fight to save the capital’s last surviving specialist women’s hospital.

Contractors

A strong response from nursing staff in South Wales against the threat to standards posed by private contractors helped win a substantial victory over cleaning firm HCS, which has just taken over the cleaning contract at Cardiff’s Ely Hospital.

350 nursing staff voted in a ballot to take industrial action if necessary to challenge the appalling standards and inadequate staffing levels of the contractors.

This followed an earlier fightback by cleaning staff and nurses who had forced the firm to reinstate a supervisor sacked for complaining at having to work an unshelled 14-hour shift.

Censors and Secrets

Delegate Conference against Censorship

Saturday October 19, 10am – 6pm

Britannia Street Conference Centre
Kings Cross, London WC1

Delegates £10 Individuals £5

Booking forms from
Tim Gopsill (NUJ) 071-278-7916

Journalists fight anti-union offensive and censorship

by Patrick Baker, NUJ London Magazine

Journalists in the magazine and book sector are preparing for a national day of action on September 27. The action is aimed at strengthening the fightback against the employers’ derecognition offensive.

The day of action will be organised on a chapel level, with groups of journalists pressing claims for union recognition against individual employers. The action, organised by the NUJ Magazine and Book Industrial Council, is long overdue – the last year has seen numerous attacks on union rights in this sector.

Where there are too few union members, or the chapel is too weak, journalists should support the lunchtime picket of Marshall Cavendish on Wardour Street, a long-running struggle against derecognition.

NUJ activists should also try to get involved in the Censers and Secrets conference on October 19. The delegate conference has been organised on the third anniversary of the broadcasting ban against Sinn Fein.

The conference should be a useful opportunity to organise media workers to campaign around issues of state censorship.

Socialism in the new world crisis

Ernest Mandel (United Secretariat of the Fourth International)

Janette Habel (author of “Cuba”)

Kingsway Princeton College, Grays Inn Road, London WC1

Rally November 29, 7.30pm

Socialist OUTLOOK
New US threat to Iraq

GEORGE Bush's threat to dispatch fighters to Saudi Arabia marks an escalation in the US proxy-war aimed at the peoples of the Middle East.

Though Bush has claimed there are no threats, that's not what this is about; the claim lacked something in credibility. Taken with the already substantial US naval forces in the Gulf and eastern Mediterranean, these add up to a substantial military arsenal on Iraq's doorstep. It is a new threat to the Iraqi people - those that suffered most in the Gulf war - to add to the economic war of starvation waged since formal war ended.

And socialists should not be fooled by the US administration's 'UN rhetoric'. First, the use of fighters and bombers to 'take out selected nuclear sites' could wreak a level of destruction through fallout that would make Chernobyl pale into insignificance.

Second, the record of the US administration in preventing nuclear proliferation is hardly a proudf one. In fact, preventing proliferation as such has not interested them. Their interest has always been in restricting possession of nuclear weapons to their client states - which is why they have never shown any great interest in the nuclear programmes pursued by Israel, South Africa, Pakistan and others.

US fighters and Patriot missiles have no part to play in guaranteeing peace in the Middle East. The greatest hope for peace in the region would be to allow Iraq to sell its oil, giving it the revenue to buy the food and medicines necessary to stop the cholera, dysentery and other diseases spreading through the population.

societal左 a new left paper is born

By Davy Jones

societal left the fortnightly paper of the Socialist Movement was launched on 25th September. And it's available in newsgroups across the nation(s), including WH Smiths and Menzies.

It's a tremendous gamble to launch such a paper at a time of decline of the Left and of economic recession. The decision to proceed reflects a determination to try to take the political initiative in the new international situation and for the post-election period in Britain.

societal aims to stimulate and coordinate a wide layer of the Left who remain committed to a socialist perspective but are currently underorganised by any one current.

The paper will have these main components: news and information not readily available elsewhere which Left activists need for their campaigns and activities; debate and discussion on the major underlying issues which socialists need to address; and a culture and living section which deals with day to day issues of interest to activists from a left perspective.

societal has a breadth of backing and sponsorship unique on the Left - from Tony Benn and Dawn Primaro to Marjorie Thompson and John Pilger.

Broad alliance

It is not a revolutionary newspaper. But it does bring together a broad alliance of those prepared to side with the oppressed and exploited, and who support a serious attempt to redefine a socialist project for the 90s and beyond.

societal arises from two years of discussion and preparation within the Socialist Movement.

Frustrated by its inability to realise its full potential or to really develop the network of local groups and political campaigns the Movement decided to launch its own political paper.

The sectoral organisations which the Movement helped to found - Women for Socialism, the Trade Union Committee, the Red/Green Network and Labour Party Socialists - faced similar difficulties of consolidating their influence without a higher profile.

At the same time the space on the Left for a new paper steadily grew as Tribune, Marxism Today, New Socialist and New Statesman steadily moved to the Right.

societal's potential readership is huge, millions of socialists and thousands - most of whom have probably never heard of the Socialist Movement or its sister organisation.

Potential

The launch issue shows the potential for societal to take the political initiative, with the launch of a campaign for an 80% reduction of the defence budget to fund a massive programme of public services.

Such a high profile political campaign would have been qualitatively harder for the Socialist Movement to launch without its new paper.

It would be foolish to pretend that there are no problems with the project. During the two years of discussion and the various pilots issues the balance between 'societal's' political and journalistic emphasis has not always been right.

It has made mistakes and disappointed some potential supporters. The Socialist Movement itself is an alliance of the Labour left, revolutionaries and libertarian socialists. There lies its strength and its weakness - inevitably reflected in the paper.

Preparations

But just as Socialist Outlook has systematically supported the Socialist Movement since its outset, so we have been involved in the preparations for 'societal'. Its launch is the best opportunity for the development of a socialist alternative on the Left to the dead-end perspectives of the SWP or Militant.

It has the capacity to bring together the best forces of the Labour Left with those campaigning, currents outside the Labour Party especially as we approach a potentially new political situation opened up by an election.

Socialist Outlook supporters are encouraged to do everything they can to make the project a major success.

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