ASLEF train drivers have voted to stage a series of one-day strikes in their battle for a pay increase to match the soaring cost of living, beginning this week.

With most RMT members in the former British Rail having voted against strike action, it is left to the drivers to defend the strength of trade unionism as management prepares the rail network for privatisation.

The strikes against BR could coincide with action on the London Underground, where a majority of RMT members have voted for action in support of their 6 percent pay claim.

But with union leaders in both RMT and ASLEF fretting from the original pay demands, and hinting that any offer above 3 percent would be referred back to the members, it is clear that the strike vote represents a wish to fight on more than just the wages issue.

This is likely to be the last chance for rail workers to stage coordinated nationwide action; there is obviously a feeling among ASLEF members that effective strikes could yet put a spoke in the wheel of the Tories' unpopular privatisation plans, and create a more favourable balance of forces in struggles to come with the franchise bosses.

The rail workers have already seen BR bosses pocket huge pay increases for their 'success' in squeezing greater productivity out of staff, while they have been offered a miserable hand out below the rate of inflation.

Their action is an important challenge to the growing scandal surrounding privatised utilities.

The full weight of media hostility will be aimed against them; they will be attacked by right wing union leaders who have done nothing to fight the Tory offensive, and by Tony Blair's Labour leadership - still smarting over the rail unions' Clause Four defiance - who would be quite happy to see the Tories take them down a peg.

But the fight can, like last summer's signal workers' dispute, serve as a rallying point for working class opposition to the hated Major government.

Solidarity with the rail strikers! Deraill the Tory sell-off!

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THE NATIONAL demonstration called by the health unions for July 29 to press their pay dispute should be a rallying point for everyone fighting the Tory offensive on the NHS.

More than a million workers have rejected an insulting 1% offer coupled to another 2% local strings attached, and are battling in defence of the national agreements which underpin their pay and conditions. If these are broken, staff in each Trust will be left to fight in isolation for their pay demands: there would be no more nationwide action.

However it appears that many national union leaders have already effectively given up the fight. Instead of building up the real anger by encouraging local branches to stage pro- test strikes which could stimulate a 1980-style wave of action, UNISON and other key unions seem to be trying to damp it all down.

Three weeks before the July demo, there are still hardly any leaflets or posters promoting it. Even the venue has been left out of the slimy leaflets sent to UNISON offices. The dispute has been dragged on in hope that members will get fed up and throw in the towel, or the Royal College of Nursing will yet the unions off the hook by striking a squab deal.

But it’s still not too late to turn the tide. There are three weeks left in which health workers and all those trade unionists and Labour activists who support them can mobilise a real show of strength on July 29.
Did Tory MPs plump for a turkey?

By Harry Sloan

'Turkeys voting for Christmas' was the way the Sam described Tory MPs reflecting John Major. Popular ideas that might restore the Tories' flagging fortunes were in desperately short supply throughout the Tory leadership contest.

Major ran on a platform of continuing the present government policies which have received much overwhelming and humiliating rejection from the electorate in the European elections, by-elections and three rounds of control elections.

Several of the Tory press and top employers who took their distance from Major in what has been described by some as precisely this weakness.

They are wondered that with a fundamental change in the Government's policies and a more popular touch, Major will prove unbeatable.

Bottled out

But of course many more recognise that the agenda of the far right is unequivocally unpopular. Even Redwood bottled out of presenting a full-blooded right wing platform in the knowledge that the electorate would not accept it.

That's why, far from offering a clear alternative, Redwood was left at the level of tinkering and gimmickry, with pledges to save the Royal Yachts that will do little to win over the millions caught with negative equity and wondering how long they will have a job...

Opinion polls showed conclusively stronger public support for Major than for Redwood or彭茅斯, their policy so far to the right that distinguished Tory votes and Labour as offering no real change.

So far Blair's proposals on the economy, health and education seem to be headed down that dangerous path. The fight for socialist policies

After Major's reshuffle

Welfare state still the main Tory target

By Harry Sloan

LIKE THE CAST of a tedious soap opera, a few faces may have been swapped around in John Major's cabinet, but the basic plot remains grimly, predictably unchanged.

Virginia Bottomley, who had expressed concern that she might be given a cabinet job that would make her unpopular, dons a straight cap with philippine Stephen Dorrell, taking over as secretary of state for health by the Ministry of Fun.

Having turned the hunt for NHS treatment into a lottery, she is now to have a go at running it.

The concepts of Bottomley and Fun will sit as strangely together as it is hard to see how she could survive. She will follow the methods of her predecessors in search and destroy mission against London's teaching hospitals, with the threat looming of assets being embroiled in battles for the closure of the Royal Opera House, with funding

Closing the Opera?

switched to the delivery of smaller-scale local opera in Tothill Street.

Of course Tories take the opera in their stride, in the same way they are currently unaware of how they could subsidise this and other middle class pleasures.

For his part Dorrell has already declared his intention to follow his predecessor in creating the probability that the Tories will go into the next election threatening to axe key services from over a dozen London hospitals.

The Department of Employment has itself been made redundant following the removal of the rabid Michael Portillo. Gillian Shephard will now contain the last of cutting the training of jobs for tomorrow and spending in schools and cutting student grants. She is also fighting up the indignation of the cyclical nursery voucher scheme.

Outrage

The outrage of Tory majority over funding is being perpetuated with the appointment as Scottish Secretary of Thatcherite Michael Forsyth, so right wing even Scottish Tories can't stand him.

Wales is saddled with boy wonder William Hague, the fourth Tory Welsh Secretary to come from an English constituency.

With Kenneth Clarke still in place as Chancellor setting the pace in spending cuts to produce a tax bite for the next election, and the bête noire Michael Howard spearheading new attacks on the electricity industries for imposing more public ratepayers, the apparent 'harder' shift in the middle class will be clear.

They will be central to the story. They are generally more militant. They'll be at the forefront of the action, on picketing lines and branch meetings.

This is certainly happening in my branch.

ASLEF takes on the Tories

By Simon Day

As the Mainland Car Deliveries strike enters its second month the 37 sacked workers need support from trade unionists more than ever.

The Oxfordshire dispute began when the car delivery company issued eight immediate redundancies.

While the other workers gained the legal seven days' notice before their supportive action, nickname to move cars out of the depot to other distribution centres.

On the day the strike began all the workers were sacked.

There is a round-the-clock picket. No more cars have been moved out of the depot since the strike commenced. Two more were sent to Govan.

The depot is the centre for Rover distribution all over southern England. Cars that would have previously been sent to the depot have now been diverted to the new assembly plant at Elv in Cambridgehire.

The TSWU has been less than forthcoming in its support.

While the strikers have followed the letter of the law, the union has not organised any support. The full resources of the union now seem to be behind the strikers.

The Oxford District Council has passed a resolution calling for action to be stepped up. It will be discussed at the TSWU bi-annual delegate conference this coming week. Union members throughout the country should also pass resolutions of support.

It is clear that the decision to sack all the strikers is part of a wider plan to de-unionise car distribution completely. The workers are being used as an example to intimidate others in the industry.

It is important to pressurise the union leadership to organise proper solidarity action - while the Ely plant is not unionised, all the workers who support it are.

Money, letters of support and copies of resolution should be sent to the strike fund, c/o B. Hill, 38 Tyrell's Way, Sutton Courtney, Abingdon OX14 4DF.

The train drivers' union has voted for industrial action over its pay claim. Socialist Outlook's Simon Day spoke to ASLEF member Mark Thompson about the dispute.

What is the background to the decision?

The main reason for the success of the strike vote is the hiccoughing resolution over the union leadership's behaviour in recent years.

We have had to accept a below-inflation rise every year - a cut in cost. Between 1992 and 1994 there was a 7.2 per cent reduction in driving staff. At our 1994 conference delegates issued a serious reprimand to the leadership, saying repetition would be unacceptable - and called for a "substantial increase in the rate of pay" in the next round.

This means, in practice, a rise of around five per cent.

The union has conducted a wide-ranging consultative process since the conference. It came out with a clear message - 80 per cent in favour of taking industrial action for an increase in the basic rate of pay, an overwhelming majority.

So the policy has been on the table for a year.

But the strike is connected to privatisation?

Of course. There is mass protest against the privatisation programme. The meatworkers strike showed how industrial action was an effective obstacle to privatisation - it puts big financial strains on these "small" companies that are trying to profit out of the decimation of the industry.

But it is obvious that the government is pulling all the strings. The activists realise that this is a strike against privatisation and, therefore, a strike against the government. We're taking on the Tories.

So the mood is determined?

Absolutely. The only doubts are directed at the leadership. Some question whether Lew Adams will carry it through. The record so far is not promising. It has been thirteen years since the last real strike. Leaders have done everything in their power to prevent such action.

A series of one-day strikes in 1993 over redundancy and compulsory transfers was stopped after one day with nothing to show for our efforts.

How will the RMT result affect the strike?

Of course the RMT voting is disheartening. We had hoped the action would be together.

We recognise that any decent pay rate should be for all BR workers, not just drivers.

There is nevertheless, a strong "go it alone" tradition in ASLEF. Drivers have shown that they can defend themselves and strike from other rail workers.

This is due partly to their ability to bring the network to a standstill all on their own. It is supported from other grades though - RMT members won't be crossing picket lines. For this, we are grateful.

Since the recruitment criteria to the union was expanded there has been a wave of young recruits with different union experience to the older members.

They will be central to the strike. They are generally more militant. They'll be at the forefront of the action, on picketing lines and branch meetings. This is certainly happening in my branch.
Much ado about nothing?

WAS IT really such a gambit, when John Major re-arranged as Tory leader, boldly challenging his opponents to 'put up or shut up' in a leadership election?

We may have to wait for some memoirs to confirm the real story, but on the evidence so far, it appears that the entire episode was simply stitched up in advance, in a deal between Major and Heseltine.

Hence, recognising that he could only win the leadership himself at the risk of triggering a through-going split in the party, there the weight of his Europhile camp behind Major, was his exclusive focus on real power in the party and in government.

The deal stated the Euro- sceptic right wing around John Redwood, leaving him just 89 votes, and giving Major a 2:1 victory.

And the same deal has now installed Heseltine as John Major’s ‘Minder’, the key driving force of the government, with his own ‘granny flat’ giving privileged and constant access to Major in 10 Downing Street.

While important sections of the Tory establishment, not least some national newspaper owners and editors are now recognising, the success of election disasters, the leadership contest, and the split, has involved some key political issues. At the centre of the upheaval is the deep anti-European chauvinism at the roots of the Tory Party itself.

John Major, generally united both on principles and to a large extent on tactics, but on Europe.

Under pressure from the Euro-sceptic rebels on the back benches and the hard liners in his own cabinet, Major had allowed government policy on Europe to slide dangerously away from the policies of the British People.

The Tories are the party of the ruling class, but there is a certain level of political autonomy which leaves room for a conflict of interest.

The challenge in John Redwood’s campaign platform, which could have opened the door for the more anti-European nationalism of Portugal in the event of a second round, would have pushed this split wider.

Most of the CBI and key industrial leaders, along with the banks and finance houses, lean towards the idea of a common European currency and further consolidating the European Union as their best hope of battling through the intensifying competition and division of the world into warring trade blocs.

The humiliating trade concessions wrung out of the Japanese car industry last month by US negotiators underline how tough this competition is becoming: British capital knows it cannot withstand such pressure without the collective strength of the EU.

Of course the complexity of achieving a single currency has been recognised by other European governments, which is why the deadlines for making further progress would have even discussed postponing next year's Inter Governmental Conference in the hopes that a later date would see Labour in office in Britain.

Major’s platform, while carefully avoiding an overt commitment to a single currency, firmly rejected the Euro-sceptic line. That is one reason why among those most assiduously canvassing in his support was that doyen of Eurosceptics, Sir Edward Heath.

But the other reason why Major was able to cement this bloc between the (largely named) ‘left’ of his party, the Europhiles and the centre, was because on almost every other political question the Tories are basically in agreement.

Of course the rhetoric appears rather different – just as John Major’s ‘early use of one nation’ rhetoric appeared to offer a contrast in policy from Thatcher’s language of overt class war. But the change in style cannot conceal the continuity of policies: Major’s government, working in the same framework of marketisation, has been every bit as right wing and reactionary as Thatcher.

It is John Major’s government which has concluded the privatisation programme, brought in the racist Asylum Act, pushed through the draconian Criminal Justice Act, scrapped unemployment and sickness benefits (replacing them with brutal new measures), the Job Seekers’ Allowance and Incapacity Benefit, designed to cut benefits to 500,000 claimants, brought in the market reforms in the NHS and imposed means-tested charges on community care for the elderly.

In fact the terms of the leadership debate were a little confused: it was the ‘right wing’ John Redwood who suggested paying the nurses a decent wage, relaxing on hospital closures, and guaranteeing a hostel place for everyone sleeping rough on the streets, while the ‘left’ wing Heseltine has been husting to privatise the Post Office.

John Redwood flirted rather ineffectually with populism, calling for more law and order, preservation of army regiments and the royal yacht, and made great play of the need to direct new tax cuts towards the Tories’ traditional middle class supporters (“families hit by the recession, small businesses and prudent pensioners”).

Yet it is Major’s new look government which is now promoting the ‘populist’ voucher scheme designed to subsidise the private nursery costs of the prosperous middle class, at the expense of the working class families who depend on council nurseries and playgroups.

Redwood’s vague plan to cut public spending across the board by 1.67 percent to finance ‘one-off’ £5 billion of tax cuts failed to disguise the lack of any serious policies that were not already part of the Major government’s agenda.

His bizarre pledge to eliminate the sleaze factor by vetting the sexual and financial indiscretions before appointing ministers must have terrified many of his more amusing potential supporters.

As London’s Evening Standard pointed out, “All those think tanks bubbling away, all those freeze, pink-cheeked blue-souled young men in University campuses all over the land excitedly inquiring the mantra ‘New Gin- grich’ came to nothing.

“When the crunch came, he failed to convince intellectually. He had no ideas.”

Cut down

So Major stays on, reinvigorated by Heseltine. The Euro-sceptics are marginalised. Redwood is cut down, and the disloyal Portillo is dispatched to Defence, where he will be in charge of closing some of the regiments Redwood promised to save in order to make the spending cuts Redwood promised to make.

Nothing has really changed. The policies which have lost the Tories almost all their council seats, and left them trailing at historic lows in the opinion polls, remain intact. The scandals of the privatised utilities, the sleaze, the fiasco of rail privatisation, the crisis in the housing market, the feel bad factor, the gun reaction against market values continue undisturbed.

Skulking disgruntled on his back benches, a third of Major’s MPs have shown by their votes and abstentions that they are so hostile to his leadership that they would risk a general election rather than back him.

Major has secured a stay of execution, scraping together a basis to continue to the next election; but his government’s electoral decline is due not to its divisions but to mass rejection of its policies.

Short of a miraculous economic recovery, it seems that not even the political inipitude of Tony Blair can avert a Tory defeat.

Then the crisis would re-emerge once more. And that, of course, would reopen the floodgates for a real leadership challenge by the Tory far-right.
Labour's NHS retreat

Stalled in Tory market

By Harry Sloan

When is a market not a market?

The question that remains unanswered from Labour's labourous 36-page policy statement Renewing the NHS.

The second paragraph lists the main story: the party is terrified of proposing any serious changes.

"It is clear that it is neither possible nor desirable to turn the clock back. Nor is there any appetite in the health service for huge upheaval. We do not intend to replace one dogmatic approach with another."

With big changes rejected, it is therefore the Tories' dogmatic approach which remains the dominant factor in the new Labour plans.

The central feature of Thatcherism was the split between those who took the lead in the costing of each item of treatment for comparison with others, and those who argued that hospitals run within rigid cash limits.

As in education, Labour would continue the discarded Tory league tables comparing hospital performance.

Compulsory tendering of hospital ancillary services would be ended, but patients contracts with private firms would remain untouched.

None of the growing number of top NHS managers would be lost; they would be put in place over the overhead costs would remain at their inflated levels.

Nor will Labour break from its long-standing support for the NHS, private provision of community care, with the imposition of means-tested charges.

Instead all they promise is a Royal Commission to investigate the problems, which will solve the issue for years ahead.

The policy says virtually nothing about how to reduce the cost of health workers or ensure more effective use of resources to help people who are not able to take care of themselves.

Embarrassment

 Blair's timid policy today could prove to be a major embarrassment tomorrow. Tories will have the added advantage of the bureaucracy and waste that will be rampant under Labour.

On the other hand, it will be told by health unions, Labour Parties and other bodies that the national NHS is in trouble and the Tories would be more about what a Labour government would do instead.

Labour's fridge test on education policy

By Richard Hatcher

ROY Hattersley was right to call for action to defend the principle of comprehensive schooling. Labour's new policy document Diversity and Excellence is an attack on the comprehensive system.

Diversity and Excellence proposes nothing to break the constraints of government-determined curriculum and testing. There is no room for grassroots initiatives to challenge educational policies designed to maintain the status quo.

The document is an ingenious "historic compromise" designed to get Labour off the hook on opted-out grant maintained (GM) schools while not offending the privileged interests represented in them.

Centralised

Labour is preparing to abandon the "comprehensive principle", further centralise control in Westminster, weaken local government and wrap it all up in the spurious rhetoric of "parental accountability".

Blair's new "foundation" schools will perpetuate division and privilege, for two reasons:

- A school which acquires an image as being "advanced" will act as a self-fulfilling prophecy in attracting parents. This image is underpinned by real advantage, in that they, and not the LEA, will own their buildings and employ their staff.
- Labour's policy encourages diversity, not just by creating three types of school: authorities, community, aided and foundation, but by encouraging schools, as the Tories have done, to specialise and to select.

Of course the document repeatedly rejects "selection by 11-plus", but there are no plans to bring the existing 154 grammar schools back into the comprehensive sector. This would only happen if there were "a clear demonstration of support from the parents affected by such decisions."

Minority

Does this mean the parents of the minority of students at the grammar schools - in which case clearly nothing will change? Or does it mean all the parents in a locality, where a vote for abolition could be campaigned for and won?

The document backs other types of selection. By encouraging selection by so-called "aptitude", the policy risks the premature labelling of children - in oversubscribed schools "aptitude" becomes a code word for ability.

Existing patterns of educational inequality, especially for working class school students, are reinforced.

The end of extra funding to GM schools is to be welcomed as is the commitment to return GM teachers to the framework of national pay and conditions.

But there is a danger that the jobs of GM school teachers and other staff will be at risk. This is why the staff of foundation schools should be employed by the LEA not the school itself. They need the safety net of a job in another school - an important issue given the huge number of surplus places in GM schools.

The document goes too far in trying to place the anti-local government lobby. It proposes to delegate even more of the LEA budget than under the Tories - up from 85 to 90 per cent.

It nevertheless admits that some services, like special needs, cannot be met by the remaining ten per cent, and that LEAs will have to find a way of negotiating some kind of clawback from the schools.

The sensible answer is to allow LEAs to retain enough in the first place.

The advantage to Blair of the 90 per cent figure is that it denies LEAs the capacity for interventions. The important innovations in anti-racist and anti-sexist education funded by LEAs in the 1980s would become near to impossible.

The document makes big claims for involving parents.

There would be more parents on governing bodies, and one comments on "sensitive on education committees. LEAs will be encouraged to set up Parents Forums."

This hardly opens up local government to popular involvement. Why not establish statutory Education Forums, involving teachers and other educational interests, with full rights to information, full consultation, with the right to put resolutions to Education Committees?

Accountability

Putting more parents on governing bodies does not necessarily address the key issue of their accountability to the mass of parents. Once elected they can do what they like. Parents are to be given no right of representation of their views.

This document does nothing to break from the Conservative agenda for education.

Once again Labour is dragging along behind the national popular opposition to the Tories. Many towns and cities across the whole country have seen big demonstrations opposing cuts in education, reflecting a new, more radical involvement, many of the activities organised by the Fight Cuts in Education.

As campaigners prepare to mobilise for the second national FACER demonstration in London on September 30, Labour's leadership remains again on the sidelines, handing the initiative back to the Tories on terrain where important inroads could be made into the middle classes.
Tories step up racist offensive

By Simon Deville

THE RIGHT wing of the Tory Party are now proposing new legislation that aims to further tighten immigration control. Particular areas being looked at include cutting benefits of asylum seekers.

End collaboration with immigration authorities

Lobby Hackney Council

Wednesday 26th July, 6.30pm
Hackney Town Hall

Free

Ragbhir Singh!

OVER 250 people joined together outside Winson Green prison on June 24 to demand the release of Walsall journalist Ragbhir Singh.

This day he was moved from Birmingham to Hackney prison, to make it even more difficult for his supporters to visit him.

However the Home Of- ficer’s illegal action back- fired, triggering increased support by campaigners, in- cluding his uncle, the Na- tional Union of Journalists. Their pressure led to a small victory: he has been moved back to Winson Green, though not held in solitary confinement.

Ragbhir’s supporters believe he is being held under charges andved with deportation because the Punjabi language newspaper he edits has pub- lished articles by him critical of the Indian government.

The fight for his release goes on, and campaigners are urging supporters to send letters and fax to protest to the Home Secretary.

Write for or phone the Governor of Winson Green demanding Ragbhir be re- leased from solitary confine- ment.

French campaigners fight rising tide of detections

By Bill MacKeth

In June the French Federation Association of Solidarity with Immigrant Workers (FASSTI) heard reports from the struggle against racist immigration laws throughout Europe.

As a representative of the Campaign to Close Campfield I gave evidence on the detention of refugees and other migrants in Britain.

FASSTI has seventy active local associations in France. It works with non-French na- tionals on the provision of housing, legal advice on re- diness and citizenship, French language instruction and pub- lic campaigning on anti-racist and solidarity issues.

In the past year there has taken part in a national march for jobs and campaigns for the right to medical treatment for non-French nationals, as well as against deportations and detention.

Two hundred people heard evidence from recent de- tainees and the local associa- tion.

Among the so-called "Paques laws" of 1993 was the introduction of "judicial detention" of "deportables" for up to six months on the decision of a magistrate - hence the new detention centres.

As in Britain, the official language of forcible detention is full of euphemisms. Detention centres in France are officially "reception centres". People are not deported - a word associated with the deportation of Jews, gypsies and others by Nazi collabora- tors - but "distanted", "isolated".

Under Charles Pasqua there has been a systematic attack on people who solidarise with migrant workers. Most notable perhaps is the December 27, 1994 law no. 94-1156 which states that "any person who while in France directly or indirectly assists or attempts to assist the irregular entry, movement or stay of a foreigner in France shall be punished by five years in prison and a fine of 200,000 francs".

The new law has been un- denied by a national cam- paign and the police by over 300 well-known public figures stating that they have broken, or intend to break, the law by as- sisting foreigners whose situa- tion is termed "irregular" by the government.

The president of the Or- leans association has been tried for public defamation of the police. His offence was to distribute a leaflet that recalls the role of the police in Vichy France in imprisoning Jews and others in detention camps from which they were sent on to their deaths in Ger- many and Poland.

He was acquitted along with the co-charged Kas- soum Sidiki at Orleans Correctional Tribune on June 23. The state prosecutor has appealed.

The French state does not intend to give up its pursuit of what is a pattern of more or less Europe-wide governmental policy on this question.

Moments decisions on immigration matters are made by interior and justice minister at secret meetings free of all public scrutiny and control.

June 24 success

Anti-racists show the way forward

HUNDREDS of people across the country mobilised for the day of ac- tions against immigration detentions and deportations on June 24th. These actions were linked into protests throughout Europe against the treatment of migrants and the draconian legislation being introduced in the UK and "Europe".

In Britain, the actions marked a small but significant step in the development of an opposition to current and future legislation.

At a time when hundreds more prison places are being built to hold black weeks, and even lighter immigra- tion controls are being proposed, it is at it is more vi- tal that the black community and the labour movement take up the fight against state racism.

Across the country

• Winson Green prison in Birmingham saw a lively picket of around 250 people, with a significant role played by the Ragbhir Singh cam- paign.

• The day of actions co- in- cluded with Ragbhir’s daugh- ter’s birthday. Pressure from the campaign forced prison authorities to return Ragbri to Birmingham.

• Around 200 people sup- ported the picket at Har- monsworth detention centre, with a coach organ- ised by the centre being supported by the Joint Committee for the Wel- fare of Immigrants.

• A march from Gospoart Ferry to Harlar prison was di- verted by police away from the planned route through Portmouth town centre. Po- lice also prevented the demo from going anywhere near the immigration wing of the prison. It appears that police were acting on instructions from a committee established under the Maastricht treaty.

• The picket at Campfield detention centre near Oxtord was supported by a lively delegation of activists from the Ivory Coast, and by the well-established Close Down Campfield Campaign, organ- ised through the local labour movement.

• In Leicester a picket of the immigration office on June 21 received media attention from Sunrise Radio and local media. Activ- ists from Leicester also mobil- ised for the Campfield demo on 24th.

• In Bristol a picket was or- ganised by local branch of AA or Harfield prison.

• In Hull local activists or- ganised a mass leafleting of the town centre.
Killer Clegg released, but political prisoners languish in jail

Britain’s hostages

By David Coen

PARATROOPER Lee Clegg, convicted of the murder of Karen Reilly, was released on parole after serving only four years of the life sentence on the day before the election for the leadership of the Tory Party.

Claiming the release had nothing to do with John Major’s desire to boost his chances in the election, government spin doctors said Clegg’s case had been through the same legal processes as any other prisoner serving a life sentence.

Mayhew

Northern Ireland Secretary Patrick Mayhew’s behaviour tells the real story. He was the one who took the decision about Clegg.

Days before the leadership election he wrote to the Times to proclaim how important John Major was to the “Peace Process”. Some of those MPs supporting Clegg were in the Redwood camp and Mayhew believed that Clegg’s release might swing support for Major.

Of the 35 Republican “killers” in British jails who have served more than 20 years, many for lesser offences than murder. Time and again appeals for parole have been turned down.

Appeals for transfer to Ireland or for compassionate leave have been refused. Little wonder that Clegg’s release led to rioting as people’s anger and frustration with the British government boiled over.

No comparison

Major himself attempted to justify Mayhew’s decision to release Clegg by claiming there was no comparison between the case and that of IRA prisoners.

Andrew Duncan, chair of the Tory backbench Northern Ireland Committee said there would be no discussion of the release of IRA prisoners until the IRA de-commisioned its weapons.

The message was clear: Republican prisoners have no right to be treated in the same way as criminals.

The issue of the prisoners has always been central to the struggle against British rule in Ireland. Labour Northern Ireland Secretary Roy Mason withdrew political status on March 1st 1976 as part of the British effort to criminalise the struggle.

Prisoners in Long Kesh and Armagh Jails began the “dirty protest” which resulted in the 1981 Hunger Strikers led by Bobby Sands, in which ten prisoners died.

A mass protest movement shook British rule in Ireland in a way not seen since the Civil Rights movement in the late 60’s. Though the Thatcher government publicly refused the prisoner’s demand to see a list of political prisoners, it later conceded privately that they should be treated differently to criminals.

The impetus from that struggle fed through not only into the rise of Sinn Fein as a political force in the North but also into the growth of a significant element within the British Labour Party in favour of involvement.

In 1983 the Dublin government, fearing the rise in support for Sinn Fein would combine with the economic crisis, tried to head off the threatened political meltdown by signing the Anglo-Irish Agreement.

Margaret Thatcher, instinct to the core, was forced to concede that the war in Ireland was not simply a territorial system.

Almost a year after the cease-fire, the British are demanding that the IRA “de-commision” its weapons before they will talk to Sinn Fein about a settlement.

We demand that the British immediately release all political prisoners as an indication of their seriousness about peace.

French socialists join anti-nuke battle

The decision by France’s newly-elected conservative President Jacques Chirac to authorise resumption of French nuclear tests at Mururoa Atoll in the South Pacific has brought an outraged reaction from many quarters.

Alongside ecological and peace organisations such as Greenpeace and CND protests, have come from many governments in the region, in particular the fifteen members of the Pacific Forum, including Australia and New Zealand.

One voice missing from this chorus of criticism has been that of the French government, which claims the new tests are an internal French matter.

This silence is partly the result of the French government’s failure to build a Franco-British axis to buttress his manoeuvres in Europe, and partly of the fact that the British defence establishment are themselves contemplating new nuclear tests.

Significant anti-nuclear demonstrations have taken place in French Polynesia and New Caledonia, scene of a continuing anti-colonial conflict.

In France itself, opposition, while small-scale, has begun to develop. There have been two several thousand strong demonstrations in Paris - the second with the political backing of a wide range of organisations, including Greens and the French Communist Party.

The opposing opposition parties, the Socialists, under their new leader Lionel Jospin, have criticised Chirac’s decision to resume the series of tests suspended in 1992 by Socialist President Mitterrand.

However, they remain supporters of French nuclear weapons. Jospin explained during the Presidential election campaign last March, “the determination to maintain the nuclear deterrent is not incompatible with a continuation of the moratorium on nuclear tests which presupposes a simulation programme - as long as the other powers keep their promises about this.”

Others pursue a more consistent anti-nuclear line, among them Socialist Outlook’s sister organisation, the Revolutionary Communist League (LRC). The comments below are taken from an article by Pierre Roussel in the LCR’s weekly paper Rouge.

“This policy involves the future of the whole of humanity, but it has been taken by one person - Chirac. Without democratic debate, he has announced his ‘irrevocable’ decision.”

We are told that the tests involve no risks. Who knows? No independent commission has been able to freely look at the problem.

The three which have been to Mururoa have had neither the necessary time nor freedom to visit the sites and have been closely supervised by the military.

The resumption of French tests risks setting off a chain reaction. In Washington, Moscow and London the military-industrial lobbies are already pushing for new tests.

The American moratorium may not be continued. The isolation of China, which has never observed the moratorium, is over.

The unaffiliated members of the nuclear weapons club such as Israel and India and the Saharan states may be emboldened.

The “candidate members” will be encouraged. This series of tests must be abandoned and the total ban on tests must be firmly signed with no delay.

It is not a question of undertaking a few more or less symbolic actions against the resumption of French tests. We have to set a new direction and revive, through struggle, the process of nuclear disarmament currently bogged down in international negotiations.”

The CAMPAIGN FOR NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT is holding a rally starting at 1pm on Sunday 16 July Trafalgar Square, London to demand: No more nuclear testing For a nuclear-free world
Trans-national corporations flex global muscles

By Bala Kumar

The big bad boys on the international stage in the 1970s were western trans-national corporations (TNCs). In the 1980s, criticism shifted to the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. Yet the reach and power of trans-national capital has been steadily growing.

By the early 1990s there were well over 35,000 TNCs with 170,000 foreign affiliates. The annual turnover of some of these companies is greater than the national income of several Third World countries. Royal Dutch Shell ranks top of all with assets of US$110.8 billion and 127,000 workers. An estimated 73 million people are directly employed and many more employed by subsidiaries.

Whereas two decades ago US owned firms dominated the top twenty list, there are now three Japanese concerns too: Hitachi, Matsushita and Toyota. Lower down in the rankings there are also Brazilian and South Korean owned companies. This shows how capital even from non-imperialist countries needs to continually seek new areas of accumulation.

However, the advanced capitalist countries account for 72% of the top 200 firms.

The internationalisation of capital has also paved the way for the internationalisation of production and distribution. So anything up to fifteen countries are involved in the manufacture of the humble Ford Escort.

This diversification is for several reasons. It may be to take advantage of lower wages, unorganised workplaces, tax breaks and access to "host" country markets. It also helps break strikes and curb worker militancy while maintaining smooth production flows – there is always another source in another country.

In the textile and garment sector relocation to new countries may be because the country quota under the Multi-Fibre Agreement has been used up.

This growth in the affiliates of TNCs means that world trade is taking place between these giant corporations rather than between countries. A conservative estimate is one-third of all world trade. However, most of this takes place between the advanced capitalist countries – rest of the world is simply excluded from these investments.

While capital hungry and technology poor countries welcome TNCs, it is arguable how far they benefit. Their main attraction is that they are major employers. Profits are shipped back to their "home" countries, not re-invested in the domestic economy – little or no technology and skills are passed on to local companies and workers.

Where countries have prospered by TNC investment such as South Korea, this has been under strict regulation of their activities and a strong state.

Some commentators see the relative power of these companies over Third world governments and international institutions such as the United Nations and World Trade Organisation as proof of the "collapse of the nation state".

It is not so simple. TNCs need a spatial location to situated themselves – the nation state. They value it not for its boundaries but because of its bureaucratic function as arbiter between capital and labour. They value in the death of the nation state have therefore been much exaggerated.

There is only one response to global capital and that is global solidarity between the exploited and the marginalised. When the rubber barbers go on strike for borders need not be workers.

It is through that re-discovery of solidarity - regardless of national, ethnic and gender divisions - stretching from the work-place to the community and back again, that we make initiatives against capitalism and for socialism.

European monetary union? No Cannes do!

By Simon Day

At the European summit in Cannes the great and the not-so-good swapped proposals over the Evian water for two days without agreeing to a single thing of substance. Plans abound. Realisation is absent.

Europe's capitalist powers cannot decide upon a collective future. The leaders of all the member countries are at odds, both with one another and their own populations. Since the fall of the Berlin wall and the collapse of the regimes in the east, Europe has been the site of the most force political contestation in the developed capitalist world.

East, south and west: the Atlantic - strategies and schemes abound. None of them look like coming off.

The political bloc created out of the second world war that was "Western Europe" is redundant. But there remains no agreement over what to do, or how to do it. Its component parts continue to disagree on both its internal functioning and external relations. The world self interest has been made visible recently by all the squabbling over "aid".

Zones

Germany, ever keen to co-opt the countries of central and eastern Europe, wants to extend its traditional zone of influence.

France, and, to a lesser extent, the European countries of the Mediterranean, are more concerned about the Magreb. Mitterrand even proposed that the EU hold an international conference in Algiers.

Now the key here is the relationship of the new Europe to the old.

The new and old are looking more and more to each other for economic relations: a number of proposals are advanced on the Spain. Spain has declared US-EU relations its priority for productivity. Three plans have been outlined:

- A Transatlantic Free Trade Area (TAFTA) which would fit in with the US enthusiasm for regional trade pacts. But it would not end the big problems over textiles and agriculture that seven years of battles in the Uruguay round have so far failed to resolve.

- Such an arrangement would probably only serve to accentuate the differences between the USA and the European powers.

- A transatlantic "economic space". This is little more than a codification of the already existing plans of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development for global investment.

- A transatlantic charter. This "great leap forward" would be of little value however if it did not cover military policy - something that cannot be dealt with until the 1996 Intergovernmental conference.

The political impact of these negotiations on the European working class is profound. Western Europe was always an artificial creation put together in the aftermath of the Second World War in order to stabilise capitalism. It expressed the world dominance of the USA.

Framework

It is important to note that this dominance was not determined by the USA's industrial capacity or efficiency, but by its capacity to set the overall framework of politics and trade. This is less and less the case.

During the Cold War it could use its military might as a means of political intervention into Europe. NATO was its device - a political tool to ensure supremacy. This is what makes the policy discord between the USA and Europe over Somalia as important as the divisions within Europe itself.

There remain huge obstacles to be overcome for European capital to create adequate military forces and a unified foreign policy.

Britain's favoured position of the USA's most senior vasal makes this even more of a struggle.

The huge divisions evident in Cannes show how much "globalisation" has been overstated. Monetary union has had to be put back until 1999 and even this first step Major has called "Eurozone".

National states remain the fountainhead of both economic policy and political action.

With problems like this, who needs Euro-sceptics?
New sections swell Fourth International Congress Workers of the world unite!

The recent Fourteenth World Congress of the Fourth International, held in Europe, registered some important organizational gains as well as conducting a series of sharp debates. The discussion ranged over the world political situation in the period of the collapse of Stalinism, the class nature of the countries of Eastern Europe, the class struggle in Latin America, and the way forward for the internationalists. Organized and numerically the Fourth International, which has sections and sympathetic groups in nearly 50 countries, was bigger than its previous Congress in 1991.

New sections or sympathetic groups were established in Mauritius, Ecuador, Spain, Australia and Puerto Rico. The Sri Lankan NSSP, with an important base in that country, became a section of the Fourth International only after the last Congress, and was effectively a new organization at this one.

Guests from a number of organizations outside the Fourth International also attended the Congress. The Belgian Gisette Dicus, the French Socialist leader, and the Övrigt, Solidarity of the USA, the Australian Democratic Left, the Zelotiki from Euskadi, the PADS from Senegal, the Brsilia Workers’ Party (PT), and three revolutionary organizations from the Philippines all sent representatives.

Russia

Greetings were also extended to the Congress by Alexandre Burgalin, a leader of the Party of Labour in Russia. In his opening political address to the Congress, veteran Fourth International leader Ernst Mandel stressed that there is currently a stalemate between the ruling class and the working class internationally, but that this would be for a relatively short period, and that major class battles lie ahead.

There were three strands to the debates on the world political situation. The French economist Maxime Durand introduced a paper on the world economic situation and the beginning of the world economy. A paper on the world political situation after the semi-collapse of Stalinism was presented on behalf of the outgoing International leadership, and there were two introductory sessions on the class nature of the countries of Eastern Europe in the light of the process of capitalist restoration which is being promoted.

Both presenters on this subject—Catherine Samary, from the United Secretariat and Stefan Peckaczcf from the Polish Revolutionary Left Current—argued against a few delegates who insisted that restoration was completed.

They insisted that despite the clear intentions of the various regimes, and with the exception of the former East Germany that capitalism has not yet been restored in any of the countries involved. Peckaczky argued that in Poland it is not just the near absence of the market which rules out capitalism as the dominant mode of production, but the lack of capital itself.

“The new private sector is incapable of keeping itself alive without huge state support, let alone financing further privatization itself. The barriers to western investment are increasing all the time and the effects of the 1991/93 recession are still operable. There is little financial infrastructure at a time when the globalization of the economy has diverted funds elsewhere.”

“The only remaining source of capital is the one that has been used up to now: the state.”

Yet no more can be squeezed out of this source without another major attack on the jobs and the living standards of the workers.

“This fact means that the limits of peaceful restoration are being reached. Any qualitative advance in capitalist restoration would involve a new massive onslaught on the working class.”

A minority current in the Congress, which included delegates from Britain, France, Poland, Ireland, Greece, Hong Kong, India and the USA presented an alternative platform in most of the debates. The exceptions were on the world economy, on which there was broad agreement in the Congress, and on Latin America, on which the minority did not have a common view.

These delegates argued that the conclusions drawn by the Congress on the effects of the semi-collapse of Stalinism—that it had thrown the working class and its allies massively on to the defensive world-wide—were too negative. They insisted that although the current situation was defensive this was of a temporary nature.

Some delegates argued that the loss of the Soviet bloc had directly strengthened the role of imperialism whilst others insisted that the fall of Stalinism, itself a wholly counter-revolutionary force, had been a much more contradictory event.

It had also opened up the political situation for genuine forces of the left.

In fact, it has been the long-standing and widespread illusions in the Stalinist bloc which have been the basis of the demobilization and retreat of the vanguard in some instances.

On the way forward for the Fourth International, the task agreed by the Congress was one of regroupment. It was agreed that the most important function of the Fourth International at this stage was to be a focus of the regroupment of left and revolutionary forces worldwide. Particularly groupings and fragments emerging from the wreckage of the Stalinist Parties—like Rifondazione Comunista in Italy for example.

At the same time it was agreed that it was important for the left to organize in militant left parties like the PT in Brazil for example—where a major current sympathizes with the Fourth International.

Brazil was also central to the debate on Latin America, where it is clear that the left, on a continental scale, has been shaken by the failure of Workers Party leader Lula to win the recent elections.

A special meeting was held on the Zapatistas from Chiapas in Mexico, a debate on which was also a strand in the Latin America debate. A speaker from the mass socialist party PADS in Senegal also gave greetings during this session, speaking of the impact of third-world debt on the African continent as well as Latin America, and paying tribute to the work the Fourth International has been able to do on the issue.

On Europe the debate was both on regroupment and on the current state of the workers’ movement—both the trade unions and the social democratic parties. The minority argued that whilst regroupment was the right thing to do when the opportunities arise, the main focus of the sections should be based around workers’ movement, particularly the trade unions, and key campaigns around social issues—against cuts and austerity and against the far right and the racists.

A meeting on Bosnia was held during the Congress, which underlined a common view on support for the national rights of the Bosnian people, the defence of a multiracial society and for the withdrawal of foreign troops and the lifting of the arms embargo.

A statement was adopted fully supporting International Workers Aid to Bosnia and calling for all European sections to become involved in it. IWA has been for the past two years the principal European-wide campaign in which the sections of the Fourth International have been involved.

This campaign, which developed strongly in a number of European countries, continues to strengthen and continues to take aid directly, as an act of solidarity, to the working class solidarity, to the trade unions in the Trieste region.

The Congress also adopted a resolution on youth work on the box.

An appeal was made for the international youth summer camp, which is being held in France this year and which is one of the major annual international activities of the Fourth International.

A report was given on the Fourth International’s residential school in Amsterdam which is holding a series of courses throughout the year and which is its principal focus of educational activity.
Youth fighting for the future

World Congress resolution

THE World Congress discussed on work amongst youth, and the need to develop independent radical youth organisations. These are short extracts from the resolution adopted.

IN THE LAST few years we have seen, at least in Europe, big movements among youth, especially those young people who continue to be a social sector which is quite ready to mobilise. Obviously the seriousness of the economic crisis and the attacks on social gains profoundly affect youth as a whole. This changes the themes, slogans and forms of these mobilisations.

Prospects

The prospects — of unemployment and mass unemployment and a growing uncertain future — are seen by young people more and more strongly. This creates the possibilities for developing youth struggles which link the right to study and the right to work. In this period we have also been big involvements of youth in the anti-racist and anti-fascist movements; in the ecological sphere; and a radicalisation of young women, starting from the defence of abortion laws but also for a sexuality that is simultaneously free and safe.

The two principal limits to these mobilisations are that they have not yet so far resulted in a significant wave of politicisation, and that real difficulties exist in putting self-organised structures in place.

All this shows the great stakes for building ourselves among young people and the urgent need for the International, and its section, to clearly involve itself in this area in whatever appropriate organisational form. This means strengthening self-organised youth structures amongst all layers of youth (for example, student unions, youth sections in the trade unions, organisations of immigrant youth, young women, lesbians and gays) to offer global political perspectives to radicalising youth — countering the danger of recovery by the far right — and allowing our organisations to gain new militant generations in the medium term.

‘Contract’

The links between our sections and the youth organisation can be very different, depending on the specific situation. What is important is that links exist and that they allow us to discuss, find solutions, find solutions and go forward together. We at least need a regular relationship, and thus a sort of ‘contract’ where the two parties each have their responsibilities. The thing is to be clear and transparent. Youth are wary of manipulation and manoeuvring behind their backs, and rightly so.

In our parties, a climate of respect must exist in which youth can feel at home.

* Liberation ’90*, an educational conference sponsored by the radical youth quarterly of the same name, is being held on Sunday 16 July at London’s Covent Garden. Details, phone Rod on (01805) 801991.

New Australian organisation recognised by World Congress

“Over ten years of hard Labor”

AUSTRALIA’S Labor Party, in government since 1983, has been implementing austerity policies on working people with the support of the trade union bureaucracy.

K. GOWING spoke with DAVID FAGAN from Solidarity on the eve of the recent World Congress of the Fourth International.

Solidarity is the new sympathetic group of the International in Australia.

What is the impact of the Labor government’s policies on working people?

OUR ATTITUDE to the government is summed up in the popular term “Over Ten Years of Hard Labor!” While the Labor Party’s consistency is still a feature of the trade union movement and working people generally, its role has been to demoralise and dismember the working class.

One example is “enterprise bargaining.” This device makes an individual workplace bargain for itself. Where there are large unionised units
Left on the wrong side of Bosnia war

The willingness of the Bosnian army to fight with some apparent success — to break the siege of Sarajevo — has gone unnoticed by the left in Britain. Unfortunately, the conclusions drawn by most of the British left are fundamentally wrong. Here and on the facing page, GEOFF RYAN looks at the newly-formed "Committee for Peace in the Balkans" and the deepening errors of the SWP.

AT THE RECENT meeting of the Committee for Peace in the Balkans Tony Benn and Tam Dalyell argued that the war in Bosnia is simply a civil war between the different nationalities. They should oppose sending more U.N. troops and should demand maintenance of the arms embargo. The only people who will benefit from lifting the arms embargo are the 'merchants of death'. All we can do is argue in favour of humanitarian aid.

All of this was accompanied by strident anti-German sentiments, including from Tony Benn. For Benn the war in Bosnia (and previously in Croatia) was the result of a German plot to break-up the former Yugo-

Michael Foot's support for the people of Bosnia was re-

Anti-German: Tony Benn
duced by Benn to a "Foot/Thatcher split" — an amalgam of which Stalin himself would be proud. It is somewhat rich of Benn to attack Michael Foot (whose views are by no means identical to Thatcher's) in such a manner when he himself is in a formal alliance with Alfred Sherman. [See box opposite].

This analysis was vociferously challenged from the floor by supporters of the Alliance to Defend Bosnia-Hercegovina, Socialist Outlook, Workers Project, many Bosnians and Croats present — all of whom were in favour of withdrawing U.N. troops and letting the Bosnians defend themselves.

No civil war

It was pointed out that the war in Bosnia was not a civil war but a war of aggression by Serbia (and at times Croatia) against an independent state. Zedan Karadzic does not speak for all Bosnian Serbs, that is a distortion by the west-end media. In the cities in particular Serbs, Croats, Bosnians and other nationalities continue to fight side by side against Karadzic's attempt to carve up Bosnia.

The war in Bosnia is be-

between those committed to a multi-national, multi-ethnic Bosnia and those in favour of ethnically pure states. It is a war between those opposed to racism and those in favour of racially pure states. Socialists have to take sides.

Opposition views were, to say the least, unconvincing. Akke Mahon, chair of the meeting, indignantly protested at the claim that "all those who oppose the aggressor are guilty for every dead civilian in Bosnia and Herzegovina" — ignoring the fact that this was the view of the trade unions of Tuzla, made in a statement by them to the meeting.

Graveyard

The only 'Peace' on offer from the Committee for Peace in the Balkans is the peace of the grave.

Indeed, a more appropriate name, as Francis Wheen suggested in the Guardian recently, would be the Committee to Hand Bosnia Over to Belgrade.

Socialists have to challenge the fundamentally reactionary views of this committee wherever it tries to raise its head, and particularly in the labour movement.

ANC kicks its charter into touch

By Charlie van Golderen

THE FINAL whistle has blown. The Springboks - 14 whites and one black - have defeated the favourites, New Zealand.

In the presidential box Nelson Mandela, dressed from head to foot in the once-hated green and yellow Springbok colours, dances a jig. He joins in singing the Africana national anthem, Die Stem.

The whole country goes into a euphoria, desperately not a million miles from the enthusiasm which helped the first non-racial elections a year ago.

This outburst of national fervour has come just in time for Mandela's crisis-ridden government. Mandela and the South African ruling class are hoping that the new found national enthusiasm for rugby will do the same for the working class. If you can't give them bread, give them circuses.

The hopes aroused in the masses by the end of apartheid have not been fulfilled. There is growing militancy in the labour movement. June saw the first nationwide half-day strikes since the elections. They were against the persistent failure of the government to meet the demands of the workers - especially against the proposed Labour Relations Act (LRA). The primate aim of the act is to limit workers' right to strike.

Stability

This is made very clear by Ministry of Labour: "labour disputes can" they say "be avoided or resolved quickly and a climate of stability attractive to foreign investment created."

These restriction on the right to strike - one of the key demands of the Freedom Charter - is just one example of what has happened to the document once considered central to the programme of the ANC.

Pounced on his left flank by his SAPC allies, Mandela has been able to throw it into the wastepaper basket.

This is by no means all. Forgotten are the demands of the Freedom Charter for the nationalisation of key sectors of the economy.

Last October the cabinet announced a six-point plan to transform the public sector. It included the possibility of privatisation of government assets ranging from seaports cars, other equipment and buildings, to major parastatals.

Of course, national and international capital are enthusiastic about these developments.

They see a chance to revolve the previous regime's programme of privatisation of the major parastatals, giving them new opportunities to take over profitable functions of the nationalised sections, greater foreign investment and stock exchange activity. Meanwhile, the economy continues to stagnate.

In the Eastern Cape, the core of the liberation movement, with 23 per cent average unemployment, each penun in work supports four other people. Life expectancy is 59 years. Infant mortality is 58.2 per 1000 live births.

South Africa is still suffering things up with its spurious demand for self-determination for KwaZulu-Natal, adding to the regime's difficulties.

The Springbok victory will do nothing to resolve these problems. The people are now demanding the implementation of the programme of the Workers Charter as demanded in the resolution at the COSATU congress in July 1989.

COSATU fighting anti-union laws, 1988

Nite out line with the theme of the 20th anniversary of the Socialist Outlook, this week the Socialist Outlook looks at what has happened in South Africa in the last two decades. The final two pages look at the country's history, the role of capitalists and the strategy of the working class.
We publish here extracts from an appeal that has been sent to the British parliament from the Congress of Independent Trade Unions of Bosnia Herzegovina and the Central Trade Union Council in Tuzla. Socialist Outlook thanks Boris Magas for the translation.

HELP from those who do not know, or do not wish to know, that the sovereign state of Bosnia Herzegovina has been partitioned by aggression from Serb extremists - who have grabbed all the arms from former Yugoslavia - is not necessary. The Serb aggressors, aided by Serb extremists from Bosnia Herzegovina, under the motto "All Serbs in One State" kill all the people who do not belong to the Serb nation, especially Bosniaks and Croats, and are destroying the material, spiritual and cultural heritage which has been created by the people through the centuries. On those territories where there are Karadzic's Serbs, Catholic churches have been destroyed as well as mosques and many cemeteries. They have been bombing the civilian population for 4 years now, in the cities and villages, killing adults and children. They cut off energy supplies, gas, water and food. And you, from the "Committee for Peace in the Balkans" call this a civil war between the sides in the conflict. There is no civil war here. What we have here is fascist aggression using the most monstrous methods, endorsed by the Serb aggressors. And we are the victims with limited scope to defend ourselves because of all the [United Nations'] resolutions, the only one that is being upheld in full is the one relating to the arms embargo on the Bosnians. The Serb aggressors have sufficient armaments to go on killing us for a further ten years. We do not look for you to fight for us. Nor do we wish anyone to be killed to save our lives. We seek: either the lifting of the arms embargo; or that the world community disarm the Serb aggressors in Bosnia Herzegovina; and to ban traffic of all types from Serbia except for humanitarian aid.

The action of the "Committee for Peace in the Balkans", under the slogan of No Military Intervention in Bosnia is an action to aid the aggressor. You from the Committee are supporting humanitarian aid, but you are not asking the Serb aggressor to stop killing civilians. You would wish to send humanitarian aid so that we may be able to eat and thereafter to be killed by the aggressors' shells. Such aid we do not need.

Why do you not lead an action to open Sarajevo - so that Bosnians, Croats, Serbs and Jews live together without food, medicine, water, electricity or gas? On the territories of Bosnia Herzegovina the civilian population is being deprived of all the necessary things for their living. We all live and work together, regardless of nationality, religion, race. If you do not agree, please stop your correspondence with us. We seek a humane response to our tragedy, and all those who aid the aggressor, are accomplices, both Serb criminal and civilian in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Sjefcica Fikretar, President, Congress of Independent Unions of Bosnia Herzegovina.
Sri Lanka: “Workers want to march into factories and take them over”

The ethnic war between the Sinhala majority Sri Lankan government and the Tamil Minority Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) resumed on 19 April 1995. The death toll in the first month of fighting has exceeded 500, including many civilians.

SOCIALIST OUTLOOK spoke to a leader of the Nava Sama Samaja Party, Vickramabahu Karunaratne, about the background to the renewal of the twelve year old conflict and current political events in Sri Lanka. The interview took place in London on 14 June 1995.

What is the impact of the IMF/World Bank policies on Sri Lanka?

The peasants in the rural areas are being turned into human dust. They lose their land, ecology, traditions, culture, history and everything. Even the workers who get jobs find them at a low skilled, low pay level.

They have lost their trade union rights. In the First Trade Zone, women workers drawn from the rural areas exhaust themselves for two to three years trying to save some money and return home in order to marry.

The struggle of the LTTE and the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) are linked to this. These youth come from the same rural petty-bourgeois background. They have been robbed of everything. They have nowhere to turn.

They are fighting for their motherland, dignity and existence. Of course they have different slogans: one says they want Tamil liberation, the other says they want Sinhala liberation.

We have had a number of wars both in the Tamil and Sinhala areas. Two hundred thousand have died. There has been a terrible degradation of society, 60,000 have disappeared in the south. These are the fruits of development. Very few have benefited. This is a system that is in crisis.

We are told that poor countries have no alternative to this misery.

The only alternative is a global one. It is an alternative where multi-national companies, the Breton Woods institutions and banks and financial institutions don’t have free rein over the world. In Sri Lanka a revolutionary government would have to take over imports and exports and foreign exchange and the banking system.

Our first task is national liberation and democracy: the tasks which have been left undone by the bourgeois revolution. This is what permanent revolution is all about.

Secondly, we have to mobilise people on a democratic basis. Real democracy has to be achieved. We have to change the electoral system from regional electorates to social electorates such as work-places, universities, barracks, villages, professions - including housewives.

We must fight for a universal franchise and a plural system. Parties should be able to put their views and fight, but representatives of the social groups should be elected and then from this collection of people we could select national leaders.

So from representing property, land, areas, minerals, resources, we move to representation of social relations. That is what we mean by the sovereign system. Under such a system the working people will be better represented.

Women’s liberation is central to this transformation of society. Women’s liberation is not Fourth International and asked our opinion on what needs to be done. In India the workers parties are powerful, but they don’t want to take power because they don’t have the right programme.

Why has war restarted?

The Peoples Alliance (PA) government came to power in [April 1994 elections] giving the impression that it would elaborate proposals for autonomy for the Tamil speaking people.

There was mass pressure for such a package. Even the LTTE was drawn into a peace process. However, after six months of waiting and various discussions with the LTTE, the PA failed to produce any proposals. The LTTE was merely waiting for popular enthusiasm to subside.

What kind of movement is the LTTE?

The LTTE is a national liberation organisation with bourgeois leanings. It is not a democratic party or one that has real mass support. It has eliminated all opposition to it, including the NSSP, in the Tamil areas.

Our leader and founder, Annamalai, was brutally murdered by them in spite of the fact that he was one of the greatest fighters for the liberation of Tamil speakers.

We have been making concessions, it has given self-respect to Tamil people. The Sri Lankan government and bourgeois parties in the south are prepared to negotiate with the Tamil speaking people because of the strength of the LTTE. It therefore has a dual character. It is opposed to any movement in its area it does not control. At the same time it is fighting the oppressive Sinhala chauvinist regime.

Last year’s parliamentary and presiden
tial elections broke seventeen years of rule by the right wing United National Party (UNP). Many sections of the left participated in the Peoples alliance coalition led by the victorious bour
geois Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP). The NSSP did not join this front. Have your reservations been justified?

Most certainly. We were always willing to fight against the repressive UNP. On many occasions we led joint struggles along with the SLFP.

On the other hand we believe the SLFP to be a bourgeois party, a party that will carry out the World Bank directives. It has become a reformist party without reforms and a populist party without a populist programme.

By joining in with the movement of the Left parties we have made a major blunder far worse than what they did in 1964. In 1964 at least certain left reforms were possible. The 1970 programme was an heroic program of nationalisation of 70 per cent of the economy including expropriation of multi-national companies.

We predicted that the PA would never adopt the programme of the UNP once in govern
ment. This is exactly what has happened. The party’s former radical wing is not accepted that we were justified in not joining the Peoples Alliance.

We believe the movement is in danger. There is in any case in the left in May, we stand in the general election on the PA slate.

In November, Presidential election we gave critical support. While explaining to the people the weaknesses of their programme it was important to recognise that the mass movement to topple the UNP would be very valuable, and to encourage it. The people who know that the government is fighting. Workers want to march into factories and take them over.

They want the right to form trade unions and change the running of their workplaces. This struggle is continuing. In the student movement there is intensity in the rural areas, the peasantry is fighting against austerity measures of the International Monetary Fund. The final stroke was thenescence of the war.

A polarisation is occurring within the PA. Before long certain sections may break away from the PA. We expect a left current to emerge from the PA. At its base people are already breaking away and joining us.

Some of the SLFP leaders were also part of this new current. The combination of this break-off, with the NSSP and the JVP and some sections of the Tamil liberation move
ment which stand for democracy and autonomy, could form a new political alternative. This could happen within the next few years.

What is the strength of the left in the PA and what debates are they having?

The Left, including the Lanka Sama Samaja Party and the Communist Party, is very weak. Presently the PA programme is very conservative. There is no talk of socialism anywhere.

The Left is weakened by divisions. And the PA leaders have not achieved what they expected. Those running the PA want the UNP till the last moment, and crossed over to the PA because they realised the UNP was no longer the instrument of the bourgeoisie.

They have done a beautiful takeover job.

The Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (Peo
ple’s Liberation Front) has been re
grouping. What so you make of its current trajectory?

The JVP has now shed its racist section. It has sought our assistance in fighting the Janatha Mithuru “Friends of the People” fundamentalists. We have formed a common front to fight against the growing threat of fascist organisations.

There are various struggles taking place against the World Bank directives among workers and in the student movement. The Nava Sama Samaja Party is trying to unite them and form a left alternative to this government.
Tanking through Hollywood

By Kathryn Marshall

Don't tell anyone, but in my dark and solitary moments I sometimes think how great it would be to blast through life insulating everyone, invariably male, who got in my way.

It wouldn't be too bad to feel you could sleep with anyone (or any living creature, come to that) so long as they took your fancy without even the remotest twinge of a sexual hang-up.

In Hewlett and Martin's cartoon this woman has such a fantastic time of it - saving the world and verbally abusing and physically obliterating power-hungry scum is all in a day's work for her.

She is free from all the constraints that trap us and, although it's not exactly practical to be her, we can all have our moments of fantasy, can't we?

How was such a trait-blazing going to fit into a Hollywood box when the whole point about her is that she didn't fit into no boxes? Hollywood's answer is to change her.

The film opens with an animated sequence of the original cartoons with a loud and proud song "Girls U Want". Then it cuts to actress Lori Petty, Hollywood's Task Girl.

It is hard as a mere human being to pack the kind of energy into your character that a cartoonist can convey with deft touches with a pen or speech bubble with "POW" written in it. Petty does very well on the energy scale.

As Sight and Sound mentions, Task Girl would never have had Petty's plucked eyebrows, but the point is that she would have done what she damn well liked.

However, the person who gave our heroine a cutey, squaky drawl has a lot of explaining to do.

After two hours of listening to this voice most closely resembling the candy-floss Frenchic, Grease's Beauty School Drop-Out, you really want the "real" Task Girl to step up and deal with her.

In the film she is also given a daughter. Are your "Women must be good" mothers' alarm bells ringing yet?

Mind you, she does give lessons to the effect that "raw luck" is a worse term of abuse than "bum-wipe". But what with a child in tow and the wacky voice, the whole thing does seem too cozy and sweet.

All this cuteness alters her image. She loses her defining quality as a completely independent woman who can make it alone. The director gives her a physical opponents absent from the cartoons - and even has her escape from the lethal clutches of a guard by means of a kiss. Sacrilege!

She is also placed inside a community who band together against the evil boss of "Water and Power". Task Girl has a very positive role in it, but essentially she is just one amongst many - her sharp edge is blunted.

This film clearly has a pretty progressive plot-line. The idea that those in power are squeezing everything from us and that we have to fight back is central. This has got to be good.

But Hollywood was scared of showing us a woman free to be totally independent and assertive. Perhaps this fantasy too far.

Digging up Engels again


Reviewed by Jonathan Joseph

The Marxist philosopher Walter Benjamin has a story about a chess playing puppet. A Grandmaster player is hidden inside. This expert puppet likes to liken to the Stalinist version of Marx's theory of history. It wins every time.

In this view history becomes an inevitable process, with a pre-ordained destiny - the communist nirvana. Society and science make steady progress through a number of preordained phases. The puppet history is flawlessly directed.

Under Stalin this simple view of history was ruthlessly used to justify the brutal industrialisation of Soviet society. Reformist socialism rests on a similar premise - the gradual cumulative changes in capitalist society growing into socialism.

Unfortunately some of these ideas have also crept into Marxism. In this book they are preeminent.

Much of this is down to a misunderstanding of the German idealist philosopher Hegel. According to Hegel, Hegel came up with the basic laws and Marxists just need to invert them - "real philosophy died with Hegel" they say.

This is presumably why there is no mention of Heidegger, Husserl or Wittgenstein, never mind Marxist philosophers like Althusser, critical theory or the current work being done by the critical realist school.

This gives the book a "timeless" air. It is as if the work done by twentieth century Marxists has never happened.

But the problem is bigger than the authors' belief that all the problems of philosophy were solved a century ago. They have the wrong understanding of Marxism.

We cannot just "invert" Hegel's idealism. It remains idealistic whatever way up it stands.

We have to extract elements that are useful and dump the rest, taking out the rational kernel from the mystic shell. This is what Marx did in Capital.

Nevertheless "Reason in Revolt" is more serious than most efforts. It contains genuinely interesting material. The critique of reactionary genetic theories, like that in Richard Dawkins' "The Selfish Gene", is particularly good.

Modern science For those interested in keeping a check on modern scientific developments and theories, the book is also of value. It is a pity the leaders of Socialist Appeal chose not to pay contemporary Marxism the same regard.

Nevertheless, aside from its scope, the book does no more than take sides with some theories rather than others. It has nothing particular to offer, in fact an account rather than an argument.

For the authors, Engels is the be all and end all. His 'Dialectics of Nature' is held up as definitive. There is a big problem here. Engels' book was based on a careful study of the most advanced scientific knowledge of the day to prove its theories. This was its strength.

Now it is a weakness. As the science loses its credibility, so too do some of Engels' claims about nature. Scientific knowledge often progresses by means of ruptures and revolutions which radically challenge previously held theories - the changes have discarded a number of Engels' positions.

This does not invalidate the whole work - but it does suggest that Marxism is more of a living, breathing, developing theory than the authors describe.

In keeping with Engels, Woods and Grant argue that philosophy is the "Queen of the sciences". Perhaps we should give it a less majestic role, but no less important, that of an 'underlabourer' for the sciences. Its job becomes to explain science's method, rather than to make substantielive proposals.

Marxist philosophy is therefore implicit in its scientific method not some grand schema. This means that there are some major questions re- main for Marxist philosophy. It is not as cut and dry as this book might suggest.
No proper basis for new left journal

By Neil Murray

"Why are there so many left papers?" is one of the questions socialists get asked most often. Of course it would be a "good" thing if there were one paper that all revolutionaries organised around (and, by implication, one organisation), but the world is not that simple.

Important differences of analyses, programme, strategy and - flowing from the tactics, mean that simply throwing different views into the same melting pot will lead to friction and a flying apart again pretty quickly.

While it is perfectly legitimate to elevate minor differences into an obstacle to such co-operation, it would be equally unprincipled (and counter-productive) to pretend serious ones do not exist.

Unification won't be brought about by argument and by argument and a testing out of ideas in practice.

But that is not the end of the story. While Socialist Outlook supporters do not currently see any other left tendency with which we could seriously produce a joint paper, no compromising important aspects of our politics, we do see the need for a paper of the left of the labour movement, supported by activists from the unions and Labour Party, some of whom support particular tendencies, most of whom do not.

The necessity of this in the face of the bosses' and Tory onslaught, the shortfall of all but one union leaders to fight back, and Blair's determination to move the Labour Party further and further away from one that represents working class interests, is glaring.

Broad agreement exists on these limited issues across much of the union and Labour Party left, which worked closely together during the fight over Clause IV than they have done for a long time.

Gulf

However, there is a large gulf between recognising the necessity of such a publication and realising it. Such a paper would not only need to be lively, campaigning and attractive to the uncommitted in ways that Socialist Campaign Group News and Tribune are not; it would also need to be under the democratic control of those who supported it and sold it.

There would need to be a democratic structure to which organisations like union branches and campaign groups could affiliate and send delegates, which would determine the broad outlines of policy and elect an editorial board which will be answerable to it.

Such an organisation does not currently exist, but needs to be built around the Socialist Campaign Group Supporters Network or the Socialist Policies for a Labour Government organisation set up at the June 17 post-Clause IV conference. Such an organisation is necessary in itself, and the question of a publication must be at the heart of building it.

There is however, currently an alternative option on the market. At its recent AGM, Labour Briefing voted to relaunch itself in the autumn, together with the publishers of the one-off New Left.

This project is neither a joint publication of left tendencies (and Socialist Outlook has serious differences with both those involved so far), nor that of the broad labour movement left, but a mish-mash of the two.

Accountability

While they want it to "reflect" the Socialist Campaign Group Supporters Network, they have no intention of funding the publication over to its accountable structures, but instead are inviting it to put one representative on the EB.

This would mean that while some EB members are accountable to the broader movement most are simply there as representing their own narrow tendency. Apart from the unworkably large EB elected at the Labour Briefing AGM, there are no regular structures to which the publication can be accountable. Indeed there could not be such a structure under these proposals because it would mean creating an additional organisational separate from the SCGSN.

It is for these reasons that Socialist Outlook supporters decided at a meeting on July 3 that they will not be taking up the offer to participate in the revamped Briefing but will continue to argue for a publication of the left of the labour movement.

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Fri 25
ASLEF rail strike

September

Sat 12
ASLEF rail strike

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Tues 12
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What's Happening

Licence to Kill

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Howard uses racist Condon

Sir Paul Condon, Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police sparked off a storm of protest when he claimed that black people were responsible for 80% of muggings in London.

He called on a number of black "leaders" to support a conference later this month to discuss the "problem" of crime in the black community.

As with previous statements from Condon on "noble cause corruption", this was a thinly veiled signal to police to step up their repression, intimidation, harassment and fitting-up of black people.

Meanwhile the mounting list of horrendous racist attacks on black people and communities is met with apathy and inaction from Condon's Met and other police forces.

Many of the black people from whom Condon aimed to gain consent for a hard-line policy have been quite rightly enraged by his overt racism, which Condon tries to justify as merely being "honest" about crime statistics.

Home Secretary Michael Howard has given his full support for Condon's actions, which, while they may be fairly representative of the police's attitude to black communities, can only serve to further racism within the police and within society.

Howard's hard line, linked with yet more attacks on asylum seekers, reinforce fears that a desperate Tory government will shamelessly play the "race card" in the hope of winning reactionary votes at the next election.

In the early 1980s such racist comments from senior police officers were commonplace. It was only in the aftermath of the riots in Brixton, Toxteth and across the country that the police were forced to review their public statements.

The Scarman enquiry attempted to whitewash the role of the police by both blaming the riots on "cultural practices" in the African-Caribbean community, and on the "prejudices" of a few low ranking police officers.

The Scarman Report was largely a cosmetic exercise, aimed at hiding the overall strategy of a police force that sees black communities and to a lesser extent white working class communities as a "problem" to be dealt with through repression. It also avoided addressing the question of the massive levels of poverty faced by the most oppressed sections of the working class.

What did result from the Scarman enquiry though, was the idea that black communities could not simply be ignored, in conjunction with the paramilitary style policing.

There was also to be "community policing", and senior officers were to take far more notice of public relations aimed at black communities.

At the same time the state made a conscious effort to create a Black middle class, albeit a tiny minority of the black community.

Condon and Howard are now attempting to shift the balance away from public relations and towards greater repression. Whilst all their moves must be opposed, it is not enough to simply defend the status quo.

You don't need to be a sociologist to understand why poor people steal. If we are serious about fighting muggings and other crimes, Black people and the Labour movement must develop their own agenda that both opposes police repression, and that offers a way out for whole communities that are currently condemned to poverty and deprivation.

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No justice for battered women

EMMA HUMPHREYS has finally been released from prison after the appeal court ruled that she had been wrongly convicted of murdering rather than manslaughter of her violent husband.

She had served ten years in jail.

Private Lee Clapp, on a life sentence for murdering an Irish teenager, served just three years. If women had not taken up her case, she would still be in prison.

Emma's case is likely to prove a landmark for future trials of women who hit back. But with decades still serving long sentences, and violent men routinely pleading "provocation" in their own defence, justice is still a long way off.

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Some of the statistics Condon fails to mention include the following:

- Black people are more likely to be stopped and searched by police
- African-Caribbeans in particular are much less likely to be cautioned or otherwise diverted from the courts, and more likely to be arrested.
- African-Caribbeans are more likely to face serious charges than white people for the same offence.
- African-Caribbeans are more likely to be charged for "victimless" crimes (e.g. driving offences)
- Black people are more likely to be remanded in custody
- Black people are less likely to have social enquiry reports ordered than whites.
- Black people are more likely to receive custodial sentences.
- Black people are less likely to receive probation orders.