

Published fortnightly

50p

Solidarity price £1

Strikers and  
claimants 25p

No 23

June 13, 1992

# socialist OUTLOOK

Labour must...

# Demand a vote on Europe

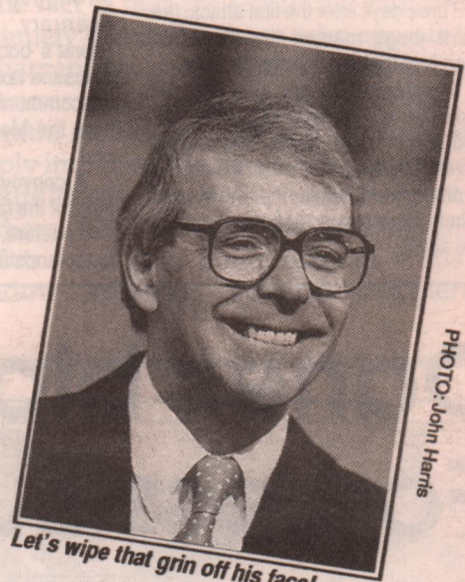


PHOTO: John Harris

Let's wipe that grin off his face!

Danish workers delivered a massive blow against the Maastricht treaty when they voted 'no' in last week's referendum. The vote was far from being an expression of petty nationalism; the whole of the left had campaigned for a 'no' vote, arguing for a rejection of the undemocratic bosses' Europe that Maastricht implies.

Maastricht is an issue of vital concern to workers. European monetary union means deflationary policies to suit the German Bundesbank, which in turn means big cutbacks in social spending throughout Europe.

The European Social Charter is a con; the European parliament doesn't even have the power to impose a 48-hour maximum week on Britain – a hundred years after workers won the 8-hour day! There is no chance that it will ensure fundamental social rights – of employment, health care, minimum wages and good working conditions.

### Undemocratic

Fortress Europe will mean tough policies against immigrants and asylum seekers. It means an undemocratic Europe in which the crucial decisions are made in secret by the Council of Ministers.

Preparations are already under way for the creation of a European strike force, a multinational army of 100,000 soldiers for use against the third world.

The Maastricht process itself is profoundly undemocratic. The new Europe is being stitched up behind the backs of the people; after Denmark, Ireland is the only country certain to get a referendum, and France might.

The left should demand that the British people have their say; if the Danes can have a vote, why not the British? If a new Europe is to be created, the people of Europe must decide.



Danish people celebrate the No vote in the referendum

After the fall of Stalinism, the reconstruction of Europe is inevitable. But its shape must not be left to the bankers and the bosses; the answer is a European constituent assembly, a congress of the peoples to hammer out their alternative.

Here and now Labour must use the opportunity of the Maastricht debate to inflict a defeat on Major in parliament; and the Labour leadership must demand a referendum. If the Labour leadership backed it, the pressure for a referendum would become irresistible.

# Community fights Manchester racist murders

By Trevor Wongsam

**SIDDIK DADA**, a 60 year-old shop-keeper from Withington, was found unconscious in a pool of blood with multiple deep skull fractures. A gang of white youths armed with machetes had carried out this brutal attack.

The elderly man fought for his life for 13 days on a life support machine, but died on 5 February.

Three days after the first attack, the racist thugs roamed the streets in search of their next victim.

Mohammed Sarwar, a 46 year old taxi driver was dragged out of his car and battered to death. His blood-covered body was left out in the middle of the street, while the murderers calmly drove around before setting the taxi alight.

Mohammed Sarwar's nephew stated: 'I had to go and identify the body of my uncle. It was such a brutal murder that my uncle's body was unrecognisable. It is a sight that will haunt me for the rest of my life... If my uncle's murder can unite people to stop racist murders, then I believe, his blood will not be in vain.'

The murders sent shock waves throughout Manchester. On 20 February, the day Mohammed Sarwar's body was released, over a thousand taxi drivers and members of the community accompanied the body from the Mosque to Manchester Airport.

A convoy of more than 800 cars, most of the taxis displaying black flags and posters, brought parts of the city to a standstill. The majority of the taxi

bases stopped work and observed the strike call.

Shops along Wilmslow Road, the heart of the Asian community, closed as the procession passed. Despite police attempts to sabotage and divide the procession, the local press stated that it was the largest funeral procession the city had ever seen.

These racist murders are the most disturbing affront to the black community in Manchester for many years. They have resulted in a depth of feeling that demands a militant and effective response.

The recent establishment of the Mohammed Sarwar and Siddik Dada Memorial Committee has provided a

focus.

Present at the launch meeting was the nephew of Mohammed Sarwar, who is, along with a representative from the Dada family, one of the honorary chairs of the Committee. The Committee also has the support of many anti-racist and community based organisations including Greater Manchester Anti-Racist Alliance, The Black People's Alliance, GM Immigration Aid Unit and the West Indian Organisations Coordinating Committee.

The Committee aims to organise a national demonstration in August demanding justice for the families, and that the police and courts recognise the murders as racially motivated,

which until now they have refused to do.

The Committee also intends to organise a high profile campaign throughout Manchester through a series of public meetings, mass leafletings and other events leading up to the demonstration.

Letters of support, donations, and affiliations from community groups, union branches, and Labour Party branches are most welcome. Please write to: MS and SD Memorial Committee, c/o WFA 9 Lucy Street, Manchester M15 4BX

Cheques payable to MS and SD Memorial Committee.



Fighting a tide of racist violence: protestors in South London remembering murdered black youth Rolan Adams

# Danes block road to Fortress Europe

By Bodil Rasmussen, SAP (Danish Section of the Fourth International)

Danish politicians, from left to right, from unions to employers, were united on the 2 June Maastricht referendum: they wanted a 'yes' vote, and were sure they were going to win.

None had expected the 59.3 per cent majority against Maastricht. So while the government immediately held a crisis-meeting, the rest of the establishment fumbled for an explanation for their defeat – and started to pin the blame on each other.

But the opposition had no such problems. Around midnight, 500 demonstrators gathered outside parliament, chanting 'Uffe (the foreign minister) must go!'.

In a statement the Unity slate, a coalition of left parties including the SAP, said 'The Danish people have won a victory over the establishment'.

Prime Minister Poul Schluter has declared, with the support of other bourgeois parties, that the government will stay. But a number of union leaders, supported by a section of the press, have demanded new elections.

The Unity slate were among the first to challenge the Schluter administration 'We don't believe that the politicians who called for a 'yes' vote will act in our interests in negotiations with the EC or act against the employers, who are



EC boss Jacques Delors

sabotaging the economy. The only democratic solution is to call new parliamentary elections.'

Resistance to Maastricht was concentrated among women and working people. Polls showed that 56 per cent of women rejected the treaty, fearing that the union would mean an attack on social welfare.

And many workers also blame the EC for high unemployment and cuts in social welfare and working conditions.

It was these factors that lay behind majority 'no' votes in the big cities such as Copenhagen and Aalborg, as well as areas of high unemployment such as Northern Jutland.

It also explains the 64 per cent 'no' vote among social democrat voters, despite their own party leaders' advice.

As for the parties of the right, the 'no' vote was considerably higher than in the EEC referen-

dums of 1972 and 1986. EC policies on agriculture and fishing, as well as national sentiments, played a role here. But racist arguments were rare.

The 'no' campaign was grouped around two coalitions – 'The people's movement against the EC' and 'Denmark '92'. They were backed by the left, from the Socialist People's Party (SF) to the far left. But support also came from the ultra-right Progress Party, christians, ex-Communists and members of the Left Socialists.

How to vote in the referendum was where the campaigners agreed; what to replace it with was where they didn't. Some wanted to accept the Maastricht social charter and environment policy; others wanted Denmark to stay in the EC, but without economic and political union.

The Unity slate, opposing EC membership, have proposed developing relations with other countries – the Nordic countries, eastern Europe, and the third world.

The SAP, Danish section of the Fourth International, has launched a 'Campaign against Fortress Europe'. Finn Kjeller explained

'We have started to break down Fortress Europe. We want to use our victory to support people in other European countries who fight for the same goals.

And we want to go on with new activities against the racism, imperialism and militarism of Europe'.



Uffe – winded by defeat

# Is anyone Left in Labour leadership battle?

THE LABOUR leadership campaign has all but disappeared from the media, and quite understandably. Neither Smith nor Gould, nor any of the other official candidates have two ideas to rub together. But what little the different candidates *have* been saying exposes the idea that any of them have left credentials.

To create a voting constituency Gould and Prescott have been trying to dust-off left wing credentials. Even Margaret Beckett has been alluding to her semi-Bennite past.

On the crucial question of Labour's links with the unions Gould has no more principled a position than Smith. He was in favour of the NEC decision to end the union vote in selecting candidates; and the attack on the block vote is a central part of his platform.

John Prescott has been stressing that he is the candidate who represents the link with the unions. But nowhere has he stated exactly what that means; he has not come out clearly on the block vote.

The search by some on the left to try to find something left wing in any of the official can-



Dusted off: Prescott



Bennite? Beckett

didates, or some basis to vote for them, is ridiculous. The fact is that the only left candidates, Livingstone and Grant, were excluded by the undemocratic nominations procedures.

Ken Livingstone himself has been spreading such illusions. At all his meetings now he explains he will vote for Gould and Prescott. Yet in a Socialist Outlook interview a month ago he insisted that Gould could only be supported if he comes out clearly in favour of the union link and against the witch hunt.

Gould has of course made neither statement. Livingstone's position however fits in exactly with what is the core of his project – an attempted realignment of the left in the PLP towards a bloc with the soft left and centre.

If this indeed becomes the position of the Socialist Forum which Livingstone wants to build, then that body will turn out to be useless. The best that can be hoped is that a Livingstone-style realignment would produce something akin to the clapped out Tribunism of the 1960s.

In any case, from the point of view of socialist politics it is a utopian project, drenched in wishful thinking. The only way you can realign with the Kinnockite and semi-Kinnockite centre is by moving sharply rightwards.

The fact is that the left in the PLP today is extremely small. For those who operate in the parliamentary arena this creates enormous pressures, mainly right wing pressures.

Smith, Gould, Beckett and Prescott are all deeply implicated in new realism and the Kinnockite legacy. There is no basis to support any of them. Ken Livingstone is spreading illusions – and thus doing damage to his own 'shadow' campaign – by suggesting there is.

## Socialist loses direction

SOCIALIST OUTLOOK has supported the Socialist Movement's paper – *Socialist* – since it was launched last year.

Many of our supporters, however, have been dismayed by recent editions of the paper and fear that its present political trajectory could destroy the potential that it represents.

Many of us, along with other Socialist Movement activists, argued, right from the early editions, that *Socialist* has been too bland and has needed a far sharper campaigning edge.

We said it needed to reflect the Socialist Movement and its campaigns and priorities in a much stronger and more direct way.

### Failure

These problems, however, have paled in comparison with those which have arisen around the general election and since. First *Socialist* failed to give up-front support to Labour during the election campaign.

Then after the election it failed to support, and in fact criticised, the left Labour leadership challenge launched

by Ken Livingstone and Bernie Grant. This came at a time when the Livingstone/Grant campaign was finding wide support and when there was a danger of a sterile right against right 'contest'.

### No reflection

Despite some change in the latest edition, in which an article by Hilary Wainwright supports the Livingstone/Grant campaign, this is not reflected in the paper as a whole.

The crucial lack of a campaigning edge remains. The SMTUC conference, a major initiative of the Socialist Movement in July, received only a routine advertisement.

The current lack of political direction and editorial judgement comes out clearly in the current edition in an article on the 'labour in focus' page headlined 'why is the Labour leadership so ugly'.

The article amounts to a series of gratuitous personal insults against the Labour front bench as to why they are so 'ugly' – short, fat, hunched or bald. The article is in parts racist and sexist. If it is sup-



Socialists must draw strength from Bennite revolt and Chesterfield movement

posed to be funny, it is not.

This kind of coverage, in place of solid support for the current left project against the right, is particularly damaging in the post-election situation. There is a clear need for the left to regroup into a more effective force in an adverse political climate.

Socialist Outlook supported the original Chesterfield Conferences because they represented the most militant forces – from the Labour Party and the trade unions – coming out of the Bennite revolt of the early 1980s and the miners' strike of 1984-85.

The Socialist Movement represented an attempt to develop this further and break from a purely parliamentary framework to embrace the broader movement. This be-

came known as the 'twin track' approach.

With others, we argued that the Movement needed a newspaper if it was to weather the storms of a difficult political period and develop its potential.

Our concern today is not whether we agree with every article or political line *Socialist* produces. We don't expect to. Our concern is that it approximates to this political role and strengthens the left at this time.

### Potential

We think *Socialist* has the potential to do this. The paper's own survey, published in the current edition, shows that the vast majority of the readers of *Socialist* are members of either the Labour Party and/or their

trade union.

*Socialist* should be developing that support in a fight against new realism on behalf of the left. New realism, created to 'make Labour electable', is in crisis and the left needs a clear voice to express that alternative.

Unless *Socialist* changes course, it is doomed. Its future lies in regrouping those on the left that wish to fight new realism, promoting their struggles.

If it made such a change, it could become a vital asset for all those that are committed to continuing to promote workers' struggles.

Without such a change, it will become a moribund journal, irrelevant to the real challenges facing socialists in Britain.

# Local government unions – fighting for their lives

By Doug Thorpe,  
Islington NALGO

What may be the last real conference of NALGO, the local government workers' union, finds it facing threats to its very existence.

The most immediate threat is not Rodney Bickerstaffe, the crown prince of Unison, the proposed merger with NUPE and COHSE, and his Kinnockite mafia. It is something even more sinister, a Tory government elected to its fourth term in the context of a Europe-wide offensive against public service provision.

The Tories are legislating to extend compulsory competitive tendering (CCT) to whole new areas of white collar services.

Their ultimate aim is to

reduce local councils to 'enabling authorities', whose only role would be to award contracts to the private sector.

This would devastate NALGO's membership. Whether they go that far or not – the timetable for the first phase has already slipped – they will find willing accomplices in Labour local authorities.

## Dented shield

Following Labour's election defeat, the Town Hall Kinnockites led by Margaret 'Lady London' Hodge have rapidly ditched the last vestiges of the 'Dented Shield' strategy.

They have embraced the new 'quality' ethos and are talking of pre-empting Tory legislation in a race to shed services to the private sector and launch a new

round of cuts, only months after setting this year's budgets.

Across the country thousands of jobs are going and they are increasingly those of NALGO members. Conference must adopt a national campaign of action against CCT and coordinate strike action across branches facing cuts rather than leaving them to fight alone.

On pay, once again we have seen the National Local Government Committee fail to mount a serious campaign around a flat rate claim. And, more seriously, they seem reluctant to prepare the membership for the attack on national pay bargaining that the employers plan to launch next year in the form of 'kitty bargaining'.

The 'unshackle the unions' statement will be discussed,

and successive conferences have pledged to defy the law where necessary in the past. But still the National Executive are opposing the statement.

This shows something of their intentions, as well as their sectarianism. In the face of Tory proposals for 'cooling off periods' and 'the right of individual consumers to initiate action against public sector unions', it is important that the statement is wholeheartedly backed.

## Merger

But the issue that looks set to dominate the conference is the proposed merger with NUPE, the public sector manual workers' union, and COHSE, the health workers, to form the 1.5 million strong UNISON.

In this merger there is the

potential to create a powerful public sector union, breaking down the divisions in the workplace between unions and between manual and white collar workers. But this is the furthest thing from the union bureaucracies' minds.

In their desire to maximise income and not spend it on strike action, they will attempt to use the merger to curtail democracy and squash rank and file attempts to fight. The left will be supporting amendments to strengthen branch autonomy and the right to campaign openly.

## Amalgamation

We will also be demanding the right to discuss the draft rules of the new union before any ballot on amalgamation. But at the end of the day it won't be the wording of the reports that determines the outcome of the coming struggle with the bureaucracy (and it will come in NALGO, merger or not), but the level of organisation and combativity of those in the union who want to take action.

## Left mobilisation

Provided the left organises, the potential gains of merger outweigh the risks, but it is essential that this organisation starts now. Despite the size of left votes at conferences, the level of formal left organisation remains abysmal.

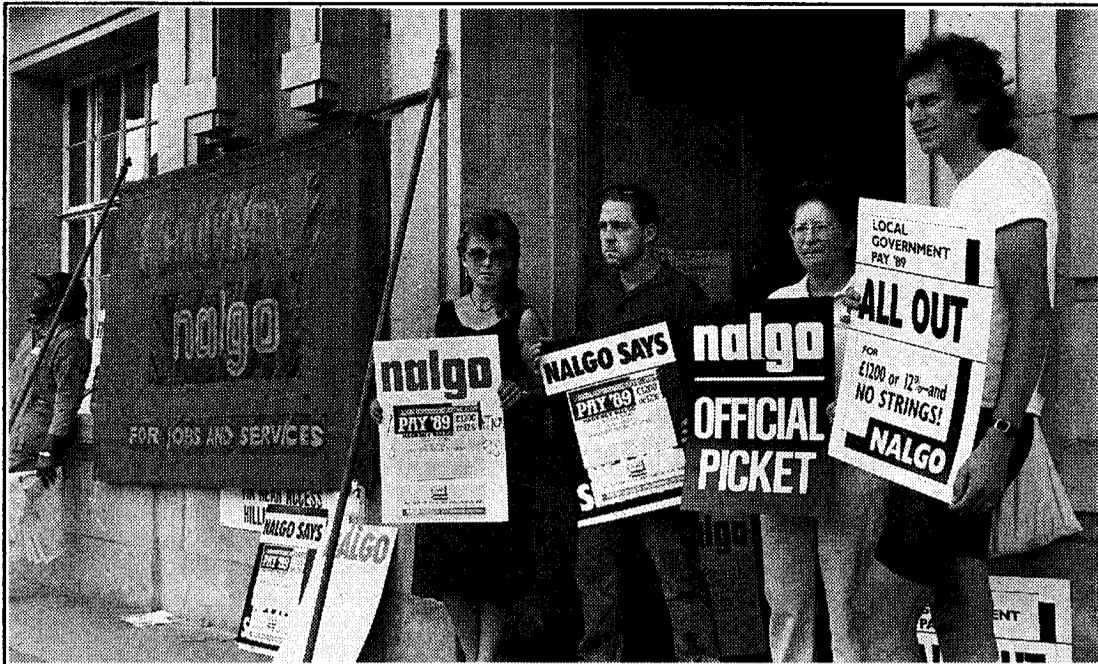
The Communist Party machine is disintegrating, the Broad Left has been reduced to an SWP caucus, and NALGO Action has died of exhaustion.

The only successes have been where branches have called single-issue conferences – such as Strathclyde's initiative around cuts, which led to a revised national strategy.

But such one-off campaigns are not enough for the onslaught which faces us now. Two ad hoc conferences calling for a democratic merger have so far been called.

These initiatives need to be formalised into a Campaign for a Democratic and Fighting Union, that struggles both on the issue of democracy and national action in defence of public services.

It needs to organise at every level of the union, particularly the districts, to support struggles and challenge the bureaucracy.



NALGO faces much more than pay battles in the coming months

# London hospitals – sacrificed on altar of Thatcher's market

By Harry Sloan

THE TORY government never really bothered to make a secret of their intention to close thousands of beds in London's hospitals.

Instead they have relied on Labour's ineptitude and one-sided press coverage to keep it from the headlines as the drive towards the new market system proceeded.

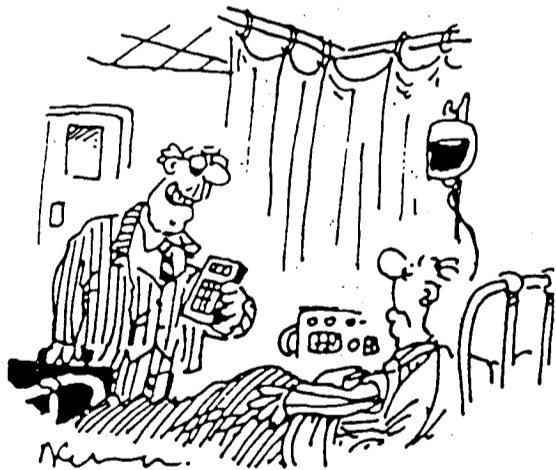
Last autumn Health Secretary Waldegrave set up the Tomlinson inquiry, with a dual brief: to draw up a hit list of hospitals for closure; and to help stave off any embarrassingly large closures until after the election.

## Autumn

Tomlinson's report is now due in the autumn, but already many health authorities which buy services from inner-London hospitals have jumped the gun and begun to send their patients elsewhere, triggering the current crisis.

The key issue here is the Tories' new NHS market system, which has taken the place of any attempt at regional or national planning of health care.

While most people saw only the unpopular proposals for hospitals to



'I'm not Dr Jekyll - I'm Mr Hyde the accountant'

opt out, the core of Thatcher's NHS Act was the establishment of this new competitive 'market', which was certain to put London's hospitals at a disadvantage.

● All of London's hospitals are saddled with inflated site valuations reflecting the 1980s property boom: as a result they must now pay higher capital charges under the new system. Worst-hit are the inner-London teaching hospitals.

● Inner London also loses out most heavily from the costs of London weighting payments for nursing and other staff – all of which help inflate the prices hospitals must charge for treatment.

● And the teaching hospitals carry additional costs as a result of

their higher levels of medical staffing and the increased numbers of more complex cases they have to handle, as well as research work.

The irony is that London's teaching hospitals are far from lying idle: they are as busy as almost any hospital in the country, treating a massive 49% more patients in 1990 than they had been planned to receive.

On current levels of activity, the closure of the 2,000 beds that are expected to fall under Tomlinson's axe would lead to the loss of up to 100,000 operations a year, and as many as 10,000 jobs.

## Targets

With either the UCH or Middlesex Hospital already certain to close as a result of the Bloomsbury cash crisis, the front-line targets for closure seem to be Charing Cross Hospital, and St Thomas's, which sits on the most valuable hospital site in London, valued at £150 million.

A conspicuous and scandalous silence in these proceedings is likely to come from the Labour Party.

Shadow health secretary Robin Cook supports the Tory view that London's NHS is 'over-bedded' and that there is a need for closures.

Throughout the election campaign, Cook and the Labour team refused to fight the Tory closure plans or to challenge the Tomlinson inquiry, allowing the Tories to sidetrack the whole NHS issue into the diversionary 'war of Jennifer's ear'.

## Waiting lists

130,000 Londoners on NHS waiting lists are not likely to agree with Cook or Bottomley that there is a surplus of hospital beds in London.

And with rows breaking out over prices for treatment between health authority purchasers and hospital providers throughout London and the home counties, there is no prospect of stability emerging from the Tory shake-up.

The fight is on to prevent London becoming, in the words of COHSE's London regional secretary Pete Marshall, a 'hospital-free zone'.

Socialists must work to link up hospital unions, local organisations, pensioners' groups and health campaigns to ensure the Tory blitz is beaten back.

The new management techniques

# The bosses' offensive

The fight against new management techniques will be a main topic of discussion at the conference being organised in July by the Socialist Movement Trade Union Committee. Here ANDREW KILMISTER explains how these techniques work and why they challenge millions of trade unionists, from car workers to teachers.

THE IMPOSITION of new management techniques will be, together with the anti-union laws, the key question facing workers in the next decade.

Although generally associated with manufacturing industry, especially cars, they are now being introduced in the public sector. Health, education, the post office, telecom and transport all face the same offensive. Few workers will not be faced with some aspect of these techniques in the coming years.

New management techniques are often called 'Japanisation' because Japanese firms have played a key role in introducing them. But they did not all originate in Japan; indeed many were developed in the US and introduced into Japan during the post-war occupation.

There are four main elements to these techniques. First an *attack on trade unions*. Second, the *transformation of working conditions*. Third, the *reshaping of the workforce*. Finally, these techniques are held together by an overall *ideological offensive*.

None of these elements, taken separately, is new. What is new and threatening is the way these things are being integrated by management into a coherent approach in which each one reinforces the others.

Attacking the trade unions can involve outright de-recognition, as in the Unipart plant in Oxford, and in the print trade. But derecognition so far has involved relatively few areas. Anti-unionism has included a range of measures designed to break the allegiance of workers to their union, and identify them with their employers.

These measures include performance related pay, individual contracts, no strike agreements and binding arbitration, reduction in trade union facilities and the abolition of the check off system where union dues are deducted at source.

Work teams, often with elected team leaders, are promoted by management as an alternative to unions, and workers are encouraged to look to their team leaders, rather than shop stewards, to solve problems.

The aim of course is to make it appear that pay and conditions depend on individual effort and not on collective union action. At Nissan's Sunderland plant workers get an annual pay increment if their perfor-



Soft on LUL company plan: RMT chief Jimmy Knapp

mance is judged to be good enough; exactly the same model is being proposed for teachers in higher education.

At Unipart the company employs a solicitor to give free legal advice, including on questions like *unfair dismissal*. Such measures constantly undermine the independent role of the unions.

The new techniques demand an intensification of work levels, achieved through a reduction or abolition of job demarcation, as is being proposed on London Underground, and by putting responsibility for quality control and maintenance on to production workers, thus cutting the workforce.

Defining jobs in terms of tasks to be carried out per week, rather than hours worked per week, effectively introduces compulsory overtime.

Speed-up often operates through team-working. Teams have the responsibility for checking their own output and also checking and reporting on other teams.

But it is not necessary for teams to play this role in every workplace. In education for example the focus is much more on individuals teachers, and instead of team monitoring the emphasis is on formal appraisal systems.

The changing character of the workforce involves increased use of part-time workers and temporary workers and stepped-up sub-contracting. In Japan this has played a very important role.

The so-called 'lifetime' employment system in large companies has rested on a huge network of smaller firms which carry out subcontracting work in appalling conditions and provide very insecure employment. In large companies temporary workers have faced particularly severe conditions.



Employers have come a long way in developing new ways of screwing the workforce

In Britain the main focus in this area has been in the public sector, especially local government, with *compulsory competitive tendering*. In education, telecommunications, social services and publishing the use of agency staff, freelance workers and workers on short-term contracts is on the increase. The workforce becomes divided, with obvious implications for those already discriminated against such as women and black workers.

The different aspects of the new techniques are held together by a number of ideological phrases or buzzwords which are constantly used - like 'choice', 'flexibility' and 'quality'. Companies aim to become 'world class' through introducing systems of 'total quality management'.

Management tries to portray anyone who opposes the techniques as being inflexible, as

standing in the way of providing choice or quality for the 'customer' or 'client'. Unscrupulous local authorities, social services departments or educational managements have no compunction about using the situation of working class people who use these services as a lever to introduce new working practices.

Teachers and social workers are told that accepting new techniques is a necessary part of providing accessibility and quality for a wider range of people; without being given any more resources to do this.

A further element of the ideological offensive is simply the proposition that unless new management techniques are accepted, then the company will go the wall. Belling, the electric cooker manufacturer, forced through new techniques on just this basis, and promptly went bankrupt.

New management techniques are not all-powerful and they can be resisted. This depends to a large extent on the militancy and attitude of the workforce. Teams cannot be used to replace trade unions if the workers refuse to see the teams who are representing their interests. Changes in the workforce need not weaken unity or trade union organisation if the unions respond and actively recruit.

The techniques have been more easily introduced by Japanese companies in new plants with a new workforce. Introducing them in existing workplaces with existing union representation will be more difficult. The struggle against the introduction of these techniques will play a major role in determining the possibilities for trade union organisation in the coming decade.

## Second Conference 1992

18th - 19th July  
Conway Hall, Red Lion Sq, London

WHICH WAY FOR  
SOCIALISTS IN THE UNIONS?

# Fighting the employers' offensive

We would like to register \_\_\_\_\_ people for the Unshackle the Unions Conference

We enclose £ \_\_\_\_\_ (£10 waged/ £3 unwaged per person)

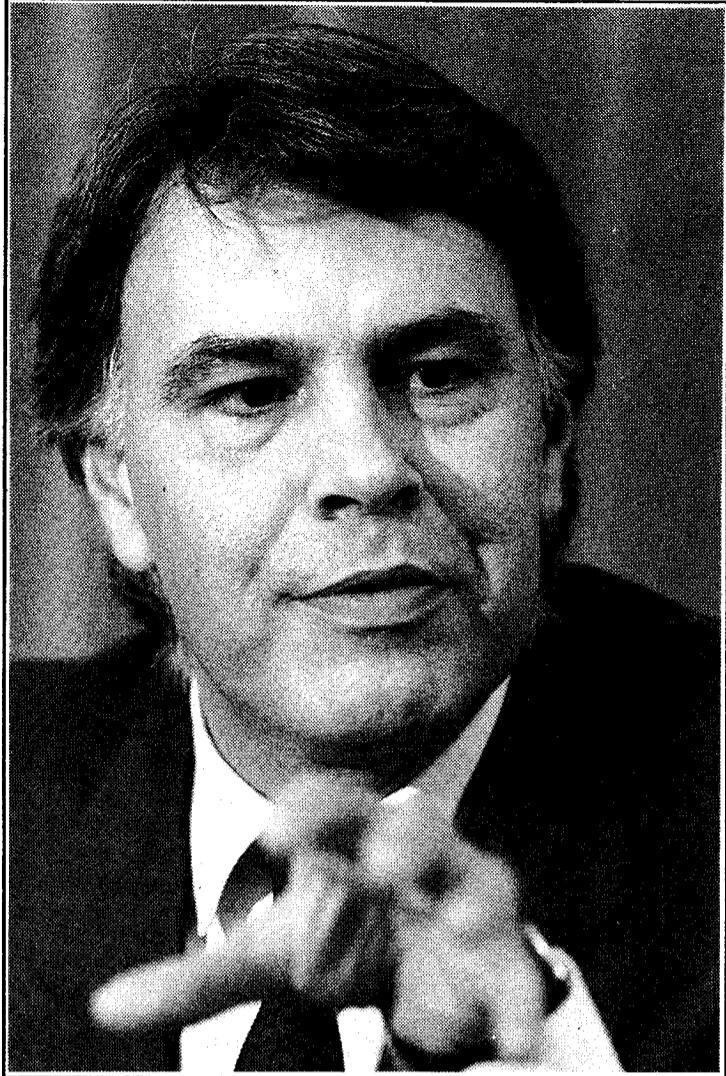
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Spanish PM Gonzales: not speedy enough to escape union fightback

# Spanish strikes defend dole payments

In the aftermath of the Spanish general strike, JOAQUIN NIETO, a leader of the CCOO union federation explained what was behind the mobilisations.

**Since 1991 various regions of the Spanish state have seen resistance to the government's economic plans. How did the call from the big union federations – UGT and CCOO – come about for the May 28 general strike come about?**

First there has been mounting discontent in response to the Socialist Government's economic and social policy. Their credibility is fading.

The anger has been expressed in a rise in mobilisations and wage conflicts.

The number of strike days in 1991 was well above the 1990 level, and the first four months of 1992 have seen two or three times as many days lost as the whole of 1991.

The factor which finally set the powder-keg alight was the government's persistence in its anti-worker offensive, despite all the protests. A very tough economic programme is being prepared so that Spain can meet the requirements of Maastricht.

The government's 'convergence' plan involves a savage attack on the unemployed, the workers and the public sector as a whole, including a decree sharply reducing unemployment benefits.

The most recent measure announced involves restrictions on the right to strike, in the hope of checking the expression of discontent.

**The ruling Socialist Party (PSOE) has had to resort to measures reminiscent of Franco to get its decree on unemployment passed.**

The decree was not adopted by the usual parliamentary channels but in the form of a decree decided by the Council of Ministers. It was neither discussed in parliament nor submitted for consideration by the unions.

This *decretazo* is a sign of a very authoritarian way of governing; here in the Spanish state we are highly sensitive to this kind of thing, which reminds us of the dictatorship which used to govern by decree.

**What is the content of this decree?**

The proposal is one that affects all wage-earners. The plan is to increase the length of time one has to work before becoming entitled to unemployment benefits from six months to one year.

Furthermore, the decree reduces the rate of benefit by between 10 per cent and 15 per cent.

Here unemployment is the highest in the EC – at 17 per cent or some 2.6 million people who have little social security. More than half of those without work (1.4 million people) get nothing – and this is only officially registered unemployment.

**Why, after a long period of dragging their feet, have the union leaders decided on a general strike?**

Besides the violence of the government's attacks, the union leaders are also under strong internal pressure.

After the various regional general strikes, rank and file pressure for large-scale action is

growing. The union leaders know they have to respond if they are not to lose credibility.

**Do you expect to see increasing unity between the UGT and the CCOO?**

I think we may take unity a step further; some of the biggest obstacles between the two confederations have disappeared. The political links have frayed.

The CCOO has simply cut its ties with the Spanish Communist Party (PCE) while the UGT is at loggerheads with the PSOE – it seems indeed that the UGT would welcome the defeat of the PSOE in elections, since this would split the party.

**What happened on May 28?**

In some places there were calls for 24-hour strikes, as was also true for some industrial branches including mines, steel and teachers, with the support of the students' organisations.

The rest observed a half-day strike between 5 and 12 o'clock. Electricity consumption fell by 68 per cent, showing that production had been seriously hit.

But the fact that there was no unified strike call affected the mobilisation. Where a whole day strike was called it was total. Where it was partial, the paralysis was almost total in the centres of work, particularly industry, construction and services but there was less impact on social life as a whole.

The unions' appeal had a significant impact on the workers, disproving assertions that the unions no longer have worker support. So they are right to consider it a success.

It seems clear that if the unions called for a 24-hour strike the dynamic would have been stronger. We have counted 140 demonstrations on May 28, with tens of thousands in the big cities. The biggest was in Madrid – the radio estimated 100,000 people – with the next biggest in Barcelona.

*Abridged from International Viewpoint, journal of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International*

# Scandal rocks Italian Socialists

The last few weeks have seen a series of scandals erupt in Italian politics, demonstrating the corruption of the Italian political system. The alliance between the Christian Democrats and the Socialists that has dominated the system since World War II, the 'partitocrazia', has collapsed.

Socialist Outlook asked LIVIO MAITAN, a leader of the Party of Communist Refoundation\* (PCR) and a member of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International, what the series of crises means for Italian politics.

**What does the seeming collapse of the 'partitocrazia' mean for the Italian bourgeoisie?**

I think to say 'collapse' is an exaggeration; it's a deep crisis, but not yet a collapse. It means that the bourgeoisie consider that their apparatus is no longer viable as a means of defending their interests, particularly in terms of the unification of Europe. It just can't deliver the goods.

**It seems that all the main Italian parties – the Christian Democrats, Craxi's Socialists and to some extent the Communist Party too – are implicated in corruption. Can they carry on in the same way when they are so publicly implicated in corruption?**

Obviously corruption is no new phenomenon. The only thing that's different now is that it has come to the surface, and people can see what has happened.

In reality it's been a kind of political law that if you want something, you

have to pay the political parties. It's a result of the integration of all the parties – including the parties of the workers' movement – into the system for the last forty years.

It's a big crisis, but there's no real alternative. That's the problem.

**With the leaderships of the traditional parties so discredited, are there new opportunities for the left?**

The real danger is that right wing forces will exploit the situation. People are against the political regime, not against the capitalist system.

And the people who appear most obviously hostile to the political regime are the Northern League and other right wing organisations.

The problem is that the left parties don't appear to be the real opposition to the regime. The only positive thing in the Italian situation today is the existence of the PCR. But it's very new.

It's not a very big party, but it's got a solid working class popular base and is seen as the only real left opposition. But it's still a fragile organisation and has to develop its political line a lot more.

The big question mark is to what

extent it will be able to counteract the offensive by conservative forces.

**So are the extreme right – the MSI, the Lombard League – a real danger?**

They are a real force. There hasn't been a big rise of the MSI, but in the centre and the south the league are growing. For example in Milan, where the administration is in crisis, there could be regional elections. They will probably show a growth of the League.

**What are the main projects of the Party of Communist Refoundation?**

The first thing, which is very positive, is that there are still a lot of people who identify as communists. Of course they aren't stalinists, they criticise what happened in the Soviet Union, but they still want to be communists.

Second, in terms of the main issues of the day, the PCR is taking the initiative around two issues. Crucially around the sliding scale of wages and secondly around Europe – it will be campaigning in parliament against the Maastricht agreement. These should help the PCR to appear as a real left alternative.

\*The Party of Communist Refoundation was formed out of the break-up of the old Italian Communist Party (PCI), in alliance with the far left party Democrazia Proletaria.

In recent elections it has won 5.6 per cent in parliamentary elections and 6.4 per cent in the Senate, compared with 16.4 per cent for the renamed Communist Party.

It has 35 MPs and 20 senators. It is the largest organised current in the CGIL union federation, formerly led by the PCI.

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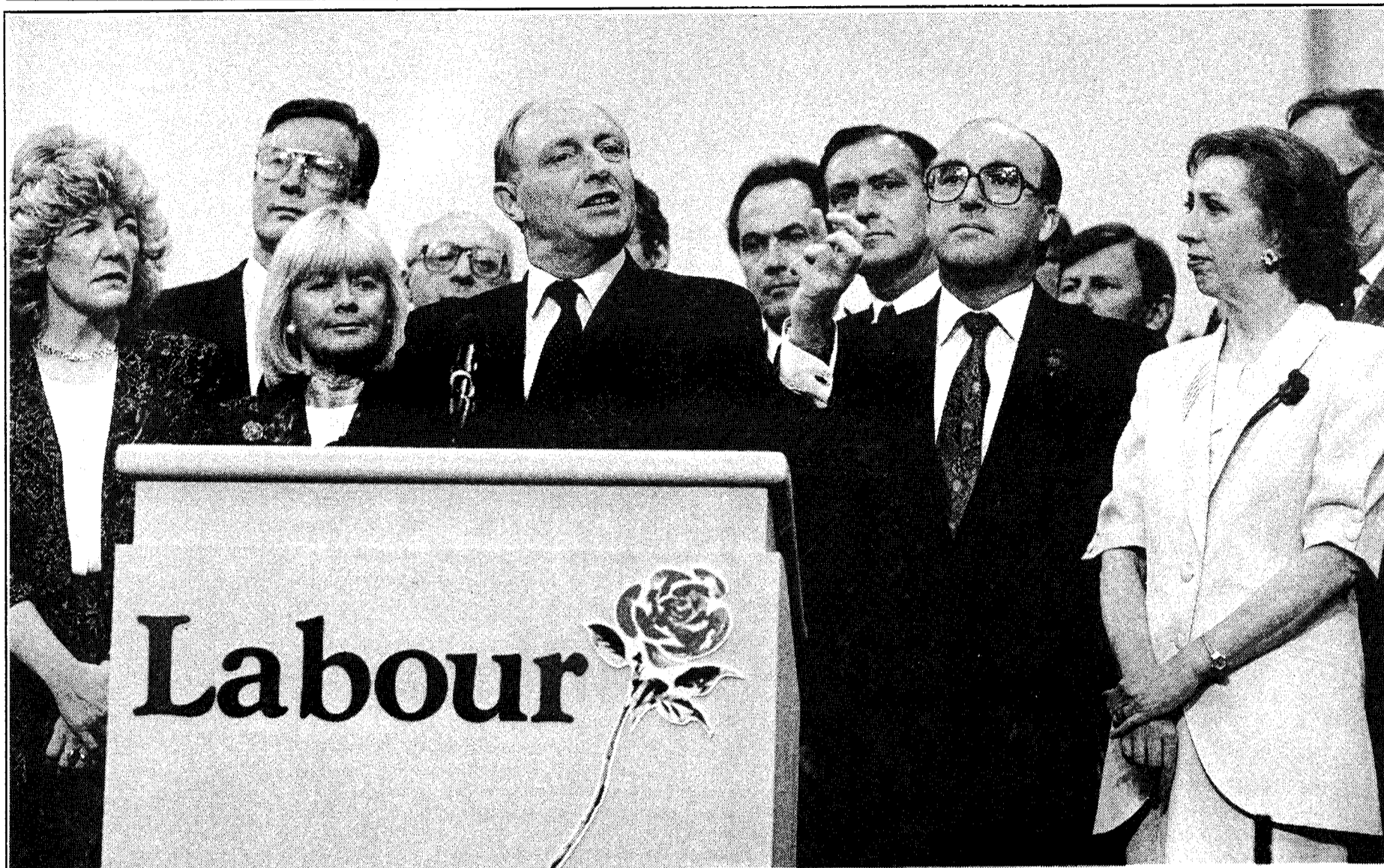
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# socialist OUTLOOK



No change in sight as Labour's leadership plays musical chairs

PHOTO: John Harris

## Which way for the Labour left? Stop the rot: start the fight!

By Pete Firmin

THE ELECTION defeat and its aftermath have clearly shown up the political and organisational weaknesses of the Labour left.

Kinnock and friends bent and broke every rule in the book to overturn democratic decisions they didn't like, to distance the Party from struggles against the bosses and Tories, to drop all socialist policies and to close down dissident parties.

All those who refused to go along with this were expelled. And all this in the name of 'making Labour electable', in which of course they failed.

While the blame for the election defeat rests fully with the Labour leadership, much of the left was not prepared to challenge them. They felt that Kinnock should be given a chance, even if they agreed with left policies in their hearts. And many didn't want to be accused of having lost the election for Labour.

Much of the left failed to seriously campaign against the witch hunt, or to

build a fight around alternative policies to those of the leadership in the run-up to the election. Such retreats mean the left is seriously weakened.

When the Campaign Group of MPs decided to put forward Ken Livingstone and Bernie Grant for the leadership, this was welcomed by activists as a sign that a left alternative was being put forward to the tweedledum and tweedledee contest. But the low level of support among MPs reflects the serious weakness of the Left.

While little support could be expected outside of the Campaign Group, what was disturbing was the number of Left MPs who supported one or other candidate of the right. A left vote would have indicated their opposition to all those who talk of cutting the link between Labour and the unions and pacts with the Liberal Democrats.

But by voting for those that have supported Kinnock all down the line in recent years, they signalled that there was really nothing to worry about. Ken Livingstone's current support for Bryan Gould is to be regretted as a step backward from his decision to stand.

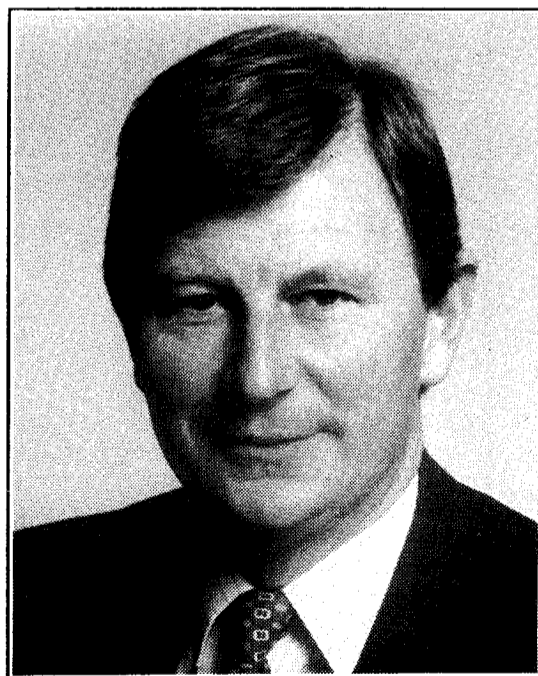
Gould has said he is for breaking the link with the unions and in favour of pacts with the Liberals. He may not be quite so open about this in the run-up to the vote - but he shouldn't be given any support by the left.

We shouldn't underestimate the weakness of the left outside parliament either, both in the Labour Party and the unions. Years of attacks on democracy, demoralisation at defeats and retreat to the right have taken their toll.

Unless the left begins to organise in a way it hasn't before, the right will consolidate its hold on the Party under Smith. The haemorrhaging of activists seen in recent years will become a flood.

That's why the holding of the Leeds conference to relaunch the Labour Left is to be welcomed. It is a sign of a commitment by the Campaign Group to organise its supporters in a way it hasn't before.

But the years under Kinnock have shown that the left in the Labour Party can't isolate itself from the struggle in



No left winger. Bryan Gould

the unions and around campaigns if it is to have any success. New realism gained the upper hand precisely because it exploited the industrial defeats and the subsequent strengthening of the right in the unions.

The fate of the Labour left does not rest just on its conduct of the internal fight in the Labour Party. It has to link up with those organising in the unions and those campaigning against Tory attacks such as the latest anti-union laws and the Asylum Bill.

Stronger organisation of the Left which comes out of the Leeds conference is to be welcomed, but to be effective it has to be committed to building a common movement with others outside the Party fighting for the same aims.



Having a laugh at workers' expense

# Don't let them cut Labour's roots!



Defender of union links: Dennis Skinner MP

**YET** another Labour Party inquiry has been set up, this time into the links with the unions. **HARRY SLOAN** argues in defence of the union block vote.

"NO SAY, NO PAY" is the militant-sounding slogan under which leaders of the public sector union NUPE are challenging moves that could break the historic links between the unions and the Labour Party.

NUPE Deputy General Secretary Tom Sawyer, spelling out the policy at their annual conference, opposed any further reduction in the weight of the unions' block vote at Labour Conference, and any attempt to remove the 12 trade union representatives who sit on the Party's National Executive.

"This is a non-starter and would take away our influence," he told delegates.

Sawyer is not the only union leader anxious to limit the extent to which Labour's rightward-moving leadership is allowed to distance the Party from the

unions which built it and still sustain it financially.

TGWU leader Bill Morris and, surprisingly, even the GMB's new realist General Secretary John Edmonds have also drawn attention to Labour's dependence on union funds.

"During the election we were asked to keep our heads down, and we did, while contributing hugely to their political funds. Then after Labour screwed it up at the election, they turn round and blame us. There is a lot of anger out there," Edmonds told the *Observer*.

## Unlikely

The anger reaches into even the most unlikely unions. While engineering union bosses of the AEEU make the most explicit calls for severing links between unions and Labour, stewards in Manchester recently crowded into a much larger than usual meeting of the Confed of engineering unions to pass militant resolutions in defence of the block vote.

Instead of building on this base of rank and file support to build a cam-

paign that could beat back the 'modernisers', Sawyer and his co-thinkers are restricting their efforts to lobbying the top level of the bureaucracy.

And they are already making concessions, voting to set up an NEC inquiry into the trade union link, which Sawyer says will look at the issue 'in the round' rather than chip away at it piecemeal.

Meanwhile union chiefs have also helped nod through by 18 vote to 2 on the NEC the decision to weaken trade union involvement at local level in the selection of local parliamentary candidates, by instituting a 'one member, one vote' ballot procedure.

The issue of union links and influence over Labour has always been central to the very character of the Party, which was built on the wave of anxiety among union leaders after the 1901 Taff Vale judgement, which declared the rail union ASRS liable for damages as a result of an official strike.

## Independent voice

The inability of the unions' traditional allies in the Liberal Party to deliver the necessary legal reforms generated a dramatic shift towards an independent voice for the labour movement, and the tiny Labour Representation Committee mushroomed into the Labour Party in 1906.

Interestingly, the early party had no individual membership structure at all - it was entirely constituted of MPs and affiliated organisations, reflecting the politics of the union bureaucracy.

Trotsky did not exaggerate when he wrote in 1929:

"The Labour Party in England, the classic country of trade unions, is only a political transposition of the (...) trade union bureaucracy. The same leaders guide the trade unions, betray the general strike, lead the electoral campaign and later on sit in the ministries. The Labour Party and the trade unions - these are not two principles, they are only a technical division of labour."

Examples of such leaders include the infamous rail union leader and Colonial Secretary JH Thomas; Ernest Bevin, the right wing TGWU leader turned Minister of Labour and Foreign Secretary, and another TGWU leader turned minister under Wilson, Frank Cousins. More recently Tom Sawyer, union boss and leading architect of 'new realism', was widely expected to have taken up a political post if Labour had won in April.

Even where union leaders themselves have not taken on the role of leading the Labour Party, they have shaped leaderships in their own image: Neil Kinnock and his 'dream ticket' pairing with Roy Hattersley was the fruit of bureaucratic union manoeuvres, just as the Smith-Beckett candidacy is the result of several years' back-room plotting by right-wingers anticipating a Kinnock failure.

Labour is the only European social democratic party to have been built and influenced in this way by the unions, and integrally tied to them.

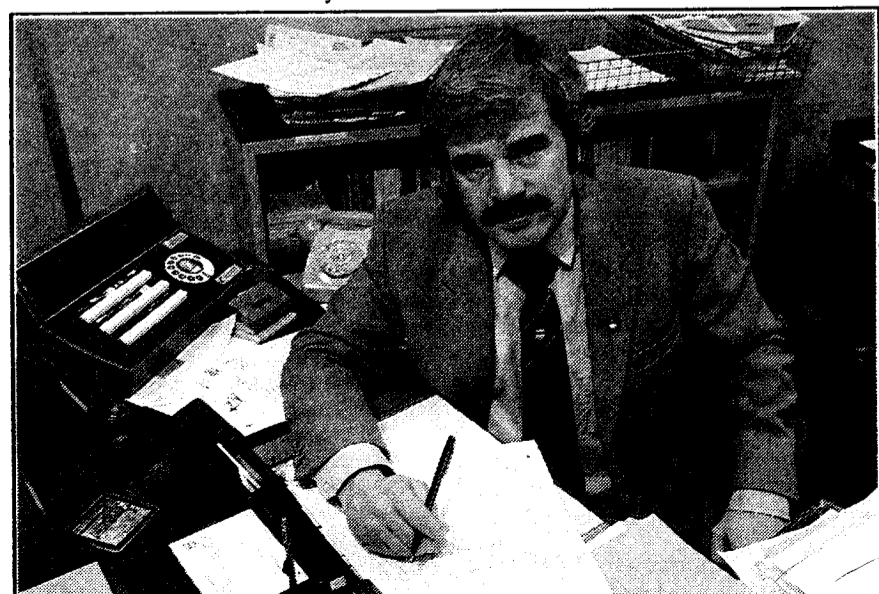
## Organic

Its very character as a workers' party has always hinged not on its (generally right wing, bourgeois reformist) programme, still less on its stubbornly parliamentarist methods, but on its organic links to the unions which have always been the front-line organisations of the British working class.

In this respect Labour has always been qualitatively different from the US Democratic Party, who, like the 1901 Liberals in Britain, angle cynically for union votes and cash, while in practice remaining a thoroughly capitalist party allowing no union voice in the shaping of policies.

British employers have always recognised the union-Labour link as a potential threat, and their attacks on Labour have time and again focused on efforts to cut it off, often by changing the law to obstruct collection of the political levy.

For a capitalist, of course, any notion of party democracy or block voting to determine policy is alien and irrelevant.



Larry Whitty: from GMB bureaucrat to Labour bureaucrat





individual workers can only influence politics through collective action

The Tory Party never had any internal democracy whatever, leaving all policy decisions to the leader. This is quite sufficient for a party of wealthy individuals who trust to their personal money and influence to pull strings for the limited changes they may wish to see.

For the working class, however, the situation is quite different. The only way an individual shop floor worker who pays the political levy can make his or her voice heard by the leadership of the labour movement is to act *collectively*, through policy resolutions from branches and through their union conference which then commits the union to support a policy or a candidate.

### Abuses

Of course there are often abuses of the delegated powers vested in union leaderships, not least in the way they cast block votes at Labour Conference.

With rare exceptions these abuses of democracy have struck blows against the left: union block votes have been the bedrock of support whenever right wing Labour leaders have attempted to push through unpopular policies, and Kinnock's 'new realist' project, ditching almost any radical or progressive policy commitments, relied from the outset on the backing of top union bureaucrats.

Many of the problems in the way the block vote has been used, often with little or no consultation within the unions concerned, must be taken up in the battle for democracy in the unions.

In particular, it would be more democratic if block votes representing

the whole union membership were to be proportionally divided according to voting patterns within the union's membership, rather than cast monolithically on one side or another.

### Principle

However the *principle* of workers whose political levy payments are the mainstay of the Labour Party having the decisive say on key policy issues is a basic one to be defended against all those who would prefer to cut the Party loose from its working class roots, turn back the wheel of history, and rejoin the Liberals in the twilight zone of 'middle ground' politics.

The fact is that Labour could cut its union links only at peril of bankruptcy. It can't afford to forego the income from the unions' political levy. And, as NUPE's 'No say, no pay' slogan declares, union leaders will not continue to pour funds into a party over which they have no control.

Irrespective of the delusions of the right wing, Labour cannot survive as a party of individual members: general secretary Larry Whitty recently revealed that, under Kinnock, membership has plunged to just 270,000, the lowest since 1929, while budget cutbacks of up to 30% of spending are already having to be made.

The fight must be to go *forward*, battling for union democracy and socialist policies in the struggles against the Tory government, not backwards to a feeble and disastrous re-run of the failed Lib-Lab years before Taff Vale.



Labour Conference 1988: Kinnock relying on union block votes

## Rumpus over PR

# Keep it in proportion!

By Dave Packer

The Tory election victory means that proportional representation is off the agenda as far constitutional change is concerned. But it is not off the political agenda for the left, which is deeply divided by the issue.

Many socialists have made opposition to PR a principle. Although some prominent socialists like Arthur Scargill support PR, the majority of the Campaign Group of MPs make opposition a key political issue.

Many in the Labour Party who oppose PR do so because they believe that it would prevent Labour ever having a parliamentary majority. This is defeatist.

Socialism is out of the question in any advanced capitalist country without a majority. And opposing PR puts socialists on the defensive on the question of democracy. After the collapse of Stalinism, it is absurd that socialists should retreat on democratic questions.

At the heart of the argument against PR is the concern about coalitionism and the issue of class independence. But sections of the left are clinging to an undemocratic institutional form rather than engaging in the real battle.

### Workers' control

Revolutionary socialists do not defend the existing form of state - bourgeois democracy. We stand for a much more democratic system based on workers' councils and workers' control.

However, we are not indifferent to the form of capitalist rule. We fight to extend

democratic rights within the existing system and to defend those rights against undemocratic and authoritarian attacks.

Britain's parliamentary system has been particularly effective at providing stable government for the ruling class. That's why not just the Tory party but the overwhelming

majority of the ruling class are against PR and want to stick to the first-past-the-post system.

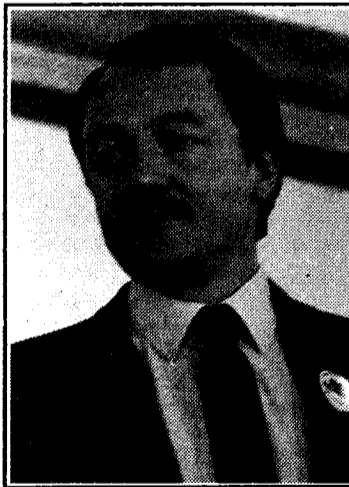
Under the present system Thatcherism has been in power for thirteen years on a minority vote. What other Western country perhaps with the exception of the US, has such a stable system? And of course the Tories are quick to point to the government chaos in Italy as proving their point.

But there are those on the left who support PR for narrow, sectarian reasons. They believe that PR is the way to create a new 'red-green' coalition, to break Labour's near-monopoly of working class politics.

While it is true the present system discriminates against small parties, any PR system introduced would almost certainly have a 5 per cent cut-off point, making it very difficult for small parties to get representation.

But in any case, the idea that constitutional reform is the key to changing the balance of class forces, or to fighting against new realism, is absurd.

Socialists should take a principled position in favour of democratic reform. But for the moment, in terms of the immediate tasks of socialists, it is at least a secondary, if not tertiary question.



Opponent of PR: Ken Livingstone

# Unite to fight our way out of crisis



Battles in the unions are the key to the survival and strengthening of the left

By Pete Firmin

LABOUR'S election defeat was a disaster. Not because a Labour government, elected on a pale Tory platform and inheriting a crisis-ridden economy, would have done great things.

But because it was a disaster for those millions who have borne the brunt of Tory attacks for 13 years – the homeless, the unemployed, the low paid.

A Labour government would not have done a lot to change their plight, but it would have lifted morale, showing the Tories could be beaten.

And it would have given workers the feeling they could beat back the bosses' offensive through their struggles. Instead, morale is going to sink further before there is the confidence to fight back.

The responsibility for the defeat lies squarely with the leadership of the labour movement. They spent the best part of ten years distancing the Labour Party from any fightback against the Tories – such as the miners' strike and the fight against the Poll Tax.

They ditched all policies which offered an alternative to the Tories, and stifled Party



Heyday of the left 1982: Benn, Scargill and Livingstone

democracy including by a massive witch-hunt.

And then the Labour leaders offered no inspiration to activists and no vision of an alternative to the electorate. There is no greater condemnation of 'New Realism' than that it could not win an election in the middle of the recession.

The trade union leaders played their part in this. They discouraged and undermined the struggles which took place, limiting their horizons to a Labour government which would welcome them back to the corridors of power.

They spent years telling us to 'wait for Labour'. This gave

the bosses the upper hand and let the Tories win the election. And now these architects of defeat are telling us that the way forward is to take even greater steps to the right.

They want to sever the Labour Party-Trade Union link (but not the influence of the union leaders) and are floating a pact with the Liberal Democrats. Developing a strategy to defeat the coming Tory attacks is furthest from their minds.

The Left has to put forward a clear alternative, rejecting such proposals. They would mean the end of the Labour Party as a party of the organised working class. And the left must reject the class-collaborationist direction taken by the labour movement leadership over the last ten years.

The fight for socialism requires a link with the struggles of the working class, not the Liberal Democrats. The Left needs to overcome its fragmentation and build a united democratic left which links together all those in the unions, Labour Party and campaigns who agree with such an approach.

Time is short. The formation of a united left will not immediately turn around the

balance of forces in either the class struggle or the labour movement. But it will considerably strengthen our ability to campaign for policies to defeat the Tories and to capitalise on the upsurge when it comes.

It might even enable us to defeat the 'new realists' on particular policies in the short term, something our divisions undermine at present. A failure to grasp this opportunity will leave the Left, and the working class as a whole, in a weaker position in the coming battles.

The Leeds conference of the Left called by the Campaign Group of MPs is the first of a series of conferences which will help the development of such a Left.

The Socialist Movement Trade Union Committee has brought together many militants in the unions, particularly through its 'Unshackle the Unions' campaign against the anti-union laws.

It is holding a major conference on July 18/19. And the Socialist Movement is initiating a 'Conference of the Left' in October.

Rather than be three entirely separate events with separate

agendas, these three conferences should be linked towards a common aim.

The fate of the Labour Left and of the fight in the Labour Party cannot be divided from the fight by and in the unions and the campaigns against particular Tory attacks, such as the Asylum Bill and the ongoing resistance to the Poll Tax.

A revival of the fortunes of the Labour Left depends on an upsurge in the class struggle and its ability to link up with it.

And taking struggles and campaigns forward depends on developing structures in the labour movement which support their aims and challenges those who refuse to do so.

The Left should drop secondary differences and agree to build a united democratic organisation around a basic platform of support for struggles of the working class and specially oppressed.

It would need to fight for labour movement democracy, for keeping the Labour-union link and opposing pacts and coalitions, and for anti-capitalist and internationalist policies.

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How the RAF slaughtered German workers

# Statue unveiled to war criminal

By Paul Clarke

The Lancaster bomber which droned overhead on 31 May, to coincide with the unveiling of the new statue to Arthur 'Bomber' Harris, evoked nostalgia among many older Londoners. Germans who survived the second world war would have had different feelings.

For the Lancasters, together with American Flying Fortresses, were the backbone of the air fleet which slaughtered hundreds of thousands of German civilians between 1943 and 1945.

Bomber Harris, although C-in-C of Bomber Command, did not invent the campaign to massacre German civilians. The decision to unleash a campaign of mass slaughter was made by the British and American governments.

Churchill's air war advisor, Professor FA Lindemann, estimated that German morale could be broken by the mass bombing of working class districts in the 58 German cities with more than 100,00 inhabitants. A third of the population, he reckoned, could be made homeless.

Lindemann's 1942 report was adopted and Harris given its execution. It was announced over the skies of Hamburg on 24 August 1943.

After a week of pounding - the British by night and the Americans by day - 50,000



Statue survives over a shattered Dresden

civilians were dead. This compares with a figure of 51,509 for the total British losses in German bombing raids during the war. In the notorious German attack on Coventry, just 308 people were killed.

Hamburg was notable as the first German city in which bombing had resulted in a firestorm during the war. Part of the bombing plan was to combine high explosive with incendiary bombs, with the deliberate in-

tent of causing a massively destructive firestorm.

Firestorm attacks were on Königsberg, Darmstadt, Brunswick, Heilbronn and finally, in the most notorious raid of the war, on Dresden. Hundreds of thousands were killed in raids on cities like Cologne and Berlin, where the destruction failed to ignite a firestorm.

The firestorm raid on Dresden in February 1943 killed an unknown number of people; 135,000 is one of the lowest estimates, others say more than 200,000. After two waves of British bombers during the night, those attempting rescue work the next day were hit by US Flying Fortresses.

The Dresden raid was the first in history where the survivors could not cope with burying the dead. Tens of thousands died sheltering in cellars, their bodies often fused together in an indistinguishable lump of carbon. One Dresden pensioner recalled:

'One shape I shall never forget was the remains of what had

apparently been a mother and child. They had shrivelled and charred into one piece, and had been stuck rigidly to the asphalt. They had to be prised up. The child must have been underneath the mother, because you could clearly see its shape, with its mother's arms clasped around it.'

The slaughterhouse of Dresden was the curtain-raiser for the firestorm bombing of Tokyo (where 90,000 were killed) and other Japanese cities, culminating in the dropping of the atom bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Bomber Harris enthusiastically and efficiently carried out the orders given by others. Those orders were to slaughter and disperse the German working class - or at least that section of it which had not been sent by Hitler to die on the Russian front.

When Dresden was bombed the Red Army was just 80 miles away and Germany obviously defeated. Indeed the air marshals were concerned lest the bombers lose their way and accidentally attack the Russians.

The excuse for the raid was the Dresden was an important railway centre. Within a few days the trains were running through the city again.

Bomber Harris was only doing his job - just like Eichmann and Himmler with the concentration camps. Erecting a statue to him is an obscenity London can do without.

## The key to the universe?

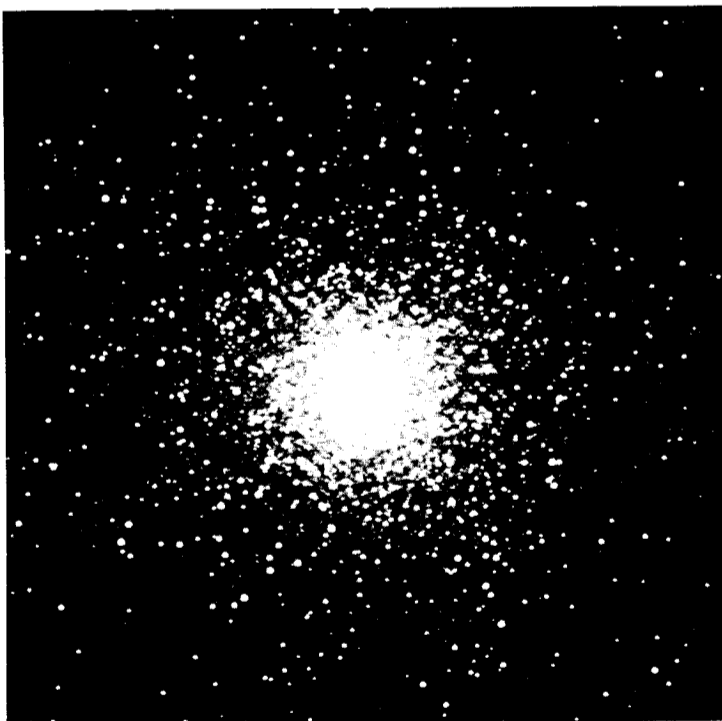
A huge wave of publicity greeted the announcement of the discoveries made by scientists working on the COBE (Cosmic Background Explorer) project. What do the discoveries really amount to? RICHARD ROZANSKI reports.

For cosmologists the COBE discoveries are very important - though they still need independent confirmation and many more details, which should become available over the next few years.

The generally-held model is of a Big Bang explosion some 15 billion years ago which marked the birth of the universe, which has been ex-

panding ever since.

Today we see a universe which is very 'lumpy' - galaxies and galaxy clusters separated by huge amounts of empty space. Yet when the universe started the distribution of matter was almost certainly very smooth and uniform. So how did it end up like it is today? How did the galaxies, and the stars within



them, form?

We know that gravity acts over vast distances and can hold galaxies and galaxy clusters together, but something was needed to kickstart the process when the universe was still very young.

Different theories suggest different catalysts; but how can we test out these theories?

Because space is so vast, when we look into the depths of the universe we effectively look back in time. The light which reaches us from the edge of the observable universe started its journey towards us when the universe was only about 300,000 years old.

The problem is that although

this is very early in terms of the 15 billion-year history of the universe, it was after the formation of galaxies. Thus we cannot directly observe the formation of galaxies and galaxy clusters.

Until the formation of galaxies, the even distribution of matter meant that the universe was clouded in 'fog'; when the fog lifted it would have been possible to 'see for miles' as it were.

At that point the temperature of the universe was about 3000 degrees. As it continued to expand its temperature gradually went down. Now the overall temperature is around C-270 degrees; only three

degrees above absolute zero.

The COBE satellite acts as a sort of thermometer, measuring temperatures in different parts of the universe with astonishing accuracy. The different theories of the origin of the universe predict different temperatures variations. Now we can measure these variations, we can sort out the viable and the non-viable theories. Hence all the excitement.

To cut a long story short, the COBE results are at least compatible with the Big Bang theory.

Hence the general sigh of relief among cosmologists world-wide. Potentially at least the results explain that there were ripples in the fabric of space, when the universe was infinitely small, which worked their way through into temperature differences, creating unevenness in the universe and allowing the formation of galaxies and stars.

Much of cosmology in the past couple of decades has been concerned with the process of the formation of the universe. Once we agree on the general dynamics of the Big Bang, much bigger questions naturally occur; like what 'existed' before the Big Bang?

Perhaps it is thus no accident that recent work by well-known cosmologists like Stephen Hawking are permeated with direct and indirect references to 'God'. In a future Socialist Outlook article I will return to why discoveries in cosmology should be of interest to Marxists and socialists.

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## Outrage's fight against homophobia

Sam Inman's letter (SO May 16) shows a deep misunderstanding of the recent moves to welcome bisexuals into lesbian and gay campaigning groups and the basic debates around autonomy.

The main purpose of organisations such as Outrage! is to challenge and fight homophobia. At the forefront of these campaigns should be those that suffer from homophobia, directly, every day.

This is the principle of autonomous self-organisation, which as Sam Inman says, is an essential prerequisite for building a liberation movement. This includes bisexuals.

The homophobic attacks of the Tory government and the overall moral shift towards the 'normal' family has affected bisexuals as much as lesbians and gay men. The bigots don't differentiate in who they attack on the street.

Of course there are differences in the way these groups are oppressed, but there are differences in the experiences between lesbians and gay men too. The movement has always coped with these by recognising the similarities.

Basically the oppression

results from homophobia and those that face this must unite. Bisexuals have always been involved in this liberation struggle, now we are claiming our right to be there openly.

Behind Sam Inman's comments lies a mistrust in the existence of bisexuality... (didn't Queen Victoria doubt the existence of lesbians once upon a time)... and a disbelief that these strange people could possibly suffer from homophobia. The objection to transvestites and sado-masochists shows a narrow definition of the lesbian and gay community.

Many sado-masochists are lesbians and gay men. Do we have to be a certain sort of gay to have the political ideas to fight?

Autonomy doesn't mean the right for certain sections within the movement to have their own safe space.

Uniting all those that suffer from homophobia is not a diversion into identity politics, but the best way to fight for liberation and it is this active struggle that will politicise the movement, not moves to shut out large sections of the community.

**Angela Bryan  
Sheffield**



Sinn Fein in conference: SO brands them as 'Catholic communalists'

## Socialist Organiser's mirror-image politics

Martin Thomas' letter in Socialist Outlook 22 illustrates the bizarre obsession of Socialist Organiser (SO) with adopting the mirror-image of the politics of the rest of the left.

This causes gross parodies of reality, such as the assertion that Sinn Fein (SF) demonstrate 'increasingly narrow and aggressive catholic communalism'. Thomas' has amnesia with regard to SO's article about the SDLP's 'good news' in the general election (SO 520).

In his letter Thomas says that SO do not 'positively support the SDLP'; but his own paper said that the SDLP is 'a lot nearer to the unity-building politics of real Irish republicanism than are Adams...'. This sounds rather like supporting, in Thomas' own words, 'a bourgeois party'.

You might think this is a single lapse - but no. At the time of Yeltsin's defeat of the

coup in the ex-USSR last August, SO hailed it as a bourgeois-democratic revolution and asserted (SO 496) that 'Yeltsin wants to clear the way for capitalism; but for now he has chosen the side of democracy'.

SO clearly thought that workers must put their faith in the emerging bourgeoisie to gain democratic rights, abandoning ideas of workers organising to fight back against capitalist restoration.

Thomas denies supporting Yeltsin - another position that SO had used to try to differentiate themselves from the left. This means that they abandon the need for working class leadership and independence in the USSR until capitalism is fully restored. The consequences for workers are unavoidable.

Even in their main area of work, SO are now using the courts and undermining the independence of NUS - if you can't win in your own movement, let the bourgeois state

help you out. But would SO have supported the invasion of bourgeois forces into the ex-USSR if they had pledged democracy?

Finally, Thomas tries to defend the high proportion of student supporters of SO 'we print articles by our comrades in the labour movement'. But articles cribbed from the Financial Times do not make up for a lack of implantation in the labour movement.

What has come to define SO has been differentiation from the rest of the left. Theory is based on how you can be different; practice on how you can best attract people.

If this means supporting Yeltsin, the SDLP, the use of the courts and refusing to back the rest of the left over Livingstone, then it is acceptable. This political degeneration deserves to be condemned.

**Rod Marshall  
Nottingham**

## Zionism and apartheid

In the light of the article by Michael Warschawski on racism and Zionism (SO21) and in view of Socialist Organiser's known opinions on the Middle East, it may be useful to examine the connections between the Zionist state and South African apartheid.

During the period when South Africa was the object of western sanctions, Israel was conspicuous by its willingness to continue commercial and military relations.

For example, the R4 automatic rifle used by the South African 'Defence forces' is a slightly modified version of the Israeli Galil assault rifle.

This is the sort of arms industry relationship which normally only exists between military and political allies.

There is also evidence of a connection between the pro-apartheid mentality and Zionism.

On March 9 this year, during the South African referendum, the Reuters news



Palestinians fighting a racist state

agency reported that Andries Treurnicht, leader of the pro-apartheid Conservative Party, said about Israel;

'I have great respect for you (Israeli) people, who do not want to share power with other groups in the Middle

East. If you share power you lose it. If you were ever forced to share power with the Palestinians and the Arabs, you had better run for your life.'

Reuters went on to report that Treurnicht held up Israel as 'an example of the kind of strong state he (Treurnicht) wanted to create for minority whites.'

It is obvious that Zionism and the South African apartheid regime are quite compatible and have much in common.

I am sure even Socialist Organiser would call the apartheid regime and its mentality racist. What then of a Middle Eastern regime which clearly shares many features with apartheid?

**Stephen Kaczynski,  
Reading**

## Who is leading Kurdish struggle?

I am writing to protest at the ill-informed and impressionable article on Kurdistan in SO of the 17th April.

Having been to Turkey three times and Iraqi Kurdistan twice in the last year, and having spoken to Barzani in some detail, I can only conclude that Geoff Ryan has concocted his article by reading the British press and certain sectarian pamphlets.

The reality is different. The Kurds in Iraq support Barzani and the Kurdistan Front because they represent forty to fifty years of historical struggle.

The Kurdistan Front (KF) is a broad united front of eight parties that covers not only the 'big two' of the KDP and PUK but also communists, socialists and the ethnic minorities of the Assyrians and Turkomans.

Currently it controls a population of three or four million and is the longest lasting autonomous government the

Kurds have ever had.

Faced by an Iraqi blockade that has crippled most public services and cut off food and with a Turkish armed forces of over a million glowering across the Northern frontier, now is not the time for any adventurism.

The PKK's strategy of sitting in the Bekaa Valley as a client of Syria and send in small teams to attack targets is one the KF could follow, but it would leave the Kurdish people to the mercy of Saddam and would be a crass betrayal.

All the Pesh Merga we spoke to are determined to stand and fight. Barzani and Talabani are determined to stand with them. British socialists need to raise real support for Free Kurdistan.

The PKK is irrelevant in this debate and is not 'the leadership of the fight for Kurdistan' as Ryan asserts.

**Keith Veness  
Islington**

# Falling asleep on the job

## *My Own Private Idaho*

Starring River Phoenix, Keanu Reeves

Reviewed by Derek Colbert

One of these days there will be a film about gay relationships that gives me hope. But one of these days there will be the start of the end of the system that causes gay oppression.

Until that latter day, it is perhaps only right that films such as 'My Own Private Idaho' tell the truth. In that sense it is a film which is a statement about the alienation that people and particularly gay people live under in capitalist society.

The critical point though is whether this statement includes any way out. Any way out apart from falling asleep...

On the face of it, a rent boy with narcolepsy who falls asleep on his ageing male clientele is quite an amusing scenario. It really pisses them off. But it also seems to piss off River Phoenix (Mike) as well and he has to be continually rescued by his 'best friend' Keanu Reeves (Scott), who is about to inherit a fortune from his father.

Mike and Scott live in an 'underground' world run by a father figure with whom the young men identify. This surrogate father (Bob) is the axis around which the 'scene' in Portland seems to operate.

At the end of the film Scott

is seen at the religious funeral of his dead father, while across the field his former friends mourn the death of their own private father in a pagan-like ritual which ends in a collective outburst of anger and celebration.

Despite the love Mike felt for Scott, his confidant has now married and become respectable and mourns the man he never loved. He can only watch the people who love him from a distance.

Yet neither world, the low-life or the high life offer any answers. The honesty of the former warms you to it in the sense that the people seem to care about each other. But at the same time, the rent boy circuit of Portland is as moribund of love as the high-finance capitalists burying their dead.

Mike ends the film by falling asleep where he can dream of the world he wants to live in. But there is no agenda for changing the world he does live in.

It reeks of the 'life's a bitch and then you die' syndrome. It sees people as the passive recipients of all the world has got to offer and as the selfish grabbers of all they can get. When Scott rejects Mike and Bob, he is only acting according to the way in which the world works.

Just because Scott only has sex with men for money, it means that he has to get married. In one of the most moving scenes, you see Mike crying while he hears his friend making love with his future wife.



Mike (River Phoenix) and Scott (Keanu Reeves)

But as in so many films, the truly gay character is a poor unfortunate soul who suffers not only from sleeping fits, but also unrequited love. Well we all suffer from the latter at some time, but it would be nice to see a film where something other than this happens. Where Mike and Scott make it, or where Mike's fucked-up psyche is not seen as the result of a broken home (there is always a reason why people are gay!).

But the most depressing aspect of this film is that the characters seem so hopeless

(particularly Mike). The film may paint a realistic picture of how life can hurt and we may identify with that.

But there is no idea of how we can fight against this situation. The idea that by joining together against the real

enemy we will eventually succeed. Scott spurns his gay friend and joins the ranks of the bourgeoisie and 'My Own Private Idaho' is yet another film that says that there is nothing you can do about it.

# Not dirty enough for the nineties?

## *Dirty Tricks*

By Michael Dibdin (Faber & Faber, £4.95)

Reviewed by John Lister

If, like me, you're one of those annoying people who likes to laugh at things you're not supposed to, you should like *Dirty Tricks*.

Don't be fooled by the blurb-writer's hyperbole, which promises that "the conventions of sex and violence have never been more satisfyingly explored." The publishers must be pleased the Trades Descriptions Act does not apply.

Crisply written, chirpily cynical and bouncing with gallows humour, Michael Dibdin's latest novel is no searing social commentary – but because of this it makes good summer deck-chair reading.

His anonymous narrator-hero is an amusing, but self-

obsessed, nasty bastard. Maybe that's what struck the common chord with me, but somehow Dibdin persuades the reader to find points in common with him as he takes his jaundiced look at life among Oxford's pampered middle classes.

It is hard not to share his contempt for small business people, his disgust at Thatcherism, his weariness at wine bores and poseurs. Only his ruthless attitude to women is clearly designed to antagonise and prevent us from liking him too much.

The plot has a neat succession of twists and surprises, but if anything the weakness is in the limited number and restricted dirtiness of the tricks on offer.

Perhaps Mr Dibdin is more easily outraged than I am, or maybe today's palate has become jaded from overdoses of television cinema and video fiction. But somehow the mixture of adultery, carnality,

avarice, deception and murder needs to be offered in larger portions or more highly spiced or quirkily presented.

It's rather like ordering a bowl of chilli in a restaurant: all the ingredients are probably there, but the combination of quality and quantity never quite lives up to the promise of the menu.

Dibdin's style – much more readable than in his rather laboured Italian cop thriller *Vendetta* – reminded me of another novel narrated by a witty but thoroughly nasty and vindictive hero, which also makes a good summer holiday read.

Now made into a disappointing Chevy Chase movie, *Memoirs of an Invisible Man* by H.F. Saint has many moments of quite deliciously poor taste comedy. Ignore the film – go straight to the book.

I went looking for my copy to check the publisher – but it had disappeared!

# Virtually a waste of time

## *The Lawnmower Man*

Starring Pierce Brosnan, Jeff Fahey

Reviewed by Kate Ahrens

'THE UK'S first virtual reality film' opened on June 5th. As a marketing technique, this was clearly an asset for this film as it told the potential viewer absolutely nothing about the plot.

Well, I say plot, but in 'reality' it was little more than a vehicle for a lot of trendy computer graphics and special effects.

Virtual reality is computer simulation on a grand scale, using not only visual stimuli but also motion and touch to create the feeling that the view on the computer screen is where you really are.

The film suggests that one of the applications of this technology could be to stimulate areas of the brain that for one reason or another have

not been developed to their full potential. In true Stephen King tradition, the result of an experiment along these lines goes horribly wrong and the result is a 'super-being' with psychotic tendencies.

There is a vague attempt to criticise the way funding from the state into new technology tends to push research into weapons building instead of constructive technology, but since that fact is so obvious anyway, the film's apparent surprise that this might be the case somewhat blunts the point.

The computer graphics and special effects in the film are far and away the best aspect of this film, but that in itself is not a good enough reason to buy a ticket. You could stand outside a computer shop for free and see similar effects.

If you're a fan of Stephen King films (which I'm not) then you may find this film disappointing as it has a remarkable lack of gore. If you're looking for a new twist in the science fiction genre, then this film is definitely worth missing.

# Earth held to ransom – who will pay?

CURRENT RATES of species extinctions are at best three, at worst four, times higher than in any other period of the history of life as seen in the fossil record.

It is a sobering fact and it is against this that all the malarkey surrounding the Biodiversity Convention at Rio's Earth Summit should be judged.

Amidst speculation that George Bush and head of the US Environmental Protection Agency, Bill Reilly, disagree over whether or not to sign the convention, is the indisputable fact that it is certainly *not* in the interests of the US biotechnology industry and agribusiness to sign away their rights to exploit 'third world' natural resources.

Reilly is really only concerned about the US presenting an acceptable face to world leaders at Rio who are vainly trying, in peacock fashion, to display their eco-friendly feathers.

Of course, with Bush still in Washington, it's Reilly who's the one on the hot-spot at Rio with the unenviable job of defending the US environmental record – the country that is the world leader in global natricide.

Bush on the other hand has more than a few problems at home. He will not sign a convention that 'attacks the American way of life, attacks the American family', arguing that the wording of the convention would, if implemented, result in the loss of thousands of jobs in the US. With the US in deep recession, it's the last thing that Bush needs as he runs for re-election.

Bush's objection stems from the fact that developing countries have insisted on *their* right to share the profits generated from biotechnologies developed from *their* natural

By Sam Inman

resources.

Their demands sound perfectly reasonable – even the British government do not disagree with this (although they might have if the British biotechnology industry was a serious competitor to that of the US).

But the other bone of contention – and here the US and British governments are in firm agreement – is that the wealthy nations of the world would, under the terms of the convention, be expected to provide financial assistance to the South, on top of current aid, so that those countries could afford to conserve plant and animal species. No way, say John Major and George Bush, can this be done with the world in recession.



Loose, woolly and exceedingly limited the Biodiversity Convention may be, but socialists should give critical support to its general framework.

If current trends continue into the twenty-first century, by 2052 half the species alive today would be lost forever. Any first year ecology student could tell you what this would mean for the long-term stability of the earth's biosphere.

It is also not true that only 'third world' nature has to be conserved. There are woodlands, forests, moors, grasslands, rivers, beaches,

hills and mountains that need to be protected from the polluting, urbanising ravages of capitalist development in the imperialist heartlands and former stalinist states.

But to make any Biodiversity Convention work to harmonise human need with global ecological stability, requires the fundamental challenging of a world economy based on competition in pursuit of profit.

No amount of noble stunts from Greenpeace and other 'Earth Warriors', Blue Peter appeals, liberal pleadings from Jonathon Porritt, or retreats into 'spiritually connecting with the

Earth' will challenge the crux of the problem itself. Socialists have to fight for a class response to the destruction of life on earth.

Only working class people – now a majority of humanity – have the power to challenge the parasites that own and control those industries, banks and governments that are stretching the biosphere to breaking point.

And that means constantly striving for the fullest active cooperation between socialists, workers and the oppressed the world over – the bedrock of socialist internationalism.

## 300 Club

# Money, money, money!

For just £5 a month you get the chance to win £50 in our monthly draw. In addition you can bask in the knowledge that you have helped Socialist Outlook to continue making life difficult for the capitalists and the New Realist right-wing.

£50 is winging its way to this month's winner Steve Kaczinski, while Fred LePlat receives second prize.

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Please pay to the Co-operative bank PLC 78/80 Cornhill, London EC3V 3NJ (sorting code 08-02-28) for the account of Socialist Outlook Supporters fund (account number 70186297) the sum of:

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Please complete and return to Socialist Outlook, PO Box 1109, London N4 2LU. Do not send directly to your bank.

## 2000 march in Brighton Pride

By Julia Stevens

Brighton this May was the scene for a ten-day long lesbian and gay festival.

Vastly expanded over the Brighton Pride events held last year, the festival attracted hundreds of lesbians and gay men to Brighton from all over the country, particularly for the march towards the end of the week, which at over 2000 people, was the largest such event ever seen in Brighton.

Dani Ahrens, a member of Pink Parasol, the organising committee said, 'The festival was a brilliant success. We achieved our aim of increasing the visibility of lesbians and gay

men in Brighton. As a result of the Pride festival, seven new lesbian and gay groups have now been set up in Brighton.'

Despite concerted attacks from the local media and the local Conservative Party, the public response was generally very positive.

There was a lesbian and gay drop-in centre set up to run throughout the festival, providing resources and information as well as giving away free safer sex kits for lesbians.

A 'Lesbus' toured around Brighton, and there were many event organised specifically for lesbians – something that many lesbian and gay events fail to do.

As well as the highly successful march, there was also a concert – 'Pride in the Park' and a Pink Picnic on the beach to round off the festival. Even the weather was kind!

'We hope this will now become an annual event, and that next year's Pride will be bigger and better than this one,' said Dani Ahrens.

Despite the enormous success of this year's Pride however, the festival has cost a lot of money. Pink Parasol are asking for donations to cover the cost of this year's Pride and to enable them to organise a similar event next year. Please write to Pink Parasol, c/o Brighton Unemployed Centre, 6 Tilbury Place, Brighton BN2 2GY.

# Chaos rules at Euro-Pride

By Rebecca Fleming

AT THE SAME time as the Danes were sticking a spanner in the Maastricht works, Euro-Pride 1992 was steaming full ahead with its bid to become something even John Major could approve of.

Hot on the heels of the privatisation of Lesbian and Gay Pride and the announcement that the political content of this year's event would be a 'celebration of European lesbian and gay identity' against the background of the single market, has come the revelation that, for

the first time, the march and festival are to be separated.

The march will now go from Embankment to Hyde Park, but the festival will take place in Brockwell Park, South London. People will have to make their own way between the two.

Pride organisers blame the police, but it is really an indication of the general depoliticisation of the event. The chaos and confusion caused, coupled with a ridiculously early assembly time, will provide strong incentives for people to skip the march altogether and head for the main attraction – the festival. Of course, this will also protect the public from the en-

during political message of Lesbian and Gay Pride.

The anti-racist and anti-fascist contingent being built is gaining momentum for its project of injecting a much more dynamic and progressive political content into Pride. But the battle to restore Pride to the control of the lesbian and gay community and a real relation to our political agenda will continue long after 27 June.

The Labour Campaign for Lesbian and Gay Rights will be marching with the anti-racist/anti-fascist section of Pride on 27 June. Socialist Outlook supporters will be with the LCLGR contingent.

## Don't read Reed!

By Bob Smith,  
Birmingham GPMU

In the latest assault on union rights in the newspaper industry, Reed Midland Newspapers have launched an attempt to derecognise the print union GPMU and the journalists' union NUJ.

Reed Midland, a free-sheet publisher employing some 400 staff across the Midlands, is determined to force out the unions, drive down wages and attack working conditions.

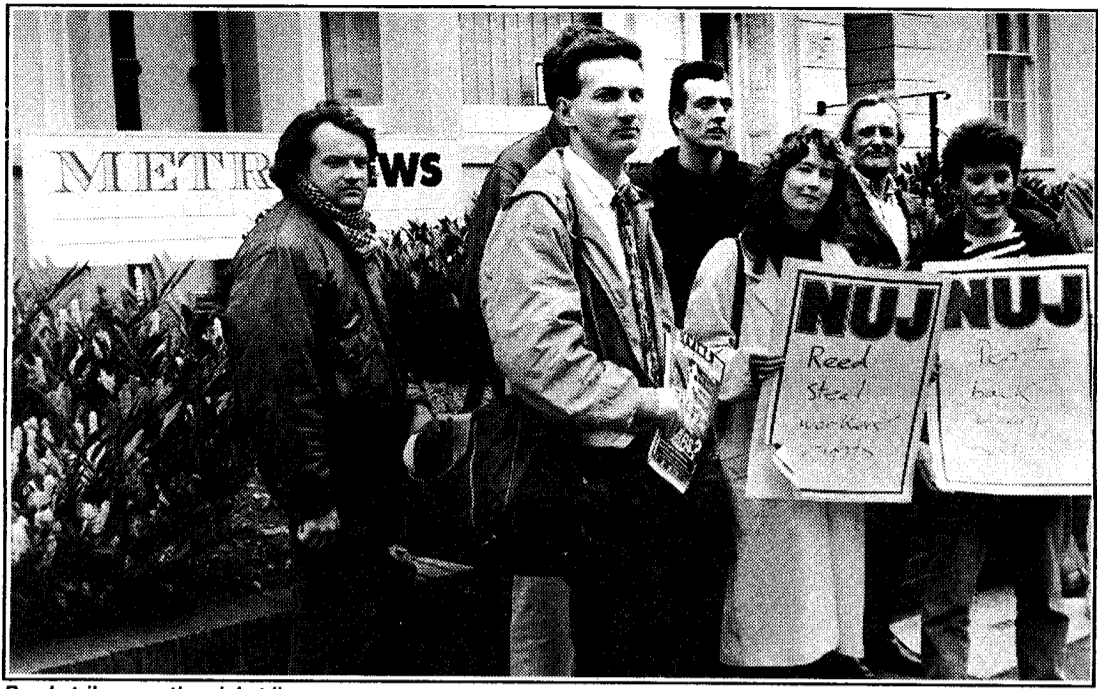
But GPMU and NUJ members have been fighting back, returning personal contracts unsigned and organising boycotts and industrial action across the group. Initial attempts at a boycott on advertising have met with considerable success, and are now to be extended to the *Birmingham Voice*.

But the campaign's successes are no thanks to Birmingham's Labour-led council, which has just given a 700,000 contract to a Reed-based consortium.

Leaders of the Labour Group on Hereford Council have backed protest campaign, however. Jo Kelly, leader of the Group and former Mayor, said 'Journalists at the Hereford Times have always been members of the NUJ and the union has represented their interests.'

Now the company is introducing personal contracts without any consultations and taking away the basic human right of seeking support from fellow workers through a union.'

Speakers/donations to: Judy Rees, 8 Gleave Rd, Birmingham B29  
Tel: 021 415 4914 or Jeremy Dear 021 326 6741 or Miles Barter 021 523 9980.



Reed strikers on the picket line

PHOTO: Marc Kirsten

## Left pressure builds up in NUPE

FOR YEARS the far left in NUPE, the public employees' union, has been isolated in calling for a militant response to employers' attacks.

But after losing 100,000 members in five years, this year's conference saw more than a third of delegates challenge the 'don't rock the boat' line. Early votes for action against cuts and opposition to anti-union laws were lost, but as steam built up the executive were forced to agree national backing to 'properly conducted disputes'.

Debate on the merger with NALGO and COHSE was germyramdered to prevent any real

debate, with a vote on the main document taken before any amendments were put. NUPE branches are now launching a campaign for a special conference on the issue.

Despite a predictably new realist speech from General Secretary Tom Sawyer, his defence of Labour-union links through a 'No Say, No Pay' campaign was backed by delegates. Other positive votes included a refusal to suspend union elections during the pre-merger period and support for the Prakesh Charurimootoo anti-deportation campaign, ending with an ARA-backed demonstration in September.

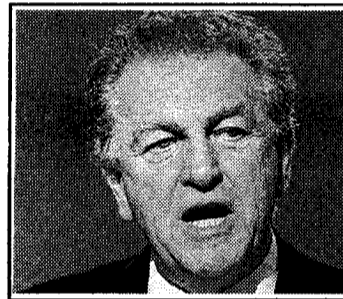
## MSF Conference

# Delegates yawn as stalinists crumble

By Glenn Sutherland,  
MSF London Region  
(personal capacity)

After Labour's election defeat and a period of no significant industrial struggles, white-collar union MSF held a conference dominated by the sterile machine-politics 'MSF for Labour' and 'Unity Left'.

Both the uncontroversial agenda and delegates' lack of confidence meant unanimous



Ken Gill

votes for 'good' and against 'evil'. Neither leadership faction felt strong enough to challenge the union's opposition to all anti-union laws or support for unilateralism, so both were re-confirmed 'on the nod'.

All four candidates for Labour leader and deputy spoke, but the speeches were notable only for the lack of politics. Prescott's standing ovation, following an old-fashioned rant, showed delegates' desperation for anything to relieve the monotony.

But this was also a symptom of the lack of any effective left

organisation in MSF. The political crisis of the stalinist-led 'Unity Left' (UL) was revealed when they refused to stand against arch-right winger Bere Saxby for Vice president.

With the retirement of stalinist General Secretary Ken Gill, UL has now lost all control over the union's apparatus - unless there's a stitch-up with the right.

A small ray of hope was provided by 'Network '90', formed by left activists to campaign for union democracy. Its daily bulletin impartially attacked both leadership factions, becoming required reading for delegates and executive members alike. It also organised a successful joint fringe meeting with the Socialist Movement Trade Union Committee, attracting 70 delegates.

There is a desperate need to forge a real broad left in MSF, but this will only be achieved with the break-up of Unity Left and a fight against their apolitical and bureaucratic methods.

## Crisis of the capitalist cistern

By David Locke

As the early summer turned into the predictable June downpour, the press and television was full of the water crisis. But it seems bizarre that a country like Britain should be apparently suffering from a water shortage.

Both the government and the water authorities are stoking up an old campaign; you the public use too much water, and to stop you doing so we shall make you pay more.

In other words, the mass introduction of water meters is on the way, with consequently much higher charges to the consumer. Thus water consumption will go down and profits will go up.

The water shortage stems from prolonged under-investment in the industry. Up to a third of all water pumped into the system gets lost through leaky pipes. Billions are needed to renew both water provision and the collapsing sewage system.

The media generally keeps a dis-

creet silence about the flood-backs which inundate several hundred homes with sewage each year.

But the crisis of the sewage system is responsible, with urban decay, for the vast increase in the rat population in Britain.

Sewage blockages tend to be worse in areas of high-density population, like council estates.

The privatisation of the water authorities requires two things. First, investors have to see a significant profit. Second, money has to be found to renew the system.

In turn this means higher charges through metering, and attacks on the pay and conditions of the workers in the industry.

Privatisation meant an end to national pay bargaining, with each authority negotiating separately.

The authorities and private water companies have been in the forefront of new management techniques like performance related pay, personal contracts and removal of union negotiating rights.

The water authorities own huge tracts of land, which are often important wildlife habitats or areas of natural beauty.

Much of this land is now threatened by sale for building. Grandiose plans for water leisure centres have been put back because of the recession.

The move to water metering will of course hit the poor, the sick and the elderly hardest. Poor families with several children of course use lots of water for washing clothes, personal hygiene, cooking and flushing toilets. They will have to cut back, as will pensioners.

As the government sees it, the problem is that people have got used to the idea that access to water in a rain-drenched country is a basic feature of normal life, something which all civilised nations expect. Cutting back on water usage will be a threat to hygiene and health.

When you have to cough up £80 for the privilege of having a water meter installed, you will know what to expect.

## 1968 Appeal

Andrew Berry, a Socialist Outlook supporter, is currently doing a project on Revolutionary Politics in France, May-June 1968.

If any of our readers have literature or information from or about that time, please get in touch with him on 0272 427370, or write to him at 10 Berkshire Road, Bishopston, Bristol BS7 8EX  
Many thanks.

## Labour council sacks strikers

In the wake of the defeat of the Camden social workers' strike, and the consequent 'non re-employment' of selected strikers, Newham Labour council has voted to sack Poll Tax workers on a four month strike against redundancy.

Now there is a call going out for all supporters of the Unshackle the Unions statement to immediately write to the council, demanding they reverse the redundancies.

Write to: Council Leader, London Borough of Newham, Town Hall, High Street South, East Ham, London E6.

## What has Doug McAvoy got to hide?

IAN MURCH, recently elected Treasurer of the teachers' union NUT, has been suspended from the union for one day less than six months.

Ian, the Bradford NUT secretary, was the left candidate in the election where he defeated Gordon Green, a leading member of the misnamed Broad Left.

He was charged with various 'offences' arising out of the TV programme 'Class Action', which ran a feature on the NUT earlier in the year.

He was elected as treasurer on a platform which included a careful scrutiny of all aspects of union finances. Many members will wonder what the union leadership feels it has to hide. They may feel it is not unconnected with press reports of big undeclared increases in General Secretary Doug

McAvoy's salary.

Murch's suspension could, of course, also have something to do with the fact that the national executive appear to have the right to nominate his replacement.

Steps are already being taken to mount a campaign for his reinstatement by activists in the union's main two opposition groups - the Socialist Teachers Alliance and the Campaign for a Democratic and Fighting Union.

Motions had already started to be sent to NUT headquarters a few days after Ian's suspension. NUT members should be immediately raising this issue at all levels of the union and supporting the defence campaign that is being built.

The leadership of the union were defeated last time they suspended left wingers, in London. It is essential they get similar treatment this time.

# socialist OUTLOOK

## Tory blitz on London's NHS beds

By John Lister

A LONG, HOT summer and an autumn of crisis seem certain for London's NHS as the Tory government's market reforms bring chaos to health care in the capital.

Already unions in two London health districts - Riverside and Bloomsbury & Islington - are discussing industrial action to fight massive spending cuts that threaten to decimate health services.

Riverside health chiefs have admitted that they are to axe at least 500 jobs as they struggle to balance their books: there are fears that the actual toll of job losses could be double this figure.

World-famous teaching hospitals and vital local hospitals have been losing out because they have been forced under the 'internal market' arrangements to compete at a huge disadvantage in the cut-throat fight for patients and revenue.

As a result many already face multi-million pound deficits for the current financial year, and are turning to massive cuts in services in their efforts to balance their books.

Bloomsbury & Islington health authority, probably the worst affected, faces a huge £20m shortfall on the income needed to run its University College Hospital and Middlesex Hospital, and £3m on the Whittington.

Last week they admitted they plan to close the Elizabeth Garrett Anderson Hospital for women and either the UCH or the Middlesex in order to claw back this shortfall.

PHOTO: Themina Boman



Nurses protest at Bloomsbury cuts (above). Where will they put the patients?



Other big hospitals deep in financial trouble include the opted-out Royal London (£7m), Barts, St Thomas's (£5m), King's (£8m), and Riverside's two teaching hospitals, Charing Cross and the Westminster.

With over 70 percent of NHS spending accounted for by staff costs, these financial problems have already begun to fall most heavily onto health workers.

But the cutbacks, carefully staved off by the government until after the election votes were safely counted, are only just beginning.

In the autumn a Tory-commissioned report by Sir Bernard Tomlinson will outline new proposals to 'rationalise' hospital

services in London. Health Secretary Virginia Bottomley no longer bothers to deny that on his hit-list for closures will be at least one teaching hospital: in fact anything up to three could face the axe.

But health workers and local campaigners can be expected to fight back in strength, as they have done against every major cutback and closure.

Already nursing staff in Bloomsbury and Islington health authority have staged strikes in defence of jobs, successfully overturning staff cuts in the mental health unit, and opposing the loss of 60 nursing posts at the UCH and Middlesex Hospitals.

With profound unease within their own ranks, the Tories remain vulnerable on their NHS policies: the left must work to ensure that every fightback receives the maximum possible support.

(See Page 4)