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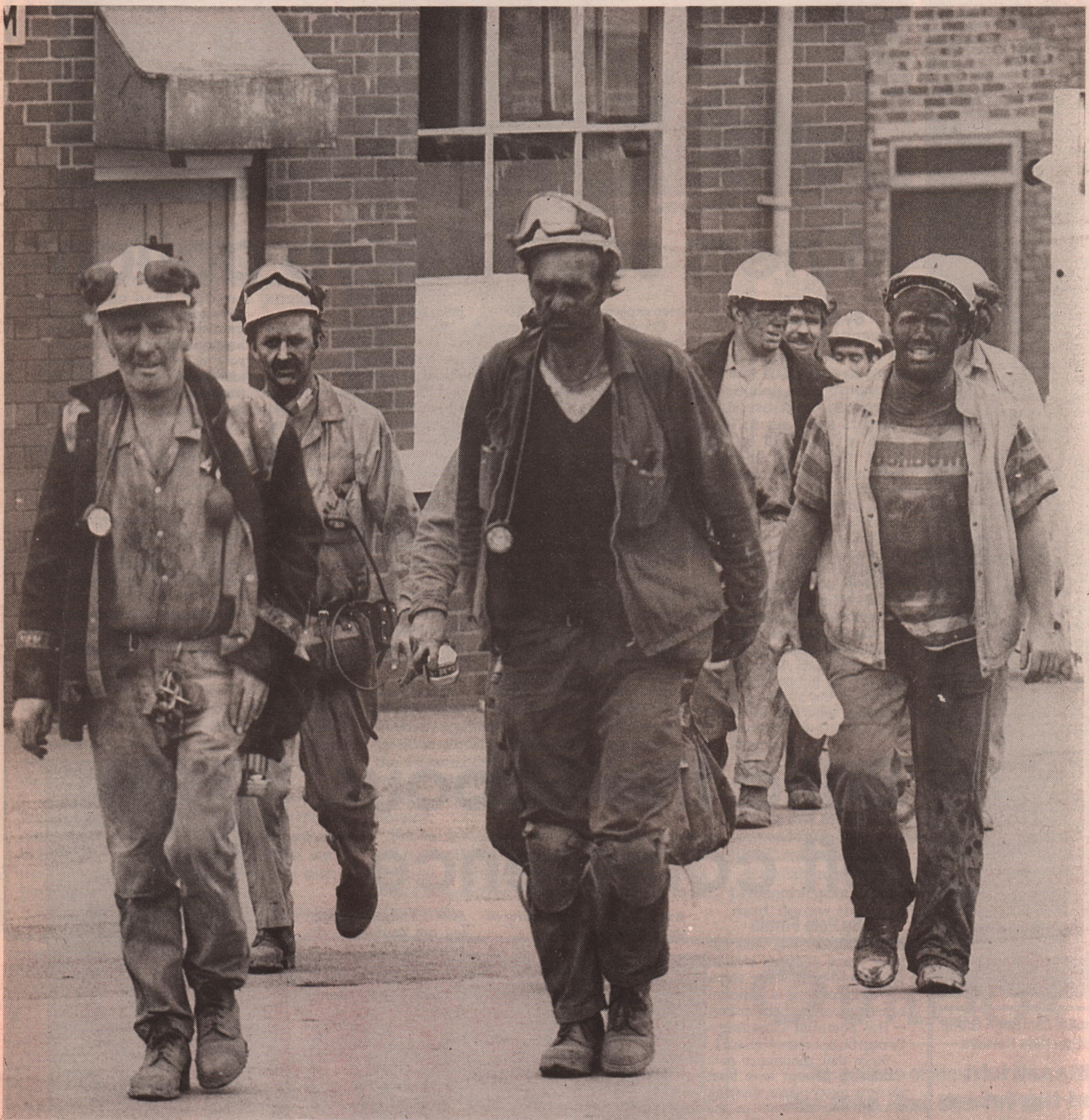
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March 13, 1993

socialist **OUTLOOK**



Don't leave the miners to fight alone

Solidarity

Scargill speaks at Silverdale rally

By Bob Smith

MORE THAN 2000 miners and their supporters marched from Silverdale pit to a rally in Newcastle under Lyme, Staffordshire on Saturday March 6.

Arthur Scargill spoke to the rally. "This is a campaign to save 31 pits from Tory vindictiveness.

"Cecil Parkinson made it clear when he said 'Do not forget what the miners did in 1972'. They do not understand that today's miners were at school in 1972. Tell our MPs to show the same class vindictiveness when they get into power.

"Not just 31 pits, but 16 coal fired power stations and 900 employees face closure. The Tories plan to replace them with gas fired power stations at a 30 per cent cost increase. This is economic madness.

"They could save £1 billion a year on subsidy to the nuclear industry and by stopping coal imports, save another £1 billion.

"I am very pleased that the miners have voted in support of the union's recommendation. We shall now campaign, with all the power at our elbow, for all the jobs threatened in our industry.

"I call on the UDM membership to forget their differences and rejoin our ranks for a united struggle with our colleagues in NACODS and RMT.

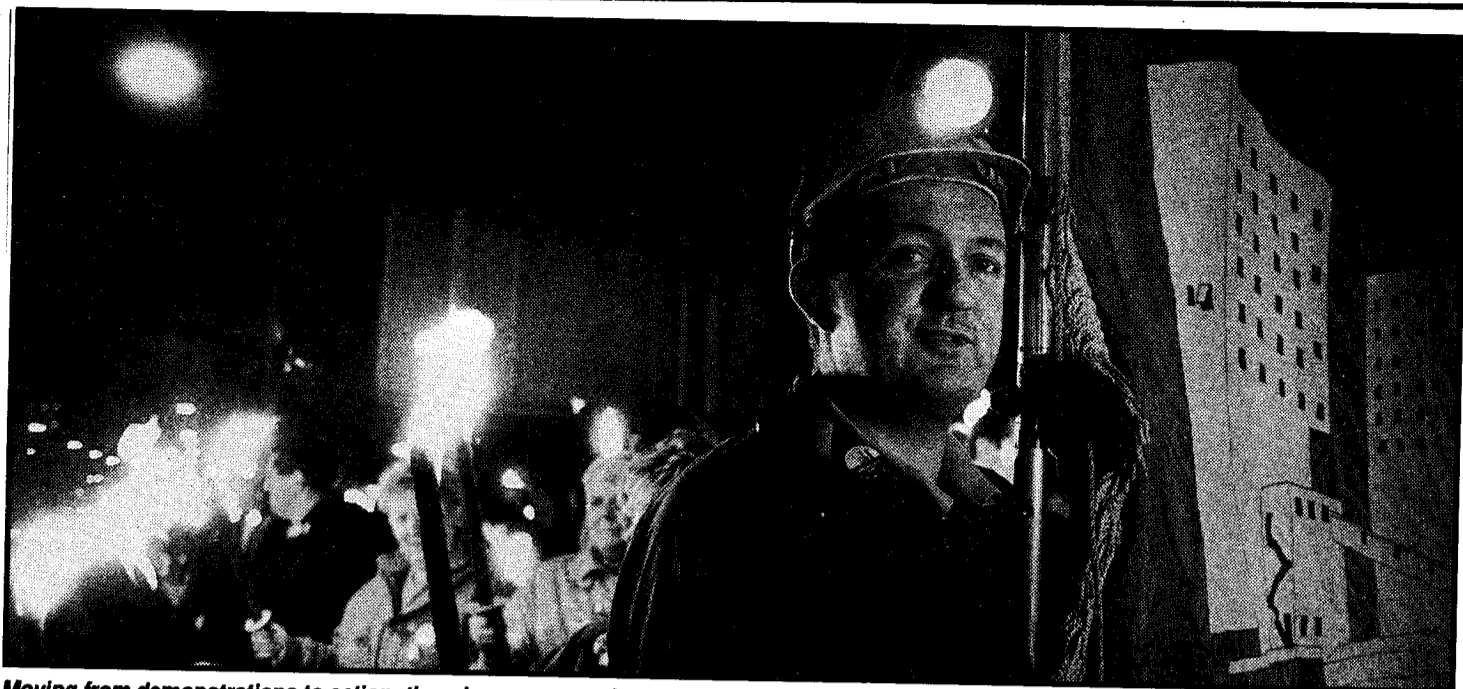
"Don't let us fight alone again! Get out from here, and get your trade union and Labour Party branch to support our rolling action. Get your MP and the TUC to fall in behind our struggle. Certainly their credibility is at stake this time round."

Rose Hunter from Trentham women's pit camp said.

"Get back to your Labour Party wards and tell them to put socialism back on the agenda. Tell the leadership to get behind our struggle this time round. The Tories will be wrecking your community and taking your job next."

Flo Rutter, also from Trentham pit camp said.

"We're all political activists now. Women have a big stake in this struggle. The Tories want to cut family benefits and our quality of life is under threat. Not 31, not 10, not one closure! We are fighting for our communities, our families, our lives."



Moving from demonstrations to action: the miners now need more solidarity

Miners say 'yes' to action

By Bill Sutcliffe

MINERS HAVE said yes to a 24 hour strike against Tory plans to axe 30,000 jobs in the industry as a prelude to privatisation. British Rail workers seem set to join them in what will be the most important labour movement day of action for many years.

The NUM miners' union, pit supervisors union NACODS and RMT railworkers held synchronised ballots against redundancies in their respective industries last Friday.

The NUM result - announced last weekend - paves the way for the first national coal stoppage since the all-out strike of 1984-85. The scale of support for industrial action surpassed the hopes of most militants, who had privately

been expecting a close call.

The strongest backing came from South Wales, with 87 per cent in favour. Other areas in favour were: Nottinghamshire (79 per cent), Lancashire (77), Leicestershire (75), Power Group (68), Yorkshire (66 per cent), Midlands (65), Cokemen (59) and the Northeast (50.1). Areas against were: Derbyshire (46), Scotland (36), white collar (30), North Wales (23).

Overall, 12,913 miners voted to strike, with 8,465 against. Turnout was 60 per cent, low by NUM standards. Areas that voted no are expected to abide by the majority verdict.

The union's executive was due to meet on Thursday March 11 to consider its next move. With April 2 already selected as a Europe-wide day of miners' protest, there is speculation that the strike will take

place on that day.

The NACODS result was due as *Socialist Outlook* went to press. Action from supervisors would paralyse the pits, as it is illegal to work without them. A two-thirds majority is needed under the NACODS rule-book.

The NUM victory will boost activists in RMT, where the official campaign for a yes vote has been lacklustre. The RMT ballot is over some 27,000 job losses in prospect on British Rail, and not formally linked to the NUM and NACODS votes, even though the pits cuts will also mean rail sackings.

Due to the union's balloting procedures, no outcome will be announced until at least March 19. But under Tory anti-union laws, strike mandates only hold for 28 days.

If rail bosses mount a legal challenge, arguing that RMT

have artificially manufactured the dispute, delays in getting a hearing could push the vote beyond its expiry date. Activists must be alive to the danger. The watchword has to be, name the day straightaway and then go for it, 100 per cent.

Outside of the NUM, NACODS and RMT, opportunities exist for those in other unions to link up their demands with coal and rail struggle. This is especially, but not exclusively, true in the public sector.

Once a date is set, we need to bring the biggest labour movement mobilisation in decades behind it. This should mean solidarity strike action wherever this is possible, and lunch-time and evening events where it is not.

Build the Labour left conference

By Pete Firmin

LAST JUNE, over 400 Labour Party activists met in Leeds and took some steps towards forming a national campaign of the Labour Left - the Socialist Campaign Group Supporters Network.

Since that conference new Campaign Groups have been set up in many places, showing that life does still exist on the Labour left. On April 17th a recall conference takes place in Leeds.

The need for a national, democratic force of the Labour left is obvious. The economy and the Tories may be in crisis, but the Labour leadership has no answers.

They removed virtually every policy and democratic measure won by the left in the last 1970s and early '80s - and then lost the 1992 general election. Now they are floundering, mostly trying to claim that they thought of Tory policies first.

John Smith's 'big idea' in his recent Bournemouth speech

was that Labour is the party of individual aspirations.

The best they can come up with is the new buzz word 'Clintonisation' - which amounts to little more than a vain hope that the US Democrats' success in winning an election might rub off on Labour, and an excuse for ditching the party-union link.

The Labour left is weaker than it has been for about 20 years, reduced to one representative on the NEC - Tony Benn - and marginal to Party debate on nearly all issues.

It has suffered mass defections to new realism over the years of defeats in the class struggle, and a high drop-out rate from those despairing of the policy changes and demoralised by the witch-hunt.

Forging a national democratic campaigning body uniting most of the Labour left will not be enough to bring an instant reversal of the left's fortunes. A change in the state of the class struggle is needed to achieve this. However, this

does not mean that nothing can be done in the meantime.

A left-wing acting together on issues where it agrees will be a much more effective and attractive force, offering an alternative to the watered-down Toryism of John Smith.

Links must be built from the beginning with the left in the unions. A campaign around retention of the union link offers the chance to work with wider forces than the existing left.

The April 17 conference will be addressed by the Campaign Group candidates for the NEC this year, but will also discuss campaigning in the areas of anti-racism, defending public services, fighting pit closures and job losses, Maastricht and the economy, party democracy and the 'New World Order'.

This offers an opportunity to discuss linking up party activ-



Campaign Group MP Jeremy Corbyn

ists with campaigns outside, and short campaigning resolutions will be taken on each of these issues.

There will also be discussion on a democratic structure for the network of supporters.

Labour left activists everywhere should be building this conference and working to ensure that we come out of it strengthened for the many battles ahead.

Socialist Campaign Group
Supporters Network

**Maastricht
and the future
of socialism**
**Organising the
left in the
Labour Party**

Saturday April 17th
Sheffield Hallam
University, Pond St
11-5pm

For further details contact:
SCGSN, c/o Jeremy Corbyn,
Red Rose Club, 129a Seven
Sisters Road, London N7

Morale, morals and the right wing backlash

The brutal murder of James Bulger in Kirkby has unleashed a wave of reactionary moral panic, in which all the churches and right wing MPs – from John Patten to Tony Blair – have chimed in. All of them agree in calling for stricter discipline over children, and in re-asserting the importance of ‘family values’. Long sermons about individual responsibility, and respect for the ‘community’ are being endlessly repeated.

This carnival of reaction has been topped off with repulsive scenes in Liverpool, as the homes of children questioned by police have been besieged and ugly crowds have gathered outside police stations and courts.

Junior prisons

Now Kenneth Clarke has come forward with plans for ‘secure training centres’ (i.e. junior prisons) for young offenders aged below 15. Few will be impressed by his claim that these will offer ‘love and care’ to the difficult youngsters consigned to them.

The murder of a two-year old, apparently by children, of course provokes strong emotions. But the causes of such events are being dealt with at the same kind of level as ‘The Omen’; the hunt is on for ‘evil’ children, ‘evil’ parents, and anyone seen as lacking ‘morality’ and (conventional Christian) religious values.

This appeal to a renewed reactionary moral order has to be fought. That can only be done by the left explaining some of the basics, looking at some of the underlying causes. What is it which leads to a brutalisation of children? Why are thousands of kids getting involved in petty crime, drugs and various kinds of violence? Why is truancy an epidemic?

The answer to these questions, of course, is highlighted by the fact that the Bulger murder took place in Kirkby, one of the poorest areas in Europe. Brutalisation of kids comes out of the brutalisation of communities by unemployment and poverty.

It is in those circumstances of deep poverty

and collapsing social services, of no prospects and schools that can’t cope, that children take on the cynicism and despair of their parents.

You don’t have to be a Marxist to understand these basic facts; anyone with a modicum of common sense will understand them.



John Blair or Tony Patten? Bi-partisan bible-bashers

Which makes it all the more unbelievable that Labour’s supposedly intelligent home affairs spokesperson Tony Blair should simply rehash the bilge of the Tory right on these issues.

Ripping off

Of course no socialist in any way defends violence against or theft from working people by other working class people. Responding to the violence of exploitation of the system by ripping off people in the same boat as yourself, or doing violence to them, is absolutely reactionary.

But such values of working class solidarity can be created, not by moral lectures, but only through a strong working class movement which is seen to be really fighting for the most oppressed.

In today’s world, in which the Labour movement is dominated by the defeatist politics of ‘new realism’, that is obviously not the case. The unemployed of Kirkby don’t see anyone – least of all the likes of Tony Blair, who appears to inhabit another planet from working class people – fighting for them. Neither Labour nor the trade union bureaucracy shows any interest in even trying to organise them for a fightback.

So the rich, the Tories and the state rip off the poor; and the poor are more and more victims of petty hoods – loan sharks, burglars, drug dealers – who operate in their own communities. Lacking collective solutions, organisations of struggle and solidarity, personal solutions on the borders of legality predominate.

Targets

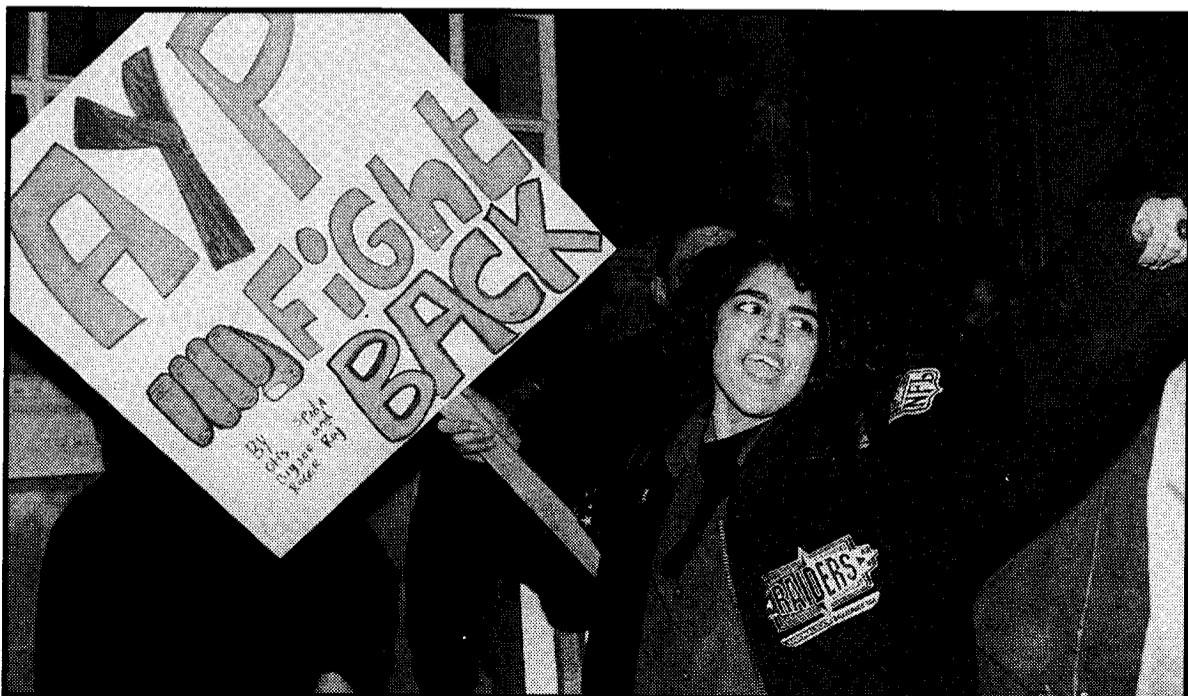
Without a challenge from the left and the labour movement, the field is now wide open to every kind of reactionary priest and witch doctor to deepen this moral panic. Order and discipline will be the themes; the poor, women, lesbians and gay men, single-parent families, black people and the unemployed will be the targets.

Yes, there is a moral crisis in Britain; the whole of the capitalist class and the political establishment are deeply affected by it. Their moral code – centred on greed, self-interest and exploitation, backed up by brute force of the state – has led to the kind of social breakdown they are now so ready to deplore.

Presiding over a collapsing economy, they have no ideas and no way out. Their only morality is to save their own skins, the best they can.

For the working class the crisis is more one of morale than morals. A few days of mass action would do more to rebuild self-confidence and social solidarity than a lifetime of sermons from cynical church-going careerists like Blair, Smith and co.

If the labour movement doesn’t step into the present vacuum, and offer workers a way forward, the law and order brigade will.



Leicester teenagers – outraged at city council plans to shut down the only youth club in the heavily Asian Belgrave area – protested outside a meeting of the authority last week. The Asian Youth Project is also used heavily by Afro-Caribbean and white youth in the area. Details from AYP on 0533 530152.

The politics of Malcolm X
The man and the myth
Thursday 18th March 7.30pm
Unity Club, 96 Dalston Lane, Hackney E8

with

Martha Osamor

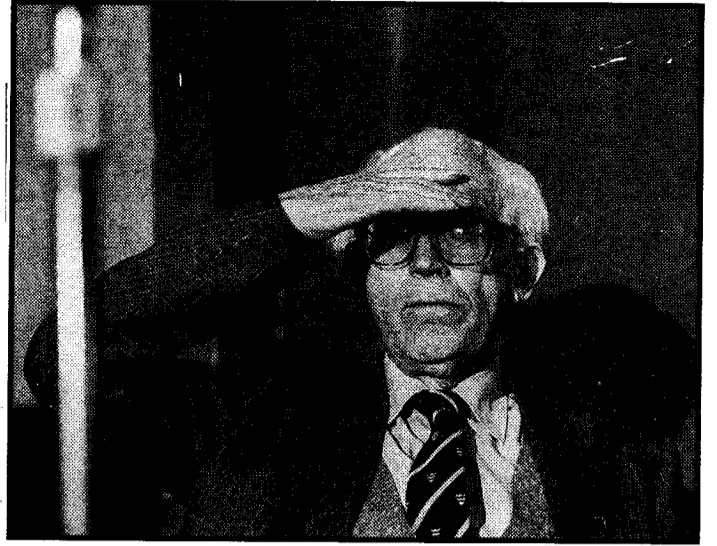
Godfrey Mdingi,
Workers

Organisation for
Socialist Action
(South Africa)

Patrick Bishop,
black NUS
presidential
candidate

Bala Kumar
Upali Cooray





Peter Tatchell (left), on foot, on the knocker; Peter Tatchell's knocker (above) Michael Foot - clashed over 1983 by-election

10 years after the Bermondsey by-election, DAVE OSLER recalls how Labour let the rabid media call the tune

A landmark in Labour's retreat

THE TENTH anniversary of the Bermondsey by-election passed by last month, all but completely unnoticed. A shock result saw a rock solid Labour seat fall massively to the Liberal Party, in whose hands it remains to this day.

But Bermondsey was a lot more than a routine by-election hammering. In retrospect, it can clearly be seen as the turning of the Bennite tide. The very symbolism is striking.

The seat had been making national headlines for 15 months after sitting MP Bob Mellish - a chief whip under Harold Wilson and knighted by the Pope, no less - was deselected in favour of Peter Tatchell.

A young Australian, Tatchell was not only a leftwinger but a long-standing gay rights activist. Today he is best known for his advocacy of 'queer politics' as part of Out-Rage!

Scargill

This was in 1981, the year that Tony Benn only just failed to win Labour's deputy leadership, Arthur Scargill launched his successful campaign to become president of the National Union of Mineworkers, and the new administration at the Greater London Council under 'Red Ken' Livingstone was implementing radical

policies.

Full of wonder at these inspiring developments, a kid called Dave Osler joined the Labour Party just over the river in Wapping. Bermondsey was to be my first time on the knocker.

Threatened

Following Bermondsey Labour Party's democratic decision to remove him, Mellish met party leader Michael Foot in December 1981 and threatened to force a by-election unless the left was tackled. With the newly formed Social Democratic Party, a rightwing split from Labour, clearly on a roll after by-election triumphs in Croydon and Crosby, Foot feared certain defeat.

Soon afterwards, Foot stood up in the House of Commons and announced that Tatchell was "Not an endorsed candidate of the Labour Party and as far as I'm concerned never will be".

As public justification for the outburst, Foot used an article penned by Tatchell for what was then known as *London Labour Briefing*, which had called for extra-parliamentary activity against the Tories. The piece was scarcely a call to insurrection; Tatchell was talking about lobbies, marches and non-violent civil disobedience,

But Foot had effectively given Fleet Street the green light: *The Sun* leader the following day stormed: "Red Pete - otherwise known as extreme leftwinger Peter Tatchell - symbolises everything that is appalling in the Labour Party. A Marxist, who has been in the Labour Party only a few years, he has contempt for democracy."

Endorsed

"Tatchell was openly referred to as a 'Marxist revolutionary'. Even a BBC news bulletin referred to him as 'the Militant Tendency candidate for Bermondsey'."

Within the week, Foot's position had been endorsed by the National Executive Committee, although the body later changed its mind, allowing him to run. The Party that month also launched the investigation into *Militant* that was to result in the expulsion of the paper's editorial board the following year.

The two issues became intertwined in the press's collective mind. Tatchell was openly referred to as a 'Marxist revolutionary'. Even a BBC news bulletin referred to him as 'the Militant Tendency candidate

for Bermondsey'

Best-placed

All this was nonsense. For the early eighties, Tatchells politics were no more than run-of-the-mill Labour leftism. Any backing he received from Militant was motivated by purely tactical considerations after Tatchell emerged as the best-placed leftwinger in the selection process. Indeed, Militant would clearly have preferred to run one of its own sympathisers.

Meanwhile, Mellish quit the party in August 1982. Rather than run as an independent, he put up a henchman, John O'Grady, as a 'Real Labour' candidate. *Private Eye* alleged that the campaign was financed by Sir Nigel Brookes, chair of the London Docklands Development Corporation, a government-imposed quango that usurped much power usually in the hands of local authorities.

Abuse

Brookes strongly denied the suggestion. But it is indisputable that both Mellish and O'Grady were paid vice-chairs of the LDDC. Brookes was also head of Trafalgar House, which then owned the *Daily Star*, *Daily Express* and *Sunday Express* and 50 per cent of the *London Standard*. These newspapers joined the rest of the tabloid and middle market press in one of the most sustained campaigns of abuse ever faced by an individual.

Much of this was based on Tatchell's homosexuality, which he persistently refused to confirm or deny. While this was clearly his right, it was almost certainly a mistake. Given his history of gay rights activism, it was inevitable that the gutter press would extract maximum mileage by innuendo. Many gays felt that Tatchell's ambivalence reinforced the idea that being gay was something shameful.

Tatchell himself has since ar-

gued: "The majority [of local Labour Party members], including myself, felt ideally that I should come out. But what convinced the majority that I should not discuss my sexuality was that gay rights would then become the predominant election issue ... whilst gay rights was a very important issue, we also felt that jobs, disarmament and the equality of other minorities should not be overshadowed."

But by now the totally fabricated 'Red Pete went to gay Olympics' stories were in full swing ('he was apparently a marathon runner in, would you believe it, Queensland') and the 'fuck off back to Australia, you communist poofter' graffiti campaign was well advanced.

Barrage

Canvassing the council estates with Clive Wood (now a Socialist Workers Party member), I found the cumulative effect of the barrage to be devastating. I imagine that working in Tory strongholds is a doddle by comparison.

The anti-Tatchell vote gravitated around the Liberal Simon Hughes, who polled 17,017 (57.7 per cent). Tatchell got just 7,698 (26.1 per cent), while O'Grady mercifully lost his deposit with 2,243 (7.6 per cent). The Monster Raving Loonies stuffed both the Communists and the Revolutionary Communists. The result represented a 21,075 vote turnaround, from an 11,756 majority to a 9,319 vote defeat.

Among the ironies that later emerged, was that Simon Hughes - who avoided declaring his own sexuality - was found to have worked on the preparation of his own party's gay rights manifesto.

Four months later there was a general election, with Hughes holding the seat as Labour to crashed to its worst showing nationally since 1918, polling just 28 per cent.

Pictures

While falling short of declaring 'it's OK, he's not bent' in 72-point type, publicity material for Labour's Bermondsey candidate, John Tilley, in the 1983 General Election featured his wife carrying the couple's babe-in-arms.

Islington South, meanwhile, elected Chris Smith, who later came out and is still Britain's only out MP. He has since won front bench preferment. But then, nobody ever called him 'Red Chris'.

Some 2,000 council workers in Walsall, West Midlands, held a half-day strike on March 1, protesting against their Tory employers' plans for mass sackings and service cuts. Up to 400 jobs are on the line following a decision to slash the budget by £8m. Many of those affected work as school dinner staff.

The strikers – members of the NALGO white collar local government union, organised a mass meeting, followed by a mass lobby of Walsall Town Hall. Much of the anger was directed against council leader Mike Bird, who argued that local government unions should follow the example of Labour Sheffield and work two days without pay in a bid to save the authority money.



Knives out for pay in Sheffield

By Mark Mullion

ALMOST 20,000 Sheffield council workers last week voted to accept a 3.5 per cent pay cut in exchange for a bosses' promise to put 1400 sackings on hold.

Only the works department, which employs some 2000 manual workers, is holding out, after stewards campaigned for a no vote. Negotiations with council chief Mike Bower are continuing. Teachers are excluded from the deal, because their terms and conditions are settled nationally.

The wage slash move – at a time when the Tories are trying to impose a national 1.5 per cent public sector pay norm – comes after the once-radical Labour council has decided to comply with a government-imposed spending limit of £366m and set a legal budget for 1993-94.

At Christmas, it warned the unions that it needed to sack 1400 workers, in a city already suffering from 14 per cent unemployment, in order to balance the books.

NALGO, dominated locally by Democratic Left, successfully proposed the idea of all workers taking three days unpaid leave instead. The money saved was spent on enhancing voluntary redundancy packages. The move contributed to the climate which led to the current deal.

Having secured the formal consent of 61 per cent of the workforce, employers are proceeding to impose it on everyone. The package gives

everyone either an hour off the working week or seven days' extra leave entitlement.

This 3.25 per cent reduction in working hours ostensibly cancels out the pay cut. But workers struggling to manage on current take home pay are unlikely to see things this way.

The council has guaranteed to pay this year's nationally agreed pay rise, with settlement date due in July, but said that next year's increase depended on savings being implemented.

Each union in the authority balloted separately, with results revealing significant discrepancies. NALGO voted 65 per cent in favour, NUPE 57 per cent, GMB 53 per cent and TGWU 51 per cent. Many lower paid workers said they voted against because they simply cannot afford to see their take home pay viciously slashed.

Labour MP Jeremy Corbyn argued that "ministers are trying to turn the clock back to the 1930s, when workers took wage cuts to save their jobs. It did not work then and it will not work now. This is the economics of the mad-house."

Mr Bower has pledged to slash managerial and supervisory jobs despite the sacrifice, arguing: "We need to cut the cost of services without cutting the services."

He has received congratulations from the Sheffield Development Corporation, the Chamber of Commerce, the Cutlers' Company cutlery bosses' club and the city's two universities.



Teachers in Leicestershire staged a half-day strike on March 3 against threatened cuts in services and job losses. Over 1,000 NUT members walked out across the county, and vented their anger in a rally outside County Hall.

Public Sector Alliance A missed opportunity

By Alan Davies

A LEOPARD doesn't change its spots. The truth of this was brought home at the Public Sector Alliance (PSA) conference at Stoke last Saturday.

The conference was dominated by Militant and the mode of operation from the days of BLOC remained unchanged.

As in the old days when the Communist Party Stalinists ran the Liaison Committee for Defence of Trade Unions, opponents were made to jump through hoops to get delegated or to have an influence on the conference.

Protests at the start, that properly delegated delegates had been excluded, were voted down by the Militant majority at the conference.

The stress on the delegate basis reflected a grandiose view by the organisers that the conference could "organise tens of thousands of workers" as claimed in the opening speeches.

What was needed however, was a conference which could organise and coordinate the activists in the individual unions in a much more effective way. Also voted down, was a propo-

sal for a more open organising committee, with sponsoring organisations having the right to send delegates to it.

Disappointing

The conference was disappointing. 550 people attended, two-thirds of them delegates, and a series of unobjectionable resolutions were adopted, backing the miners and calling for one-day national strikes to start a serious fightback against pit closures and in defence of the public sector more generally.

The purpose of the conference however, was difficult to see. What effectively happened was the setting up of little more than a front organisation for Militant.

The narrow basis of the conf was its biggest problem. The platform was narrow (and almost entirely male) and NUPE pulled out following a circular from the TUC. Directives were sent by the NUT and some other unions, to every local area, warning them against attending the conference.

The only national union represented was UCATT. There were no MPs and no representative at a national level

from the NUM.

The guest speakers invited included a very good account of the Timex dispute, but important current initiatives such as the pit camps were absent.

A national committee for the PSA was set up which is dominated by Militant and was given unlimited powers of co-optation. The regional basis of the committee (2 delegates per region) is a clue to what the Militant are doing.

United action

The real need was to organise within the individual unions to achieve what everyone wants which is united action across the public sector. There was nothing along these lines set up at the conference and the proposed local bodies will not be in a position to achieve this.

There is no doubt that a real objective basis exists for united and co-ordinated action in the public sector, or that the left could play a major role in forging this action.

Such a role however, could only be played by an open and inclusive initiative and not one tailored to the requirements of a particular current.

Councils' jobs toll

By Eugene Slack

SOME 53,000 local government jobs were axed last year, in addition to 31,000 which went in 1991. And there is far worse to come.

Stephen Bubb, secretary of the Association of Metropolitan Authorities, claimed last week: "We believe that up to 100,000 more local government jobs will be lost in the next 18 months."

The *Financial Times* early estimated that there would be 90,000 council sackings in the next year alone. Whichever figure you select,

the result is a wholesale jobs massacre.

Around 5,437 local government jobs were axed in just one week last month, bringing the total number of sacking announced since the start of February alone to 25,971.

Labour environment spokesperson Jack Straw released detailed figures compiled by CLES European Research Network on behalf of the Association of Labour Councillors.

The statistics are based on planned or actual reports in the national, local and specialist press, and CERN's own survey work.

Socialist Outlook candidate fights self-destruction of NUS

Students in fight to save union

By Andrew Berry and Simon Deville

SOCIALIST OUTLOOK students are standing a black candidate for NUS president. Patrick Bishop, an overseas student who is a member of the Belgian Trotskyist *Jeune Guard Socialiste*, is standing on a platform opposing the destruction of the National Union of Students planned by its executive.

The Socialist Outlook executive slate of four, stands for left unity to tackle the Tory onslaught against students and the madcap plans of the executive.

The NUS executive, led by right-wing members of NOLS, the Labour student organisation, have put forward radical proposals to depoliticise and scale-down student organisation.

Voluntary

Their consultative paper, due to go the Easter NUS conference, proposes two key changes - voluntary membership of the student union by individual students, and that NUS and affiliated unions have charity status.

This changes would have a spectacular effect. Organisations with charity status are subject to regulation by the Charity Commissioner, and are meant to be non-political. Student unions could only possibly campaign on issues proved to be directly relevant to students; and the interpretation of this would be in the hands of the Charity Commission.



New proposals will put an end to NUS campaigning

The long tradition of student union campaigning on issues such as racism would be destroyed at a stroke, and unions reduced to organisations providing entertainment, travel and similar services.

Safeguard positions

The proposals are a pre-emptive strike by NUS leadership, in advance of what are expected to be wide-ranging proposals by the Tories. The executive hope to safeguard their bureaucratic positions by 'getting their own house in order', at the expense of the mass of students.

Higher education is being radically overhauled. The Tories are boosting student numbers to take people off the dole queue, but providing much worse facilities.

Student poverty is almost universal. As student numbers go up in terrible conditions, students need a vigorous campaigning union to fight for their interests and link up with other groups fighting the Tories.

This is exactly what the Tories plan to stop, now with the able assistance of the NOLS NUS leadership.

Other planned changes include the abolition of union general meetings, so that students could only decide policy through elections and referenda. This goes hand in hand with changes already made, abolishing the NUS national December conference.

Uncontrollable

The bureaucratic clique at the top of NUS would be supplemented by uncontrollable little cliques at college level.

The left in NUS is hampered by the lack of effective fighting co-ordination. The largest left group, the SWP, builds itself in glorious isolation, substituting narrow party-building for political effectiveness.

'Left Unity', the Socialist Organiser front, has been compromised by widely known plans to take NUS to the capitalist courts, as well as unprincipled deals with right-wing groups.

Also on the Socialist Outlook slate are Andrew Berry, Louise Whittle and Simon Deville.



Campaigners protest at abortion ban in the Republic

Legalise abortion in six counties

Ireland's hidden toll of misery

By a Special Correspondent

AMID the furore over abortion in the Irish Republic, the fact that abortion is still illegal in the Six Counties has been overlooked. Every week at least 10 women from the North make the journey to the mainland to have abortions.

But many are forced by lack of cash or social pressure to have unwanted children. Others resort to backstreet abortionists, still doing good business in this part of the 'United Kingdom'.

Beyond the toll of unwanted children and backstreet terminations, the anti-abortion law has a dire impact on the availability of contraception advice, and on ante-natal care.

Pre-natal scans, especially amniocentesis, are generally not available, except to articulate, middle-class women who demand them. The reason is that the detection of abnormalities could lead to a request for an abortion. There is even a widespread social stigma against having scans for this reason.

Bigots

The one Brook Street clinic to have opened in Belfast has been regularly picketed by anti-abortion bigots. The clinic gives only contraception, not abortion, advice; but the anti-abortionists argue that contraception for teenagers makes them more interested in sex and thus more likely to have unwanted pregnancies.

The denial of ante-natal screening to working class women is just part of the conspiracy to prevent abortions. The Northern Ireland Office gives an extra 5000 compensation to rape victims who become pregnant - in return for a written agreement not to have an abortion.

The lack of availability of regular pre-natal scans naturally leads to the birth of a disproportionate number of children with acute disabilities.

Some women who have had an early scan in which a slight abnormality was picked up, and who subsequently were not given further tests, have been shocked to find their children suffered from Downs Syndrome or spina bifida, with no advance warning.

Because Northern Ireland is a relatively isolated and small community, the incidence of congenital defects is twice the European average; a natural case for universal and regular scans for pregnant women, not the denial of this facility.

The 1967 Abortion Act was never introduced in the Six Counties. As a result abortion is governed by the 1861 offences against the Person Act, which makes it unlawful to 'illegally procure' an abortion.

No guidance

Since there is no further guidance about what it means to 'illegally procure' an abortion, doctors fear this covers all terminations.

But some GPs do refer women for abortion, and some gynaecologists do perform them, but in secret and in defiance of the law. Because this is clandestine, the beneficiaries are overwhelmingly middle class women who have the resources and contacts.

For the bulk of working class women, especially young women with little money and often living at home, things are much more difficult. Raising the money to go to Britain in many cases means going to a loan shark. And then there is the difficulty of explaining a three-day absence, against the background of heavy social pressures on both sides of the Nationalist-Loyalist divide.

Another breach in the anti-abortion consensus is the bizarre fact that the DSS sometimes provides the money for women to have abortions in England, a cynical economic calculation that social security payments will be less without further children.

Churches united

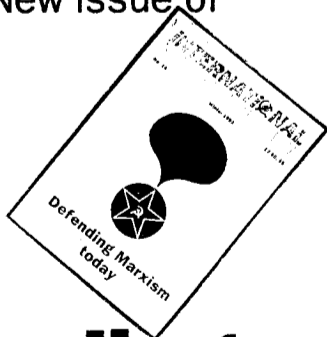
Abortion is an issue on which the all the churches in the Six Counties, Catholic and Protestant, unite.

No 'mainstream' politician has been prepared to raise his head (it's generally 'his') above the parapet of religious reaction and bigotry to raise a challenge on this issue. Many women activists complain that their demands are put to one side while the war goes on.

It's time for the political left in Britain to alert progressive and democratic public opinion to this little-discussed corner of tyranny and misery.

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(no. 14)



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Keep watch with Timex strikers!

By Bill Sutcliffe

THE TIMEX watch plant dispute in Dundee is a crucial test of strength for the entire labour movement. The effective mass picketing, high levels of militancy and widespread solidarity on display are an example to trade unionists everywhere.

Some 300 assembly workers have been sacked by bosses of the American-owned multinational, in the biggest mass dismissals since the News International dispute of 1986-87.

The AEEU is defying a court injunction to enforce the Tories' 'six-picket-only' rule, with convenor John Kydd and deputy convenor Willie Lesslie arguing they would rather go to prison than cave in.

Around 70 scabs are being

bussed in daily. Many of them are school leavers, while others are former temporary workers at the plant.

In addition, a small number of engineers from Portsmouth firm Turnright, where Timex boss Peter Hall was formerly managing director, are staying in a local hotel in order to work at the factory.

Some 90 MSF members are also crossing the picket, with supervisors thought to be training the scabs. MSF activists must demand they are called out.

In a successful bid to stop the strikebreakers' coach, John Kydd senior, AEEU district official, deliberately stalled his car in front of the gates on Monday last week and refused to move. The scabs faced 45 minutes of heckling from the 200-strong picket line until



Timex picket line

police got them in through another entrance.

Labour movement support has been magnificent, with donations of £1100 from Longanet pit complex in Fife, £1000 from Glasgow Rolls-Royce workers, and a £1-a-week levy from British Aerospace. Street collections are bringing in £800 a day. Collections must be organised wherever possible.

Timex convenor John Kydd junior, addressing a Scottish Militant Labour conference, called on the Scottish TUC to

organise a day of action to enable mass picketing at the factory. The demand should be taken across the movement.

Management commenced a lock-out on 15 February, after employees refused to accept a 10 per cent pay cut, three hours

on the working week, and other changes for the worse in pensions and other benefits. The sackings followed shortly.

Donations/messages of support to AEEU offices, 2 Union Street, Dundee, tel: 0382 22406

Don't miss it!

Don't let Tories charge for the Pill!

By Marion Brain

THE TORY government is launching another attack on women's rights and ability to choose what method and brand of contraception they use.

In reviewing the supply of contraceptives to Family Planning Clinics and GPs, they propose that the variety will be cut back and that doctors will be required to prescribe on the basis of cost rather than just suitability.

Patients wanting to continue with their accustomed brand will have to pay the full cost - which could be from £11 to £33 for three months' supply.

We must defeat this idea and join with the National Abortion Campaign and insist that the government stops this review at once.

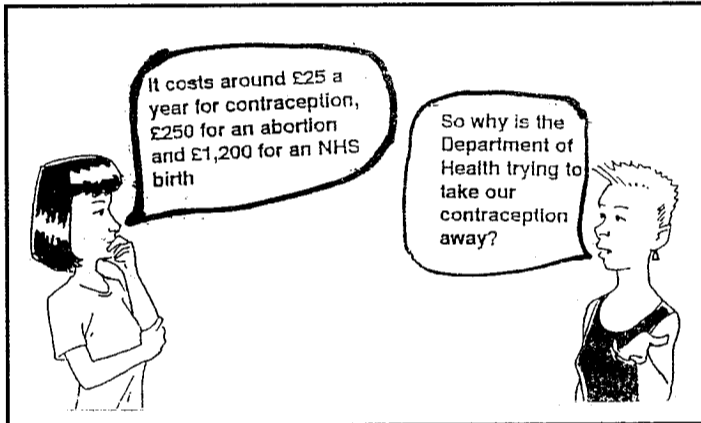
The National Abortion Campaign have produced campaign postcards to be sent to MPs. They are also encouraging people to write to their MPs to emphasise the fact that to reduce the range of contraception will increase unwanted pregnancies and abortions - supposedly the opposite of the government's much-vaunted 'Health of the Nation' policy for health promotion.

Those worst hit would be young and poorer women who could not afford to buy their own contraception.

We have to defeat the Tory attack now before they decide that they will go the whole way and make women pay for their contraception.

Defend the principle that contraception is free at the point of use. Send donations to NAC.

NAC can be contacted at: The Print House, 18 Ashwin Street, London E8 3DL.



Fake 'commission' is anti-abortionist front

By Marion Brain

DAVID Amess, MP for Basingstoke, failed in his attempt to undermine the 1967 Abortion Act when his Ten Minute Rule Bill on opposing sex selection was defeated.

We must also organise to ensure that the anti-abortionists' fake commission is exposed.

Now anti-choice groups have set up an 'independent commission' under Lord Rawlinson of Ewell to examine the 'operation and consequences of the Abortion Act'.

This group of prominent anti-abortionists, includes David Alton, Dr Margaret

White, Peggy Norris, Mary Kenny, Professor Norman Stone, Catherine Francoise and others.

Invitations to give evidence have been sent out on House of Lords headed notepaper and adverts asking women to send their experiences of abortion have been placed in the glossy women's magazines.

The National Abortion Campaign wants members and supporters who see these ads to write to the magazines concerned pointing out that this is not an independent body and should say this in the ad.

If you write to the commission, send copies to the National Abortion Campaign.

Bigots aim at NAC union link

THE LATEST issue of Human Concern, SPUC's newspaper, urges its members to 'Target the union movement' and get resolutions to change trade unions' pro-choice policies.

National Abortion Campaign supporters need to be aware of this and also mount a counter offensive.

This calls for redoubled efforts to ensure their trade union branches and regional bodies are affiliated to NAC, and therefore receiving the information needed to fight these anti-choice groups.

Outlook for Socialism '93 EUROPE'S CRISIS: SOCIALIST ANSWERS



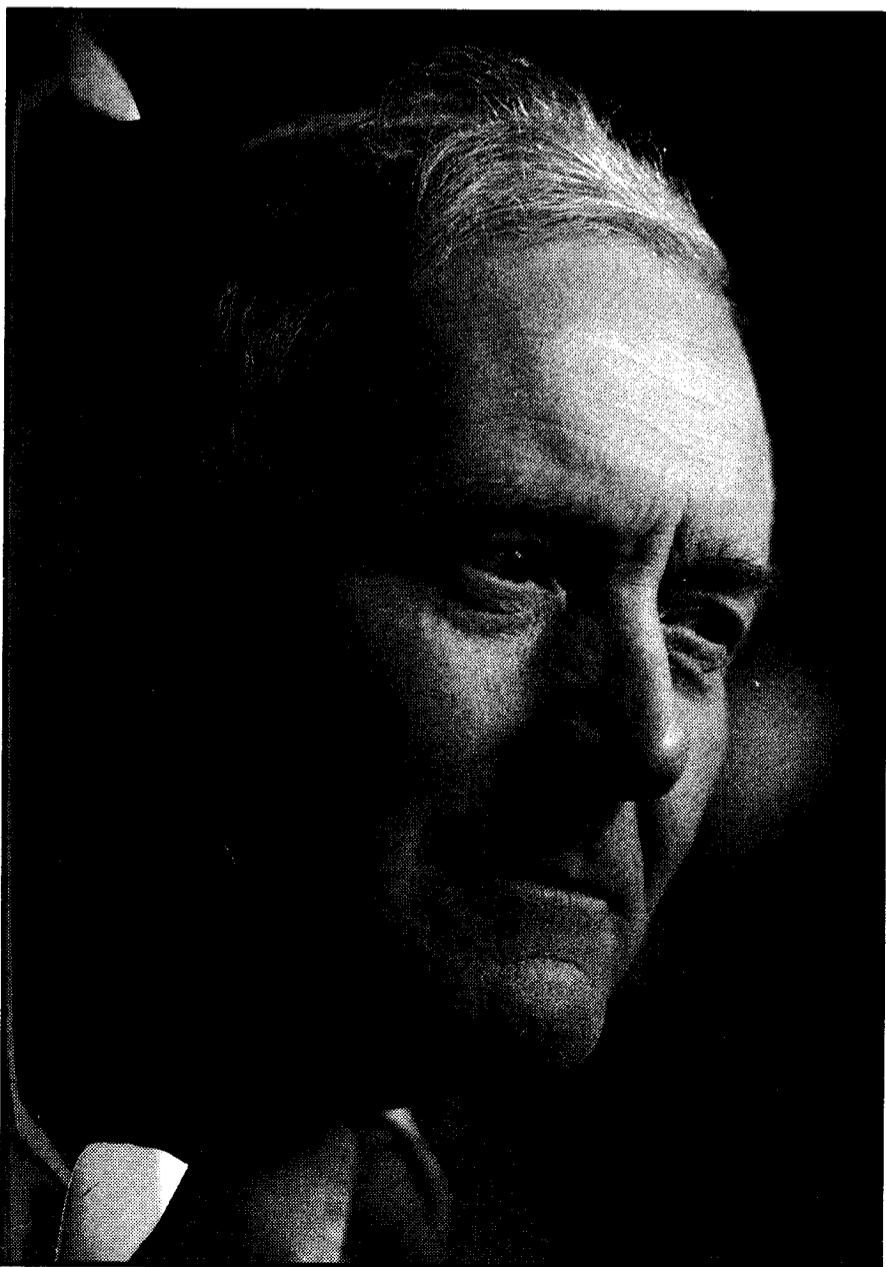
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Saturday March 13 9.30am-7.30pm
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Italian pensioners fight against austerity measures

Maastricht, socialism and the labour movement



Tony Benn

Last year TONY BENN introduced a parliamentary Bill for a new 'Commonwealth of Europe' as an alternative to Maastricht.

The Bill, proposes a Europe including all the states, east and west, based on fundamental social rights – the right to a job, civil liberties, health care and other social benefits; a Europe which respects the environment, combats racism, committed to peace and a new relationship with the 'third world'. DAVE PACKER talked to Tony Benn about the campaign against Maastricht and the prospects for socialist advance.

not some mythical alliance of the left and right over Maastricht.

But of course there's nothing strange in politics about people taking a similar view on something for totally different reasons. We can't determine a proper socialist attitude to the bankers' Maastricht Europe simply on the basis that it's excluded in all circumstances to go into the same voting lobby as Teddy Taylor.

Not only the Labour leadership, but most of the trade union bureaucracy has come out in favour of Maastricht.

THAT'S BECAUSE after 12 years of Tory rule the trade union leaders get better treated in Brussels than they do in Downing Street. But I think it is a classic failure of analysis by the trade unions not to recognise that the Maastricht Europe will be run for profit at the expense of working people.

The recent case of the Hoover plant moved from France to Scotland is typical. Here Scotland was the beneficiary because we're becoming a low-wage sweatshop; but this is a product of the Treaty of Rome. You have free movement of capital. So capital comes to Britain where wages are low; and the free movement of labour is into the dole queues.

Does the view of the trade union leaders reflect opinion in the country?

THERE HAS been little information about the real meaning of the Maastricht. If you present opposition as a lot of Thatcherite nationalism, it's bound to be unattractive. But it has to be understood that the Maastricht Europe will be deeply undemocratic. In Britain all the laws decided in Europe have been imposed by Royal Prerogative. It's the first time since the execution of Charles I that laws have been made by ministers without consulting parliament.

Is the European Commonwealth you propose a socialist one?

THE CHARTER of Rights in the Bill is a very radical series of measures. It doesn't enforce socialism, but it certainly makes the European model of capitalism impossible. Because it lays down that everyone is entitled to work, and a home and to join a trade union, and so on. These are demands that people can rally around.

But the British establishment wants Maastricht, the City of London wants it, as does the IMF, the international financial markets, the newspaper proprietors – all of them. And for the simple reason that it would make democratic social change much more difficult.

Some people on the left suspect that campaigning against Maastricht gives cover to right wing nationalism, and that only the right wing benefits from such a campaign.

BUT THAT is simply untrue. In Britain it was the left that was against the Treaty of Rome, the Tories were all in favour of it; it was the Tories who took us into the EC, using the Royal prerogative, without consulting anyone. It was the Labour Party which came out in favour of a referendum on the issue.

The idea that because Mrs Thatcher discovered that foreigners start at Dover turns it into a right-wing campaign is ludicrous. I'm not a nationalist, and I won't appear on platforms with right-wing nationalist opponents of Maastricht.

The reason why Tory opponents of Maastricht are getting all the publicity is because only they have the power to defeat the government on the issue; if we had a Labour government it would be the left critique of Maastricht getting all the publicity.

The proponents of Maastricht want to present the anti-Maastricht campaign in a way which alienates liberal opinion, so they say, well it's led by Le Pen and Thatcher; but it's not the case at all.

Of course the opportunity to present things this way in part stems from the Labour leadership's pro-Maastricht stance. The real question is why do the three main party leaders agree about everything.

Major, Smith and Ashdown agree about NATO, about nuclear weapons, about Ireland, Maastricht, market forces and controlling the trade unions: that is the real unprincipled political coalition,

Why is the Major government against the Maastricht social chapter?

THEY ARE against it because they think it might possibly strengthen trade unions and workers' rights. But in reality the social chapter is a bit of a fraud. It's completely unenforceable, and it won't do what it's alleged in creating minimal standards of social welfare and workers rights.

What will happen if the Danes vote against Maastricht in the coming referendum?

BY VOTING against Maastricht last time the Danes put themselves at the heart of Europe, not as Major says outside of Europe. If they vote 'no' again, then Britain won't go in. And Kohl said just yesterday they might have to go ahead with a 'core' 10 countries. But it won't work, and there will have to be a big rethink. Then I think that proposals like my Commonwealth of Europe Bill will come into their own. But it has to be said that the near-unanimity of the political leaders in Denmark in favour of Maastricht makes another 'no' vote a difficult task.

Do you think that the Maastricht treaty will be realised?

IT'S MUCH more difficult now, to create the kind of capitalist economic and political unity they are looking for, because of the depth of the economic crisis. Harmonisation is very difficult when there are such disparities between states, and the interests of different groups of capitalists conflict.

But my worry is that a failure of Maastricht, because of the way it has been done, could lead to a rise of reactionary nationalism. The French will blame the British for Hoover, the British will blame the French for subsidising agriculture, the Americans will blame the Europeans for subsidising the Airbus.

So we've got to find a way of building a substructure of working class links in Europe, and not only in Europe, to prepare an alternative to the rise of reactionary and right-wing forces.

That's why I'm in favour of building a Fifth International, a common association of working people worldwide to confront the power of capital.

What do you think is the real meaning of 'Fortress Europe'?

THE REAL INTENTION of the people who founded the EC, like the people who founded NATO, was to prevent socialism spreading. That's what it's all about. They aimed to rejuvenate European capitalism with the aid of the Marshall plan, that's what the EC was all about, and to defend capitalism, that's what NATO was all about.

Now that the cold war is over NATO is extending into what is called an 'outer area role'; and for capitalist Europe this is an attempt to restore the dominant position it had in relation to the colonies it lost during the two world wars.

What we're witnessing is 'Euro-nationalism' preparing to challenge the United States and Japan for world dominance. And this Euro-nationalism is not internationalism at all, it's the opposite.

If the EC is about defending capitalism, then why have the



French socialists about to pay price of Mitterand's failure

main social democratic parties in Europe all adopted such enthusiastic pro-EC policies?

IT'S WELL WORTH reflecting on this question. In my opinion it's because of the collapse of socialist confidence, and a collapse of understanding about what socialism means. Looks at Yeltsin; he was the secretary of the Moscow Communist Party, and now he's so far to the right of Thatcher he makes her look like a progressive. The Socialist parties became career structures. You joined a Socialist party and got into power; you became a minister. Then you expelled dissidents, distanced yourself from struggle and hoped to establishment would accept you as one of the two ruling parties.

Nobody in these parties discusses capitalism any more, let alone socialism. I can understand the Labour leadership not discussing socialism, since they don't have the remotest idea what it is; but you think they'd discuss capitalism and its crisis. But all they discuss it Major, Lamont and Heseltine.

So there's this huge vacuum. Socialism is about building a society on a moral basis, about internationalism and about democracy. And those three ideas have a universal validity throughout human history.

But these values have been totally neglected, so there's a gap which is filled by trying to strengthen capitalism, while calling it 'a more humane society'. It isn't at all. It's the same its always been, throwing workers on the floor and allowing the privileged and rich elite to run things.

What can be done to turn around the present difficult situation for the working class and socialism?

THE FIRST thing is to re-establish the socialist tradition of debate, argument and education. The media in this country have obliterated serious discussion, it's all in terms of personal abuse and sound bites. The

first thing to do is to get people asking basic questions again - why are we poor, we are we unemployed, why does every family in this country spend £30 a week on weapons before they pay the rent? Why? Once you ask this basic question, you're half way to a socialist analysis, and that's how socialism started in the first place - as a critique of the existing order.

Now everyone knows the working class has changed in this country, and internationally. Of course there are no longer 750,000 coal miners going underground. But this idea that because the occupational structure of the working class has changed, there's no hope for socialism, as Marxism Today used to say before it went bust, is an absolute illusion.

Two hundred years ago the working class were agricultural labourers. Then they became industrial workers, like the people in the shanty towns in the third world today.

Then many became employed in small businesses, in hi-tech industries like computers and so on, but they're still working class. Because the definition of working class is where you get your income from; do own things or do you work? And by that definition the working class is very much alive.

But the situation of the working class is difficult today because the debt chains have been added to unemployment. Becoming unemployed can be a real personal catastrophe because, unlike the 1930s, you can lose your house and savings.

So people are worried about challenging the boss. There's a real groundswell of anger, but it's partly frozen by fear. And it's denied an outlet, because the leadership of socialist parties have stopped talking about any alternative - except 'let's give us a chance to run things'.

We'll see now what will happen in Australia, where the Hawke and Keating Labour governments have simply been running capitalism in a Yeltsin-like way. Probably they won't be re-elected, and no wonder. Indeed what is the hope for working people if the only choice is between Thatcher and Kinnock?

Indeed, obliterating hope is the worst thing you can do, because that is the

seed-bed of fascism. And we've seen a very disturbing growth of the far right in Europe as a consequence of this.

So the left has to fill the vacuum with argument, analysis, historical understanding and future perspectives, which can win support from a wide range of people.

But still, coming back to Maastricht, isn't there a problem about outlining a socialist alternative to it? The left can identify the undemocratic and deflationary character of the Maastricht process, but what do we propose?

THAT'S RIGHT. A negative criticism on its own is inadequate, because we don't want a capitalist Britain living outside a capitalist Europe, we want a socialist Britain in a socialist Europe. That means you've got to have a much stronger socialist association across Europe and the world, and is precisely why I'm fighting for this idea of a Fifth International.

But quite honestly if you're going to recover Britain from its current state, you have to have public ownership, planning, a more egalitarian tax system, a totally different system.

Why did you become a socialist?

MY DAD was a Labour MP, I was brought up in a socialist home, I joined the Labour Party on my 17th birthday. I campaigned for Labour on the troop ships in the last war, campaigned in 1945 and was elected to parliament in 1950. So I've been an MP for 43 years, and a member of the Labour executive since 1959. And I was a government minister for 11 years.

Everything I've learned in this period has deepened my understanding of the nature of capitalism, and made me want to change it. It's not fundamentally a theoretical matter, it's a question of whose side you're on when the going gets rough - do you cop out or do you support people in struggle? It's about an understanding of history and perspectives for the future.

And it's also about right and wrong as a guide to political behaviour. It's wrong that people are unemployed, that we waste money on weapons, that we had the Gulf war. That may seem simplistic, but it's actually quite a revolutionary idea in contemporary politics. It's also about democracy and a world perspective.

The exciting thing is since last October when the pit closures were announced we've seen the most tremendous political campaign, and things have begun to change. The problem is the lack of leadership given by the Labour and trade union leaders. I do a tremendous number of meetings, so people won't give up and sit at home watching Inspector Morse. I try to encourage people to continue the struggle - that's my function in life.

Maastricht: The Crisis of European Integration

Interviews with Tony Benn MP and Peter Gowan (New Left Review editorial board) and an article by Dave Packer

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Send to: *Socialist Outlook*, PO Box 1109, London N4 2UU

The rise and fall of the Black Panthers

Bitter Grain – Huey Newton and the Black Panther Party

Written by Michael Newton
Published by Holloway House, £3.50.

Reviewed by Paul Clarke

MALCOLM X had a phenomenal effect on the consciousness of Black America, but it was not until after his death that the ideas of Black Power began to take organisational shape.

The slogan of 'Black Power' was coined by Stokely Carmichael, in the mid-1960s the leader of the Student Non-Violent Co-ordinating Committee, working in the racist deep south.

The moves to form an or-

ganisation inspired by the ideas of Black Power took shape following the Watts, Los Angeles, riots of August 1966. Watts burned for six days; 35 people were killed and thousands arrested.

In the ferment of black politics which followed, a group of young blacks came forward in South California to form the Black Panther Party for Self-Defence, which rapidly became the most prominent, most notorious, black nationalist or-

to confront racist attacks by the police. They organised provocative armed defiance, such as marching straight into the California State legislature with automatic weapons.

Once underway, though, the party had to define its strategy. This wavered between militarism, ideological flirtation with 'marxism-leninism', and the kind of populism which led to their immensely politically successful programme to provide break-

Because of their militarism, the Panthers were an easy target. The party was smashed up through state para-military violence, many of its members being murdered

ganisation.

Its founders like Huey Newton, Bobby Seale and Eldridge Cleaver, started with the idea of black armed self-defence. They mounted armed patrols of the ghettos,

fast for the schoolkids of the ghettos.

From the start the Panthers were targeted by the state, and especially the FBI under J. Edgar Hoover. Because of their militarism, the Panthers



Black Panther candidate Bobby Seale campaigning for Mayor of Oakland

were an easy target. The party was smashed up through state para-military violence, many of its members being murdered in so-called 'shoot-outs' with the cops.

The very un-militant state of the black movement in the US today, with dozens of black politicians co-opted into becoming mayors and getting

positions in the Democratic Party, is part of the legacy of the crushing of the Panthers and the other black nationalist organisations twenty years ago.

This book is a timely reminder of the period of the civil rights movement, and the era of militant struggle for Black Power.

Analysing Yugoslavia's agony

The destruction of Yugoslavia – Tracking the Break-Up

Written by Branka Magas
Published by Verso £12.95

Reviewed by Ben Wolfe

A NEW Serb offensive is under way in eastern Bosnia, with the familiar flight of starving refugees, the destruction of villages, random murders – the whole panoply of 'ethnic cleansing'.

This is not the end-game of the Yugoslavian tragedy. New horrors await in the majority ethnically-Albanian province of Kosovo, which will be the next arena of the Great Serb offensive.

That this should have been the fate of Yugoslavia, which unlike most of the non-capitalist states in eastern and central Europe, emerged out of a genuine popular revolution, has largely been a mystery on the left.

Horror, and denunciation of all 'reactionary nationalisms' has been the typical socialist response, while those of a more Stalinoid bent have, openly or otherwise, sympathised with the Serb forces of Milosevic and Karadzic.

More than any other writer on Yugoslavia, Branka Magas tracked the emergence of the Great Serb project from its very beginnings. The first chapters of her new book, writings from 1982-3, expose the para-military repression in Kosovo by the government in Belgrade. The cracking open of the Yugoslav federation was prepared over a

long period. Anyone who wants to understand the mechanisms by which the war was prepared, and made inevitable, will find Magas' account the most illuminating available.

But more important than a chronological account is the political-theoretical understanding of the causes.

The multinational Yugoslavian state emerged from the 20th century attempt by the South Slavs to create a viable federal state which would free them from the historic role of pawns of rival imperialist powers. At the end of the second world war, various figures in the international communist movement, most prominently the immensely prestigious Dimitrov, floated the idea of a Balkan socialist federation, which would have included Bulgaria and maybe Romania.

Once this option was rejected by Stalin, the modern Yugoslavia emerged as the next best option, but as a state with non-Slav minorities, notably the Kosovo Albanians (perhaps 40 per cent of the Albanian nation) and the Macedonians. The national question was built-in as a key question to be resolved.

However, a viable resolution of the national question, or more formally, the correct resolution of the national and democratic tasks of the revolution, depended on two conditions.

First, the creation of real equality between the nationalities; second, the all-round development of the economy under the social hegemony of the working class, as the basic material precondition for national equality.

Bureaucratic rule in Yugoslavia never involved the kind of permanent military-police



Fighting Greater Serb expansionism: Croatian forces can fall prey to right-wing nationalism

terror characteristic of 1930s Russia. Nonetheless, bureaucratic rule made the resolution of the national question impossible. The famous experiment with self-management, which in reality was an experiment of local autonomy of enterprises in the context of marketisation, had the effect of worsening tensions between the different republics and provinces, competing for resources and funds.

In a one sense Yugoslavia is an example of a more general trend; once bureaucratic rules falters, without a democratic socialist alternative available as an immediately practical option, broad sections of the masses of the people, who have lost faith in the old system, can invest their hopes in the nation.

Socialists of course reject all nationalist ideology; but recourse to nationalism by the masses can be a more or less rational option, depending on

circumstances. In particular, when the nationality of which they are part is under sustained, and even military, attack, defence of the nation is a precondition of survival.

Ex-Yugoslavia should teach us the ABC of the Leninist approach to the national question, namely that respect of national rights, up to and including self-determination, is obligatory for socialists. To denounce all nationalisms as equally reactionary is, in many conditions, to simply capitulate to national oppression; in the Yugoslav context it means to capitulate to the Great Serb project.

But Magas's explicit support for western intervention is a major failing in this otherwise strong work. Sending in imperialist troops cannot possibly solve the crisis.

Writing during the first world war, Trotsky pointed out that there was no future for the South Slav peoples

outside of a Balkan federation, which is practically viable only on a socialist basis. However, the road to federation today goes through the stage of independence for the different nationalities.

Whatever the horrors inflicted by the warriors of Greater Serbia, historically it is a doomed project. There is and will be an independent Slovenia and Croatia. The Albanian people of Kosovo cannot be held down by force forever. Sooner or later Milosevic and his gang of ex-communist bureaucrats in Belgrade, will go.

The best contribution socialists can make to the eventual resolution of this tragedy is to fight for a lasting peace – a socialist federation in the Balkans – and that means the defeat of both the Great Serb project and reactionary forces in Croatia.

X misses the spot

Malcolm X

Directed by Spike Lee

Reviewed by Steve Smith

While welcoming the revival of interest in one of the most famous revolutionaries to emerge in the post-war imperialist heartland, the arrival of Spike Lee's long-awaited biopic *Malcolm X* should receive a cool response by socialists.

Something is clearly up when we see Bill Clinton jogging around in his 'X' cap and when opportunist entrepreneurs are making a quick buck selling Malcolm X crisps and Malcolm X car freshener.

Spike Lee's film was begun with money from the Hollywood studio system and finished with the money of black American millionaires. The Maoist-influenced director, Jean-Luc Godard, is credited with that solid Marxist adage, 'The economics of a film are the politics of a film.' *Malcolm X* is a compromise between the commercial diktats of the Hollywood companies and the political mystifications of the black bourgeoisie.

Spike Lee has a reputation for being a polemical filmmaker. It is, for the most part, entirely undeserved. In fact, once the hype dies down, it is doubtful whether he is any more of a radical than, say, Oprah Winfrey.

Legacy

The appearance of Lee's *Malcolm X* can only be judged in a very particular socio-historical context. A huge ideological battle has been raging for years over the political legacy of Malcolm.

At the same time, class stratifications among American blacks have grown wider and wider. While General Colin Powell firebombs Iraqi conscripts, alienated American youth firebomb Los Angeles. While the mass of black America remains proletarian and disempowered by the capitalist system, a growing black bourgeoisie has been flexing its ideological muscles. The uncompromising revolutionary spectre of Malcolm X haunting both white and black America has had to be confronted and neutralised.

He has joined an iconography of 'Great Afro-Americans' - from which a monolithic and classless black identity has been constructed. Boxer Joe Louis equals jazz singer Billie Holiday equals soul star Jackie Wilson equals Martin Luther King Jr equals Malcolm X... and so on.

Spike Lee has made six films in a seven-year career. His first two, *She's Gotta Have It* and *School Daze* had a fresh experimentalism and a praiseworthy (if awkward) attempt

to sift through some difficult issues of sex, race, and, fleetingly, class

Do The Right Thing (1989) made Lee's critical reputation and created his image as a black 'enfant terrible'. It remains his only really satisfying film, employing dazzling Brechtian techniques to forecast the oncoming of last year's LA riots.

But from then on, Lee's celebrity status has had a dire effect on his output. *Mo' Better Blues* (1990) was utterly incoherent, and *Jungle Fever* (1991) was, although technically better, displaying growing signs of a reactionary adherence to a vision of a family-based communal harmony among blacks.

Increasingly, black feminists have grown more weary of Lee's seamless procession of wooden light-coloured female characters who have betrayed the initial promise of *She's Gotta Have It's* Nola Darling.

Epic

Malcolm X, judged purely on film-making technique, is quite possibly the worst of all his output. Lacking any real dramatic electricity, the characterisations are flat and the script is bland, over-literal and ponderous. This is mainly due to the 'epic' style that Lee chose for the film (his inspirations were *Dr Zhivago* and *Lawrence of Arabia*).

Trying to understand modern black American history through the prism of Lee's *Malcolm X* is like comprehending the Roman slave revolts by studying Kirk Douglas in *Spartacus*.

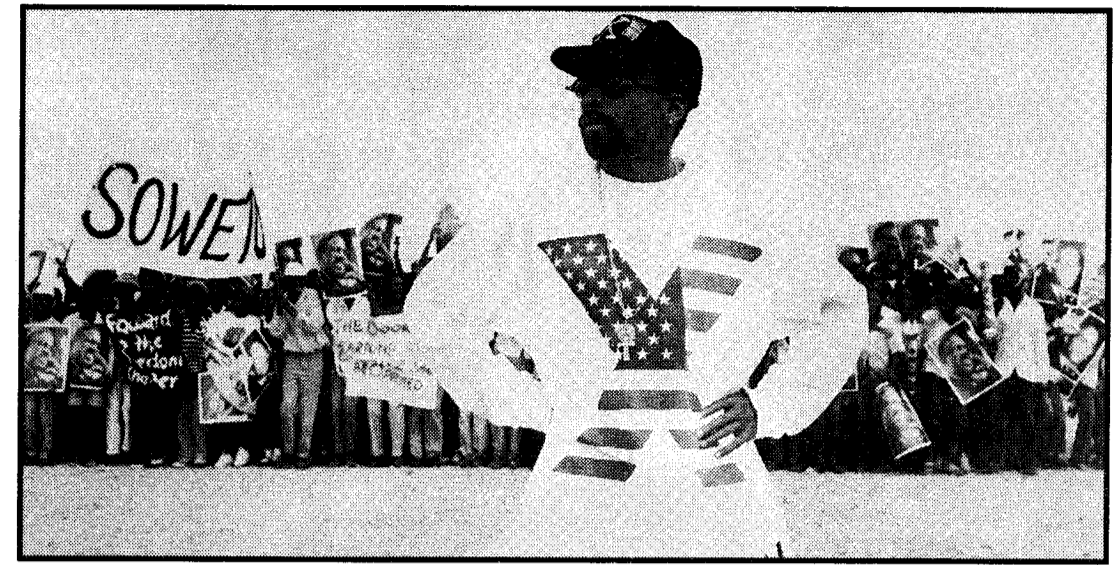
But of course the film will be judged on far wider considerations than its technical merits. The story of Malcolm's life is inspirational enough to guarantee this, despite Lee's uninspiring rendering.

It is for this reason that black British youth (and white youth who have benefitted from an anti-racist cultural environment) will flock to see this film and respond warmly to it.

But it is the responsibility of socialists to respond more critically than with just liberal 'radical chic' praise for Spike Lee. In fact, black radicals and socialists have been doing this for a long time now.

The hype over the funding of the film, largely obscured an earlier row. This revolved around vociferous criticism from American inner-city activists like Amiri Baraka, who was quoted as saying 'we will not let Malcolm X's life be trashed to make middle-class Negroes sleep easier.'

Spike Lee's work has been perceptively debunked by Paul Gilroy (author of *There Ain't no Black in the Union Jack*), who has accused him of



a middle-class colonisation, or 'parasitism' of working class style and art-forms, eg the hip-hop culture.

Gilroy makes the crucial point that black America is increasingly fragmenting into two parts - 'a small middle class that encounters prejudice in its competition with whites for a few professional job opportunities, and a permanent workless 'underclass' for whom racism past or present is secondary to the institutionalised effects of multiple economic disadvantage.'

Gilroy concludes that the corpus of Lee's work 'projects a neo-nationalist ideology that mystifies the volatile relationship between the two groups. The active opposition between them is thus dissolved in a dewy-eyed representation of kin, blood and communal harmony.'

Lee's films have become progressively more and more devoid of any clear representation of class dynamics. This is remarkable feat given the condition of the black American working class and Lee's role as the foremost black American film-maker.

Lee's *Malcolm X* carries on in this classless vein. In dealing with political themes, the film is utterly vague and unchallenging.

Malcolm's more famous speeches are concentrated on, but there is no context and no analysis of his impact on political trends inside the rapidly developing black political movements of the time. The absolute basics are relayed, his abandonment of black separatism, his continuing adherence to the legitimacy of revolution-

ary violence and a vague nod to CIA involvement in his assassination. No other political ideas or movements trouble the narrative.

To socialists, the last year of Malcolm's life remain a fascinating study in his thought, particularly his embrace of political alliances and concepts containing an in-built anti-capitalist dynamic. Malcolm even began a dialogue with American Fourth Internationalists, recounted by the Trotskyist, George Breitman, in his book *The Last Year of Malcolm X*.

But the last year in Lee's film portrays him as increasingly bewildered and fatalistic victim. Torn from the certainties of the Nation of Islam, Malcolm has only sparks of the old dynamism and leads a shambolic group of followers.

Instead of developing his own distinctive ideology of militant resistance, he is shown sleepwalking towards assassination. It is clear by this point that Lee has lost all interest in Malcolm's life - the only destiny that can be entertained is to be shot and reborn as a cultural icon.

This vacuous portrayal of Malcolm has been defended many times by Lee with recourse to relativism - 'there are many Malcolm Xs. I made the film I wanted to make.' His Malcolm is a commodity for mass appeal that perfectly complements his range of 'X' caps and jackets.

Of course, it is better that the 'kids' are wearing 'X' paraphernalia rather than the emblems of pro-Republican stars like Arnie Schwarzenegger and Steven Seagal. The fallout from the film will be highly complex - it will lead many to devour the autobiography.

But the final chapter of Malcolm's life and the true significance of his legacy can only be fully understood with reference to a class analysis. Spike Lee is on record as saying that Malcolm's message 'does not exclude the middle class'. Spike's message certainly doesn't - in fact it is repackaged to make them, in Baraka's words, sleep easier. It's up to socialists to cut through the hype and teach some real history.

socialist **OUTLOOK**

The politics of Malcolm X
The man and the myth
Thursday 18th March 7.30pm
Unlty Club, 96 Dalston Lane, Hackney E8

with
Martha Osamor

Godfrey Mdingi,
Workers
Organisation for
Socialist Action
(South Africa)

Patrick Bishop,
black NUS
presidential
candidate
Bala Kumar
Upali Cooray



Obituary

Bob Fryer, a socialist class fighter

THE END of almost six decades of struggle and devotion to the working class movement came with the death on 28 February of Bob Fryer at the age of 70.

Fryer worked for 43 years at the Cowley car assembly plant. He was one of a small group of militant workers who organised the semi-skilled and production workers into the TGWU in the 1950s and early 1960s.

Right until his untimely death from a heart attack, he remained an active and committed socialist, campaigning on the issues of the day against the Tories and the employers. He had continued to be active in both the union and the Labour Party.

Bob Fryer was born in 1923 in Budapest to a Jewish family. His father was the treasurer of the Budapest Communist Party, and fought in the Bela Kun revolution of 1919.

Given the defeat of the revolution, the family were forced out of Hungary in the late 1920s, and moved to Vienna where Bob's father continued as a CP activist. Bob was a member of the communist youth movement.

Bob took an active part in the resistance when Hitler marched into Austria; when just 15, after the defeat of the resist-

At the high point of union power in the plant: Fryer speaks at a 1970 mass meeting



Workers Press archive

ance, he was arrested with his brother while trying to cross into Switzerland.

By a 100-1 chance he was released after a month's detention, thanks to the intervention of Quakers, and brought to Britain. The rest of his family perished in the Holocaust.

After the start of the war he enlisted in the Argyle and Sutherland Highlanders, and survived being blown up on the beaches during the Anzio landings.

He was transferred to army intelligence because of his language skills, and given the job of interrogating captured Nazi officers, many of whom had been involved in war crimes.

He settled in Oxford after the war, but never joined the British Communist Party, despite his family traditions.

He embraced Trotskyism in the mid-1960s, and worked with the Socialist Labour League in Cowley, and in the wider labour movement.

As convenor during the 1960s and early 1970s, Fryer withstood many attacks from management, but was bureaucratically removed from office by TGWU national officials in 1974 during a national press witch-hunt following my own victimisation as deputy convenor.

The TGWU imposed elections by secret shop-floor ballot as a means to instal their chosen hard-right wing

leadership, headed by one-time left-winger Reg Parsons.

Unlike most other convenors in such situations, many of whom would take voluntary redundancy, Fryer remained in the plant, returned to his old job in the paint shop, and joined the fight-back by the left.

This led by 1977 to Fryer's re-election as convenor, a remarkable, and possibly unique achievement. The response from the TGWU was to institutr a renewed witch-hunt early in 1978, which aimed to remove Fryer from office once more and bar him and other prominent left wing stewards from all office in the union.

This witch-hunt was only

defeated when outgoing TGWU General Secretary Jack Jones was replaced by Moss Evans, who did not share his single-minded commitment to smashing the left at Cowley.

Fryer remained as convenor until 1987, when he was succeeded by Ivor Braggins, who was elected on a left platform, but swiftly moved to the hard right.

For a further year before his retirement Fryer again went back to his physically demanding job in the paint shop.

His remarkable record as the convenor of the most militant car plant in the country was a major contribution to the strength of the unions in the car industry in the 1960s and '70s.

He was the kind of militant workers' leader who is extremely hard to replace. Indeed one of the key problems of the trade union movement today is that in the absence of major mass struggles, new rank-and-file leaders are not being forged to replace the likes of Bob Fryer, and the immense contribution which he made.

Alan Thornett

Alan Thornett worked with Bob Fryer in Cowley for 25 years, more than half of them as his deputy convenor.

Burning need for socialism as Rome fiddles

200,000 people marched through Rome on February 28 in protest at austerity and the shocking corruption scandals which have rocked the whole political establishment, and

even implicated some members of the former Communist PDS.

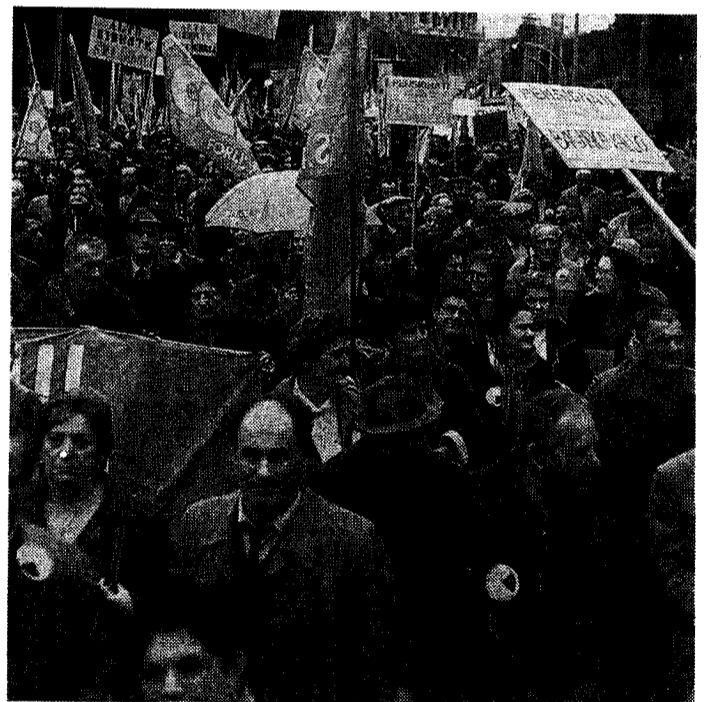
Key organisers of the demonstration included leaders of the Party of Communist Refoundation, the left split of the

old PCI, and left wing trade unionists.

The Rome demo was one more sign of the potential for struggle against the Europe being put in place by the Maastricht process - the Europe of 30 million unemployed, the Europe of growing racism and fascism, the Europe of economic crisis and austerity.

This potential has now been revealed in a series of struggles across Europe last autumn, starting with a wave of protest in Italy, going on to the miners' demonstrations in Britain and culminating in the huge mobilisations of over one million people against racism in Germany.

However, in the next few days we are likely to see the right sweep back to power in France. If they do, a huge programme of privatisation and 'Thatcherisation' faces that country. And despite big anti-racist mobilisations, the threat



of racism and fascism still hangs across the continent.

Despite continuing struggles, the left and the workers movement in most European countries finds itself on the defensive; and whole sections of the left have been disorientated and even demoralised by the collapse of the ex-Soviet Union.

In the face of this, moves are afoot to organise a European conference of the anti-capitalist left, to debate the way forward in the struggle for an alternative to the crisis of capitalist Europe.

The conference is planned

for Paris on the weekend of 12/13 June. Signatories to the appeal for the conference already include leaders of the Party of Communist Refoundation in Italy, the Workers Commissions in Spain, the German Party of Democratic Socialism and the Greens.

It is expected that several thousand activists from across the continent will attend the conference.

In future issues Socialist Outlook will publish details of the Appeal for the conference, as well as details of the conference agenda and travel from Britain.



Polish workers' new solidarity rocks Walesa

By Jan Sylwestrowicz

THE END of 1992 and beginning of 1993 have witnessed a significant upturn in social struggles in Poland.

A spirit of protest is fast enveloping the country; still uncoordinated and fragmented, but extremely dynamic and already producing major developments.

For the first time since the move towards capitalist restoration began in 1989, the question being asked in the mass media – and above all, on the street – is no longer 'how long will this process take?' but 'will it survive?'

The first important element of this protest movement was the all-out strike by miners in mid-December, which rapidly became a virtual general strike in the southern region of Silesia, the most important centre of Polish industry.

The miners' strike was spontaneous. Solidarity, currently one of three main labour federations, had been bypassed and marginalised during the strikes of the summer and early autumn.

In an attempt to restore credibility, the national leadership of Solidarity threatened it would hold its own 'protest actions' against the government's economic policy, and finally called a token two-hour stoppage on December 14.

This weak-kneed tactic backfired on the labour bureaucrats: when the two hours were over, the Silesian miners simply refused to return to work!

The miners were soon joined by other sections of Silesian workers – by the railworkers in particular. This meant that, as temperatures began to drop in Poland, the country's predominantly coal-fired power stations looked to be grinding to a halt.

Nationalised

The miners' demands symbolise an important change in labour struggles in Poland. The emphasis of the strike was on saving the nationalised coal industry as a whole and on ending the discriminatory tax policies of the government – which destroys the state sector financially so it can then be sold off for next to nothing.

The Silesian strike was the biggest in Poland since the collapse of the old Stalinist regime and by far the most politically significant. For a time, it even



seemed possible that the government would fall, but it was saved by the Solidarity union bureaucracy, who managed to retain leadership of the strike at a regional level (mainly thanks to the goodwill of the other pit unions).

The miners finally went back to work on the basis of a sellout deal that offers little more than empty assurances of noble intentions on the government side. However, rank-and-file opposition to ending the strike was strong, and many pits only returned to work to maintain unity when it became clear that others were going back.

This has had two important results for the union movement. First, pressure from the rank and file has produced cracks in the bureaucracy of both Solidarity and the OPZZ (the former 'official' union federation under the Stalinists), both of which are in the

process of concluding a nationwide 'social pact' with the government.

The second effect may be of much greater significance. The sellout by Solidarity has given the impetus to a move to form a new national union federation on a clearly militant program.

Combative

Moves to set up some form of inter-union coordinating structure began during the summer strikes. Now, the most combative sections of all three major federations, particularly in Silesia, are declaring their will to break with their respective bureaucracies.

At a meeting attended by 12 unions, six accepted the idea of a new 'independent' federation, while six gave initial support.

The first six include the

whole Silesian region of Solidarity-80 (mostly mines, steel and auto) and the old OPZZ miners' union, the train drivers, two smaller Solidarity unions and the most militant of the farmers' unions.

Together they would have a membership of some 700,000. Along with the other six unions that have not yet ratified the agreement, the new federation would bring together around 1,300,000 workers.

This would mark a big change in the composition of the Polish union movement – and a very positive one.

Independent

A powerful and independent union federation committed to a fightback against pro-capitalist policies – one lacking the stigma of previous links with the Stalinist regime (like the OPZZ) or with the country's present anti-worker government (like Solidarity) – would rapidly become an enormous pole of attraction for workers across Poland.

Meanwhile, strikes and protest action are continuing with varying intensity in other parts of Poland.

Alongside the growing industrial actions is a burgeoning political movement, in particular growing demands for referenda.

A draconian law banning abortion is now going through Poland's parliament.

At present, there is no statutory provision for referenda in

Poland, but a human rights bill being discussed in parliament (and sponsored by President Walesa himself) mandates the government to call a referendum when one is demanded by 500,000 citizens.

In the space of one month, pro-choice campaigners collected over 1,500,000 signatures on a petition for a referendum on abortion.

Whatever the final outcome, the referendum campaign has for the first time built up an organised and united pro-choice movement in Poland, which is a huge advance. Referendum committees exist in almost all towns and city districts, and a national conference is planned for early March to structure the movement nationwide.

Abortion is only one element here. At the end of December, parliament re-introduced censorship, adopting a law that says the media must 'respect Christian values'. Parliament is about to give the government the power to rule by decree.

Hard right offensive

The extreme right is also organising. Since the beginning of January, the most reactionary parties not represented in the ruling coalition have been holding a campaign of demonstrations against Walesa and the government, culminating in a 'protest march' to the presidential palace on January 29.

The danger of these forces acquiring a stronger following is very real. Confused and feeling betrayed by their former leaders, large social layers – especially the impoverished middle class – could move to support the call for a 'strong, no-nonsense' government of the extreme right (with the undoubted support of the Polish Catholic hierarchy).

The present situation cannot go on much longer. The pro-capitalist forces will have to launch a serious offensive to crush working-class and popular resistance.

At some point, this will necessitate the imposition of a much more severe form of authoritarian government – most probably outright dictatorship.

To prevent this scenario from becoming reality, what is needed is a united workers' movement in defence of their own interests – in particular, in defence of democracy and the nationalised economy.

The main obstacle to this so far has been the ideological damage caused by Stalinism.

The most urgent task of all in Poland today is to rebuild the tradition of genuine socialism, and to construct a new political leadership of the working class based on a socialist program.

UNITA steps up Angola terror campaign

by Bala Kumar

ONE MILLION Angolans face starvation as a senseless war tears their country apart.

A second round of United Nations mediated peace talks between UNITA and the MPLA floundered even before they began when UNITA didn't turn up.

Since fighting began at least 160,000 have died and thousands face immediate death as the brigands of UNITA complete their successful siege of the town of Huambo.

Huambo, in the central highlands, is of symbolic importance to UNITA's authoritarian leader, Jonas Savimbi. It is home to the Ovimbundu people whom Savimbi claims to represent.

But UNITA's strategy is more sophisticated.

Oil and diamonds

It aims to secure control of the vital oil and diamond mines in the North and in the east. The US multinational Gulf Oil is the major player in the oil producing areas, while South African multinationals Anglo-American and De Beers control the diamond industry.

As Angola relies almost exclusively on these two minerals, nothing short of the paralysis of the economy is sought.

UNITA cannot hope to permanently occupy those areas. These moves are intended to strengthen its bargaining power in its quest for state power.

Over a year ago *The Guardian's* Victoria Brittan warned that UNITA was making preparations for war in the run up to the September elections.

Backing

Even then Savimbi enjoyed the support of Western governments, particularly the Bush administration.

Lauded by Washington as an 'anti-communist' warrior, Savimbi obtained US\$30 million a year in covert military and financial aid for at least the last decade.

The South African Defence Force fought alongside

UNITA until it was trounced at Cuito Cuanavale in 1988. This defeat by Cuban and Angolan troops rocked the apartheid regime.

Presently South Africa is actively helping UNITA (see *Socialist Outlook* 37). They are also backed by Zaireois troops loyal to the imperialist stooge and puppet, Mobutu Sese Seko.

When in free elections the MPLA won the parliamentary ballot with 58% of the vote, trouble was predictable.

First round

Then when the MPLA presidential candidate beat Savimbi in the first round of ballots, all hell broke loose.

In the capital Luanda, UNITA, began attacking MPLA offices and their supporters.

The racist and reactionary nature of UNITA has been clear right from the anti-colonial struggle against Portugal. In the early 1970s, UNITA actually fought with the colonialists against the MPLA.

Following the Angolan revolution, it fought on for 16 years financed by the US and South Africa, using Namibia as a base for raids into Angola.

At present UNITA has launched terror attacks on civilians. There has been systematic rape and murder of whites and mixed race people. Also death squads have killed prominent intellectuals supportive of the MPLA.

Defections

Things are not going all Savimbi's way. Several of his top generals have defected to the MPLA, fearful of the human rights abuses Savimbi has committed amongst his own loyalists. The UNITA deputies in the plural parliament favour conciliation with MPLA.

The liberation movement in South Africa must continue to demand that De Klerk stops all aid to the UNITA brigands.

In the West we should point out that the cause of this war is the 'cold war' agenda of US and British governments and their support for Savimbi.



Militant plans a party

LAST MONTH'S conference of the Militant decided to generalise the 'Scottish turn', which has involved an exit from the Labour Party and a policy of standing 'Scottish Militant Labour' candidates against official Labour.

The turn means that Militant will now declare itself to be an open political party, with a generalised policy of standing against Labour. The party will be formally declared at a Wem-

bley rally on 6 June; 'Militant Labour Party' is hotly tipped as the new name.

Militant has been in political turmoil over the last two years; the turn resulted in a split with 'Socialist Appeal', which involves well known former Militant leaders like Ted Grant and Alan Woods.

Membership collapsed from a mid-1980s high of around 8,000 during the heyday of the Liverpool council and Poll Tax struggles, to not more than

1,500 last autumn - some have said dues paying embership was down to 750.

Militant have adopted an audacious ploy to break out of the post-Poll Tax campaign period of split and decline, namely the decision to launch the Public Sector Alliance.

The party declaration hopes to capitalise on Militant's efforts to make the Alliance the dominant campaigning organisation against the attack on the public sector.

Defend Kate Magee

KATE MAGEE, an Irish woman living in Derby, is fighting back after her horrific experiences under the provisions of the racist Prevention of Terrorism Act.

Kate was detained on 14 April last year following the killing of an army recruiting officer in Derby the previous day. Her son was put into care against her wishes, and she was not allowed to communicate with him for six days. The six-year-old was eventually released into the custody of Kate's sister.

After nine days incommunicado detention, Kate was charged under the PTA with "failure to disclose information", and under ordinary law with "impeding the arrest or prosecution of person or persons unknown".

Her brother was named by police as wanted for questioning in connection with the killing, which was claimed by the Irish National Liberation Army. Joseph Magee has since been arrested by the Irish Gardai in Limerick, where he is being held, and is contesting attempts to extradite him to Britain.

Kate was moved to Durham prison and strip-searched on many occasions, even after a visit from an Irish embassy representative.

She was allowed telephone calls to relatives only on condition she did not reveal where she was. It was sixteen days after her arrest before an Irish prisoners' welfare organisation discovered her whereabouts.

After 75 days she was given

restricted bail on two sureties of £10,000 each and instructions to report to the police three times every day. The most serious charge has now been dropped. On her return, Kate discovered her home had been ripped to pieces, with all the pipes pulled out and doors kicked in.

A number of trades councils, trade union branches are sup-

porting Kate's campaign, as are Irish organisations such as the Irish in Britain Representation Group, the Repeal the PTA Campaign and the PTA Research and Welfare Association.

● Affiliations/messages of support/donations to Kate Magee Support Group, PO Box 158, Derby DE1 9NB

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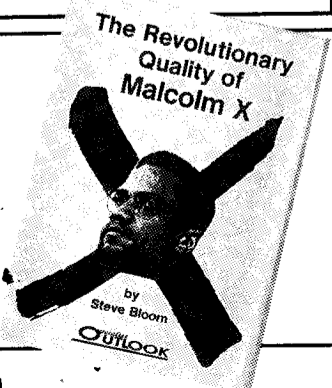
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Burnsall strikers scent victory

By Bob Smith

On the picket line for nine months, the Burnsall strikers, mainly Punjabi women, now appear to be on the verge of a breakthrough.

Burnsall customers Jaguar and Rover are apparently responding to labour movement pressure and withdrawing work from the Smethwick electroplating factory. Meanwhile, a series of 53 industrial tribunals for un-



Bus jobs sell-out

By a London busworker

London Transport (LT) is on the brink of inflicting a major defeat on 12,000 busworkers.

Having already put out to tender the more profitable routes, the government has now withdrawn the subsidy given to all other routes, forcing LT to cut costs on these routes by approximately 20 per cent.

New contracts

The immediate result of this for the workforce has been the introduction of new employment contracts, with 20 per cent lower wages, 20 per cent longer hours and a worsening of other conditions. Workers were given until February 28 to sign or be sacked.

A TGWU ballot for strike action on February 19 gave a 2:1 majority in favour of action but no action was arranged, even after the deadline of the 28th

had passed. Even now, there is only a possibility of a token one-day strike.

No intention

It is clear that the union bureaucracy has never had any intention of fighting this attack. Their actions from the beginning have shown that defending their members rights is the last thing on their minds.

Waited

They deliberately waited until individual members had been placed in the invidious position of choosing whether to sign or be sacked before the union took any action.

Rank and file busworkers have shown that they are willing to fight back against the attacks being made. Now they must organise to push the union leadership into supporting them before its too late.

lawful deductions, equal pay and victimisation are coming up, piling financial pressure on the ruthless O'Neill family, who have been condemned by their own Irish community. This should soon ensure that they will be forced into a settlement with the GMB, the strikers' union, or face insolvency.

The strikers' demands are for: equal pay (currently the workers are paid £120 min, with women only receiving £90); health and safety - adequate ventilation and protective clothing, clean toilets and canteen facilities; an adequate wage; no forced overtime (was 65 hours, seven day week); a proper contract of employment; guaranteed basic rights and no victimisations, with workers being treated with respect and dignity.

Hopefully this dispute can inspire other workers suffering

such indignities and degradation at the hand of revanchist employers.

Burnsall is not unique, there are many similar companies operating in the Birmingham area, indeed all over the country.

The strikers' main concern now is the GMB full time officials who have been somewhat constrained by the imagined legal restraints upon them. Their concern with staying within the trade union laws has prevented initiatives being taken.

The resilience of the strikers, especially the women who face vile abuse, mental and physical, is an inspiration.

Certainly this struggle is key in convincing the black community and other oppressed groups that a struggle can be effectively fought with their own communities' backing and

labour movement support.

Delegations from Houghton Main pit camp, Sheffield WAPC, coaches from London and supporters from other areas will be joining the Birmingham labour movement in a rally at the picket on Tuesday March 9 to celebrate International Women's Day.

A social for the Burnsall strikers and Trentham WAPC will take place on Friday March 26th at the New Birmingham Trade Union Club, 723 Pershore Road, Entrance £2 with Banner Theatre, Dawberry Firkin, and the Kitchen Girls.

Messages of support and requests for speakers c/o GMB, Will Thorne House, 2 Birmingham Road, Halesowen, West Midlands.

There is now a London Support Group which can be reached c/o Londec, Instrument House, 205-217 Kings Cross Road, WC1 9DB

Anti-witch hunt mood grows

By Terry Conway

THE ONLY highlight of a very dull weekend at Greater London Labour Party Conference on March 6-7, was the close call on the anti-witch hunt motion from Lambeth Women's Council.

While a stronger motion opposing all witch hunts moved by Peckham women's council was defeated by 4 to 1, the Lambeth motion, calling for a review of the NCC, for the action taken against the Lambeth 15 to be reversed and for the outstanding charges to be dropped, was lost narrowly on a hand vote after a lively debate.

The ensuing card vote was lost with 205,000 votes for and 377,500 votes against with support from RMT, MSF and NCU.

It was further interesting that many right wingers voted positively for the motion - perhaps a sign that they are becoming fed up with the antics of the Labour Co-ordinating Committee.

Such a margin, given the strong instructions from union leaderships to vote against, represents the fact that genuine opposition to the leader-

Apology

SOCIALIST OUTLOOK regrets that an editorial blunder in production resulted in our article on the Islington NALGO strike in the last issue failing to mention the leading role played by Debbie Whitfield as chair of the Islington NALGO branch. Our apologies to her.

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Tories' secret strike fears revealed 1.5% pay limit — No way!

THE TORIES are expecting widespread industrial action against the 1.5 per cent pay norm this spring, leaked Whitehall documents revealed this week. Let's give them all they bargain for, and then some.

Details of a memo, drawn up by senior officials servicing a cabinet committee on pay which is chaired by former energy secretary Lord Wakeham, appeared in *The Guardian* this week.

Miners and firefighters are seen as "high risk". Making the 1.5 per cent limit stick in the pits "threatens to be difficult ... given the background of pit closure and privatisation issues".

A relatively generous pay formula for firefighters, conceded after industrial action in the late seventies, will almost certainly be axed this year. The Fire Brigades Union has pledged to strike in its defence.

Railworkers and nuclear power workers are

graded "medium risk". Council manual workers and airport and prison staff may also go on strike in the next six months, the document predicts.

NALGO, the white-collar local government union, is seen as possessing "the ability to organise effective selective strike action". The union has called a day of action for March 18.