

socialist OUTLOOK

Major wobbles under fire on pit closures

Save the pits: axe the Tories!

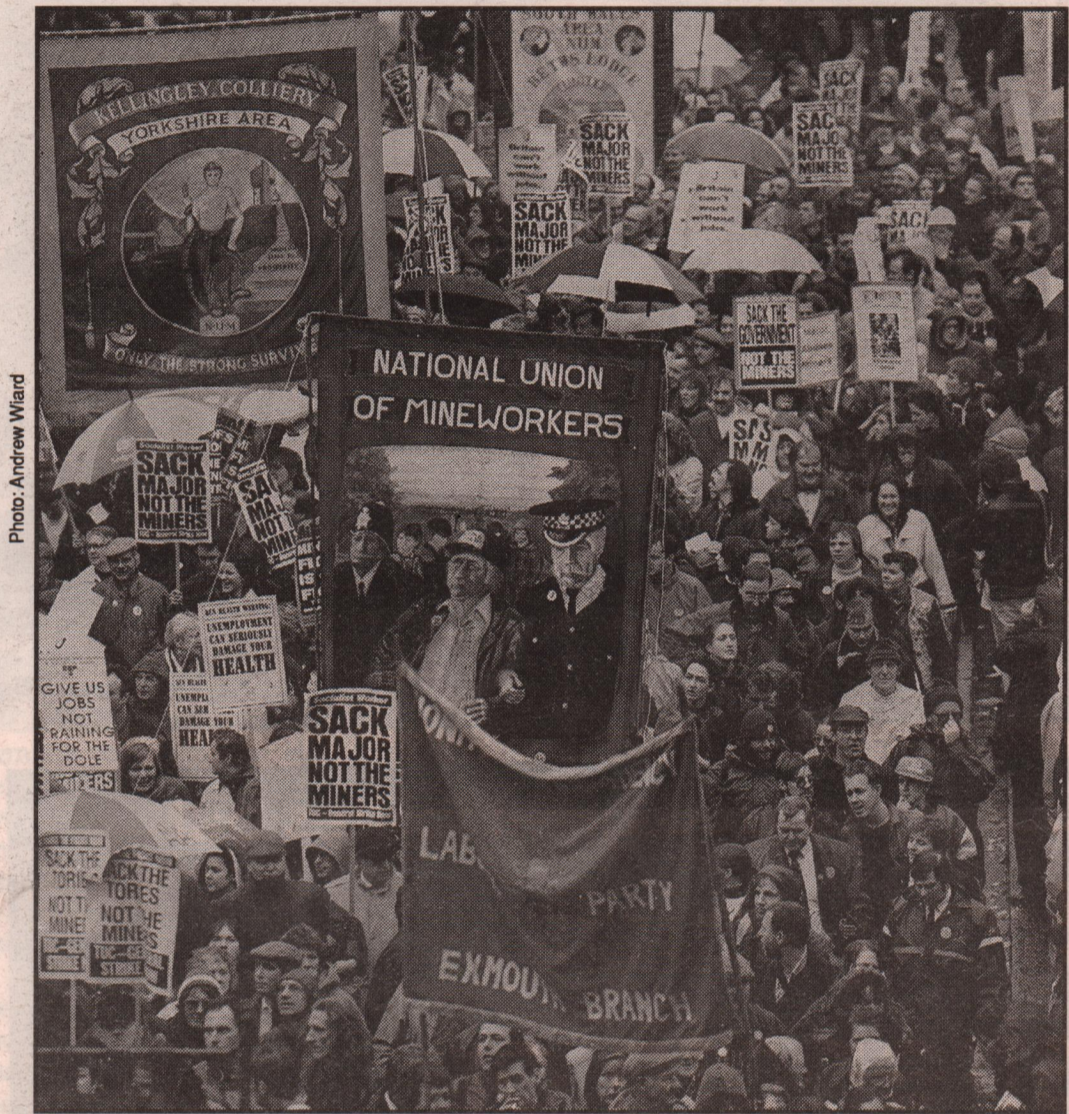


Photo: Andrew Ward

Mass action is needed to defend the public sector

AS SOCIALIST OUTLOOK goes to press, the Tories are in deep crisis over the pit closures, apparently on the verge of offering substantial subsidies, although this is being fought hard by ultra-right wingers in the cabinet. The campaign must continue until *every* pit is reprieved.

But the fact that Heseltine and Major have been forced to the verge of a humiliating climbdown is full of lessons. Only the mass campaign, the huge demonstrations and the outburst of working class protest has forced the Tories to the brink of retreat.

The battle to defend the pits and 100,000 jobs is just the leading edge of what must be a massive struggle to defend the public sector. Thousands in rail, local government, the post office, the NHS and other public services face redundancy, as real unemployment zooms past 4 million.

A victory by the miners will further divide the government and create openings for renewing working class resistance. It must be followed by action to bust the 1.5 per cent public sector pay limit. Destruction of jobs and services, and the pay freeze, must be fought by building a public sector alliance, at national and local level. Every initiative towards this end must be supported.

Arthur Scargill has called for a national 'stayaway' on 18 February; the RMT, NUM and other unions are balloting simultaneously on March 5 for a day of strike action. These initiatives can drive forward a new stage in the fightback.

A victory for the miners will not end the Tory crisis, but deepen it. There is still no sign of economic recovery, but there are green shoots of a workers fightback. Now is the time to put the boot in.

Build a public sector alliance!



USA – frenzied giant lashes out Iraq raids – strength or weakness?

By Paul Clarke

ACCORDING to one-time left winger Michael Ignatieff, never since the Roman Empire has a single imperial power been so all-dominant as the US today.

His evidence is the ease with which the US bombs Iraq, walks in uninvited to Somalia, controls the UN and is organising 'allied' forces for an intervention in ex-Yugoslavia.

But is this frenzy of military activity a sign of strength or weakness? And what were the air raids on Iraq all about?

To put these things in perspective it is useful to look at what has been happening to the Clinton 'transition team' since they won the election last November.

Clinton has 'discovered', lo and behold, that the figures on the US budget deficit are much worse than he knew during the presidential election campaign.

Net result: he is going to have to back-track on his election pledges of health reform,

education spending, cutting the budget deficit and reducing taxes.

Clinton's alleged surprise at the level of the budget deficit is only half true. What has been revealed in the past few weeks is an extra \$60 billion deficit beyond the commonly quoted figures. But this is peanuts in terms of the hundreds of billions that the US owes.

In short, the US economy is in deep structural debt to international financial institutions, particularly the Japanese banks. This represents the massive decline in the US economy over the past 25 years. And this is the crucial background to the flurry of military activity over the past months; the US is trying to assert its political and military leadership of the West, as a means of boosting its economic position.

Political dominance always has a massive spin-off in terms of trade; and the US made a profit from the Gulf war out of the tribute paid by Japan, Germany and the Gulf states to finance the US expedition.

The recent raids on Iraq were however motivated by more than this. The right-wing forces in the military, intelligence and foreign policy establishment which George Bush represents were making their last effort to tie Clinton in to their policy of military adventurism.

The excuse for the raids, forcing Iraq to 'comply with UN resolutions' was so utterly feeble, that even France was forced to state that the cruise missile attack on the factory outside Baghdad was 'outside UN resolutions'.

Everyone knows that the 'no fly zones' have done nothing to prevent Saddam Hussein from attacking the Marsh Arabs in the south with utter impunity.

In many ways these raids were a symptom of weakness. After everything, Saddam Hussein is still in power. Sanctions and military attacks have succeeded in hurting only the people of Iraq, not the regime. Bush has gone, but Saddam remains.

But more fundamentally,

the relative decline of the US economy continues unabated, and cluster bombs and missiles aimed at Iraq are not going to turn the situation around.

If the US military is able to strut the world, apparently unopposed, this is caused not by a new and powerful, economically confident US, but by political changes which give the US this option.

The collapse of the Soviet Union is the first cause; ten years ago it was unthinkable that the USSR under Brezhnev or Andropov would have allowed US military intervention, especially with UN approval.

China, where the process towards capitalist restoration is deeply entrenched, has at best abstained in the UN Security Council, thus effectively giving the green light to every US attack.

But in western Europe, social democracy is the real culprit – social democracy in power, social democracy in opposition. The governments in Spain, and particularly France, have signed on the dotted line for every US abomination.

And in Britain of course, the Labour Party under Kinnock in the Gulf war, and now under Smith, could think of nothing better to do than repeat parrot-like that new raids on Saddam Hussein are absolutely necessary.

The truth is that the US is engaged in a frenzied world offensive to defend its own position because it has to. Ten years hence the relationship of forces with Japan and German-led Europe might be much, much worse. That's why raids on Iraq have to be seen as part of the same process which led to the US get-tough posture over the GATT trade negotiations. Precisely because the recent

raids on Iraq were part of the game-plan by the Republican regime to tie in Clinton to their military policies, it seems unlikely that the recent wave of attacks will continue.

But overall what will characterise the Clinton regime is continuity with what has gone before. Economically Clinton will not be able to fulfil his campaign promises. There is no new deal coming for US workers, no big relaunch of the economy, no big welfare concessions.

Internationally, Clinton may shirk, in the short term, from expensive absurdities like using 40 cruise missiles to blow up one factory, but the overall imperial posture of the US is unlikely to change.

One constant which will remain for certain is staunch support for Israel. The recent raids of course came while 400 Palestinians are still stuck on a snow-bound mountainside between Israel and Lebanon, with little food and medicine. This obscenity is an affront to the whole Arab world.

But the Democrats are notoriously more pro-Israel than the Republicans. The 'peace process' started because Bush heaved the Israelis into it. Now even this minimal pressure on Israel will be reduced.

Ignatieff is wrong about the US. Of the major imperial powers in world history, the US period of dominance, roughly from the 1930s to the 1970s, has been the shortest.

We are not in a 'uni-polar' world, but a world in which the US is decaying and stagnating, challenged by Germany and Japan. And even 40,000 cruise missiles can't put US hegemony back together again.

Tories only survive because of Labour weakness

For the umpteenth time, the 'green shoots' of economic recovery have been shown to be a mirage. The apparent surge of consumer spending after Christmas was merely the cash-strapped masses trying to pick up bargains in the sales. Official unemployment is hitting three million; the real figure is well over 4 million. Manufacturing output is down again. In short, all the efforts of Major and Lamont to 'talk up' the economy are pure hot air.

At the same time, the succession of disasters which have befallen the government show no signs of being resolved. Ministers are running for cover on pit closures, leaving Michael Heseltine holding the baby. Maastricht looms in the background, and will re-emerge as a parliamentary crisis in the spring.

Tax rises

The government is desperately unpopular now among sections of the middle classes; and they, together with millions of working people, are likely to be hit hard by tax rises in the budget, as well as by the new Council Tax. In other words, the fundamental crisis of this government which exploded with the ERM fiasco last autumn has not gone away.

When John Major described the new unemployment figures as 'deeply disappointing', he was not joking. The Tories know that only some good news on the economic front will resolve this rumbling crisis. But with the present situation in the world economy, with a tiny blip upwards in North America, but gloom in Germany and Japan, there is no short-term way out for Britain's bosses.

The second aspect of the situation which has radically changed since last autumn is developments in the working class and the labour movement. There is a new mood to fight back, but it is very uneven and lacks leadership. Last week there were major protest strikes among

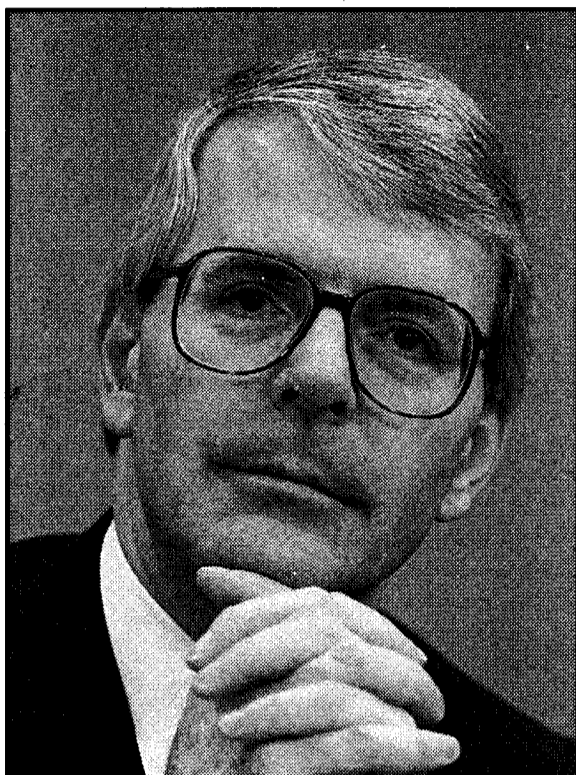


Photo: Andrew Ward

Major: dependant on Labour capitulation

local authority workers in Newcastle and Birmingham. The round of protest actions over pit closures continues.

But the problem remains that all this is mainly just *protest* action, and does not translate itself into sustained industrial action, which remains at a very low ebb. And at a parliamentary political level, Labour is frozen and immobilised. While a host of would-be 'new thinkers' busily devise ever more ways of accommodating to Tory free market ideology, the party drifts rudderless in the class struggle. It is bereft of ideas and policies to fight the Tories.

But there are two aspects of the situation which could give decisive openings for the left. In the trade unions, there is a growing realisation of the necessity to co-ordinate action in the public sector, of the need to forge a public

sector alliance.

All the statistics about trade union membership show that it is in the public sector where the unions have the highest proportion of membership. The Tory onslaught against local government, health, rail, the post office, the miners and countless other public services is not just about the ideology of privatisation, it is also about smashing up bastions of trade unionism.

While fighting for the miners, and pushing for action in their defence, the left has to grasp that this is just the leading edge of a much more widespread struggle. All the various moves aimed at building alliances at national and local level of public sector workers must be vigorously supported.

Fighting cuts and redundancies is always a difficult struggle; but to this battle must be added a unified fight to *smash the pay freeze*, a struggle which will accelerate as the pay round develops into the spring and summer.

Disquiet

In the Labour Party itself, the discussion over the trade union link and 'Clintonisation' is unlocking internal debate and creating sharp debates at even shadow cabinet level. John Smith's abject support for raids on Iraq has caused widespread disquiet in the party. And a left formation, the Socialist Campaign Group Network, is in place which can act as a real focus for galvanising the left in the party.

A public sector alliance is long-overdue. The decision of several unions, led by the NUM and RMT, to organise co-ordinated ballots for a day of strike action to defend the public sector must be built on.

John Major's government is presiding over a basket-case economy which is drifting ever-downwards. It is a government with a small majority, fragile and accident-prone. If it survives it is because the Labour leadership have learnt nothing from three election defeats. It is up to the left to turn the situation around.

A setback for the Socialist Movement

By Alan Thornett

THE SOCIALIST Movement annual general meeting, held in Manchester last Saturday, marked a further decline for an initiative which drew significant broad support when it started at the Chesterfield conferences after the election defeat of 1987.

Less than 100 people attended, with only around 60 of them paid up members with the right to vote. The movement has clearly suffered both from the adverse political situation and serious mistakes made over the last few years.

The first main debate was over a proposed new Socialist Movement constitution, which left its various sectors - Socialist Movement Trade Union Committee, Women for Socialism and Labour Party Socialists

- in an ambiguous position, with no right to representation built into the new structures.

The second was over the direction of the movement - essentially a debate between the 'networking' proposals promoted by the Socialist Society, and the need for a campaigning orientation put forward by *Socialist Outlook* supporters. Finally, there was the question of the future of the movement's paper, *socialist*.

Damaging

Socialist Outlook supporters argued that if the movement was to be revitalised, the lessons of recent damaging mistakes - particularly over *socialist* and its transformation into *Red, Green and Radical* - will have to be taken on board and the movement will have to identify and organise some key campaigns in order to prove



PHOTO: Mark Salmon

The Socialist Movement has failed to give support to campaigns like this NALGO strike in Birmingham

itself as an effective campaigning organisation.

The resolutions on networking and campaigning were both adopted, but it is clear where the priorities of those now in control of the new co-ordinating committee - effectively the Socialist Society - lie.

The change of name of the pilot issue of the new magazine format *socialist* to *RGR* was almost universally condemned. A decision was taken to proceed with a new publica-

tion if possible, jointly with other organisations. The new name was not decided, but it will incorporate *socialist*. The movement would have a 'golden share' but would relinquish editorial control to those who finance the new project.

Unsatisfactory

Elections to the new co-ordinating committee were also unsatisfactory. Although a deadline for nominations

was contained in a mailing some time ago, this had clearly not had the desired impact, since the only nominations received by the deadline were from the Manchester area - essentially the Manchester Socialist Movement group.

Since the re-opening of nominations on the basis of this unsatisfactory situation was opposed by the organisers, these were the only choice available when it came to the elections.

Scandals force out top midlands health chief

SIR JAMES Ackers, Tory chair of the country's largest regional health authority, resigned on January 9 amid a growing roar of scandal.

Ackers had sat for ten years as the political appointee in charge of the 22 health districts of the West Midlands RHA.

He became best-known in recent years for his role in promoting the hilariously-mis-titled 'Healthy Birmingham' plan. This is an unworkable scheme which would reduce Britain's second city to two inaccessible suburban hospital sites, 20 minutes on a good day from the city centre.

But it was not this which brought his demise, nor even the new spate of cash crises and bed closures which have reduced Birmingham's NHS to a continuing 'yellow alert' situation, in which only emergencies and urgent cases can be admitted.

What forced Health Secretary Bottomley to intervene and demand his resignation was the growing tide of embarrassing revelations about the financial dealings of the £2 billion a year RHA, and its links with a string of private and newly-privatised companies set up under Ackers' encouragement.

Among these are:

- The rapid collapse with £2.2m debts of Qa business services, formed by an RHA management buy-out.

- Audit Commission criticism of the hiving off of the RHA's supplies division.

- The halting of the region's Healthrac computer system, which had cost the RHA £3 million.



Sir James Ackers

- The 'unlawful' payment of £1m to the private computer firm Financial Information Project.

- The payment by the RHA of a massive £2.5 million to US management consultants United Research Group. This covered such items as the charter of private jets. RHA official Chris Watney went missing on a round-the-world yacht trip, and has now returned to face allegations over the deal.

- The semi-privatisation of the RHA's estates division, which is also on the brink of collapse, threatening up to 60 redundancies. Essential services are being taken back under RHA management.

Eventually Ackers, whose own company is now in receivership and reputedly deep in debt, ran out of luck. An inquiry into the RHA's affairs

by Bottomley's advisor, Sainsbury's boss Sir Roy Griffiths, concluded that he had to go: his Tory cronies could no longer protect him.

Birmingham Northfield MP Richard Burden is now demanding a Commons statement from Bottomley "on how such a state of affairs could arise in one of Britain's largest RHAs. How did the Authority get into such a financial mess. The system that allowed it all to take place is the real villain."

NUPE's local official John Dempsey points out that:

"Secret deals in smoke-filled rooms have led to the inevitable errors." He is

demanding

"An end to secret meetings, proper consultation with health workers, and an opening of the books."

Meanwhile the battle against the closures continues. Save Our Services campaign coordinator Sharon Small said:

"Ackers was totally immovable and arrogant but he was only the figurehead. The fight to save our 6,000 threatened jobs, community services and facilities is only beginning. The closures of wards and sites will be fought."

■ **Contact SOS Action Campaign Committee, SBHA District Offices, Oak Tree Lane, Selly Oak, Birmingham B29 6JD (021-627-1627).**

Lambeth corruption scandal Firms profit from Labour's purge

By Helen Shaw

ON JANUARY 22, a special Lambeth council meeting discussed the Chief Executive's report into £10 million of alleged corruption.

His report highlights: unauthorised redundancies, overcharging by the council's Direct Labour Organisation (DLO), and overcharging by sub-contractors who had often won work improperly. Three senior officers have suffered intimidation as a result of their investigations.

Officer solutions to this mess are to break up the DLO and re-tender "in-house" services. The meeting was lobbied by Lambeth workers whose jobs are threatened.

Press reports fail to mention that it was witch hunted councillors who called the special council meeting to stop the illegal redundancies by removing work from sub-contractors.

This followed the privatisation of half of the housing DLO. DLO workers clearly had jobs to do but council leader, Steve Whaley, wanted to get rid of people he called "dross".

The same legal officers who forced councillors to make the redun-

dancies are now saying that this was illegal! The left's attempts to stop the redundancies were later used to expel them from the Labour Party!

Steve Whaley had brought in consultants KPMG to supervise the compulsory competitive tendering (CCT) of the repairs section - originally for a £6,000 fee. KPMG had earlier been used by the Tories to try to impose a Housing Action Trust in Lambeth. They are now helping Walesa to privatise Poland!

Extended contracts

The Chief Executive's report criticises massive extensions of contracts to the private sector when work should have been retendered. KPMG's contract has now been extended to over £250,000!

John Smith's man Jack Straw MP has tried to blame left wing councillors for this scandal. However, Labour Party General Secretary, Larry Whitty admitted, when expelling Lambeth councillor Steve French, that he recognised his achievements in fighting corruption as chair of the DLO in 1986-7.

French removed dozens of over-charging sub-contractors from the council's approved list and sacked nearly the entire DLO top management. Sadly, in the years since, the initiative has been lost. CCT has offered new opportunities for corruption to flourish. Four of the contractors that Cllr. French banned have been reinstated.

At the meeting, expelled Labour councillors narrowly lost a resolution of no confidence in Whaley. However, their motion condemning the ban on councillors seeing financial reports was passed.

Senior officers propose more redundancies to cover up their failings. Even Chief Executive Herman Ouseley said "Failures are due, in some way, to the failings of... top management, including myself."

The council leadership unquestioningly accepted the recommendations from this failed management to move towards the closure of the DLO. Its ordinary worker wot gets the blame.

Privatisation is the harbinger of corruption, not the solution!

Setback for Brighton witch hunters

By Steve Smith

Campaigners against the witch hunt of socialists in the Labour Party are celebrating morale-boosting victories in Brighton as the local tide of expulsions was stemmed during the latest hearings of the National Constitutional Committee.

Rod Fitch, 1983 parliamentary candidate in Kemptown, and Socialist Outlook supporter Mark Thompson became the first activists facing the inquiry to avoid expulsion. They demolished the evidence concocted by Brighton's Labour council leadership and local LCC activists.

Eight 'trials' at the Brighton NCC since last September have resulted in expulsions - with long serving party members being found 'guilty' of membership of Militant.

The cases of ten others, including prominent members of the Christian Socialist Movement, Jean Calder and Andy Winter, Socialist Outlook supporter Jon Green, anti-Zionist campaigner Tony Greenstein and national chair of Troops Out Richard Stanton, are all in the pipeline.

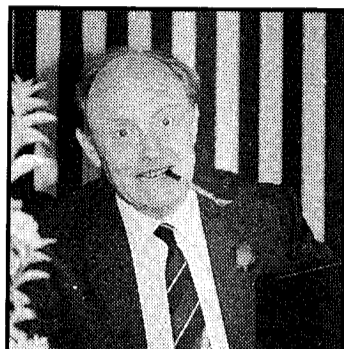
The Rod Fitch judgement gives powerful ammunition to the anti-witch hunt campaign because, remarkably, Rod was actually found 'guilty' of Militant membership by the NCC!

Although suspended from holding office for two years, this precedent should be publicised and brandished in the face of every Labour right-winger in the country, to underline the fact that even within the tortured logic of the witch hunters, membership of a 'proscribed' organisation is not an expellable offence.

Mark Thompson, who became the first ever Labour councillor for the Seven Dials ward in 1988 commented:

"Although our stand in opposing poll tax and cuts in council jobs and services has been justified, the witch hunt has already inflicted heavy damage on Brighton Labour Party. It was almost wiped out in last year's council elections, showing that witch hunts are purely and simply a gift to the Tories."

The Brighton hearings are a



Founder of witch hunt: Kinnock

timely illustration of the importance of the left taking the fight against the witch hunt seriously, and organising a genuine fight against it.

With the exception of high media profile cases like Lambeth, Liverpool and Coventry, the intentions of the Walworth Road bureaucracy remain unclear.

But there are hopeful signs that the Kinnockite ice age of suppressed Labour Party debate may be thawing.

The shadow cabinet bloc has fragmented since the general election defeat, with the ultra-right embracing ideological fads like 'Clintonisation', and centre-left bureaucrats like Gould, Prescott and Short seeking to increase their profile.

With splits looming on the union block vote, all this can increase the respectability and tolerance of internal party debate.

The left is also in a better position to take advantage of these debates with growth of the Socialist Campaign Group Network and developments in the class struggle like the movement in solidarity with the miners.

The SCGN must prioritise this issue, and centre leftists like Gould and Prescott must be put on the spot as to where they stand on this question.

Brighton NCC hearings have been set for former councillors Richard Stanton (22 February) and Fiona Roberts (28 March). Messages of support can be sent c/o 92a Springfield Rd., Brighton. Updates on the national witchhunt can be obtained from the Campaign Against the Witchhunt, c/o 56 Ashby House, Loughborough Rd., London SW9 7SP.

Where was Militant?

The two blows struck in Brighton against the witch hunt by Rod Fitch and Mark Thompson have sadly thrown into sharp relief how local Militant supporters have chosen to (not) fight the witch hunt.

The bureaucracy's task in Brighton was made considerably easier when about a third of those accused of Militant membership failed to renew their Labour Party cards.

Of those who remained, none called witnesses or took pains to prepare a comprehensive rebuttal of accusations against them. One Militant supporter said he had 'better things to do'.

While the bureaucracy have fought since 1983 to rid the Labour Party of Militant, it now appears that Militant is giving them a helping hand, by preparing a retreat from Labour Party activity in England and Wales to parallel that already in hand in Scotland.

Scargill: "Time for talk is over" Coal and rail unions gear up for fight

By Bill Sutcliffe

NUM president Arthur Scargill told a rally in Cardiff recently: "The time for mere talk and demonstrations is at an end." Pressure is slowly building for concrete activity in support of the miners and in defence of jobs across the entire working class.

Women Against Pit Closures have set up protest camps outside a number of threatened pits. The TUC 'jobs action day' on February 18, - which Scargill wants to see become a 'stayaway' - could spark unofficial action in some workplaces.

Most importantly of all, there is now a real likelihood of the major coal and rail unions organising synchronised strike ballots on March 5. RMT leader Jimmy Knapp is speaking in terms of a "spring of discontent". Socialists must now work flat out to ensure that the trade union bureaucrats live up to their fine words.

Women's camps

WAPC have now established camps at Markham Main, Trentham, Houghton Main, Grimethorpe and Parkside and aim to start them at all of the ten pits at the top of the Tory hit list.

Anne Scargill, a prime mover in WAPC, has appealed for women to spend time at the camps, while labour movement and community organisations are asked to pass resolutions of support and send donations. A major TUC-backed demo in London is planned on February 6.

The TUC's February 18 jobs action day is clearly intended as another Congress House cop-



out. As an official press release makes clear: "This is not a call for industrial action but for broad-based activity to demand change."

Instead, leaflets will be handed out at Jobcentres, presumably in case any unemployed have failed to realise that unemployment is not a good thing.

The statement continues: "At workplace level unions and employers will be urged to cooperate in meetings and other activities to demonstrate their shared concern about the damaging impact of unemployment on their communities and the need for government action."

Yet many bosses have put hundreds, if not thousands, of people on the dole queue since the start of the recession. Extracting expressions of concern will do a fat lot of good.

If the TUC's day of national recovery last month is anything to go by, the overwhelming majority of trade unionists will simply ignore such fatuous advice.

Scargill correctly asked the Cardiff rally to use February 18

to protest in a way far more militant than anything envisaged by the TUC: "I call on all trade unionists to stay away from work and go onto the streets of Britain."

But there are obvious problems with such an attempt to skirt the anti-union laws. It puts the onus on trade unionists to act as concerned individuals rather than exploit their collective power.

It could also open the road to victimisations. The best advice for militants is to push for action on immediate demands in their own workplace where this is at all possible. Indications are that there could be some response to such tactics, but not enough to force a government backdown.

Linking up

A meeting of coal unions NUM and NACODS and rail unions RMT, ASLEF and TSSA on January 20 agreed to link their jobs fights and take back to their respective executives a proposal for synchronised ballots on March 5.

The ballot will call for a one



Scargill:
"I call on all trade unionists to stay away from work and go onto the streets of Britain."

day strike on a day to be specified, and a rolling programme of industrial action thereafter. Excellent. But so far no one is committed to anything definite.

The NUM is to hold a delegate conference on February 4, which is expected to endorse the plan and kick off a campaign for a yes vote. NACODS are likely to hold a similar gathering. The RMT executive last Friday agreed to ballot.

Question marks hang over the response of ASLEF and TSSA. Despite earlier rhetoric in support of a 24-hour general strike, ASLEF general secretary Derrick Fullick effectively undermined the RMT's planned fightback against the London Underground company plan.

TSSA remain an unknown quantity.

ASLEF and TSSA activists need to ensure a ballot takes place; activists in all the unions concerned must pull out all the stops for a yes vote on March 5. There is a real chance of winning decisive majorities.

But the anti-union laws still loom large. The employers may seek rulings that a co-ordinated strike would constitute a political rather than a trade dispute. Now is the time for the nettle to be grasped. Successful and united defiance would render the judges' decision unworkable.

●WAPC pit camps c/o NUM headquarters, Holly Street, Sheffield S1 2GT. For speakers telephone: 0742 766900x295

Rail sell off - fast track to disaster

By Dave Osler

BRITISH RAIL sell-off proposals announced by the government last week are a one-way ticket to massive fare hikes, thousands of job losses, widespread route closures, plummeting investment and safety cutbacks which will ultimately cost lives. What a way to run a railroad.

The move has already been branded a "poll tax on wheels" by Conservative MP Robert Adley, chairman of the public transport select committee. He later added: "This experiment could jeopardise the whole of the railway network."

Other Tory critics of the scheme include three ennobled former cabinet ministers, Lords Ridley, Young and Whitelaw, notable enthusiasts for the Thatcher privatisations, and the Bow Group on the Conservative left.

Straight-laced trade paper Jane's International Railways denounced it as "a dogma-driven exercise, utterly irrelevant to national need for a well-balanced multi-modal transport system". The idea is so stupid that even

the Labour front bench feels safe in opposing it.

A straight sell-off or small shareholder issue have both proved impossible, giving the resultant enabling bill all the hallmarks of a Tory think-tank free market Heath Robinson.

Under last week's enabling measure, a new body, Railtrack, will take over BR's track and signalling equipment, while a new franchising authority will invite the private sector to bid for the right to operate passenger services on Railtrack's infrastructure.

BR's Freight and parcels businesses will be sold outright, while stations will be up for sale or lease. A third quango, the independent rail regulator, will supervise the industry, with a brief to promote competition and protect the consumer interest.

The bill would also enable the government to privatise London and Glasgow Underground railways and the Tyne & Wear Metro without further legislation. The government insists this is a drafting technicality, but it is impossible to take them at their word.

The stated aims of rail privatisation include competition, attracting private

investment, and the injection of entrepreneurial culture into BR. But as Tory critics realise, none of these are likely to come to fruition.

Real competition is ruled out simply because it is physically impossible to run two trains on same route at same time. Transport secretary John MacGregor has admitted many franchises will have to be on an exclusive basis.

BR has been systematically starved of cash for years, unlike most European networks, and is expected to double its 1992 loss of £145m this year.

As BR chairman Sir Bob Reid put it: "Give me the Italian subsidy and everyone could travel for free. And I would give the passengers a tenner at Christmas."

While the government is seeking to save money, it may even need to shell out more cash to finance the new bureaucracies and provide sweeteners to get operators to run unprofitable but socially necessary lines.

Railtrack will be expected to maintain existing infrastructure, finance any expansion and probably make an eight per cent return. This will force it

to levy high charges on track users, who will in turn argue they have no choice but to scrap marginal routes.

For instance, former Sealink ferries operator Sea Containers is interested in taking over Southern Region, but has already stated it would close the Southampton-Portsmouth-Brighton-Eastbourne Coastway line and the North Downs route between Reading, Guildford and Tonbridge.

As well as the closing down entire lines, private sector operators will naturally strive to cut staffing levels. The inevitable outcome will be a great train jobs robbery.

The whole fiasco gives the lie to government claims that it wants to see road traffic switch rail to reduce carbon dioxide emissions.

Public transport offers so many social and ecological benefits that it cannot be judged by standard profit-and-loss accounting. Development of an integrated public transport policy, placing BR, light railways and bus companies under the control of workers and the communities they serve, would be an obvious early priority for an incoming socialist government.

Solidarity with the Miners

WOMEN'S CAMPS
AGAINST CLOSURES
Contact numbers:
Doncaster area: Hatfield
Main 0302-841365
Barnsley 0226-202687

Women Against Pit
Closures
NATIONAL
DEMONSTRATION
LONDON
SATURDAY FEB 6
Assemble 11am
Embankment, march
to Hyde Park

Picket NW region TUC
Saturday February 6,
Mechanics Institute,
MANCHESTER

Rotten, racist, reactionary Clinton's Democrats offer no model for Labour

By Dave Osler

SHOULD LABOUR reinvent itself as a British version of the Democratic Party? Many activists see the Democrats as the nearest American equivalent of a European-style mass social-democratic party, and are naturally attracted to any formula that seemingly offers electoral success against the political right.

But underneath the surface, the current Clintonisation debate is the latest manifestation of an ongoing drive to transform Labour into an openly bourgeois formation, as the self-styled 'moderniser' faction seeks to hitch its strategy to a rolling bandwagon.

Unlike the Labour Party, which despite the blandishments of Blair and Co still ultimately represents the political expression of the trade union bureaucracy, the Democrats ensure that the American labour movement has no independent political expression at all. For this process to be duplicated in Britain would mean a major setback for working class politics.

The Democrats are not, in the European usage of the word, a party as such, but a loose federation of local electoral machines, with no fixed membership or even formal membership requirements. Democrats are simply those who vote for the Democratic Party.

There is no party leadership beyond the presidential candidate, few staff and no official publications. There is no programme, or even a set of principles, save loosely-worded presidential platforms, which candidates at every level are free to implement or ignore, as they see fit. The attractions of such a set up for the neo-Kinnockites are all too obvious.

True, the Democrats' foot soldiers are drawn from organised labour, black and feminist activists, and other progressives. But ultimately, big business bucks call the political tune, as can be seen by Clinton's stance on everything from workfare to foreign policy.

Free trade

Historically, the Democratic Party has been a vehicle by which those sections of the US bourgeoisie favouring free trade won democratic legitimacy through a mass electoral base, with the Republicans carrying out this valuable function for protectionist interests. In recent decades, even this distinction - minimal from any socialist viewpoint - has eroded to the brink of disappearance.

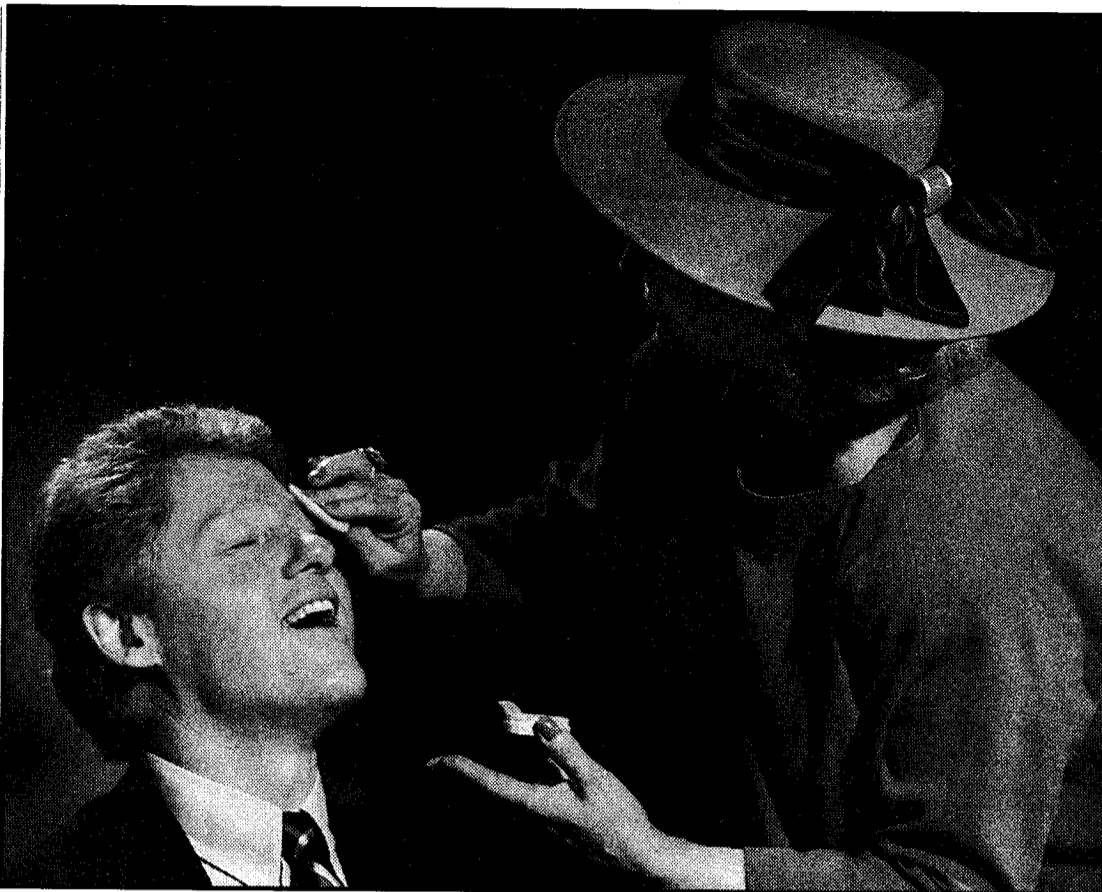
The Democrats' reputation as a party of the left, in the eyes of many recent British commentators, rests almost entirely on two policy packages; Roosevelt's New Deal of the 1930s - extensive welfare reform and

job creation measures to counter the great depression - and the 1960s Great Society programme - limited public health provisions and a 'War on Poverty' palpably more rhetorical than real.

Both were largely in response to pressure from below, reflected in the upsurge in union militancy of the 1930s and the black activism of the 1960s. Yet to this day, American welfare provision is surely the worst seen in any advanced capitalism.

The starting point for any understanding of US politics is the civil war of 1861-65. Abolition of slavery was a side issue for Abraham Lincoln; the real conflict was between northern industrial capitalism, represented by the Republicans, which sought to build up American industry behind tariff walls, and southern slave-holding plantation owners, grouped around the Democrats, who wanted free trade to boost their agricultural exports. The northern victory was decisive in shaping America's subsequent capitalist development.

The Democrats remained politically dominated by the segregationist ruling class of the Deep South, and built popular support among poor southern whites through unabashed racism. In the North, the party looked to Catholic immigrants



The US economy will need more than a touch of make-up to cover the cracks



Franklin D. Roosevelt: best friend of the profit system

from Ireland, Poland and Italy.

The Republicans turned instead to native-born Protestant workers and farmers, and the relatively few enfranchised blacks, who regarded it as the anti-slavery party. But in class terms, both parties constituted blocs between sections of the bourgeoisie and sections of the masses, built around pro-capitalist platforms.

Unions

Working class organisation, albeit narrowly based on elitist craft unionism, became increasingly evident after the formation of the American Federation of Labour in 1886. The Socialist Party was briefly able to win substantial support between 1901 and about 1920. But while the European proletariat forged mass reformist parties in this period, the American working class was crucially unable to attain even this basic first step towards class independence.

Coming to power in 1933 in the midst of capitalism's worst-ever slump, President Franklin D. Roosevelt - proud to proclaim himself the best friend the profit system ever had - seized the political opportunity to constitute a new hegemonic bloc which would bring organised labour firmly into the capitalist fold.

Early on, Roosevelt passed legislation guaranteeing collec-

tive bargaining and the right to organise. Rising class confidence saw general strikes in Minneapolis, San Francisco and Toledo in 1934 and a wave of factory occupations in 1936-37, with Trotskyists often playing a leading role. Farmer-labor parties in several states enjoyed some electoral success.

Radical

Out of these struggles emerged a new union federation, more radical than the AFL - the Congress of Industrial Organisations. In order to head off rising working class demands, Roosevelt gave the trade union bureaucracy a place as junior partners within the Democrat machine in return for labour movement electoral support.

The small but influential Communist Party of the USA, in line with Moscow-dictated policy of popular frontism, happily played ball and even did its best to keep the production lines rolling throughout World War Two after America accidentally found itself allied with the Soviet Union.

By the late 1940s, high inflation and widespread unemployment among demobbed service personnel led to a strike wave surpassing even that of the previous decade. In response, Congress passed draconian anti-union legislation - the notorious Taft-Hartley Act - in 1947.

Repeal

In return for union support in the 1948 election, Democratic President Harry S. Truman promised its repeal. But following his narrow victory (after which he was heard to exclaim 'labour did it'), Truman resorted to the use of Taft-Hartley 12 times in first year after his election.

More anti-union laws followed, paving the way for the McCarthy witch-hunts against the left. By the time of the 1955 AFL-CIO merger, the US labour movement was firmly wedded to the Democrats.

Thereafter, the Democrats were forced - against their gut instincts - to win over black support. Mass migration of black

workers to northern cities to service war industries made them a constituency that could no longer be ignored in Democrat fortresses like Chicago.

The late 1950s upsurge in black activism against segregation in the Deep South gave the party a major headache, thanks to the continued strength of the Dixiecrats - the party's racist southern right.

Democrat President Kennedy conceded a weak Civil Rights Act in 1963. Yet Texas Democrat governor John Connally could still warn Kennedy's successor, Lyndon B. Johnson, at the Democratic convention the following year: "If you seat those black buggers, the whole South will walk out." LBJ had most of the Mississippi delegation physically removed.

Rhetoric

Nevertheless, the 1967 riots saw the rise of a cadre of professional black bourgeois politicians who exploited black power rhetoric to win local office. The number of black elected officials rose from 103 in 1964 to 6,424 in 1986.

The Democrats decided to ride the tide and take moderate black demands on board. In so doing, they served both the interests of the ruling class in demobilising black struggle, and the interests of a newly emergent black petty bourgeoisie. But for the black working class, conditions continue to deteriorate.

History exposes the Democrats' pretensions to radicalism as hollow. It will not take long for Clinton's actions to prove his administration is a worthy heir to his party's rotten, racist and reactionary traditions.

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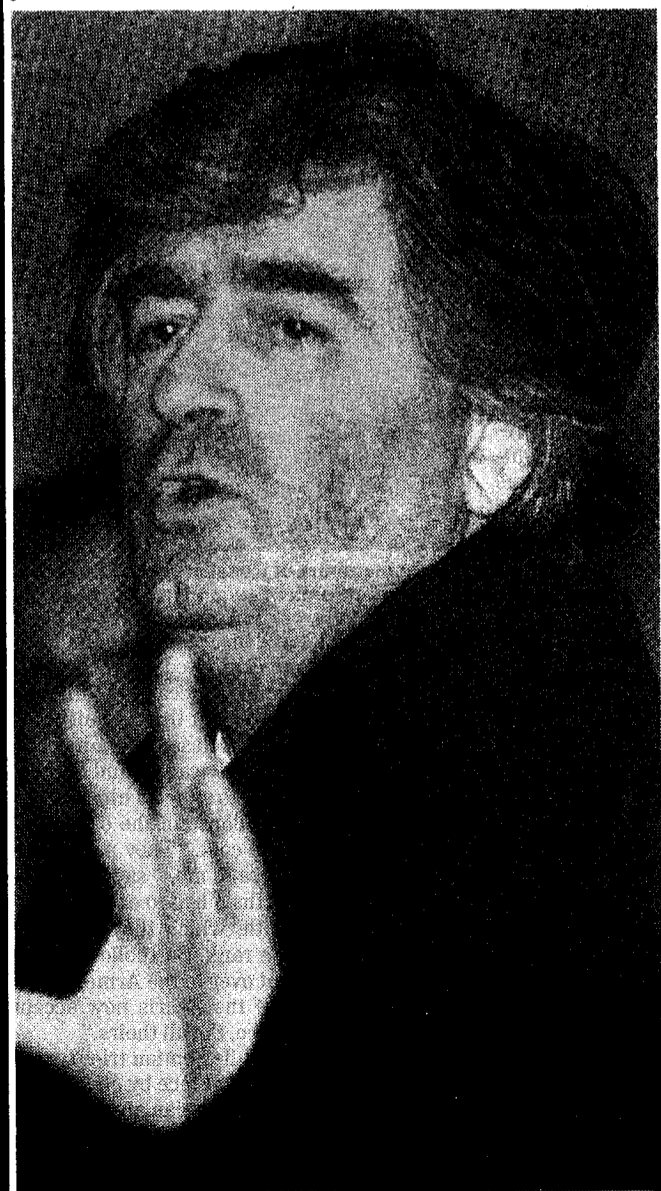
Bosnia No to UN peace plan

AS THE AIRCRAFT carrier Ark Royal heads towards ex-Yugoslavia, the beginnings of a major imperialist intervention are now in place. While intervention so far has been very limited, an enormous apparatus, including a NATO command and control centre, has been established in Yugoslavia and on board allied warships off the coast.

This operation is not to defend Bosnia against the Serbian attacks, or to liberate the 70,000 people held in secret camps, or to end the systematic rapes being carried out by the Serbian forces of Karadzic and Milosevic. It is to impose the newly-brokered 'peace' agreement between the UN, in the form of David Owen and Cyrus Vance, and the Serbian leadership.

As the self-styled Bosnian Serb 'parliament' debated the issue, they did so in the sure knowledge that the agreement gives them everything they want. 'Peace' is coming as the dismemberment of Bosnia, its cantonisation into ethnic zones, which is precisely what Karadzic and Milosevic wanted all along. Now, tragically, it seems as if the Bosnian government of Izebegevic is preparing to go along with this.

The operation being carried out by the imperialist powers gives the lie to explanations which see the West as opposed to Milosevic's plan for a Greater Serbia, or determined to bring him down.



Bosnian Serb leader Karadzic

Milosevic has caused instability in the region, which has brought him into bad odour with the West. But in order now to re-stabilise the Balkans for imperialism, the West regards Greater Serbia, and the regime in Belgrade, as the cornerstone of future order and stability. They may not like Milosevic, but they will do business with him.

Doing business with him now means breaking up Bosnia; and what the UN mediators are doing, at the behest of imperialism, is criminal.

Multi-ethnic

Bosnia has existed since the second world war as a multi-ethnic province, in which, apart from the Croatian region along the coast, no part of its territory has been clearly dominated by one ethnic group. Diverse ethnic origins divide towns, villages and even families. And until the Great Serb onslaught by Milosevic, there was no hint of a national question *within* Bosnia, or of any substantial ethnic conflicts there either.

The defence of Bosnia was in its origins multi-ethnic. But the possibility of a united defence of the province was sabotaged by the actions of the right-wing regime in Zagreb, who used the Serbian attack to establish a Croatian enclave. This in turn has opened a political space for Islamic politicians, and is reflected now in growing tensions among the Bosnian fighters between Muslims and Croats.

The position of socialists should be for the defence of the unity and integrity of Bosnia against the attempt by Serbia and Croatia, now with the sanction of world imperialism, to carve it up.

Positions that talk about being neutralist or pacifist, or merely denounce 'all nationalisms' fail to grasp the real issues. The crisis in ex-Yugoslavia stems from the decision of the corrupt right-wing regime of ex-Stalinist bureaucrats in Belgrade to use Great Serb nationalism to shore up their rule.

By unleashing the Yugoslav army against Croatia and Slovenia, they ensured the slide into a bloody and diabolical war, in which the only gainers are right-wing ultra-nationalist forces.

Attempts by sections of the Western



The left must support self-determination for Slovenia, Bosnia and Croatia

left to suggest that the only right-wing forces involved are the nationalists and Ustache Croatian forces are bizarre. The Serbian fighters who control a part of Sarajevo are fascists. Milosevic's regime, far from being some sort of vestigial socialist outfit, is in fact ultra right-wing.

Despite the reluctance of rape victims to talk, particularly those who fear the stigma of being a raped woman in Muslim communities, all the evidence is that rape has become a systematic weapon of terror used by the Serb Chetnik forces. Thousands, probably tens of thousands, of women have been raped. Rape is used systematically in the detention camps.

According to the Red Cross there are perhaps 70,000 people in detention camps whose existence has not been officially notified to the UN. The fate of men and women in these camps must be very grim.

"Too delicate"

The use of rape in this way, on such a scale, is probably unparalleled since the second world war. It is a major crime against women and against humanity. And the fact that David Owen, speaking for the West, finds it 'too delicate' to even raise in his last talks with Bosnian Serb leader Karadzic, speaks eloquently about the priorities of imperialism.

The new situation which enables the negotiation of a peace agreement is precisely that the Serb forces have won most of their objectives. A major imperialist intervention now would be about enforcing the decapitation of Bosnia, against the will of the overwhelming majority of its people.

Most likely the main military conflicts would be between imperialist forces and the Bosnian resistance.

The Milosevic regime has strung out the fighting in Bosnia, beyond the point where the Serb forces have achieved their objectives, to firm up its domestic political base. If 'peace' comes at the price of decapitating Bosnia, Milosevic

has a new agenda, which is to turn his attention to the ethnic Albanian population is Kosovo, which after all was the scene of his first wave of Great Serb mobilisation in 1988-9.

Socialist federation

The solution to the crisis in ex-Yugoslavia is not imperialist intervention, but the fight for a *socialist federation of the Balkans*. But such a federation is a medium or long-term objective. Here and now it must pass through the stage of the self-determination and independence of the various nations, and nations in formation, in the region.

Socialists must defend the independence of Croatia, Slovenia and Bosnia, but also the rights of national minorities within these nations.

The right of self-determination of Kosovo, and unity with Albania if that is what the population want, must also be supported.

And they should, besides opposing imperialist intervention, demand an ending of the arms embargo, which has only prevented the Bosnian resistance from obtaining the necessary weaponry for self defense.

Key demands in this situation are:-

- No to imperialist intervention in the Balkans; the people of Bosnia need arms not UN troops!
- No carve up of Bosnia - support the Bosnian resistance.
- For an international campaign against the use of rape, for a war crimes tribunal to bring the torturers, rapists and murderers to book.
- No to Greater Serbia, for the self-determination of Bosnia, Croatia and Kosovo.
- For a socialist federation of the Balkans.

"Milosevic's regime, far from being some sort of vestigial socialist outfit, is in fact ultra right-wing"

Solidarity with Bosnian resistance



Catherine Samary, a supporter of the French LCR, has just returned from Sarajevo. Below we print her assessment of the situation. The position of Socialist Outlook is set out on page 7.

SARAJEVO is an encircled city, but you can reach it, which reflects an unstable relation of military forces. I confess that many aspects of the relationship of forces is obscure to me. At the entrance to Sarajevo there are Serb Chetnik forces who check all arrivals; but they are not strong enough to completely block the entrance to the city or to take it by force.

In other words, Sarajevo is encircled, being strangled, but Sarajevo still lives. The Serb offensive lasting several weeks was defeated, and the Bosnian forces pushed the Serb snipers who terrorise the city, mainly mercenaries, to the outskirts of the town.

One area of the city is under the control of extreme right-wing Serb Chetniks, but the rest is under the control of the military and civil Bosnian authorities.

The population is often prostrate or passive. The most active are enrolled in the police, the army or the administration, which was totally disorganised by the departure of a large part of its Serbian functionaries.

There is no electricity and it gets dark at 4pm; people use candles. There are

problems with the water supply; the population takes several hours each day to replenish water from rivers or wells.

There is no heating, except for the few who have gas. It was between minus 5° and minus 10°C. on 1 January; and this is just the start of the Yugoslavian winter! (The pipeline which brings gas from Hungary goes through Serbia, but has not been cut off.) For those without gas there are other expedients; fences, even window-frames, are made into firewood.

Food supplies have been severely reduced; three kilos of foodstuffs per person per month, brought in by the relief columns. There is also a seemingly widespread black market, where everything is sold in German deutschmarks.

A kilo of coffee in Sarajevo is 50DM (about £21). Five kilometres from the city you find it sold for 5DM.

The most numerous deaths are among babies and the old, from lack of milk, vitamins and heating.

One hundred thousand people in Sarajevo are refugees or displaced people; 30,000 coming from combat zones close to the city, and 76,000 from the part of the city controlled by the Serb Chetniks, whose houses have been destroyed.

The encirclement of the city is carried out by the Chetniks, but also by mercenaries, paid for their crimes. But there is also one entrance to the city controlled by the Croat HVO militia. We were taken by that route, which links Sarajevo to the Adriatic and passes through Mostar.

All along that road one sees Croat banners and flags. Bosnian flags didn't appear until the end of the route, near Sarajevo.

In Sarajevo itself, there is a unified Bosnian command. But people repeated over and over to us that the Croats did not want to break the vice-like grip on Sarajevo. They described the suburb of Stoup, where, as the shells fell on the city, the Croat HVO militia and the Serb Chetniks fraternised happily together.

One can thus speak of a double strangulation on the military and political level. The Bosnians are politically and militarily straight-jacketed by the threat of reprisals against Bosnian prisoners, of whom there are thousands in Croatia, by the Croat nationalist militias, and by the power of Croat leader Tudjman.

The latter wants to expand the Croat state at the expense of Bosnia, and within the framework of an 'alliance', to put the blame for all aggression on Serbia.

The Bosnians, through the Croat actions, are hobbled in the battle against the Serb aggressor, whose threat is much more violent and immediate.

The Bosnians describe this situation by way of an old Bosnian myth about being eaten by two monsters, one who eats the body, the other who eats the soul. They also say in Sarajevo: 'God save us from the protection of the HVO'.

But the official Bosnian line is the prisoner of an immediate and disastrous tactical choice, that of an alliance with the Croat nationalists faced with the more direct and immediate Serb aggression.

People in Sarajevo insist on the necessity to talk about the truth and existence of a Bosnian identity and not just a 'Muslim' one. One of the decisive aspects of this affirmation is the appearance of a completely new Bosnian army.

Formed at ground level during the struggle, it has existed for several months. But it was formed very late, because for a long time the Bosnians considered the Yugoslav army to be 'their' army, that of national liberation.

Because, even during the war in Croatia, nobody believed the war would spread to Bosnia, no action was taken to create a functioning army. They were totally disarmed on that terrain, and lost a lot of time.

The army was born from ethnically mixed battalions, from spontaneous groups of resistance, without a unified command. They have a strong tradition as anti-nationalist partisans. That was the principal effort of the anti-nationalist Bosnians; to create an army with refurbished weapons, or newly made ones. That takes time. But their weapons were able to destroy tanks.

The anti-war movement developed strongly in this period. Until last April, they demonstrated solely against the war as such, with a strong anti-nationalist dimension. But since the war spread to Bosnia, the problem has been posed in another way; against the war, for peace, but with what political solution?

Inside the anti-war movement, a current exists which tries to push forward an alternative to the nationalist decapitation of Bosnia, but is not content to oppose the war. It aims to organise resistance, aid the refugees, prepare the return of the displaced people, and overcome the lasting trauma which the war has caused.

On the question of foreign intervention, everyone is for it, but with very different visions of what it would mean.

They demand the arms, but not the presence of a foreign army which would substitute itself for a political solution, and which it would want to control.

The resistance is for any measure to break the siege of Sarajevo and the multi-ethnic villages. There exists every sort of position, including those who think the Gulf war and American technology show the way to bring down the reactionary powers in Belgrade.

As everywhere else, the divisions between political left and right mark the differences of assessment of the West.

It is necessary for us to demand that all aid and intervention is subordinate to the needs of the Bosnian resistance, to be against all logic of cantonisation, or decapitation of Bosnia on the basis of single-nation states. If we can, we should send international brigades on that basis!

There is no solution without challenging the construction of single-nation states on the corpse of Yugoslavia. The sole solution to avoid that outcome is the construction of a Balkan federation. This idea has most support in Bosnia and Macedonia, but to attain it means political changes in Belgrade and Zagreb, and the end of the war.

The present negotiations are scandalous from two viewpoints. On the one side there is a big fuss to denounce the what's happening – and the reality is massacres, concentration camps and the fascist politics of the Chetnik Serbs.

On the other hand negotiations continue as if none of this is happening.

All negotiations should be conditional on ending the siege of the towns, which expresses the wish to suffocate everything which is mixed and non ethnically-pure. No negotiations without attempting to arraign the war criminals, denounce the mass rapes as crimes, and put on trial those responsible for murder and massacre.

Second hypocrisy; the West accepts the logic of single-nation states, recognising Croatia and Serbia, without demanding that these states recognise Bosnia.

The Serbs are presented as the sole aggressors, and the Croats present the Bosnians as the 'third party' and the 'Muslim side'. The Croats don't support a Bosnian resistance, but only that of 'their' territory, with a part of Bosnia going to the Muslims.

This is an absolute negation of the Bosnian multicultural identity and of the present resistance. However, the Bosnian multi-cultural line is the sole alternative to massacres and war without end.

'The United Nations serves as a shield for aggression'

The following interview gives an insight into the thinking of Bosnian activists. CATHERINE SAMARY speaks with FAIK DIZDAREVIC, a former ambassador and ex-director of radio and television in Sarajevo, and JESENKO GALIDASEVIC, who worked in television in Sarajevo. They are now both in exile in France and organise the 'Sarajevo Association'. Translation by Geoff Ryan.

C.S. It is madness, in the case of Bosnia-Herzegovina, to support a project of 'cantonisation' on an ethnic basis - as the European powers have done. This would mean dividing with a knife what is indivisible. On the other hand denying the existence of several communities is impossible.

J.G. The most surprising thing is what the EC accepted in Lisbon. These were the first negotiations and the EC fell in with the idea of ethnic partition, which could not even be done by force - except by the extermination of a large part of the population, which is where we are getting to today.

Even in these conditions this division isn't tenable. The major mistake, a terrible mistake, of Europe has been to want to make the Bosnians accept partition.

C.S. Is there still, even on a small scale, a multi-ethnic resistance? Is there still a Presidency, a Bosnian government basing itself on a line of resistance for a multi-national Bosnia-Herzegovina and commanding legitimacy?

F.D. Bosnia-Herzegovina exists either as a community or not at all. The most convincing example, in my view, of a resistance bringing together everybody into a single community is in Tuzla. Tuzla has succeeded in maintaining an entire 'free' region, a vast space encompassing one million inhabitants.

It is for that reason, moreover, that they have never received any aid. It is a working class region, the sole region of Bosnia in which the nationalists didn't win the elections. Today the symbol of Bosnia-Herzegovina is Sarajevo but the symbol of resistance is Tuzla.

J.G. And Tuzla is the sole hope. The sole hope because the Muslims, even those with nationalist inclinations, understand full well that Bosnia-Herzegovina can never exist if the



The cost of this conflict has been paid in human lives

three communities do not have equal rights.

F.D. But on this issue the EC has also played a negative role. We have been forced, in effect, to identify with a national flag. And we shouldn't forget the fatal role of a good part of the intelligentsia. They are the ones who elaborated the theories that, at a later date, Tadjman and Milosevic have put into practice.

We must underline this essential responsibility of the media, journalists and intellectuals.

C.S. The existence of this

soon as possible. My view is that the international community should give air support and allow the Bosnians themselves to liberate their country by giving them arms.

F.D. We must be clear about one thing. The Bosnian people, those living in the country, those defending themselves are not asking for intervention. They don't believe in it. They hate the presence of UN-PROFOR. When a U.N. armoured car passes through the streets of Sarajevo people say 'look out, save yourself, there goes the United Nations!'

The commander of the

(i.e. in France, though for that matter in Britain as well - G.R.) this affair has been passed by in total silence.

J.G. In a certain way the presence of the UN gives a justification to those carrying out the bombardment. Moreover, numerous witnesses report that UN armoured cars frequently pass by wounded people and simply gaze at them without doing anything. The fact is that the UN serves as a shield for aggression.

C.S. Should we demand the withdrawal of the UN forces? It is true that one can feel ill at ease in demanding the withdrawal of those who guarantee protection for the distribution of humanitarian aid...

J.G. But if the Bosnians had sufficient arms they would be perfectly capable of distributing aid. Some time ago I was in a humanitarian aid convoy. It was stopped by a group of paramilitaries dressed up like Rambo. There were thirty vehicles. They held us for several hours without the UN-PROFOR doing anything. I'm not sure whether the UN soldiers should withdraw but if they are just going to do the same things as they have done

up till now then it is better if they leave. That is what people in Sarajevo write to us.

F.D. We have managed to communicate with Tuzla. They said to us 'political activity is one thing but, for the immediate future, we must do whatever we can to get arms. You have to understand one thing: who is participating in the defence. It is the people, the small people. The rich, they always manage to get out of difficulties. The defence forces are the workers, the miners. That is who we must support.'

J.G. However, there is a remarkable thing. Everyone knows very well that at Tuzla there is a perfectly useable airport, but it is not being used. It is now winter, which means convoys will no longer be able to pass.

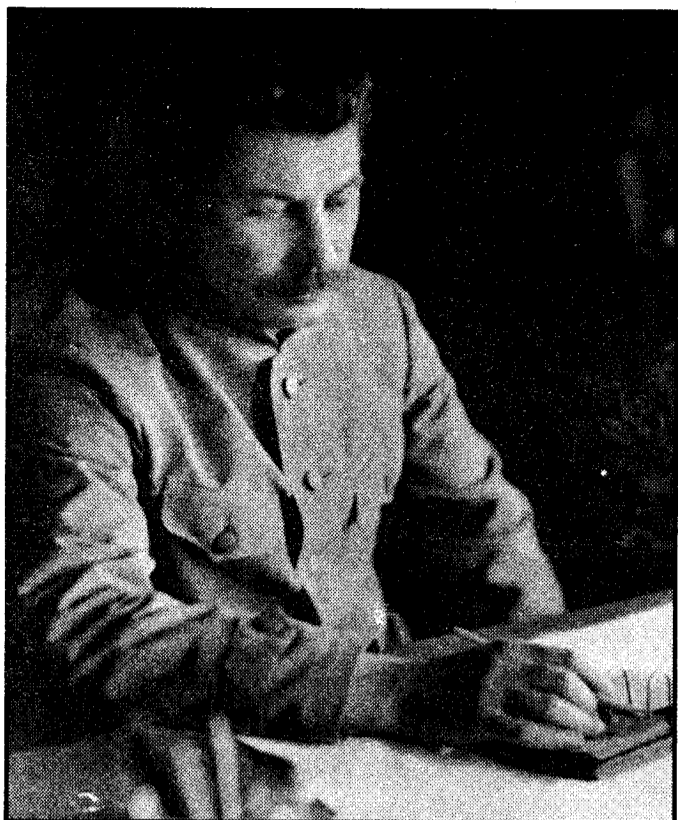
There are nearly a million people in this region controlled by the Bosnian forces of Tuzla. If there was a desire to help these people use could be made of this airport. But this isn't being done. Why? Because whilst they (i.e. western governments) negotiate with those who apply the most iron law they are crucifying Bosnia-Herzegovina!

"The Bosnian people, those living in the country, those defending themselves are not asking for intervention. They don't believe in it."

resistance, this Bosnian defence force determines our solidarity tasks: in my opinion we have to organise aid for this defence force so that it can control the political process. Certain forces extol an external intervention. What is your opinion?

J.G. Arms should be given to those who are defending themselves. This should be done as

French battalion at Bijeljina has boasted of having stopped the very few arms the Bosnians were able to get hold of. We can also note - and this accusation has been presented and published in an extremely precise manner in Sarajevo a fortnight ago - that it has been confirmed that General MacKenzie sent for some young women who disappeared afterwards. Here



Cynically urging on the ultra-left: Stalin



A rally of Hitler youth – the Nazis lost no time in consolidating their victory

Ultra-left blunders that opened door to Hitler

SIXTY years ago Adolf Hitler's Nazis rode to power in Germany in the teeth of the most powerful working class in the world. While Hitler's tactics welded together an alliance of radical reaction, the politics of the mass Social Democratic Party (SPD) and the German Communist Party (KPD) left the working class divided and disarmed.

Yet tragically the real lessons from this historic defeat, the scars from which still disfigure world politics, have yet to be learned by many in today's workers' movement and organisations of the revolutionary left. Our last issue looked at the events leading up to Hitler's triumph. Here JOHN LISTER looks back at the political issues raised for marxists by one of the turning points of twentieth century history.

TO UNDERSTAND Hitler's rise to power, we must examine the politics of the two main German working class parties, whose disastrous decisions opened the door to fascism.

The Social Democratic Party (SPD), which held the support of most industrial workers and the majority of the working class, had evolved as a classical reformist party.

Despite adopting a formal marxist programme in 1891, its leaders had in the final decade of the nineteenth century been drawn increasingly into the bankrupt politics of bourgeois parliamentarism and trade union reformism.

The relatively democratic constitution and the electoral successes of the SPD reinforced deep-seated illusions (criticised by Engels) that working class interests could be better served by peaceful reforms than by revolutionary struggle.

In 1902 the craven 'new realist'-style reformism of SPD leader Eduard

Bernstein was singled out for ruthless criticism by Russian marxist leader Lenin, as he drew the dividing line between reform and revolution in his key pamphlet *What is to be Done?*:

"The very conception, 'ultimate aim', was declared to be unsound, and the idea of the dictatorship of the proletariat was absolutely rejected. It was denied that there is any counter-distinction in principle between liberalism and Socialism. *The theory of the class struggle* was rejected on the grounds that it could not be applied to a strictly democratic country, governed according to the will of the majority, etc."

This political challenge to reformism raised by Lenin in the Second International, and opposition from a vocal left wing in the SPD itself, could not prevent an accelerating political degeneration. The search for reforms within capitalism led logically to support for capitalism itself.

From 1910 an even more right wing SPD leadership began to purge left opponents. By 1914, the majority of parliamentary deputies of the still 'marxist' SPD voted in favour of credits to aid the war-drive of their own capitalist class.

A left minority, including Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, committed to class struggle, internationalist politics, fought on inside the SPD, only to be driven out in 1917.

The German Communist Party (KPD) was formed in January 1919. Within weeks it had lost its key leaders, as right wing SPD leaders Noske and Scheidemann presided over military

moves to crush the revolutionary workers' upsurge, and the murder of Luxemburg and Liebknecht.

The SPD's squalid record of class collaboration continued throughout the 1920s. By 1931, Trotsky could sum up the party's politics in brief, caustic terms:

"The rottenest portion of putrefying capitalist Europe is the Social-Democratic bureaucracy. It entered upon its historic journey under the banner of Marx and Engels. For its goal it took the overthrow of the rule of the bourgeoisie. The powerful upsurge of capitalism caught it up and dragged it in its wake. In the name of reform, Social Democracy betrayed the revolution, at first by its actions and later by its very words. ...

"The war came. Social Democracy supported the war in the name of future prosperity. Instead of prosperity, decay set in. Then the problem resolved itself no longer in concluding from the inadequacy of capitalism the inevitability of revolution; nor was it one of reconciling the workers with capitalism by means of reforms. The new policies of Social Democracy now consisted in making society safe for the bourgeoisie at the cost of sacrificing reforms.

Sacrificing gains

"But even this was not the last stage of degeneracy. The present crisis that is convulsing capitalism obliged Social Democracy to sacrifice the fruits achieved after protracted economic and political struggles, and thus to reduce the German workers to the level of existence of the fathers, grandfathers and great-grandfathers. There is no historical spectacle more tragic and at the same time more repulsive than the fetid disintegration of reformism amid the wreckage of all its conquests and hopes."

There were more than sufficient grounds therefore for German Communists and revolutionaries in the 1920s and 1930s to hate and despise the politics of German Social Democracy. A river of blood had long separated the SPD's reformist leaders from the marxist movement: but gut reactions along

these lines can lead to poor political decisions.

Any objective assessment of the German working class showed that despite all its betrayals, the SPD still retained mass support, and unions linked with the SPD still organised the lion's share of German workers.

This problem could not simply be surmounted by denouncing the SPD. Workers with illusions in the Social Democrats had to go through experiences that would break those illusions and lead them towards revolutionary politics.

Lenin had set out to challenge knee-jerk ultra-left positions in the fledgling Communist Parties in his pamphlet *Left Wing Communism, An Infantile Disorder*, circulated to all delegates at the Second Congress of the Communist International (Comintern).

In it he warned that to win power Communists must win the support of the masses, and this in turn meant working with the masses where they were to be found:

"To refuse to work in the reactionary unions means leaving the insufficiently developed or backward masses of workers under the influence of the reactionary leaders

"You must be capable of any sacrifice, of overcoming the greatest obstacles, in order to carry on agitation and propaganda systematically, perseveringly, persistently and patiently in those institutions, societies and associations – even the most reactionary – in which proletarian or semi-proletarian masses are to be found."

Lenin also reiterated time and again a painful fact of revolutionary life:

"... revolution is impossible without a change in the view of a majority of the working class, a change brought about by the political experience of the masses, never by propaganda alone." (emphasis added)

Trotsky in the leadership of the early Comintern and then in the fight against Stalinism in the 1920s and 1930s returned to this theme time and again. The Comintern itself moved on from its initial task of demarcating itself from social democracy to spell out the tactics of the united front by which the Communists were to approach the broad mass of workers and show them in



The victims: Communist militants rounded up by fascists after the Reichstag fire

practice the need for a new, revolutionary leadership:

"In ... clashes – insofar as they involve the vital interests of the entire working class ... – the working masses sense the need of unity in action, of unity in resisting the onslaught of capitalism or unity in taking the offensive against it. Any party which mechanically counterposes itself to this need of the working class for unity in action will unfailingly be condemned in the minds of the workers." (March 1922)

United front

Trotsky summed up the 'united front' tactic of the Fourth Comintern Congress in this way:

"...posing before the workers who do not yet trust the Communists the following proposition:

"You do not believe in revolutionary methods and in the dictatorship [of the proletariat]. Very well. But we Communists propose to you and your organisation that we fight side by side to gain those demands which you are advancing today."

"This is an unassailable argument. It educates the masses about the Communists and shows them that the Communist organisation is the best for partial struggles as well."

Unfortunately many leading elements of the KPD never developed beyond the gut reaction leftist response to social democracy, while in the USSR the emergent Stalinist bureaucracy was incapable of training a genuinely revolutionary leadership.

The KPD's line towards the SPD therefore became increasingly sectarian from 1924 onwards. The problems were compounded by the elimination of minority tendencies and factions within the KPD as the Thälmann leadership (known as the 'pro-Comintern left') consolidated its grip in 1929.

This was a historical conjuncture in which the home-grown, gut-reaction ultra-leftism of the KPD leaders was intensified to new levels by the wildly irresponsible 'Third Period' policy of the Kremlin, under which social democrats were denounced as 'social fascists' (as described in our last issue).

Isolation

The KPD's sectarian attacks on the SPD, even in the teeth of Hitler's mounting fascist threat, was made easier by the growing isolation of the party from the industrial working class. In 1927, though 68 percent of KPD members were classed as industrial workers, only half of these were employed, and a mere 3 percent worked in big industrial plants – most of which were controlled by pro-SPD unions.



Lenin warned against 'infantile' ultra-leftism

The situation worsened in the slump. By 1932 80-85 percent of KPD members were unemployed, meaning that most of them had no contact with the SPD strongholds. Any possible political resistance to KPD sectarianism was hampered by the rapid turnover of party members in this period, meaning that the equivalent of the entire membership changed every two years.

It was very much against the stream therefore for Trotsky in 1931-32 to attempt to resurrect the traditions of the Comintern and Bolshevism in the KPD by fighting for the policy of the united front against Hitler:

"Today Social Democracy as a whole, with all its internal antagonisms, is forced into sharp conflict with the fascists. It is our task to take advantage of this conflict, and not to unite the antagonists against us.

"The front must be directed against Fascism. And this common front of direct struggle against Fascism, embracing the entire proletariat, must be utilised in the struggle against Social Democracy, directed as a flank attack but no less effective for that.

"It is necessary to show by deeds a complete readiness to make a bloc with the Social Democrats against the Fascists in all cases in which they will accept a bloc. To say to the Social Democratic workers: 'Cast your leaders aside and join our "non-party" united front means to add just one more hollow phrase to a thousand others. (...)

"It is necessary, without any delay, finally to elaborate a practical system of measures – not with the aim of merely 'exposing' Social Democracy (before the Communists), but with the aim of actual struggle against Fascism."

(Germany: *The Key to the International Situation*)

The heightened class polarisation and the depth of the capitalist crisis in Germany also offered opportunities for the Communists to develop a class struggle programme as a basis for joint action with SPD workers.

Trotsky again referred back to the traditions of Bolshevism and the early Comintern in stressing the need for transitional demands, with a special focus on the fight in highly-organised factories for workers' control over production, and the development of an alternative economic plan centred on links between Germany and the USSR as a means of attracting the best militants.

But Trotsky's arguments and the efforts of the small German Left Opposition were quite unable to break down the bone-headed sectarianism of Thälmann's Kremlin-backed KPD leadership.

Still denouncing and fighting Social Democracy as the main enemy, the KPD was itself crushed by Hitler and the Nazis. Trotsky's grimmest warnings of the consequences of such a historic defeat were tragically confirmed.

But Stalin's Communist International showed itself completely unable to learn from or even to note the terrible errors that had been made. Even after the defeat, with leading German Stalinists languishing in Hitler's jails, the bureaucratized Comintern retrospectively endorsed the political line that had brought defeat.

New International

It was this evidence that the Comintern had ceased to play any kind of revolutionary role which persuaded Trotsky that it was beyond recovery, finished as a useful instrument for the working class. In the worst possible circumstances, amid the roar of the defeat of Europe's most powerful working class, he issued the call for the building of a new, revolutionary International to develop the struggle for marxism.

But sixty years later, have the lessons been learned by today's revolutionary left? Sectarianism of the worst kind is still rife among organisations many of which would claim to stand or derive from the Trotskyist tradition. Some of the errors on the united front attacked by Trotsky in the 1930s appear chillingly familiar for British marxists today.

The illusion that the Labour Party in Britain can simply be circumvented by building an alternative 'mass' revolutionary party lingers on in various

guises. Trotsky challenged these illusions in a KPD which had a membership of almost 300,000:

"Oh, no! the functionaries keep drumming, 'we shall "first" liquidate Social democracy. How? Very simply, we shall order our party organisations to recruit 100,000 new members within such and such a period.' Instead of political struggle – merely propaganda; instead of dialectical strategy – bureaucratic plans."

Recruitment

Trotsky emphasised that even large scale individual recruitment to an already large party was no substitute for building influence in the mass organisations of the class:

"...the numerical growth of the party solves nothing. Within a tottering nation shot through by crisis and contradictions, an extreme left party can find new supporters in tens of thousands, especially if its entire apparatus is directed to the sole purpose of capturing members, by means of competition. Everything depends upon the interrelation between the party and the class. A single employed Communist who is elected to the Factory Committee or to the administration of a trade union bears a greater significance than a thousand new members, picked up here and there, who enter the party today in order to leave it tomorrow."

Many in today's British left will recognise the absurdly sectarian caricature of a 'united front' which has been erected purely and simply as a front organisation by one of the left currents, and in which they will not brook any challenge to their domination. Trotsky opposed precisely this method when implemented by the mass-based KPD:

"The task of the party consists in learning, from the experience derived from the struggle, how to demonstrate to the proletariat its right to leadership. While the Stalinist bureaucracy, on the contrary, holds to the opinion that it can demand point-blank obedience from the proletariat ...

"Every united front which doesn't first place itself under the leadership of the Communist party, reiterates *Die Rote Fahne*, is directed against the interests of the proletariat. ... The very historical problem which the Communist Party has yet to solve – that of uniting the overwhelming majority of the workers under its banner – is turned by the bureaucrat into an ultimatum...."

Rank and file

And while sectarian currents of the British left persist in grouping their rank and file supporters outside rather than carrying the fight into the organised labour movement, they would do well to remember Trotsky's angry rejection of the KPD's suicidal tactic of building breakaway, self-isolating 'Red Unions':

"All the while it is precisely within the trade unions that an exceptionally fruitful field is now open for action. ... The 200,000-300,000 workers who are now organised in independent Red unions could serve as a priceless leaven within the reformist unions."

It is high time these basic lessons were learned and absorbed by the British left, not to be kept as relics in a class struggle museum, but as a guide to action in today's class struggle. A look at the events of sixty years ago in Germany serves as a stark reminder of the costs of getting things wrong.

It was this evidence that the Comintern had ceased to play any kind of revolutionary role which persuaded Trotsky that it was beyond recovery, finished as a useful instrument for the working class.



The Socialist Campaign Group Supporters Network, launched in Leeds last year

Making Labour fit for socialists

THE AIM of the Socialist Campaign Supporters' Network is to co-ordinate and sustain a non-sectarian network of actively campaigning Labour Party members who want to turn their Party to socialism.

It is vital that socialists in the Labour Party campaign, because the leadership of the Party is not going to do it for us. Indeed, the present direction of the leadership continues to be American presidential-style media promotion based on Clinton-type 'good-looks'.

The 1987 and 1992 General

Election TV broadcasts were compared to Oscar-winning films. Unfortunately they flopped at the box office.

Clintonisation

Clinton is supposed to show the way forward for Labour. Yet he says about the bombing of Iraq: 'there is no difference between my policy and that of the Bush administration.'

But the Labour leadership has not learnt the lessons. Instead it continues to jettison the last remnants of socialist policies and expel socialists who campaign for them. It has

Feedback

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

capitulated to Tory ideology and exchanged parliamentary deals for political opposition.

On the other hand, we must campaign in new ways, not just knocking on doors at election times. We must campaign outside and inside the Party, with people who are prepared to struggle against the Tories, and draw people into the Party.

We must campaign in a democratic and participatory manner, working together cooperatively and encouraging the same values in our campaigns as we would want to see in our policies.

Grassroots

And we must support the left MPs and ensure links between them and the grassroots of the Party. Parliament is designed to alienate its members from their origins (if they are on the left, that is).

Socialists who work in the Party to ensure representation must not allow their representatives to vanish behind the veneer of Westminster. We should not leave our MPs to become isolated individuals but should enable them to be accountable to the rank and file which supports them.

Most of all socialists in the Labour Party must never forget *why* we are campaigning. It is not just to fight against the Tories – though we must. It is also to transform the balance of wealth and power, to strive to eliminate disadvantage and to improve the institutions of society so as to work in favour of

the people they are supposed to serve.

In short we are working to fulfil a vision of socialism and our actions must be judged by that vision.

The Labour Party is not an island (although it often feels like it). The Socialist Campaign Network must therefore turn local Labour Parties into a participatory and campaigning organisations reaching to new forces – in the community, the country and the world.

We must not be afraid to assert principles that have been submerged by the PLP's increasingly frequent claims that the Tories' plans are not wrong, just that Labour thought of them first.

Public ownership and control of the economy, restructuring wages and benefits, abolition of nuclear missiles and the consequent reliance on nuclear power, self-determination for Ireland as much as for South Africa, the freedom for women to control their reproductive rights – all of these are campaigning issues which will be supported by large numbers of people. What is needed is a leadership to put them forward.

The Labour Party should be providing that leadership. The job of the Socialist Campaign Network is to make the Labour Party provide that leadership – and to make the Labour Party fit for socialists to be in.

**John Nicholson,
Chair LPS, 1990-2**

Cover-up on tube sell-out

SO NEW realism has come to the pages of Socialist Outlook with a disgraceful cover-up for the reasons for the defeat of the RMT on London Underground last November (see SO 33).

Heaping all the blame on the 'company union' ASLEF your article lets the RMT bureaucracy completely off the hook. I suppose you feel you have to write up the defeat in this way because the bureaucrats had the sense to inveigle the leadership of the LT District Council into endorsing their actions at every stage – a District Council you characterise as dominated by 'class fighters'.

Unfortunately, it is no excuse to explain the LT debacle on the role of management or other unions – after all they only did what was expected of them.

Rather we need to ask why, if the conditions never existed to win the dispute, the strike was ever threatened, given that the withdrawal of the threat only led to a deepening of the defeat.

And if the conditions did exist for a strike, what went wrong in the RMT's actions to cause the morale of the workforce, after two successful ballots for action, to be so rapidly lost?

Groundswell

On the first point, the feeling for action was not limited to '100 or so militants', as you say, but was a real groundswell in the wake of the upsurge in support of the miners.

The conditions to win did exist, despite fear of management intimidation.

Why was morale lost? First, one has to ask why the strike was called by RMT in advance of the ASLEF ballot? This made it inevitable that ASLEF would then repudiate any action by their own members.

Either the decision was a cynical manoeuvre, or caused by over-confidence among the 'class fighters' of the LT District Council, prepared to gamble on morale to expose ASLEF.

By calling for a strike before the ASLEF ballot, the ASLEF leadership were let off the hook.

Second, one has to ask why, on the Friday before the strike, when it was becoming clear that morale was fading because the lack of ASLEF back-up, no attempt was made to delay the RMT strike? Even up to the eve of the strike it would have been possible to postpone it, rather than just cancel it. The talks at ACAS were a perfect excuse for such action.

Complete capitulation was not called for. A delay in the strike, to wait for the ASLEF decision, could have prepared the basis for joint action and a firming-up of morale. Of course the ASLEF leadership would have tried to duck the fight, just like the RMT leadership, but a second successful ballot would have made this difficult.

A senior member of the District Council said that no delay in the strike was possible under union rules; but to call it off altogether apparently was! The RMT bureaucracy used ASLEF as an excuse for their capitulation. The actions of the LT District Council handed the bureaucracy this gift, neatly wrapped, on a plate.

**Greg Tucker,
South London**

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**What
is to be
done
about...**

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The Blade Runner Syndrome

By Phil Hearse

RIDLEY SCOTT'S cult movie, now undergoing its second run as 'Blade Runner, the Director's Cut' pictures Los Angeles 2019 as a multi-level mega-city, where high technology jostles with almost total infrastructure collapse.

The masses live at ground level, with constant rain and filth, among the most dire pollution. The city itself seems to go on forever -upwards and outwards.

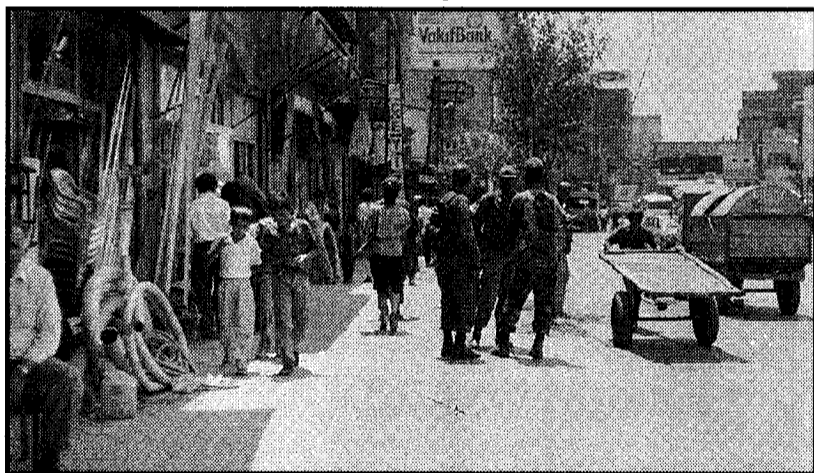
Twenty years ago this might have seemed the most improbable futuristic nightmare. Not so today; economic and social developments in late capitalism have given a dramatic spurt to global urbanisation.

Mega-cities

In 1992 there are more than 20 cities worldwide with more than 10 million people. Tokyo has more than 24 million (depending where you draw the city boundary), Sao Paulo has nearly 20 million, Mexico City 15 million.

Thirty years ago the biggest cities, Tokyo, New York and London, had about 10 million each. Now Jakarta with 10 million is only 13th in the size league-table. The era of the mega-city is a social and environmental catastrophe.

Seventy per cent of the mega-cities are in the third world; but those like Los Angeles in the advanced world are undergoing a process of 'third-worldisation'. Public infrastructure collapses, the



Repression is the inevitable result of poor facilities and overcrowding

poor are forced down to third world levels of subsistence.

Mega-urbanisation is a rapidly accelerating process; Karachi, which now has 8 million people will reach between 11 and 12 million by the year 2000; in the same period Bombay will go from 13 to 18 million, Djakarta from 10 to 13 million.

The problem is not just that of poverty and inequality which imperialism and the local elite impose on the third world masses. The sheer size of impoverished mega-cities distorts the social fabric of third world countries, and imposes housing, health, employment and environmental problems which even the most enlightened socialist regime would find it difficult to solve.

Mega-urbanisation is not a 'natural' process resulting from industrialisation and 'progress'. In the third world it has two central causes, rooted in mass poverty.

The first is rural impoverishment, a product of the absence of land reform.

agri-business conspire to drive the small farmer off the land

Combining with rural poverty is the problem of population growth. The problem here is not mainly ignorance of birth control techniques, but material pressures. On the land or in the cities, millions of poor people know their chances of survival depend on having enough children to support them in old age.

Violence

Violence, prostitution, drugs and child labour are the inevitable consequences of the marginal existence of hundreds of millions in the third world mega-cities.

The typical form of expansion of such cities is the construction of *barrio* shantytowns. By definition the barrios don't have the sewage and electricity infrastructure of the city centres. Thus they are massive centres of environmental and health problems.

The cholera epidemic which hit Latin America in the last two years was directly spurred by the lack of clean water and sewage facilities in the barrios.

And the mega-cities inevitably develop a huge problem of refuse disposal, generally without the infrastructure to solve it. Inadequate public transport often means a glut of cars, adding to industrial atmospheric pollution.

Third-world mega-cities don't just damage their own environment, but also the surrounding countryside, which is pillaged for building wood, leading to deforestation and soil erosion.

Endemic violence and crime and often political volatility, lead directly to repression. The only way to police the dispossessed masses is through state violence, whether it be Los Angeles, Karachi or Lima.

Keeping the masses down requires a large and brutalised police force like the LAPD with its constant helicopter patrols of Watts and South central, or more simply a murderous army.

But as well as having the multi-million poor who have to be policed, the mega-cities are the centres of economic and political world power. They are also centres of the urban super-rich and middle-classes, who have to be protected from the wrath of the poor.

The rich either live in guarded enclaves, or flee the city centre to the suburbs, leaving its heart to rot. That is the fate of Detroit, abandoned to the black poor. Economic collapse has followed, leading for example to the demolition of hospitals only 20 years old, for want of funds to keep them open.

Political solution

The way out of the mega-city crisis is political. Spontaneously the situation will just get worse. Only by

popular administration of the cities can different social priorities be imposed.

But as the example of the administration of the big cities of Brazil by the Workers Party shows, control of the cities by popular or left-wing organisations can only be a palliative, alleviating some of the worst problems.

And as the local administration in Curitiba, Brazil, found, efficient transport, job-creation and housing projects can lead to an influx of poor people from other parts of the country, gradually undermining gains already made.

Solutions at the level of one city can only have a limited effect, in the absence of a change in political regime and social priorities nation-wide.

Land reform

In the third world the first priority is land reform which can give a stable income to peasant farmers, stemming the flight from the cities. That would have to be backed-up by a social security system ensuring a decent living standard for the elderly, thus reversing the trend to large families for purely economic reasons.

Self-organisation often comes naturally to the barriodwellers; they have to try to organise things like electricity and water for themselves. This self-organisation is an immense reservoir of revolutionary potential, given socialist political leadership.

But everywhere, in advanced countries and third world countries, the rush to pathological urbanisation will only be stopped by different political priorities, and above all by a nationally-planned economy.

Transform

Socialism surely won't dismantle cities. But over time cities can be transformed and made liveable.

Modern communications mean that it is no longer essential for humanity's production and living units to be piled upon one another. The Blade Runner syndrome is just one barbaric future that capitalism has in store for us, if it survives.

The clock is still ticking.

Boom – or bust? SWP opts for high-risk tactics

By Dave Osler

THE SOCIALIST Workers Party is undergoing one of its periodic sharp political lurches.

Recent internal documents and keynote articles in the SWP press illustrate a growing belief that the organisation – already the largest on the far left – is on the verge of qualitative transformation as Britain stands at “beginning of a path towards revolution”.

However, its 1992 conference report argues that there is one major obstacle to seizing the time: “the way the party presently operates”.

Scarred

“Only a minority of the party is responsible for the successes of the past few weeks – recruiting, selling more papers etc. Many of this minority are themselves very recent recruits to the party.

“Many more experienced comrades, scarred by the 1980s, dominate the branch meetings, where they act as a conservative block to shifting the party.”

The SWP claims its membership has grown to 7,500, with 2,500 joining in the last three months of 1992 alone. But membership now means a

very low level of commitment, and does not entail financial support or even attending meetings:

“Every new period, and the change in the party’s tasks which it brings, requires a redefinition of membership. Today a member of the party is someone who sells *Socialist Worker* and is prepared to defend the politics it contains.”

New members, we are told, “need to be given their head”. Meanwhile, there are indications of a backlash against the party conservatives, with expulsions of key cadre in Glasgow.

A significant minority of the SWP’s ruling central committee is believed to have opposed the party’s ‘general strike now’ line in the pit closure crisis. But the body’s deliberations remain hidden even from the membership.

One stark illustration of the SWP’s growing delusions of grandeur is the interview with its leader Tony Cliff, published in last week’s *Socialist Worker*: “Imagine if we had 15,000 members of the SWP and 30,000 supporters: the 21 October miners’ demonstration could have been different.

“Instead of marching round Hyde Park, socialists could have taken 40 or 50,000 people

to parliament. If that had happened, the Tory MPs wouldn’t have dared to vote with Michael Heseltine. The government would have collapsed. This prospect is not unrealistic or romantic.”

Visions

It is, in fact, both. It obviously takes far more than a peaceful march past Big Ben to topple the Tories. Perhaps Cliff has visions of storming the Winter Palace? Needless to say, the SWP did not raise the question on the day.

All socialists should be heartened by recent signs of political radicalisation in Britain, seen on issues from the pits crisis to the spread of anti-Royal feeling.

The SWP’s enviable ability to attract new support in the present period proves that its propaganda does strike a chord, especially among students and white-collar trade unionists.



Romantic visions won't achieve real change

But the new line is based on a one-sided assessment of current reality. Working class militancy is at a hundred year low and grass roots organisation has been seriously weakened by the pincer effect of Thatcherism and the new realism.

The struggle against pit closures does contain the potential to turn the tide, but even a victory will only mark the start of a long process of reconstructing the labour movement. The short-term prospects of a major breakthrough for any section of the far left remain limited.

Elements of the latest perspective have clear parallels with the course adopted by Gerry Healy’s Workers Revolutionary Party in late 1970s, minus of course the overpowering stench of corruption.

It carries within it a real danger of both demoralising seasoned comrades while ultimately losing most of the current influx, which is being recruited on an alarmingly flimsy political basis.

It is a high-risk strategy which could yet prove a costly mistake.

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Seven month strike wins concessions

By Doug Thorpe,
Islington NALGO
vice-chair

AFTER SEVEN months the Islington NALGO strike against compulsory redundancies proposed by the Labour council is due to end. A return to work will be recommended at a branch meeting on 27 January, following further concessions from the employers.

The strike started last June with 90 Housing Benefit workers, and has escalated to more than a thousand on strike. For the first four months council leader Margaret Hodge refused to negotiate, using bullying tactics, which included sacking 700 strikers and using scab labour.

Intimidation

NALGO successfully resisted this intimidation and brought out another

400 workers. When Hodge left the council to work at Price Waterhouse, the new council leader Derek Sawyer was elected on a pledge to negotiate a settlement.

But negotiations were hampered by the Labour council's right-wing faction, which wants to smash NALGO.

Voluntary

Concessions made by the council included a tawl of the council for voluntary rather than compulsory redundancies, and on enhanced terms; and the right of redeployed workers to return to their old jobs if vacancies arise. The council also agreed to re-employ the sacked strikers on their old contracts.

The sticking points remained the council's refusal to guarantee an alternative job to all NALGO members, and their insistence on using sickness absence and industrial action as criteria for selecting those being made redundant.

The strike remained solid through Christmas; but after six months some weariness had set in and the level of activity was declining.

More importantly, NALGO nationally was beginning to question the expense of the strike. The branch committee succeeded in getting further financial backing, but only to the end of January.

In this situation the council made threats of further sackings, and withdrawing its previous offers, unless a settlement was reached.

Scaled down

With the likelihood of further sackings and a withdrawal of strike pay, the branch leadership made the assessment that further gains could not be made. Urgent negotiations were called on a scaled down set of demands, while 90 youth and play workers were brought out on strike.

This produced further concessions, including removing official industrial

action as a criterion for redundancy, protection of strikers on temporary contracts, and further extensions of redeployment periods, which should mean no compulsory redundancies until all redeployment options are exhausted.

On this basis the branch leadership is recommending a return to work, providing that a no victimisation agreement is gained.

Some of the left, including the SWP, argue for continuing the strike until further demands are met; but apart from calling on the national leadership to agree escalation and a national campaign, they have no strategy for making further gains from the strike.

To carry on with the strike now would risk leaving it high and dry, isolated and faced with hundreds of new sackings. Of course, the demands made by the SWP are aimed at highlighting the inadequacy of the NALGO leadership strategy, which leaves

branches to fight alone; but these propagandistic points are not a way to take the strike forward.

The full demands of the strike have not been won, but substantial gains have been made. Strike action has been sustained for seven months; union organisation in Islington has been maintained and built in the face of vicious attacks from a Labour council intent on smashing NALGO once and for all.

The council has failed in its objective, and instead has been forced to concede measures that will improve the terms of workers facing redeployment, remove discrimination against those take official industrial action and avert the need for hundreds of compulsory redundancies.

In the current industrial climate, and the lack of a national fightback, this is a substantial achievement.

London social for Burnsall strikers

ASIAN workers at the Burnsall electroplating plant, who have been striking for seven months against low pay and bad working conditions, have initiated a support group. Fifty people attended its inaugural meeting last week.

London supporters are holding a fund-raising social on Friday 12 February at the Camden Centre, 8pm, with Cobra and Linton Kwesi Johnson, £5/£2.

Birmingham NALGO strike

THOUSANDS of Birmingham NALGO workers struck for the day on 19 January in protest against the council's plan to axe 2000 local authority jobs. The council says that it has to save £40m on its budget next year.

Newcastle protests against pit closures and council cuts

By Pete Burnett

MORE THAN 4000 workers, parents and children marched through the streets of Newcastle on the January 18, calling for action against council cuts and pit closures.

Across the city members of NUPE, NALGO and the teaching unions had successfully balloted for strike action on the day. As well as UNISON banners in evidence, delegates from Swan Hunter shipyards joined forces with miners and dozens of community groups. Over 200 children, carrying their own placards, cheered and sang.

Like many other cities, Newcastle faces a crisis thanks to Tory cuts and the panic response of its right wing Labour council. A loss of £20m from the city budget over the next three years directly

threatens 2000 jobs. At the same time a further 2000 health jobs are at stake, with plans to downgrade Newcastle General Hospital. Heseltine's attack on coal would leave only one pit in the region.

The regional TUC leaders played no part in the mobilisation except to oppose it. Both strike and rally were entirely organised by the Northern Trade Union Alliance, which unites NUM, MSF, UCATT, RMT and teaching and local authority unions at branch level.

A crowded rally heard Alan Margham, secretary of the Wearmouth NUM, call for a series of one-day strikes. Kenny Bell of the city's joint shop stewards committee announced that his organisation will campaign for a national ballot of all local authorities for an nationwide one-day strike on the 23 March.

Council workers fight back

By Keith Sinclair

HUMBERSIDE County Council is threaten 27m worth of cuts next year, with potentially devastating effects on jobs and services. Schools and youth centres are likely to be hard hit, with every secondary school losing at least four teachers, some up to 12.

A protest lobby of 300 trade unionists of a County Council Labour group meeting got the anti-cuts campaign off to a flying start, attracting significant support from members of NALGO, NUT, NUPE and the Community and Youth Workers Union (CYWU). Police were called to evict demonstrators from outside the council chamber.

The next focus for the campaign is the meeting of Humberside County Council on 17 February.

NALGO activists are campaigning for strike action on that day. Both Hull and Humberside NUT have now passed policy in support of industrial action at local and national level.

All unions are concerned to prevent compulsory redundancies; but it is worrying that some branch leaderships are willing to collaborate with cuts other than redundancies.

Tony Marsh, Hull NUT secretary, told Socialist Outlook: 'It is clear that public sector workers are willing and able to locally fight against cuts. However, what is also required is national action by public sector unions. Hull NUT is committed to supporting all moves to unite public sector unions to fight the cuts and the 1.5 per cent pay freeze and to build a public sector alliance.'

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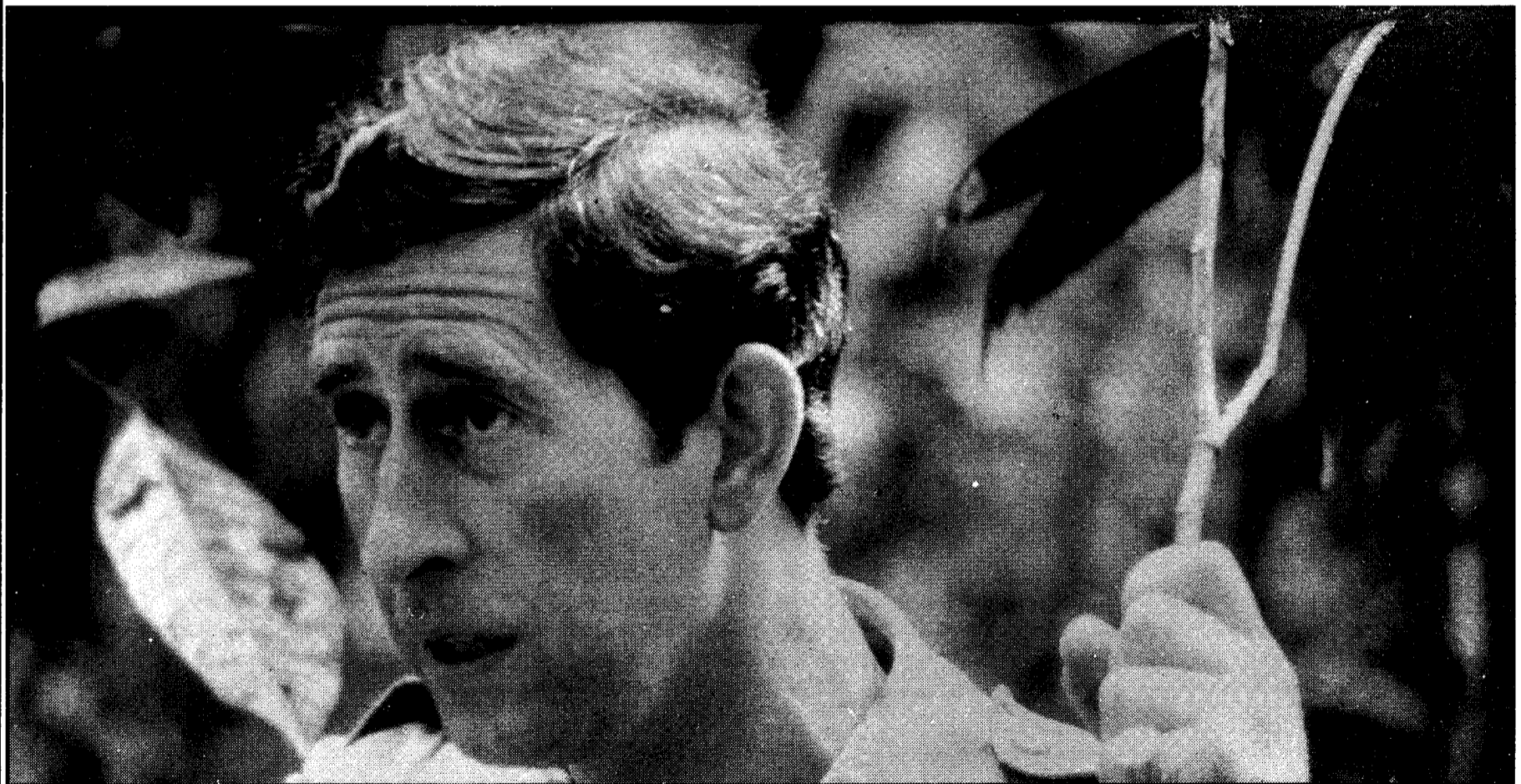
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socialist OUTLOOK

Attacking the left, grovelling to monarchy

New realism turns to old royalism



One is thinking of voting for that John Smith chappie in future

No wonder they call Labour Her Majesty's opposition. Party leader John Smith, eager to maintain Labour's invisible profile, was reportedly furious when shadow cabinet members Jack Straw and Mo Mowlem dared raise the scarcely radical subject of reforming the royal family last week.

Yet a poll published in *The Sunday Telegraph* reveals that

24 per cent of Labour MPs favour a republic, while a further 32 per cent want to see the monarchy scaled down. 30 per cent had no comment or gave no view, only 14 per cent explicitly favoured a no change policy.

Nevertheless, Labour's spokesperson on constitutional affairs, Graham Allen, told the *Telegraph* that the ques-

tion was certainly not on Labour's agenda.

Out-and-out right-winger Austin Mitchell MP rightly commented: 'The Labour Party's policy on this is ridiculous ... and shows how absurdly conformist we have become.'

Only Keith Vaz – once a member of the hard left Campaign

Group – spoke up for the House of Windsor: 'I absolutely support the monarchy. There should be no change.'

A democratic republic has been a basic demand of British radicalism for centuries, stretching back through the Marxist tradition to Tom Paine and the Levellers. Socialists today should demand nothing less.