

COUNTER INFORMATION

june/july/august 1991

VICTORY FOR PEOPLE POWER !

THE TORY government have been forced to announce the abolition of the poll tax. This historic victory, won by mass non-payment, shows that our power lies in direct action, organised from below. It shows the bankruptcy of the capitalist Labour Party, users of bailiffs and sheriff officers. And it shows that our rulers can only exploit us as long as we remain willing slaves.

What Now ?

The poll tax is dead. But the government says it will still stalk the land, zombie-like, for another 2-3 years - till its eventual replacement by the Council tax.

The Anti Poll Tax Movement is proclaiming that mass collective non-payment must continue. All poll tax arrears must be written off. To this demand many independent anti poll tax groups are adding
* Abolish the poll tax now
* Reverse the cuts in public services - tax the rich
* Free all poll tax prisoners.

In some areas anti poll tax activity has fallen away - but now is **no time to demobilise**. We need to drive off the bailiffs and sheriffs, to defend non-payers in England and Wales facing possible jail, to make the collection of poll tax bills and arrears impossible.

Broadening Out

What's more the movement can go **forward** from this victory. As Edinburgh's Stockbridge New Town APTG state: "We believe that any use of sheriff officers by the council, businesses or companies to harass people in their homes is wrong and should be vigorously resisted. Threats of eviction and electricity or gas cut-offs are similarly indefensible. We appeal to anyone in the area being harassed by sheriff officers or other authorities to contact us for support."

In April the independent network Lothian Anti Poll Tax Action mobilised to stop an eviction for rent arrears in Moredun, Edinburgh. The family involved - which included a man who was HIV positive and 2 young children - were refusing to pay rent as their Council flat had rain pouring in.

20 people blockaded the threatened flat on 8 April. After 7 hours, 40 police attacked. 7 protestors were dragged away and the family evicted. A noisy 30 strong picket of St. Leonards Police station won the release of the 7 (charged with breach of the peace). Temporarily re-housed, the family are still under threat of eviction from the Labour District Council.

These events illustrate that anti poll tax resistance can generalise - but to be successful needs real local participation. Through

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REFUSING & RESISTING

*****Newsnight (12 March) reported that 15.7 million in England and Wales and 1.5 million in Scotland had either paid no poll tax or were in serious arrears. John Major has stated there are 18.7 million non-payers.

*****29% of Scottish Councils' 1990-91 poll tax income was unpaid at 31 March (Scotsman 23.4)

*****85% of non-payers issued with a liability order by the courts in England and Wales have refused to return the form ordering them to reveal their place of work, etc.

*****In England and Wales bailiffs have no legal right of entry, unless you open the door. In Scotland sheriff officers arriving without notice cannot legally force entry. Keep them out and ring the anti poll tax group!

*****In Hackney Bailiffs Rayner Ferrar have been picketed, followed, threatened, and physically attacked. Their cars have been vandalised. Dogs have been set on them, baseball bats waved. They have now withdrawn from their poll tax contract!

*****A 150 strong picket at a home in Hamilton on 6 March forced sheriff officers to cancel a warrant sale for non-registration.

*****Govan, Glasgow : sheriffs needed police protection as 5 poundings were stopped on 3 May.

*****On May Day 100 non-payers visited bailiff boss Roche, in tiny Nempnett Thurbwell near Bristol. Building was in progress, and soon Roche's doors and windows were bricked up!. Fishing gear, clothes and wine appeared from his garage and were auctioned off, while anti bailiff slogans mysteriously appeared on his walls.

*****There have also been raids on a bailiff's home in Draycott, Notts and on councillors' homes in Camden and Croydon.

*****In England and Wales the authorities have jailed around 14 non-payers in an unsuccessful bid at intimidation. APT groups are pressurising councils to stop these 'committal proceedings', and are showing solidarity with defendants.

*****The jailing of 2 non-payers by Tory Trafford Council in late April led to 150 people besieging Huddersfield police station, and protest marches in Huddersfield and Sale.

*****A mass meeting at Fords Halewood on Merseyside voted to strike if Fords implemented wage arrestments.

*****There have been 3,000 successful appeals against Income Support arrestments in Strathclyde



Local kids join anti-eviction protest in Moredun, Edinburgh.

FREE THE PRISONERS

25 PEOPLE arrested at anti poll tax demos are now serving sentences of up to 4 years. They, and all still facing charges, need our unconditional support. For info on prison pickets, prisoners' addresses, and local support groups country-wide contact TSDC Poll Tax Prisoner Group, c/o room 205 Panther House, 38 Mount Pleasant, London WC1X OAP tel. 071 833 8958

THE COUNCIL TAX

MASS non-payment has forced significant concessions. The new 'Council Tax' is related to ability to pay, and there are 100% rebates for those on Income Support.

However the banding system protects the really rich. And the Council tax continues to concentrate power with central government. Already the possibility of non-payment of the Council tax has been raised at May's Scottish Anti Poll Tax Action conference.

THE MOVEMENT

Where possible the independent anti poll tax groups are increasingly organising in regional networks, autonomously from the Militant dominated Federations. An all-Britain conference is planned for the autumn. Info: Ian Greaves, Leeds APT Fed., Trades Club, Saville Mt., Leeds 6. Refuse and Resist, PO Box 239, Glasgow G3 6RA. London Fight the Poll Tax, c/o BM CRL, London WCIN 3XX

FROM BLOODY SUNDAY TO TRAFALGAR SQUARE... is an excellent broadsheet outlining the links between repression and resistance in the North of Ireland and the anti poll tax struggle. SAE to Box 9, 124 Vassall Rd., London SW9

WHAT WE THINK

In the last 30 issues of Counter Information we have reported acts of resistance in Britain and around the world. By reporting this opposition and resistance to capitalism, hierarchy and oppression in general we hope to show that things can change, and that this process of social revolution is already happening.

The revolutionary transformation of society begins within ourselves and our daily lives, not at some distant point in the future. Any real and lasting change can only come from the bottom up, by people participating and deciding how to define and create their own liberation. You can't decree freedom or impose liberation.

For this revolutionary change to come about AND be successful it must be organised, and on a massive scale. Resistance on its own will not change society. Similarly, resistance without clear aims and strategies can lead to burnout, failure or at best pointless dead ends.

In supporting the progressive resistance of people in general, we also warns of the dangers in allowing Union Officials, bureaucrats, or others not directly involved in the struggle to control how it is run. We stress the importance of people making their own decisions by organising in grass-roots, democratic and accountable organisations - decisions being made through participation and action.

Replacing "bad" leaders with "good" ones in centralised, top down organisations misses the point. The problem is the structures themselves, not who is in charge of them. The task should be to create different structures which work, not reforming those that don't. These structures are only good for diverting, buying off or silencing people who otherwise could be part of the real resistance.

Revolutionaries can participate in their own liberation, and give solidarity and support to other sections of society in struggle. But they cannot do things for people, only with them. This is why we oppose groups and ideologies which seek to seize power first, then liberate everyone else later.

Separating one issue from another, and attempting to change society through creating isolated single issue campaigns divides us and weakens our ability to see that we are fighting a whole system, not just one small part of it.

We can learn from the successes of our class against those who oppress us, and repeat these successes for ourselves. Since no struggle in society exists in isolation, linking different struggles together can create a movement strong enough not only resist oppression and exploitation, but to destroy it.

FESTIVALS OF THE OPPRESSED

USA: Rioting came within 10 blocks of the White House in May after a Hispanic man was shot and critically wounded by police in Washington DC.

SOUTH KOREA: Weeks of mass street protests ensued after police beat a student to death at a demo on 26 April.

FRANCE: Youths attacked shops and clashed with police in Sartrouville, Paris on 27 March following the fatal shooting of a youth of North African origin by a security guard.

McLibel Support Campaign

Last September McDonald's issued libel writs against 5 supporters of London Greenpeace for allegedly producing/distributing anti-McDonald's literature. Three apologized faced with the threat of paying huge damages - two still face libel action.

Support them by picketing and other direct action at your local store.

Future events:

16 Oct - World Day of Action.

19 Oct - March in London

Donations & Info: The McLibel Support Campaign, c/o London Greenpeace, 5 Caledonian Road, London N1

Anti poll tax cont.

discussion and practical initiatives local anti poll tax groups could gradually develop towards becoming local community resistance groups. Such a process is underway in some groups in Edinburgh, while in Haringey, London a similar proposal for a solidarity network is under discussion.

This development will not be easy. But if the self-organisation of the community against the poll tax could grow into a more permanent self organisation to struggle for people's needs, this would be an even greater victory than the defeat of the poll tax itself.

NEW BOSS - SAME AS THE OLD BOSS

"PUBLIC life in the Soviet Union is like an active volcano and even periods of 'calm' do not bring social peace".

(KAS-KOR Digest No 4).

March: Miners' strikes spread from the Donbass in Eastern Ukraine to Kuzbass in Western Siberia to the Tula mines south of Moscow to Vorkuta Norilsk (nickle) in the Arctic and to the Urals and Kazakhstan. Over 200 mines were in workers control with 10% of national production affected. After the austerity price rises in April, a general strike developed in Belo ('white') Russia: "I'm very glad that at long last we've woken up", said one Minsk woman striker expressing the experience of workers' power.

Political demands for Gorbachov's removal and the end of Communist Party control, threatened the power of the elite more in ten weeks than had the turmoil on the periphery of the USSR with the secessionist struggles in Armenia, Georgia and the Baltic republics. Contending leaders Gorbachov and Yeltsin were driven to make an agreement based on the

transfer of control of all mines to the Republics. It was Yeltsin's role to defuse the movement by stressing the concessions he extracted.

The deal hatched with Yeltsin, leader of the Russian Federation, also modified the 2-300% price rises implemented on 3 April. While the Ukrainian miners largely stressed economic demands, the Kuzbass miners largely stressed the weakening of communist party and central control of industry. This would further the market economy by direct fixing of coal prices between coal enterprises and other industries.

The Independent Miners Union (NPG) has demonstrated it is a "real fighting trade union" (KAS digest). Future conflicts could separate Ukrainian/Kazakh/ Russian miners with ownership at Republic level and miners and other workers, such as the 200,000 who took part in the general strike in Belo Russia and Kirov Plant strikers in Leningrad in early May. They will be driven into conflict with Yeltsin and his 'liberal' allies who aim to preserve the power of the elite against the workers whose "Force is in our solidarity, having united we shall seek freedom and abundance". (Kas-Kor Digest - send donation to 44-71, N. Krasnoselskaya Street, Moscow, 107066, USSR)

Stop Press: May: Miners strikes have broken out in Bulgaria and Poland.



A victory for Perotti

ON the 42nd day of his latest hungerstrike, against being incarcerated in the sensory-deprivation 'hole' of Lebanon Prison in Ohio, the prisonrats conceded and transferred John Perotti to Mansfield Prison. Although still being held in isolation, as he has been for most of 9 years, John says:

"I feel 100% better here. No more daily harassment or experimentation and I'm with a lot of my comrades now."

Characteristically, within days of his transfer, John, jailhouse lawyer and organiser with the Industrial Workers of the World, had filed and won a grievance suit against the use of chains on isolation prisoners and had visits increased.

John writes "Give my greetings and thanks to all who wrote and called the Governor during my hungerstrike"

John Perotti, M.A.N.C.I.no.A167-712, POB 788, Ohio 44901, USA.

A real soldier hero

SHOWING remarkable courage, professional soldier Vic Williams refused to go and fight for US oil interests in the Gulf and has been imprisoned in a military guardhouse since. He needs messages of support to boost his morale.

Send letters, cards recorded delivery to L/Cpl Vic Williams 24780695, The Guardhouse, 17th Field Regiment RA, Woolwich, London SE18.

Martin Foran

MARTIN'S latest parole bid on the grounds of ill-health to get him released from the 'hostage' sentence has failed. Medical specialists are demanding £13,000 and parole to do surgery on his colostomy so this will not be going ahead. However one will do a limited repair for £1,700. Donations to Martin Foran Support Fund c/o Conviction PO Box 522, Sheffield S1 3FF.

OUT OF ORDER

THE shooting war in the Middle East is over as far as the West is concerned. For the people of the Middle East little has changed since the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and the Western bombing of Iraq.

The real aims of the war are clearly demonstrated in the post war "peace": Saddam Hussein still in power, Kurds still persecuted, reactionary monarchs still governing, and Kuwait re-occupied by Western capitalism. The official reasons for the war have been proven to be no more than a diversion and an excuse. Besides recaptured oil profits, the other main outcome of the war is several hundred thousand people dead or seriously wounded.

The bombing of the Basra-Baghdad highway is a holocaust on par with anything Nazi Germany could achieve fifty years ago. For over five hours a two mile stretch of a four lane road packed with fleeing Iraqi conscripts and civilians was strafed and bombed by the US Air force. By first attacking the front and the rear of the convoy they were determined no one in between should survive. Those who headed into the desert were individually pursued and destroyed by jet fighters. At least 100,000 are thought to have been killed on this road.

Through a popular uprising? No. America wants a military coup to kick Saddam out, and keep the fascist Ba'ath party in power.

In Kuwait the newly restored Al Sabah monarchy declared Martial Law, then allowed reactionary mobs to indiscriminately attack (mainly) Palestinians for their alleged collaboration with the Iraqis. Reports abound of Palestinians being dragged from prisons, hospitals and their homes - to summary execution. These mobs were soon replaced by official agencies who pursued their own brand of terror against Palestinians through show trials, torture, and death sentences.

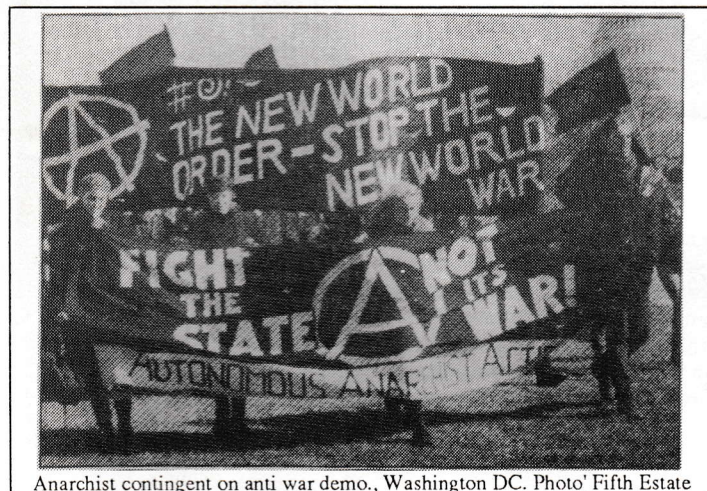
for emergency tents and transport.. There are reports of Turkish troops looting the refugees of the little aid that does reach them.

The early part of the Kurdish uprising was both grass roots and controlled by the people directly involved. Kurdish towns such as Soleimanieh and Ranieh established their own councils or 'Lirna', which organised food, medical relief, transport, and the defence of the town from Iraqi forces. They were also independent of the conservative traditional leadership of the Kurdish movements. After the formation of Lirnas the various groups within this traditional leadership formed the Kurdistan Front. Despite its involvement in the capture and defence of Kirkuck, its main activity was secret discussions with imperialism and various reactionary states such as Turkey, Iran, and Syria.

Betrayed

Undoubtedly the official Kurdish leadership played a significant part in the uprising's defeat. They feared the self activity and organisation of their own people more than governments whose power and authority is founded on exploitation, oppression and manipulation. By 27 May the Kurdistan Front was negotiating with the Iraqi regime.

The lessons of the gulf War are stark and bleak. A movement to defeat Imperialism and domestic repression must come from the bottom up, and remain independent and grass roots controlled. A top down, hierarchical resistance movement may not lead only to defeat, but to slaughter.



Anarchist contingent on anti war demo., Washington DC. Photo: Fifth Estate

To believe the "New world order" rhetoric of George Bush, the uprisings of the people of Iraq, were to herald the beginning of kinder, gentler Middle East. The majority Shias in the South of Iraq, who were later backed by Iran, and the Kurds in the North of the country had made significant progress in the week following the ceasefire. Unfortunately for the people of the region, and the rest of the world in general, this new world order is the kind of order only available from psychopathic gangsters obsessed with the pursuit of power and profit. The uprisings were upsetting American plans for Iraq, because ultimately they needed to maintain the power of the Ba'ath Party.

In Iraq Saddam Hussein and the Ba'ath Party still rule. The USA has made it quite clear they want Saddam Hussein out. But how? Through an election?

Kurdistan?

The repression against Kurds still continues. In Turkey their villages have been destroyed and the inhabitants herded into camps not unlike the concentration camps used in Iraq. The brutal repression against Kurdish culture and language still continues. It was Turkish regular troops (not conscripts) who threatened to shoot any refugees leaving the mountains on the Turkish Iraq border.

The Kurdish Enclaves in Iraq are for the benefit of the West, not the Kurds. They are little more than poor and disease ridden prison hospitals. All about control and nothing to do with freedom. They do however give Turkey a convenient buffer between Iraq, Iraqi Kurds, and their own 11 million Kurds. A high proportion of British aid went to the Ministry of Defence to pay

A WORLD TO WIN



Brazil

ON 11 Dec in Diadema (South of Sao Paulo) Brazil, 2,000 residents of 'Vila Socialista' tried to resist Brazilian "Shock Troops" (special police unit) when men, women, children, defended their squatted land with nail-studded clubs, pitchforks, shovels and stones. But when the shock troops realised they weren't going to win they used live ammunition and baton charges supported by firing tear-gas (which some of the children threw back!)

The squatters were eventually thrown off the 'private land' but have vowed to return to fight the landowners' greed for money, resources and big business connections.-Source: The Shadow

ROMANIA

21 March: 15,000 demonstrators marched to the Presidential palace in Bucharest to protest against the government's decision to increase food prices. Bones and stones were thrown, women beat empty egg boxes and the crowd chanted anti-government slogans. Price rises will increase inflation to 160%. Members of ALFA - the free trade union bloc are demanding that the government's whole market economy reform programme is abolished.

NEW ZEALAND

On 15 March, a 3-4,000 strong demo against benefit cuts took place in Wellington. The demo also had support from 1,200 building trade workers.

Source: Statement

TIMBUKTU

Throughout Africa, the barbarism of multi-national capitalism, and its phony 'Aid' packages, are being questioned with revolts against oppressive one-party states, most recently in Mali, Togo and Cameroon. In Mali, army massacres directed by President Traore resulting in 160 dead, led to an explosion of riots, a general strike on the 25 March and the overthrow of the regime.

Anti-War Strike

The first unofficial self-organised general strike in Italy since World War 2 saw 100,000 workers and 30,000 students stop work on 22 February to oppose the Gulf War.

INTIFADA

AS soon as the curfew was lifted in the Israeli-Occupied Territories, at the end of the Gulf War, the Palestinian Intifada resumed with full force: demonstrations, riots, confrontations with the army, youths shot to death, house demolitions, detentions, deportations ...

Severe new restrictions on employing Palestinians in Israel have left many unemployed. Israelis opposed to the repression have been defying the authorities to run food convoys to the Occupied Territories.

(Info: The Other Israel, P.O.B. 956, Tel-Aviv 61008, Israel)



NALGO Council workers took strike action and 2,500 people marched through Edinburgh on 8 May to oppose Lothian Region's decision to axe all funding to the Citizens Rights Office and Unemployed Workers Centre. The Labour Council wants to replace these independent organisations with its own bureaucratically controlled Advice Shop. Now central government poll tax capping threatens massive cuts and redundancies in Lothian.

Independent workplace organisation and real involvement from service users are needed to generate widespread strikes and occupations of threatened services.

Info: Campaign against Cuts and Redundancies in Lothian, c/o EUWC, 103 Broughton St, Edinburgh.

***Meanwhile in Lambeth, London, occupations continue at 2 Advice Shops threatened with closure.

Children come first?

OPPOSITION is mounting to the Child Support Bill (formerly the White Paper "Children Come First") now before Parliament. Its main proposal is the establishment of a Child Support Agency which will replace the courts in assessing, collecting and enforcing maintenance payments from absent parents (usually fathers).

While working lone parents will have the option to use the agency, those on benefit - the large majority

of lone parents - will be required to use it. This may involve the naming of fathers who have physically or sexually abused their wives and families, putting women and children at risk by forcing them into contact with violent men. Failure to provide information "without good cause" could mean a woman having up to 20% of her Income Support deducted.

The Bill also attacks absent parents on low income and benefit. Due to a standard formula for assessing maintenance the low paid will pay proportionately more than those with above average incomes, while those on Income Support will have to pay 5% of their benefit

Unhealthy times

As the Health Service hits the headlines, a Yorkshire health worker gives a grass-roots view:

THE BEGINNING of the financial year saw the usual round of cuts and closures in the NHS. Although Guys and Bradford Trusts were highlighted by the media (and the Labour party who prefer to focus on Trusts, which they might abolish, rather than threaten to reverse the underfunding, and expansion of managerialism, which is really causing damage of the delivery of health care) "savings" were the order of the day throughout the NHS as hospitals strove to make themselves more "marketable".

At Bradford where 200 redundancies are envisaged, it took the threat of all-out strike action to bring 'gung-ho' Chief Executive, Dr Mark Baker, to the negotiating table. To date there is no evidence that the redundancies have been withdrawn.

Cost cutting

In Leeds management are seeking "savings" which do not overtly affect patient-care. This means tighter controls over staff, and additional workloads for NHS workers. Another tactic is the progressive transfer of certain kinds of patient into the private sector. Starting with the elderly, this trend could extend to those with chronic illnesses and disabilities.

Meanwhile the experience of "community care" for the mentally ill over the last 15 years has not deterred NHS managers from shortening the stay of in-patients in hospital beds and discharging them earlier than in the past, putting further strain on district nursing services, and thereby shifting the cost of care from the State to private individuals, without recompensing the home carer.

All in all a bad time is expected for all, with the exception of an expanding managerial class for whom the existence of cuts and closures guarantees another 3 years on lucrative performance-related contracts.

towards maintenance.

It is true that fathers should take equal responsibility for child care. But under this bill lone parents and children on benefit will be no better off as their benefit will be reduced by the amount of maintenance awarded.

Resistance

The Child Support Agency scheme is based on an Australian system which has been operating for two years. It has had many problems and administrative delays which has led to resistance from numerous Child Support Action Groups in Victoria, SE Australia.

The DSS already possesses the powers to be assigned to this new

agency which will be administratively cumbersome and costly. The Bill should be seen in the light of the government's push for "traditional family values" and reduction of public expenditure. It will whittle away the few remaining rights of those on low income and benefit, like denying them access to legal aid. This will infringe on lone parents' right to choose arrangements suitable to themselves and not to the convenience of the state.

For more info contact: Wages for Housework, King's Cross Women's Centre, 71 Tonbridge St., London WC1H 9DZ

FIGHT CLAUSE 25

THE attack on lesbians and gay men - Clause 28, is now followed by another attack. This time discreetly tagged onto the Criminal Justice Bill as clause 25.

If two men show any affection in public, even kissing or holding hands, they are guilty of "indecent". To be guilty of soliciting, two men need only exchange telephone numbers. Allowing two men to sleep together in your house would make you guilty of "procuring". Ridiculous you might think - but this Bill is currently before Parliament.

But once again lesbians and gay men have shown their opposition to these new attacks on their sexuality. On 20 April a new group, "Stop the New Clause", demonstrated in Amsterdam. On 13 April thousands of lesbians and gay men marched through Manchester in protest against the Clause.

In the last four years there has been a 51% increase in the numbers of gay men convicted of minor sexual offences because of their sexual preference. If Clause 25 becomes law then these minor "offences" would be placed in the same category as rape. Those convicted could be liable for up to five years imprisonment, and compulsory "psychiatric treatment" afterwards.

Is consenting sex between two people of the same sex a crime? Homosexuals enjoy less freedom than heterosexuals. Campaigns against Clause 25 exist all over Europe. We're not sex criminals. We're human beings fighting for our rights!

TOP MARKS FOR RESISTANCE

PARENTS and teachers in Scotland have refused to co-operate with the Tories new compulsory tests for primary school pupils.

These national tests impose yet more grading and competition on an already oppressive education system. Young children would be subjected to worry and stress.

In Glasgow 85% of parents withdrew their children from the tests. In Lothian parents' withdrawals and the teachers' boycott meant 70% were not tested. Parents Action Groups have sprouted. Teachers in the

EIS defied Union leaders and voted for and implemented a boycott - despite Labour Councils docking their pay.

In England and Wales teachers voted against a boycott. But resistance is developing amongst parents. In Sheffield on May Day parents took their children out of school and marched together in protest to the Council Education office.

COUNTER INFORMATION invites readers to * send us news * take copies to distribute * write for info on the CI collective and other local activities. Printing 13,000 of each issue costs over £500. We really need donations (stamps, cash, cheques to Counterinformation, standing orders). This issue went to press on 27 May 1991. Editorial address: CI, Pigeonhole CI c/o 11 Forth Street, Edinburgh EH1, U.K. Local distribution and activities: in the North of England - CI, c/o 52 Call Lane, Leeds: in the West of Scotland - CI, c/o P.O. Box 239, Glasgow, G3.