

*Socialist*  
**Action**

January/February 1996  
Vol II Issue 3 £1

*Review*

*Immigration  
and asylum —*

# The Tories' new pass laws

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY

UNITED KINGDOM OF  
GREAT BRITAIN  
AND NORTHERN IRELAND



PASSPORT

- *Black politics after the 'Million Man March'*
- *European monetary union unravels*
- *France strikes against Maastricht*



## Comment

# *A colonial master moves into Bosnia*

As we go to press NATO is starting the biggest military operation in Europe since the second world war — the occupation of Bosnia. The Dayton agreement, imposed without the agreement of the Bosnian Serbs and under threat of US military force, was described by *Newsweek* in the following terms: 'The agreement... gives America and its allies virtually colonial power to enforce their will in Bosnia... In effect, the warring parties have given NATO the authority to force a peace — by killing anyone who stands in their way.'

Under the terms of the agreement 60,000 NATO troops, 20,000 from the US and 13,000 from Britain, will be deployed in Bosnia under US command. Far from being a peace implementation force, the US is committed to arming and training the military forces of the Bosnian-Croat Federation. *Newsweek* reported: 'The 10th US Special Forces Group... will be responsible for training Bosnian government troops. The Serbs will rightly conclude that we have taken sides.. "we won't be exactly neutral," snorts a Green Beret Captain who is scheduled to go in with the first wave to train the Bosnian Army.'

NATO's first task may be to smash the defences of the large Serb suburbs of Sarajevo whose proposed transfer to Bosnian-Croat control has provoked demonstrations by tens of thousands of the inhabitants.

The deal establishes US leadership over the European Union and Germany in eastern Europe. For three years the US blocked any agreement in Bosnia by holding out the prospect of NATO intervention. In March 1994, it brokered the formation of the Bosnian-Croat Federation to fight the Serbs. On 5 October 1995 the *Observer* revealed: 'A mixture of overt and covert action has helped the peace efforts. The US relied on diplomacy to create the federation, on the politicians to refuse to police the embargo and to put pressure on the UN to finally allow the NATO air campaign. Training the Croats and covert arming and training of the Muslims has produced a mixture much less obvious than the United States involvement in Vietnam or Nicaragua. "They've changed a lot," said former Croatian Defence Minister Martin Spegelj. "In Vietnam they made mistakes. They learnt their lessons. Now they are doing it slower but safer. America has grown up."'

Far from this course of events producing justice in the former Yugoslavia, it has created, in Croatia, the most ethnically cleansed state in the region, in Bosnia a Serb population forcibly incorporated into a state of which they want no part, and opened the military phase of imperialist expansion to carve out new spheres of influence in eastern Europe. Indeed, Hungary will host eastern Europe's first NATO base as the staging post for US troops on their way to Bosnia.

NATO is moving into eastern Europe to tighten its ring of steel around Russia — which it still does not control — and, as the US Defence Secretary, recently spelled out in the *Wall Street Journal*, to guarantee stability against any future political reaction against capitalist economic reform.

The large sections of the west European left which effectively endorsed this course should consider how they managed to leave out of account the operations of the most powerful actors in the situation — who are not the Serbs but the imperialist states united under US leadership in NATO.

Like the Gulf war, NATO's operation in the Balkans would not have been possible without the acquiescence of the Russian government. It is to be hoped that the political struggles which will accompany the parliamentary and presidential elections in Russia will put an end to a regime whose policies every day bring closer to Russia's borders the imperialist military alliance which killed more than 200,000 Arabs in the Gulf war and will now try to impose itself as colonial master of south eastern Europe.

## Contents

Vol II Issue 3 Jan/Feb 1996

*Page 3*

Editorial

**France strikes against  
Maastricht  
Russia's elections**

*Page 4*

**Behind the assault on  
refugees  
The Asylum and  
Immigration Bill**

*Page 6*

**Students: fighting racism  
and reaction**

*Page 7*

**Forging black unity**  
Interview with Lee Jasper  
and Atma Singh of the  
National Black Alliance

*Page 11*

**After the March** — Views  
from Manning Marable and  
Don Rojas after the 'Million  
Man March'

*Page 16*

**The left and the  
Labour Party**

*Page 22*

**Cuba adopts 'Chinese'  
economic reform**

*Page 24*

**Hungary — the record of  
the Socialist Party**

*Page 25*

**Reviews**  
**Riff Raff**  
**British Communism**

*Page 27*

**In depth** —  
**European Monetary Union  
unravels**



# France strikes against Maastricht

The French working class has launched its greatest class struggle since 1968 — against an attack on the welfare state which is coordinated on a European level through the Maastricht Treaty on economic and monetary union. The entire European working class, and every oppressed group, has a material interest in their success.

The government of Alain Juppe has embarked upon its programme of tax increases and welfare cuts to try to get France's budget deficit down from 5.2 per cent of GDP to within the 3 per cent limit imposed by Maastricht in time to take part in monetary union by 1999.

Even more savage attacks on the welfare state, together with higher unemployment, would be necessary for the weaker economies of southern Europe, Sweden and Britain to sustain monetary union with Germany — and the German Bundesbank has made clear that Maastricht's limits must be *tightened*, not loosened, and enforced by massive fines.

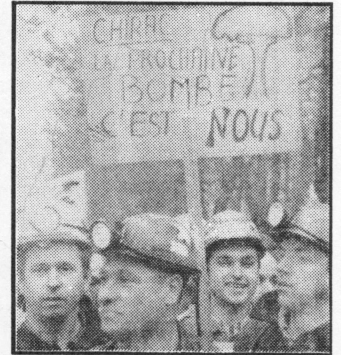
A defeat for Maastricht in France would reduce monetary union to the tributary economies of Germany — rendering it meaningless. That would be a defeat for the most serious attack on living standards in western Europe since the second world war.

It would also undermine the coherence of the European Union and reduce its pressure on the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe.

It is already clear that, while the NATO military alliance *will* expand eastward, the promised benefits of European Union membership are *not* going to be extended to the east European economies. Germany will not pay the bill for extending the Common Agricultural Policy and regional aid eastward and EU countries are blocking access to markets for east European steel, textiles and food. That is going to undermine further one of the factors which made capitalism seem an attractive proposition to much of their populations at the end of the 1980s.

The mass movement confronting President Chirac has

produced an alliance of public and private sector workers, students, pensioners, womens' groups, doctors and others in strikes and demonstrations which will inspire confidence throughout the working class movement in Europe. The chief obstacles it faces are *political*.



The French Socialist Party, *supports* Maastricht, and, as a result, presided over a decade of unemployment levels averaging 10 per cent. That is why Chirac came to power in the first place and why the far right National Front of Jean Marie Le Pen regularly wins more than 10 per cent at the polls. In fact, many of Juppe's measures were originally developed by Michel Rocard, when he was Prime Minister of a Socialist Party government. If the mass movement in France were to be defeated the beneficiaries would not only be Chirac and Kohl, but also Jean Marie Le Pen.

For ten years, the west European social democratic bureaucracy has pursued a bloc with big European capital in support of capitalist integration in western Europe. The result has been the highest levels of unemployment in the advanced industrialised world and the current attack on the welfare state. That political line — Eurosocialism — is now collapsing. Tony Blair is merely its belated tail-end.

A victory for the mass movement defending the welfare state in France would be a blow against the greatest attack on living standards in western Europe since the second world war. It would signal a shift in working class politics to the left throughout the EU.

The struggle of the French working class to defend the welfare state deserves total solidarity.

## Russia's elections

But there is a second political struggle unfolding, in part on the European continent, which is going to have much greater consequences than France — and that is in Russia. All polls show that in democratic elections the capitalist parties of Russia would be decimated. The Communist Party and its allies are far ahead of all other parties. Since the war in Chechnya, the balance of the opposition has swung in favour of the left against right wing nationalists. The new rich have been campaigning desperately to cancel the parliamentary elections on 17 December and the presidential elections due next year. They now argue that to defend capitalism democracy must be

suppressed. Massive electoral fraud is highly likely. But nothing can disguise the fact that the population of Russia in its great majority rejects capitalism and is moving to the left. Western governments' attempts to paint the opponents of capitalism in Russia as a red/brown menace have lost all influence in a country devastated by a market reform whose proponents are by far the greatest threat to democracy. For four years the Russian working class has waged a struggle as desperate as that of 1917-21 or 1941-43. Its outcome will be as momentous for world history, and as inescapable for everyone on the planet, as those battles.



## The Asylum and Immigration Bill

**T**he Tories 'Asylum and Immigration Bill' was published on 30 November. The Bill will amend and supplement the 1971 Immigration Act and the 1993 Asylum and Immigration and Appeals Act. In addition to savage attacks on the human rights of refugees and asylum seekers and the encouragement to racist discrimination by the creation of criminal penalties for employers who employ 'illegal immigrant' — which we outline below — the Bill would create an entirely new legal category of 'immigrant', and in so doing the basis for a legally defined group of second class citizens.

### The Asylum and Immigration Bill would:

- Empower the Secretary of State to designate countries 'in which it appears to him that there is in general no serious risk of persecution'.
- Allow the removal of an asylum claimant to a 'third' country, that is a country which is not his or her country of origin but which in the opinion of the Secretary of State is a 'safe' country'.
- Rule out appeals against such a decision unless made from *outside* the United Kingdom, that is after the decision has not only been made but enacted through deportation to the named country.
- Increase the powers of immigration officers to 'enter, if need be by force, the premises' in which 'he has reasonable grounds for suspecting' that there are 'illegal immigrants'.
- Create a criminal offence of employing a person without documentary entitlement to work in the UK.

The financial memorandum to the Bill estimates that this will have an initial compliance cost to employers of £13.5 million and an annual cost of £11.5 million due to the need to 'make additional enquiries to establish the status of new employees in some cases'. As the National Black Alliance has pointed out this will intensify racism in employment as employers opt for the simple expedient of not hiring black people.

- Introduce an entirely new legal category of 'immigrant'.

An 'immigrant' would be 'a person who...requires leave to enter or remain in the United Kingdom (whether or not such leave has been given)'. This would represent the creation of a legally defined group of second class citizens who would be denied access to employment and to housing and Child Benefit under this Bill. The implications for all black people in Britain are obvious.

- Exclude any 'immigrant who is of a class specified in an order made by the Secretary of State' from any entitlement to local authority housing and any entitlement under the homelessness legislation.
- Remove any entitlement to Child Benefit by ruling that 'No immigrant within the meaning of the Asylum and Immigration Act 1996 shall be entitled to child benefit for any week'. This proposal would reinforce attacks on asylum seekers' access to services and benefits being proposed by Peter Lilley.

● For information on actions against the Bill contact CAIAB, 28 Commercial St, London E1 or telephone 0171-247 9907

# Behind the

The racist proposals to further tighten Britain's asylum and immigration restrictions, put forward by the Tory government, are without a doubt motivated by the Conservative Party's attempt to attract racist support and votes. But they are also part of an intensification of measures seen in all European Union states in the last decade to deter, refuse and expel asylum seekers and refugees.

**T**he context of these measures is the creation of huge waves of refugees in the semi-colonial countries. These are the result of the intensification of imperialist exploitation of the 'third world' since the end of the 1970s and particularly in the last decade, through rising interest rates on debt, the imposition of 'structural readjustment' programmes which destroy the independent productive capacity of the semicolonial countries and by resort to direct military intervention wherever regimes attempt to resist these policies.

On official United Nations figures — inevitably a considerable underestimation — there are 25 million refugees internationally. Of these less than five per cent seek refuge in Europe, the overwhelming number residing in other third world countries nearer to their state of origin. The aim of the policies which constitute 'Fortress Europe' is that the massive human tragedy created by imperialism's assault on the countries of the 'third world' should be contained within those countries themselves.

These policies include:

In Germany the liberal asylum laws adopted after the second world war have been abandoned and it is now virtually impossible to claim asylum in Germany. All countries bordering Germany have been de-

clared safe and any refugee arriving via a neighbouring country is immediately deported to that country.

In France, Chirac's first announcement after his election was to say that aircraft would deport 'illegals' on a weekly basis with the aim of 15,000 deportations in the first year, rising to 24,000 annually. This is the largest attempted expulsion from France since the mass deportation of Jews in the last war.

In Italy the far right Northern Leagues announced they would be rounding up illegal immigrants and asylum seekers and flying them out of the country. One Northern League deputy said that if he had his way they would be dumped out of the planes over the sea.

**A**cross Europe, and North America, laws equivalent to the Carriers Liability Act have been introduced with major penalties on airline companies that carry passengers to Europe without the necessary documentation. In Britain aircraft carriers paid £63 million in such fines to the government from 1988 to 1994. These fines mean it is very difficult to get to Europe by air, but overland to Germany, for instance, means deportation to Poland, the Czech republic or another country en route.

All these measures have been introduced alongside intensified

## Lobby of Parliament

*Tuesday 19 December*

*1-5pm, House of Commons, London SW1*

Organised by the *Asylum Rights Campaign* in conjunction with the *Campaign Against the Asylum and Immigration Bill*.



# assault on refugees

policing of the black communities in Europe, ostensibly aimed at identifying 'illegal immigrants'.

France's Pasqua Laws allow the French police to arrest anyone who cannot produce their papers proving their right to be in France. This has led to escalating police assaults on black communities. In May an incident in Belleville — the main Jewish and North African part of Paris — led to a police riot. Bystanders were beaten up and the police were heard to call their victims 'dirty Arab' and 'dirty Jew'. Over the summer the French police shot and killed an 8 year old asylum seeker fleeing with his unarmed family.

In Britain, Howard and Lilley's proposals will be debated in parliament in coming weeks and months. The cynical electoral considerations immediately motivating these measures were referred to in a Conservative Party strategy document saying that 'immigration was an issue that had played well in the tabloids' in previous elections and which still had the power to hurt Labour.

Since the implementation of the 1993 Asylum Bill the proportion of asylum applications that have been successful has dropped dramatically, from around 75 per cent to 6 per cent in 1994. Only one person who claimed asylum from Nigeria in 1994 was successful. All of those from Ghana were refused. From Algeria 92 per cent were refused. From Sierra Leone 98 per cent. This legislation will formalise this gross denial of human rights.

Howard's measures are aimed at 'fast tracking' failed asylum claimants out of Britain through: denying all welfare benefits to those appealing against a first refusal; eliminating oral appeals in some cases; reinforcing the right of the government to deport asylum-seekers to a 'safe' third country which they passed through en route; designating some countries of origin as 'safe' from which all claims will be viewed as 'without foundation'. To prevent asylum-seekers reaching Britain in the first place visa requirements will be extended to a further list of countries.

These measures are to be accompanied by steps to legitimise the harassment of the resident black community through internal passport checks in public services and making employers who hire criminally liable for the immigration status of their employees.

The Refugee Council has estimated that the total denial of welfare benefits to certain categories of refugees from 8 January, proposed by Peter Lilley, will mean utter destitution for 8,000 people, and a further 2,000 each month after that.

The announcement of these proposals has already whipped up racism.

These proposals are going to be bitterly fought. The estimate of campaigners and MPs involved in attempts to stop previous bills is that a united, broad-based and active campaign can, unlike earlier measures, create sufficient pressure

to stop these proposals becoming law. A key factor in that will be extracting an unequivocal commitment from the Labour leadership to repeal them.

---

'The intention is to contain the massive human tragedy created by imperialism's assault on the 'third world' within those countries themselves.'

---

**T**he Campaign Against the Immigration and Asylum Bill unites black, anti-racist and refugee groups and has already won the support of more than 50 MPs from a spectrum of the political parties, civil liberties and anti-racist campaigns, Poale Zion and Jewish community representatives, trade unionists and students. Its lobby on 19 December and other events leading to the national demonstration on 23 March must be a number one priority for all those who wish to halt the fundamental threat faced by the entire working class — that of the worst rise of racism since the 1930s.

By Anna Samuel

Asylum seekers have become a hostage of the political problems within the Tory party. The Tories want to win the election by attacking vulnerable people, by introducing racist laws and by sending asylum seekers to meet their killers.

British people are not aware about what is happening in Algeria, in Sri Lanka or Nigeria, or many other countries. They are saying that they are safe countries. How can Algeria be a safe country when the British embassy has been moved from Algeria to Tunisia?

In front of us we have three people sentenced to death in Algeria. How could you send such people back? How could human beings do that to another human being? We want you, all of you here please to help us. We didn't come here for thirty pounds in benefits. We are doctors. We are engineers. In this country we only have a right to survive, not to 'live'. Please think about asylum seekers and unite against these measures'.

*Representative of the Algerian Refugee Council speaking at the Campaign Against the Immigration and Asylum Bill rally on Thursday 16 November.*

If we do not form a united front to fight this then very soon enough they will get us all out. They will pick on whomever they choose. I'm telling Mr Howard, that I'm here to stay, that I have a right to be in this country, that indeed all of us have a right to be in this country. They are telling us that because we've served our purpose here they're going to kick us out. My father paid taxes for all 25 years he worked here. Now we have the council saying he hasn't paid his poll tax. I feel like writing and telling them that Mr Howard said that he was an illegal immigrant even though he spent 25 years working in this country so you should actually give us a refund of all the taxes that he has paid.

I'm here and I'm here to stay. I'm fighting and I'm going to make myself heard and make sure that they bring my father back into this country where he belongs. My mother will stay, my brother will be released and my two younger sisters will be allowed to stay.'

*Lola Onibiyo speaking at the CAIAB rally on 16 November. Lola's father was deported to Nigeria after living in Britain for 31 years.*



# Students: Fighting racism and reaction

The Student Assembly Against Racism on 4 November marked a significant breakthrough in the politics of the student movement. It succeeded in putting the question of racism back on to the agenda of student politics and was the first step towards winning an alliance between students and the black communities.

**W**hat has been so lacking in the politics of the student movement was clearly demonstrated at the Student Assembly Against Racism. The initiative came from the National Assembly Against Racism and Youth Connections — the umbrella youth organisation which took the leadership among the Bangladeshi youth in Tower Hamlets following the near-fatal attack on Quddus Ali and the election of Derek Beackon. Youth Connection recognised the necessity of creating an alliance with the wider student movement and bringing the focus of anti-racism nationally to Tower Hamlets by holding the Student Assembly in Tower Hamlets College.

Secondly, the politics of the conference, which brought together a broad range of speakers and organisations, refugee groups and campaigns, the families of victims of racist attacks, and Jewish representatives, was able to attract the most progressive students.

Thirdly, Labour Students supported the event and NUS President Jim Murphy spoke.

Because the Student Assembly came from and was based in a community at the sharp end of racism, the case for black leadership and black unity emerged in very clear terms. There was a noticeably high attendance by black students. The most animated and well attended workshop was that on black unity and self organisation.

The number of black sabbatical officers in student unions is growing and black students are becoming more organised. This reflects the fact that the recent expansion of education has led to a large rise in the number of black students, who are acutely aware of the racism which they and others face. This awareness is leading to a fight back against racism on campuses and in the student movement. Bringing this develop-

ment together with the most progressive wing of the anti-racist movement, represented by Youth Connections, the National Assembly Against Racism and the National Black Alliance, to forge a united student anti-racist organisation on the same principles will create a powerful alliance.

The situation for young black people is a desperate one. An average 61 per cent of black males in London are unemployed. Homeless charity Centrepoint recently reported that 44 per cent of homeless people in London were from ethnic minorities. This, together with the growing levels of racist violence and police harassment mean that fighting racism is one of the most central issues the student movement should take up.

The most pressing issue at the moment is building the broadest opposition to the immigration and asylum bill. The student movement can make an important difference.

Part of the re-emergence of youth radicalisation has been mobilisations against racism. Black youth have led campaigns to defend their communities against police harassment and attacks by racists and fascists. NUS has not played a leading role in this radicalisation.

Firstly, the issues of racism and the concerns of Black students have been de-prioritised. Anti-racist and anti-fascist campaigns have focused on the far right but virtually ignored the daily attacks and harassment of the black and ethnic minority students.

Secondly, the current NUS campaign on 'anti-racism' focuses on the small Islamic fundamentalist group Hizb-ut-Tahrir. In press reports NUS called for the banning of Hizb-ut-Tahrir on the basis of the assertion that: 'It is the single biggest extremist threat in the UK at the moment'.

**B**ut this just does not equate with the real situation. In the past 4 years alone at least 7 young Black people have been



murdered by racist gangs. In Tower Hamlets in the past year around 70 per cent of the reported racial incidents were against young black people aged 14-18. In student unions up and down the country racial harassment — from a racist atmosphere in the union bar to actual physical assault — is the most serious manifestation of racism.

There is no doubt that the politics of Hizb-ut-Tahrir are right wing and reactionary on many issues and should be opposed. But in an article in the *Guardian* Martin Bright correctly concluded that 'Whatever the truth of the matter, a hysterical obsession with "fundamentalists on campus" will do nothing to help the cause of Britain's growing population of Muslim students who have often had to overcome poverty, racism ... to get to university in the first place' (7 November). The article points out the extraordinary state of affairs whereby the London Guildhall University, 5 minutes walk from Brick Lane in the heart of the Bangladeshi community in East London, was closed because a Hizb-ut-Tahrir demonstration was taking place. The protest was being held because a muslim girl was allegedly racially abused by people throwing condoms filled with alcohol at her.

**T**he Student Assembly Against Racism began to reorientate the student movement by placing the fundamental issues — the economic onslaught on the 'third world', the rise of racism in Europe and the United States, the need for unity and mutual respect — back at the top of the agenda and assembling a broad coalition of support.

By Kim Wood

---

The Student Assembly Against Racism began to reorientate the student movement by placing the fundamental issues in the growth of racism back at the top of the agenda.'

---



# Forging black unity

The National Black Alliance of Asian, African and Caribbean Organisations (NBA) unites a broad alliance of black organisations and has played a leading role in the Campaign Against the Immigration and Asylum Bill, in defence of black communities against racist attack and in formulating a progressive black perspective on a range of left policies. *Socialist Action* spoke to Lee Jasper and Atma Singh of the NBA about current developments in black politics in Britain and the impact of the 'Million Man March'.

**In recent speeches you have stressed that black people in this country have to understand themselves as part of the majority population of the world when considering the roots of the attacks on refugees and the growth of racism in Britain. What have you meant by that?**

*Lee:* Well, besides the obvious physical fact that we are the majority peoples on the planet, it is crucial that the black communities in Britain have a greater understanding of the international framework of our struggle, particularly since the axis of the new wave of racism is the attack on immigration and on refugees. The reasons why people are being forced to leave their countries of origin is not that they think that Britain, the United States or the west in general is a wonderful place. Everything indicates that people would rather stay where their local histories, culture, experience and family bases are. The reality is that GATT agreements and IMF requirements, made in the interests of the West, are devastating the economies of Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean.

Those of us here must see that our vested interests are with those people. In the struggle against racism, on the British stage, to paraphrase Malcolm X, black people are a minority. But on the world stage we are a vast majority. Our vested interest lies with developing Africa, the Indian sub-continent, the Caribbean and so on, to develop opportunities for fair trade and to campaign here for a greater degree of equality in the economic relations between the west and those countries. The debts that have arisen from interest payments or loans from international banks are the very things that are crippling economies and are leading to the mass dislocation of entire peoples.

---

**'The new Asylum and Immigration proposals encapsulate imperialism's undermining of the semi-colonial economies and the efforts to deal with the remnants of the colonial legacy, the black population in the west'**

---

The world is being carved up, people in the 'south' are being systematically deprived, immersed in long-term, nail-biting poverty, plunged into civil war. At the same time the countries of the west are intensifying barriers against immigration, increasing attacks on asylum seekers already in the west and instigating an all-out attack on the black communities resident in Europe.

It's a bit like what Malcolm said about house negroes and field negroes. Those of us born and grown up in Britain can somehow feel that a British passport and British citizenship, compared to the worst effects of racism as it affects black foreign nationals for example, is nothing to do with us and will not affect us. In the 1970s we watched visa conditions being imposed on the Indian sub-continent. Caribbeans and others thought it wouldn't affect them. Less than 20 years later, having refined an immigration system primarily on the Indian sub-continent, people of African, Caribbean, Latin America and elsewhere now find themselves subjected to the full rigour of that system. It's a very damaging kind of shortsightedness not to see the international context and the similarities in the problems the black populations face.

Wherever we allow the state to go unchallenged in its abuses of a particular minority those abuses become legitimised power. With this legislation the alarm bells should really be ringing for the black community. We have to align ourselves absolutely full square with the asylum and refugee seekers. That's why the NBA supported the launch of the Campaign Against the Asylum and Immigration Bill.

This particular legislation gives the clearest indication that as far as this government is concerned, it sees no difference between asylum seekers and British black passport



holders. It encapsulates imperialism's undermining of the economies of the semi-colonial countries and the efforts to deal with the remnants of the colonial legacy which is represented in the physical presence of the black communities in Europe and the United States. After this attack we can look forward to greater internal controls. The Tory race card has got 'ID' stamped all over it.

**And how would you see this connecting with the effects of the economic situation in west Europe?**

*Lee:* Racism can be charted against the economic cycles. Right now Europe is crawling along the bottom of the deepest recession since the 1930s and there is no light at the end of the tunnel. The cuts in public spending, the 'downsizing' in all countries involves the decision to consign millions of people permanently into abject poverty. The social consequence of that is being dealt with by harsher and harsher internal controls and repressive mechanisms. Since the economic situation is going to get worse, racism is going to grow. We have to unite against racism but also build this into a social programme to tackle the roots of racism.

Over the next decade and into the next millenium we are likely to see some horrific legislation aimed at suppressing and controlling the Black African, Caribbean and Asian communities in the UK.

**Atma:** The fundamental issue driving a new phase of racism is the attempt by international capital to reassert itself on the world. The way it is doing that means utter devastation, starvation and death for the populations of the third, or semi-colonial, world. Imperialist capital is concentrating on how to get the maximum profit out of the semi-colonial countries and people are secondary to that. They simply don't count. Whether they live or die, whether in small or big numbers, that's not an issue for capital. What is an issue is the control of the resources, the raw materials in Africa, Asia and so forth.

The question for imperialism is how are they going to get hold of those raw materials without incurring any sort of backlash, without having any of the strains put on them which have happened in other countries where, because of the national liberation or left movements, at least some of the resources of those countries went to people within the country.

State spending in all African countries, in Asian countries like India has been slashed, in the context of the extraction of massive wealth from these countries by imperialism through the multinationals and the trade arrangements. That has resulted in immense poverty. Although parts of Asia have seen economic growth, that isn't the same as growth in the living standards for the vast majority of the people in those countries. In Africa nearly every single government apart from the government of South Africa, had huge attacks on state expenditure, which is an indication of how crucial South Africa is to the future development of the African continent.

**Lee:** I think we also have to add in the perception of the black communities, who see the majority of capitalist control in the hands of white people. It is a vociferous, white, racial capitalism that is destroying the black world. Western capitalist economies have been sustained by the deaths of millions and millions of Africans and Asians, in order that we can sustain these so-called civilised living standards. It is morally and politically repugnant.

I agree that South Africa has a key role to play in the black world's development. The question is whether it can begin to act as the economic agent to drag Africa into a new, progressive economic era.

South Africa also has to take international responsibility in places such as Cuba, which was willing to send, troops, resources and aid to them in their struggle. Now that Cuba is in difficulty I would like to see the South African government paying a lot more attention to what it can do for Cuba by way of reciprocation.

**What in your view is the current stage and the dynamic of the development of black politics in Britain and in the United States, and how do you see Louis Farrakhan's black capitalism proposals fitting in with your last comments?**

**Lee:** The Nation of Islam is only a powerful movement in the United States. It is not a politically mature movement in terms of its analysis of what kind of economic and social policies will lead to black emancipation and equality. It's a repetition of the status quo. I think that Al Sharpton called Louis Farrakhan 'Booker T. Washington in a bow tie', which is quite apt.

What Louis Farrakhan is doing, and this is his appeal, is saying we will help you to improve yourself, with total dependence upon yourself. That is a very appealing message to lots of black people. If you're on the other end of racism, living in the godforsaken housing estates, your school is the one that is being failed by the government, economic prospects for you are virtually zero, then anybody that comes along and says if you link with me, brother or sister, we can improve your situation, improve your moral standing, and give you a pathway to heaven, is going to sound very appealing.

In this country the difference is that in certain respects we have a more politically mature black community, which has been a secular political movement. There has been a greater degree of analysis, tolerance to different views and thought about their economic and social implications.

Manning Marable is right, the Nation of Islam are conservative militants.

The job of organisations like the National Black alliance is to link in to this appeal, but present a different way forward. To pick up where the Nation of Islam leave off. In this country we have only reached a maturation of the black political movement in the last five



Louis Farrakhan

years. Although there have been big developments in black self-organisation in the labour movement this did not sufficiently base itself in the experience of the black communities. Black people both need organisations can explain the general economic situation and create levers for change, through self-organisation, but which also help with their particular position, particularly the growth of mass and institutionalised racism.

The black section movement within the Labour Party was strong on theory and extremely weak on action. This was exacerbated by its increasingly narrow base and its failure to involve a diversity of concerns.

The problems rooted in this actually came to a head in the developments in the ARA.

The ARA was a big achievement. It was a coming together for the first time of sections of the white left, sections of the black left and sections of the independent black political sector. Prior to this the white left looked at the black community through the eyes of the Black Section. But the black communities were wider than that. In the ARA the opportunistic weaknesses of the black section leadership brought the movement into conflict with those it was supposed to represent, particularly black families. That destroyed it.

One of the most clear examples of this opportunism, which came after the collapse of the ARA as any kind of organisation fighting racism was the 'open the borders' campaign, which is a campaign to extend the racist Schengen agreement to Britain. This agreement allows the 'free movement' of white Eu-

---

'Farrakhan is a product of US racism. The potential he has captured is a challenge to organisations like the NBA to offer an alternative.'

---



ropean nationals across Europe while intensifying repression against black communities in Europe and the exclusion ring around Europe.

In contrast with this experience, however, there has been a real broadening of the anti-racist movement, as seen at the National Assembly Against Racism with a variety of people, not least the families themselves in the case of racial attacks, being brought straight into the forefront of the political process and the political programme. That now gives the anti-racist movement a degree of credibility within the black community that is unassailable.

**Atma:** In the US, the most powerful imperialist country, poverty is increasing more sharply than at any time in the post-war period. Spending on welfare has been slashed and the black community devastated.

Farrakhan, who is a very rightwing politician, because he says you have to sow divisions in the black community and uses 'black' not in the sense that Malcolm X used it, which is the only way it can be used — to mean the majority of the world, by including Asians, who are in themselves are the majority of the world, by including Arab people, Africans, people from Latin America, the Caribbean peoples — but to mean only a section of the non-white population of the United States. Even in the US a vision of black nationalism which says all the oppressed non-white people should unite would be approaching a near-majority of American society. That would be a serious threat to imperialism.

In addition, Farrakhan hasn't said made any serious comment on any international situation. How can you be a black politician and not concerned about what's going on in Africa through the IMF plans, what's going on in Asia, in Cuba, in Latin America? Black radicals need an internationalist perspective. Farrakhan has none.

By attacking women, lesbians and gays, the Jewish community he is rejecting the potential for a powerful progressive movement. The most recent example of this potential in the US was the Rainbow Alliance, when millions of white people voted for Jesse Jackson. That showed that white people would rally behind a black person who was serious about challenging the direction of US society.

**Lee:** I think that we tend to misunderstand one thing. And that is the difference between a political analysis of a particular phenomenon and experience of a phenomenon. These can lead to different conclusions. For instance, for African-Americans I can readily understand that if you're sitting in a darkened room, the smallest pinprick of light can often seem like salvation. That's what Farrakhan represents. This links to what Marable says about distinguishing between Farrakhan and the motives of those who went on the march.

In this country this sort of potential has to be addressed by organisations like the NBA. If you're a black youth in Moss Side, no good state education, whose family is in second or third generation poverty, police are on your tail all day, and if you see no alternative from the white community in terms of black equality, if you see black organisations in the labour movement failing to support you, then the cynicism that you may feel can mean that Farrakhan's message becomes appealing.

People won't necessarily stay with that kind of politics — that depends what alternative we offer.

But fundamentally, Farrakhan is a product of US racism, not a product of black society gone wrong or flawed in some way.

Whilst much of what he says is completely objectionable, wrong and not things I would endorse, millions supported the march because they want equality.

Farrakhan says we've got capitalism, my programmes are about hard work, dedication and profit and the capitalist mode of delivery. And that fits in to the dominant culture in the US. The masses say well we are never going to get Clinton to turn round on welfare benefits. In the absence of a broad social alternative, a powerful black progressive politics linking up with the left across society, there's a sense in which this entirely individualistic vision makes sense to people and seems attainable.

There is a fine line between progressive black nationalism and right wing black nationalism, which is retrogressive and backward. The right wing black nationalist response is created by the social and economic conditions of US society.

The political maturity and even the level of general education in the UK is higher than that of the US. That's not something we should be

holding up as any sort of badge, it's entirely a result of the kind of racism and the level of oppression in the US. It will be interesting to see now that Farrakhan's got the ball exactly what he's going to do with it. To take one million men to the steps of Washington to get them to say that they are sorry is a missed opportunity in anybody's books. Now everybody is looking at Farrakhan as the leader of black American politics, even Jesse Jackson.

**Atma:** The biggest mistake for progressive politics in the US was the failure of strategy around Jesse Jackson's Rainbow Coalition. Jackson's campaigns represented a huge step forward. But there was a critical moment when there were two choices, either to found a new political party that was independent of the Democratic Party and the Republican Party — a black political party, a rainbow coalition involving all sectors of the alliance or a party of labour or to become tied to the Democrats. Jackson chose the latter and so he left a huge vacuum.

This vacuum was filled by Farrakhan. The 'million man march' expressed a desperation. In my view that desperation is being channelled away from a confrontation with US capital. This would require uniting the non-white population in the United States and allying that with a progressive alliance in the rest of society.

In the US such a horrific situation is being created that a serious alliance with other progressive forces is possible. The left developments in the leadership of the AFL-CIO are an indication of that.

The potential that Jackson showed existed has to be recreated. Instead of an historic opportunity — of mobilising huge numbers of the black population for positive change — grasped, under Farrakhan we may witness an historic opportunity missed.

In Britain although the black community is more privileged economically than in the US, in very relative terms, the main difference is on the political level. The ten year fight in the Labour Party for self-organisation showed that you could have an alliance with the labour movement based on black people being respected not on black people abandoning any of their goals. That step forward is still there de-

---

'The danger is that Farrakhan will direct the desperation expressed by the 'million man march' away from a confrontation with US capital'

---

spite the setbacks. The Black Socialist Society and the TUC Black Workers Conference and race relations committee are still there. It would be very hard to go back on those massive gains.

The subsequent failures should be kept in perspective and are being overcome. That is clear in the positive labour movement response to the National Black Alliance, the Campaign Against the Asylum and Immigration Bill, the National Assembly Against Racism and the Student Assembly Against Racism for instance.

**Lee:** We have always said that gains for race equality benefit everybody. To take equal opportunities, the biggest group to have benefited are white women, although much of the dynamic and inspiration came from the black struggle, particularly in the US civil rights movement.

The stark problems that the black communities face reflect the fundamental contradictions of capitalism. For black people to gain equality will require fundamental change, not a partial accommodation, just increasing the number of haves and decreasing those who have-not.

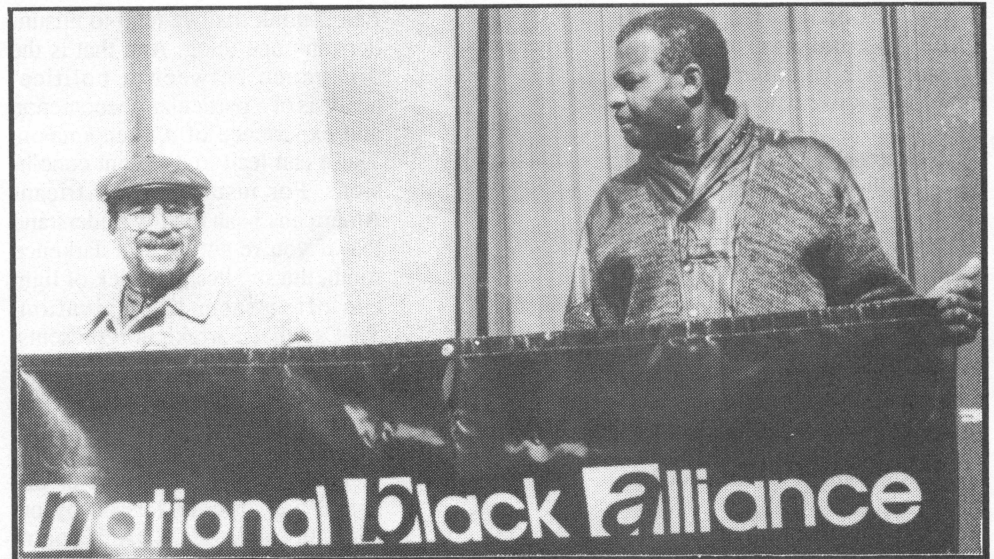
The NBA is dedicated to unity and alliances. This means building in respect and tolerance. There are all sorts of retrogressive pressures acting on the black communities. We are not able to deal with all of the negative baggage of the culture of racism at once — what being in a black family emanating from the Caribbean, emanating from a slave society, ending up here in 1995 on the wrong end of a whole pile of social statistics means.

Unity is a plea to say hold on, we're not all as we should be but we're not what we were and we are moving in the right direction.

On the other hand, when anybody tells the black community they have the answer, the black community immediately knows that they haven't got the answer. When anybody says let's enter into a dialogue to find the answer, then the doors in the black community are opened.

None of us are post-revolutionary perfect organisations. We have to take our communities with us along the road of political development, not rush ahead as individuals.

The immigration and asylum legislation presents us with the opportunity, and necessity, to develop



this alliance. When people come to the lobby on the 19 December and see Africans, Caribbeans and Asians campaigning together, the same dawning that came on people in the Jackson movement, that the differences are more imagined than real, will be more apparent.

**Your statements on unity and the practical steps towards it seem quite a contrast to Farrakhan's, his exclusion of women for instance?**

**Lee:** Well, I wouldn't be going on any march that was only for men, because it would be a waste. We know very well in the black community that the vanguard of the struggle, although it is presently often articulated by the male, the actual day-to-day fights are conducted by black women. Women have a role to play in leading the movement in this country that has not yet come about. I don't think that is primarily because of sexism within the movement, although that is prevalent, but because of the economic and social circumstances of the black communities and black women.

Black politics is greatly affected by the effects of long-term, historical poverty. Poverty and disadvantage breed prejudice — those of us who have been able to move forward, out of the working class, black, ghettos, can testify to the tug of its retrogressive culture. I know lots of black people caught in that trap who would, if given a way out and the support to move, would move.

**Atma:** Looked at globally, black women are at the bottom of the heap. In Africa, they're dying be-

cause of the consequences of IMF policies. In this country vast numbers of black women cannot get jobs or are stuck in employment ghettos. The sort of work black women are in is usually physically demanding and poorly paid. State support, nursery care, is very poor.

The increased role of black women in the political process is a positive element but remains very restricted. Diane Abbott's election to the NEC of the Labour Party represented a big gain for black women, but also for the left and the entire black community.

It is necessary to create institutional structures to ensure that black women are on political platforms, that the struggle for black women to be elected to parliament is supported. It is shocking that there is only one black woman MP, we have to ensure we get more black MPs and more black women MPs, representing the diversity of the black community. The anti-racist movement has to ensure that it pays attention to black women having an equal role within its leadership.

**From the point of view that the black population in Britain is a minority population, how important do you see the relationship between the black population and the labour movement? And how do you see that developing?**

**Lee:** It has been incredibly uplifting for us as a black community to see that an organisation such as the TUC has been prepared to put serious resources and political energy into the anti-racist struggle. They are doing this in the understanding that black organisation and leadership is key in the anti-racist struggle.

---

**'The serious resources and energy which the TUC has put into its Unite Against Racism campaign organised in partnership with black communities, is very important for the battles on racism which lie ahead'**

---



# After the March

**Socialist Action** presents the views of two prominent black activists in the United States about the current situation in US black politics and the implications of the 'Million Man March' held on 16 October.

■ **Don Rojas** was Minister of Information in Grenada until the US invasion.

**The march was controversial both in the Black movement and among left activists. Why did you decide to participate?**

I thought it was important for progressives and people on the left generally and certainly people of colour on the left to participate in this march from the position of critical support.

I thought it was important for the left not to be left out, not to be marginalised by what clearly was going to be a huge mobilisation of African-Americans — most perhaps from the ranks of the working class, and a lot of them young. So in spite of the serious problems that I had with the lack of political direction, and with the overall orientation of the march — the emphasis on atonement and reconciliation — I became convinced at least a week before that large numbers of men would be showing up for a number of reasons, not necessarily in sync with the call by Farrakhan and Chavis.

I also had a lot of problems with the exclusion of women from the march. I thought that was just another manifestation of the Nation of Islam's patriarchy. They have not really advanced very much on the women question and on the whole range of other questions that are critical to those of us on the left.

But as I argued on the day of the march, 'I intend to march in Washington to make one simple statement to the world — the cancer of racism is eating away at the heart

and soul of America, thus depriving all its people, of all colours, the fullest realisation of their humanity.

I will not be marching to the drumbeat of Louis Farrakhan or Benjamin Chavis or any of the other leaders and organisers of this march but rather to the clarion call of my conscience and to the imperatives of our time. They have their agenda and I have mine. Some aspects of both overlap but they are by no means identical.

Many friends and colleagues will also be marching, not to atone for our sins before the world, as Farrakhan wants us to do, but to call attention to America's greatest sin — racism. We will be marching to protest the haemorrhaging of Black America not only by its own hands but more severely by those with their hands on the levers of real political and economic power in this country. We will be marching to demand — yes demand, not beg — jobs with decent pay for all Black Americans, male and female. We make this paramount because without honest work a man has little or no dignity and self-respect. Jobs are among the most important debts America owes to the sons and daughters of its former slaves.'

Yet the march has been so depoliticised by Farrakhan's emphasis on atonement that it is being perceived by the power brokers as posing little or no threat to America's status quo. Major establishment figures from President Clinton to Colin Powell, to the leadership of the Republican Party have embraced the 'objectives' of the

gle — that black people have a right to be able to determine the solutions to the problems that they face. This is very important for the battles on racism which lie ahead.

The key alliance against racism is that between struggling oppressed black communities and the labour movement. Given our weight in this society, such an alliance is absolutely critical.

Also one has to take into account that black communities are largely a sleeping giant in electoral terms. Many people are not registered to vote. We have some responsibility to get that situation changed. The campaigning alliance with the wider labour movement, greater electoral registration and activity by the black communities and, of course, greater representation and leverage within the political process for black communities are all critical.

**Atma:** The TUC, in organising two anti-racist demonstrations and supporting the National Assembly Against Racism in February, has taken a big step forward. They could have chosen a different route, that taken by other labour movements across Europe, that of engaging in racist hysteria. When the 1905 Aliens Act was introduced, the TUC passed a motion saying keep foreigners out, so you can see how far the things have come.

This relationship could become a powerful weapon for progress. Black people, as they play more of a role within the labour movement, can ensure that the interests of black communities and the fight against racism is articulated more meaningfully and that the labour movement is not divorced from the black communities.

However, black people in the labour movement have to be concerned about what's going on in their communities, whether people are being murdered and attacked, whether young people are unemployed, what the opinions are in the community. Black individuals who don't have these concerns are not representing black communities.

The developments going on in black politics and the positive, opening up by the TUC to the black communities and the anti-racist struggle, gives us hope for moving forward, creating a more representative black leadership in alliance with the labour movement and a strong and enduring anti-racist movement ■

march, if not its caller.

**Some women did attend. What was the response?**

There was no hostility that I observed toward the sprinkling of women who participated. I also saw a handful of whites in the audience and here too there was no hostility.

As I said on the day of the march, 'no one who shares these concerns should be excluded or should exclude themselves from this march. Indeed, Black men should encourage their wives, mothers, daughters and sisters to absent themselves from their jobs, schools, and shopping malls and present themselves in Washington to stand with their men in a forceful demonstration of Black unity and solidarity in these critical times. Now is not the time for Black women to stay at home and pray on Farrakhan's anointed 'Holy Day'.

**What attitude did Black women activists take?**

They were pretty much split down the middle on the question of whether or not they should support the march. Angela Davis, the most prominent opponent of the march among Black female activists, came out at a press conference in New York and very strongly denounced it. But there were other prominent and not so prominent Black women, who did express critical support for the march. Some of them actively participated in organisational work leading up to it. So there was no consensus among Black women activists.

**What was the main reason people turned out? What messages resonated with the crowd?**

The ideas expressed by Farrakhan were not the main reasons that people turned out. They came for a range of reasons. Many came to protest to the government the terrible plight of Black males. Some did come, in fact, to seek bonding and a sense of community and brotherhood with other African-American men from around the country. I could sense that, I could hear that, I could feel that spirit of unity that sense of power in numbers and in single-mindedness of purpose. And that was a very powerful thing.

But I also saw how the crowd (and I was in the middle of the crowd) reacted very positively to the more political points made in

several of the speeches. Unfortunately the speeches were a mixed bag. Some were very backward and reactionary, some were progressive. Some were a little of everything.

It seemed as though there were two realities taking place that day. One on the stage where the speakers and the leaders of the march were expressing themselves, and another among the million men who were there. They came looking for powerful leaders. They didn't find them on the stage. They found them among themselves. They found leadership in their ranks and I think that's going to be a very positive thing in the months ahead as they return home and get involved at the local level and help to give guidance and direction to that emerging leadership, particularly among young people.

---

**'To destroy the structures of inequality we need more than self-help. We need a broad mass movement that challenges the power structure'**

---

**Many Black officials and entertainers endorsed and/or participated in the march. What is the relationship between Farrakhan and these more 'mainstream' elements in the Black community?**

Unfortunately most of them played second-fiddle to Farrakhan on this thing. His marathon speech — two and a half hours — was far too long. It was rambling and lacked any sharp focus. There wasn't enough emphasis on public policy issues, too much mysticism and numerology. Just the length of the speech itself was a violation of the privilege of being the keynote speaker and did reflect, in my view, a kind of megalomania in Farrakhan. Hopefully that can be brought into check if structures of accountability emerge in the months ahead that will make the NOI and Farrakhan more accountable to African-American communities around the country.

The most powerful part of his speech was where he dealt with white supremacy, when he said that white supremacy must die in order for humanity to live. I think that's a very powerful point. I was hoping that he would develop it more, but he didn't. The bourgeois media's interpretation of this was that his old anti-white racism was expressing itself again, which of course is nonsense. A critique of white supremacy does not translate into anti-white racism.

Farrakhan's emphasis on self-help, self-improvement, self-reli-

ance, all solid values in themselves, hark back to the days of Booker T Washington's accommodationist position vis-a-vis segregation in the South. This was vehemently opposed by WEB DuBois. Farrakhan has been called the Booker T Washington of the 1990s. In my view while these values are good in themselves they are not necessarily an antidote to racial and social inequality. Inequality is systematic, it is structured into all the social, political, and economic institutions of US capitalism and I don't think that Farrakhan and his people in the NOI understand it in those terms.

So in order to destroy the structures of inequality we need more than self-help and self-improvement. We need a broad based mass movement that is political in nature, one that challenges the power structure.

**Farrakhan's stakes have gone up. He is now in the ranks of major Black leaders in this country...**

Farrakhan is not, despite what many think, a flaming radical given to anti-semitic speeches, at least he isn't any longer. His effort to enter the mainstream has also had an effect on him. He learned something from the fiasco of Khalid Muhammad's vile speech on a New Jersey campus. He is trying very hard to clean up his image, and has particularly sought the assistance of Chavis, when he was still head of the NAACP, and Kwesie Mfume when he was chair of the Congressional Black Caucus.

The attempt by the mainstream media to demonise Farrakhan is something positive in the eyes of most Black Americans. Given the hatred of the white power structure they will turn out in massive numbers to hear him speak as a simple act of defiance. And despite his sexism and homophobia he has the keen ability to capture the essence of the Black condition. He provides a voice for the voiceless, expressing the profound resentment that exists within the community. Clearly, he isn't afraid of what white people will think of him. That is why he has gained the ear of the masses in a way that no other Black leader can even hope to match at the present time.

■ This interview was first published in *International Viewpoint*.



■ **Manning Marable** is professor of history and political science and director of the Institute for Research in African-American Studies at Columbia University, New York City.

I want to address the construction of a new black resistance movement, and what explains the outpouring of emotion and enthusiasm that characterised the 'Million Man March'.

There are several key factors.

Firstly, one of the things that characterises this political, social and economic conjuncture for black struggle as we're nearing the 21st century is the escalating attacks against black women, men, and other people of colour from within the political system.

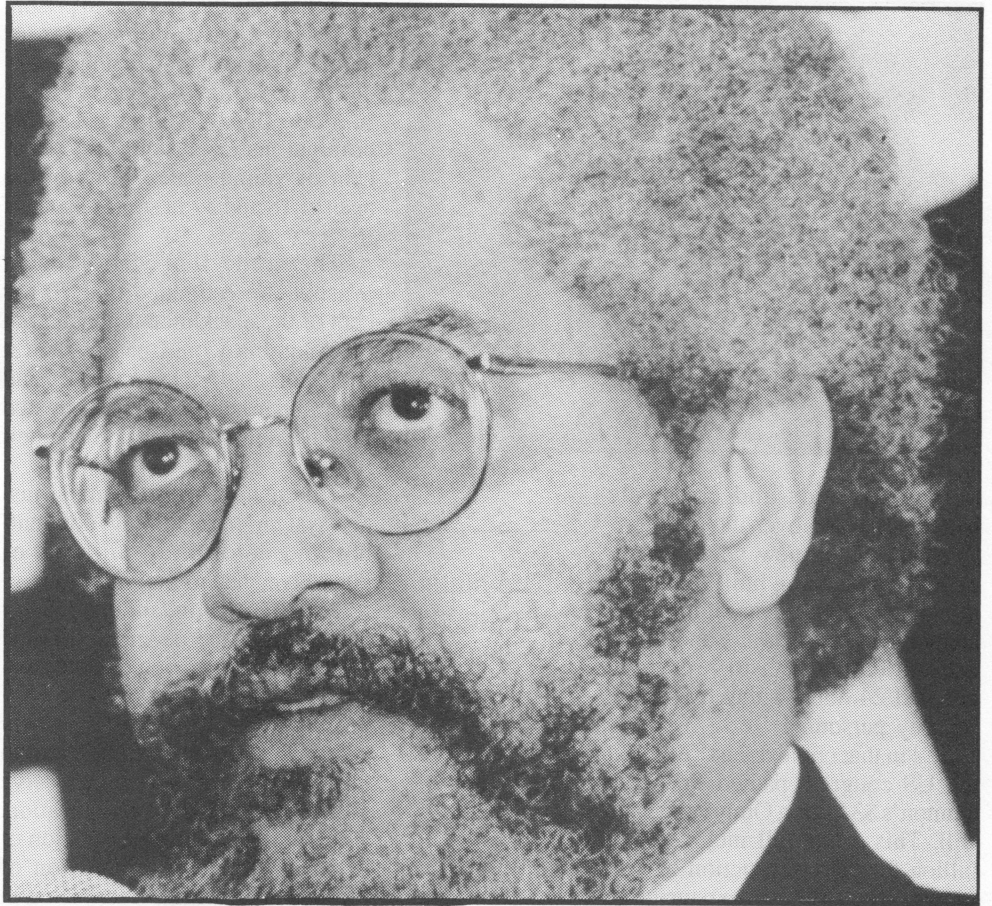
In the United States this is seen in the assault on affirmative action, with, for example, the supreme court attack on the majorities-minorities legislative difference which threatened to cut in half the number of black representatives in congress. It is also seen in Proposition 187 in California which denies educational access and access to public health facilities for undocumented workers. There is also the movement towards what is called the 'english only' movement: to deny asian americans, latinos in particular, the right of using their own language in voting, which in California, for example, disenfranchises millions of people.

Then there is the attack on welfare, the demonisation of black and latino women, recent legislation refusing welfare support to unwed mothers under 18.

The backlash against the black led struggle characterises this entire period. Everything from the 'Bell Curve' onwards represents an escalation of racism.

The second important factor is the polarisation of class and the escalation of social inequality within the United States — and by extension within other capitalist societies.

We are witnessing a consolidation of wealth, power and privilege pyramidically within society, the likes of which in the United States has never been seen. As of 1993 the top 1 per cent of income earners in the United States had a greater combined net wealth than the bottom 95 per cent of all income earners.



In short, a small minority of individuals in the United States, 2 to 3 million at most dominate and control the totally overwhelming majority of resources in the society.

According to a survey of the 85 largest metropolitan areas in the US, between 1973 and 1989, average incomes fell by 16 per cent. In the New York borough of Manhattan, the poorest one-fifth of the population in 1990 earned an annual average income of \$5,237. The richest one-fifth earned \$110,199.

The same profile of inequality exists in every US city. In Los Angeles, the median annual incomes of the poorest and the wealthiest fifth in 1990 were \$6,821 and \$123,098 respectively. In Chicago, the figures were \$4,743 and \$86,632. In Detroit, \$3,109 and \$63,625. Millions have been pushed into unemployment and poverty, while for America's privileged and powerful elite, things have never been better.

This is the core of what the conservative political agenda of the 1980s-90s is about: from Reaganism to Newt Gingrich's 'Contract with America', or contract ON America, this rests fundamentally on expanding inequality.

This is perhaps the primary reason why the march acquired such widespread support — the recogni-

---

'The backlash against the black struggle characterises this entire period'

---

tion that blacks are faced with an unprecedented crisis within the US political and economic system.

The ruling class in the United States tries to hide or obscure that income inequality or blame the hardships of white working class people on the behaviour of black, latinos and other people of colour.

The third element is the acceleration of the construction of the coercive apparatuses of the state — the use of the prisons and the criminal justice system as the central means of warehousing unemployed and vagrant black and latino peoples.

To give just a few statistics: In 1980 there were half a million people in prison in the United States. By 1995 there were 1.5 million people in US prisons. At the rate we are going now the number of prisoners in the United States doubles every seven years. Every day in the US they construct on average 200 new prison cells just to keep up with demand.

There has been a comparable escalation of other elements of the coercive apparatus of the state. As of 1995, there were 554,000 officers employed by local and state police forces. Beyond this, there are an additional, 1.5 million private security officers, employed to guard office buildings, stores, affluent



neighbourhoods and corporate headquarters all over the country.

Many of the new planned suburban houses being built in the US today — planned communities — are surrounded by walls and gates, wire, electronic surveillance, guarded 24 hours a day by private security personnel.

It's in that context, last year, that the US congress passed President Clinton's \$3 billion Omnibus Crime Bill. This crime bill included \$10 billion for the construction of new federal prisons and an expansion of the number of federal crimes for which the death penalty is applied from 2 to 58. The bill also eliminated existing statutes prohibiting the execution of mentally incapacitated people. It includes the so-called 'three strikes' proposal which mandates life sentences for anyone convicted of three violent felonies — which the Conservatives in the UK apparently want to better by going for 'two strikes'.

There's a section which allows children as young as the age of 13 to be tried as adults and the creation of special courts able to deport non-citizens alleged to be 'engaged in terrorist activity on the basis of secret evidence'.

In terms of the life chances of black and latino young people in the US these facts translate as follows. About one half or over 750,000 inmates in prisons and jails in the United States are African-Americans. Out of every 100,000 black male residents in 1992, for black men between the age of 30-34, about 6,300 are in prison. For black men between the ages of 24-29, the figure is 7,200 for every 100,000.

This means that about 30 per cent of all young black men between the ages of 18-29 are either in jail, on probation or parole, or awaiting trial. In a typical day in Washington DC in 1991, 15 per

cent of all black men were in prison, 21 per cent were on probation or parole, 6 per cent were being sought by the police or on honorary trial. In a city like Washington DC the criminal justice system has 42 per cent of young males between the ages of 18 and 34 in some aspect of it.

The study that was done in Washington estimated that 70 per cent of the black men in the district of Columbia would be arrested at some point before the age of 35 and that 85 per cent would be arrested in Washington at some point in their lives.

This reality of the criminal justice system, in regulating, dominating and controlling millions of black lives has to be grasped.

The fourth fundamental factor that needs to be understood is the systematic destruction of a progressive, transformationist black politics. The state over the last thirty years has done everything it can to eliminate, to divide, progressive black leadership and organisation. You see it with the assassination of Malcolm X, the assassination of Martin Luther King, where King in the last two years of his life moved from reformism to a more internationalist perspective, to a perspective against war in Vietnam, organised with poor people to march on

Washington DC.

In the late 1960s and early 70s the Black Panther Party was targeted and wrecked by the FBI and police. Since then hundreds of progressive black elected officials have been indicted and imprisoned.

In the 1980s there was the very contradictory project which had progressive strengths but also weaknesses — Jesse Jackson's Rainbow Coalition presidential campaigns of 1984 and 1988. Seven million people voted for Jesse Jackson in the 1988 presidential campaign. Only 3 million of those votes came from African-Americans.

The campaign registered hundreds of thousands of new voters, it created the potential for an independent politics to the left of the democratic party. That did not happen. Part of the reason was due to Jackson himself, who in effect demobilised and destroyed his own movement in 1989 by insisting on the right to name his own representatives of state organisations and opposed the democratic election of leadership of the Rainbow Coalition from the bottom up.

As a result, the forces within the Rainbow became disorientated, disillusioned and fragmented. By the early to mid-1990s a massive political vacuum was created within the black freedom struggle. In 1993-

---

'The state over the last thirty years has done everything it can to eliminate, to divide, progressive black leadership and organisation'

---

**Following the march, Manning Marable added these comments:**

The 'Million Man March' on 16 October was the culmination of a year-long mobilisation, led by Farrakhan, leader of the Nation of Islam, and former National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (NAACP) secretary, Benjamin Chavis, and endorsed by more than 200 national black organisations. Although the march's official position was to exclude women — Farrakhan's advice was to stay at home, pray and watch the children — several women's organisations also endorsed the event, including the National Council of Negro Women and the National Black Women's Political Congress.

In one opinion poll, 85 per cent of all African-Americans expressed support. Thousands of people returned to their homes with a new dedication to participate in black organisations. For example, although the National Urban League and its affiliates refused to endorse the march, many blacks returning from it contacted this moderate civil rights body to volunteer their services.

Even so, one must keep in mind that the majority can be wrong. In 1991, the majority of African-Americans favoured the appointment of Clarence Thomas to the US Supreme Court. Thomas's subsequent conservative tenure has represented a disaster for black people. Mass popularity is no guarantee that the masses are pointed in the right direction.

Following the march, Farrakhan committed the Nation of Islam to conduct a massive voter registration campaign, bringing millions of new black voters to the polls in 1996. This represents a challenge to the remnants of the Rainbow Coalition and the traditional civil rights establishment. Does Jackson embrace Farrakhan's leadership or does he attempt to regain the political initiative? Can Jackson revitalise multi-cultural, multi-racial, left-of-centre politics, speaking beyond black and white? If he fails, black America may increasingly turn within itself, moving away from the possibility of multi-racial democratic reform.



94 the potential for filling that vacuum emerged, much to everybody's surprise, from within the NAACP.

Benjamin Chavis, who had been elected the head of the NAACP, was a person with a very distinct and left wing political history. For five years in the 1970s he was a political prisoner. I worked with Ben directly in the short-lived national black political party in 1981. He defeated Jackson for the leadership of the NAACP.

In 1993, from within the NAACP, he opened a dialogue with alienated urban youth, with black nationalists and also with the left. He advocated broad based black united leadership, which would include Farrakhan, but also included a variety of forces to the left. Black nationalists, and people like Angela Davis through to many cultural nationalists joined the NAACP.

When Chavis was attacked for engaging in a dialogue with Farrakhan, he carefully distinguished his own politics from those of Farrakhan's Nation of Islam. In the New York Times in July 1993, he reiterated his support for the 'long and honourable alliance' between African-Americans and Jews, emphasising that 'neither I nor the NAACP have ever embraced anti-Semitic beliefs, nor would be countenance them.' He explained that it was wrong to claim that a dialogue with Farrakhan implied an acceptance of his philosophy.

My view is that this was fundamentally threatening to the power structures in the US. By the middle of 1994 a massive and ideological counter offensive to the trend represented by Chavis began. I had one editor of a white liberal publication in New York say to me 'We would rather see a black leadership which goes nowhere than a black leader with the politics of Ben Chavis talking to Farrakhan.'

By the end of 1994, charges that Chavis had misappropriated NAACP funds to cover up allegations of sexual harassment eroded the moral and political base of his leadership. A compliant board of directors some of whom had definite pulleys in the internal corruption and patronage within the NAACP hierarchy summarily fired Chavis.

Farrakhan astutely recognised an opportunity to expand his own base with the assistance of Chavis. Despite his ousting from the association, Chavis still commanded sub-

stantial influence among key sectors of the black middle class, professional associations, Christian denominations and some NAACP chapters.

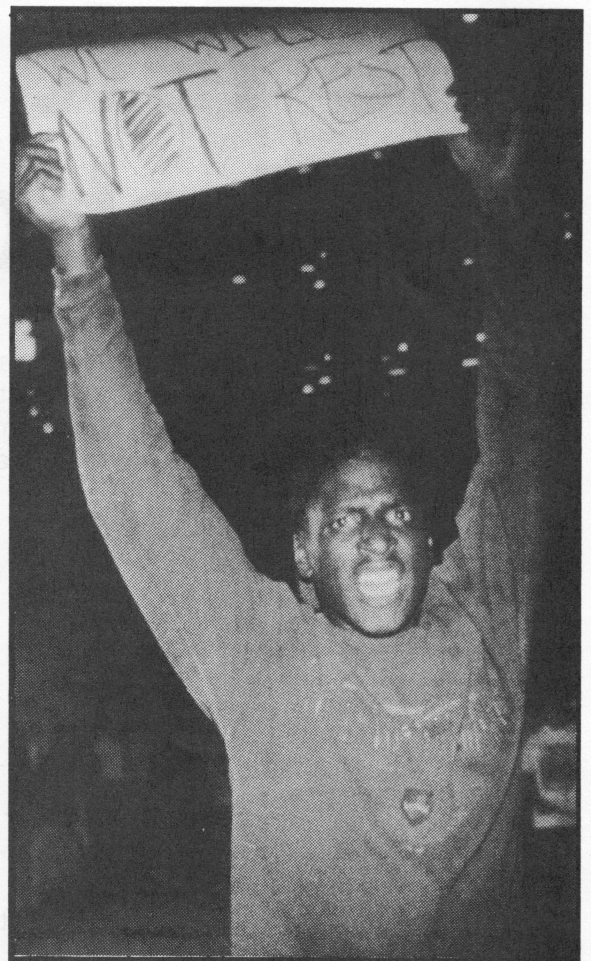
By recruiting Chavis as national spokesperson of the 'Million Man March', Farrakhan and the Nation of Islam were able to reach constituencies where previously they held marginal influence. This was a partnership based more on pragmatism than political philosophy. Chavis sought personal and political rehabilitation. Farrakhan sought to move his own organisation from the margins into the mainstream of black middle class politics. Chavis was prepared on balance to jettison much of his previous left-of-centre history and politics for a black nationalist programme centred on patriarchy and the theme of atonement with self-help conservative politics.

To grasp how conservative the programme of the Million Man March is, listen to the speech Clinton gave on the day of the march. Clinton, the President of the United States, said 'I have no problem with the agenda of this march. I have no problem with its emphasis on black family development and the patriarchal family (he didn't use those terms but that's what he meant). I unite with it. I have no problem with emphasising social responsibility and less reliance on government expenditure programmes. I have no problem with that.' He said 'The only problem I have is with the spokesperson for this mobilisation'. And that's it.

So what does that tell you about the content of this programme of mobilisation? That's not to say that the brothers, and some sisters, who were at this march, are uniting with or represent, the politics of Louis Farrakhan. You've got to be very clear about this. There's a difference between the politics of the people on the platform and the politics motivating the masses of black people who are there at that march. To critique the programme of the people on the platform is not to condemn the people in the audience.

At an ideological level the march represented a kind of pragmatic united front, anchored in cultural nationalism and the racial politics of the aspiring black middle class. Neither Farrakhan nor Chavis has significant influence within black labour unions of the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists, for instance.

Finally, where do we go from




---

'There's a difference between the politics of the people on the platform and the politics motivating the masses of black people who were at that march'

---

here? A new social theory must be constructed, in intimate contact with the masses — who are in motion — and based on an analysis of the structural changes within the current political economy.

There are models in local and community levels all across the US and, I am sure throughout Europe. We can point to struggles taking place against racism, in neighbourhoods and communities, against the death penalty and the struggle to defend the life of Mumia Abu Jamal in the US, the struggles of women's organisations, progressive activism in trade unions and the labour movement. This is accompanied by a growth in the US of independent politics — the new party which has elected 100 people throughout the country, labour party activists, green politics, all pointing toward an institutional break with the Democratic Party.

Our best moments of resistance have been when our politicians are simultaneously politically, legally and morally justified. When we have a social vision which is not truncated or distorted by racism. We must articulate a vision of emancipation and liberation that speaks not just to ourselves but to all of humanity.

# The left and the Labour Party

The unfolding of Tony Blair's 'New Labour' agenda, and particularly events at the 1995 Labour Party conference, has stimulated a discussion on strategy for the left. One response has been the call by Arthur Scargill for socialists to leave the Labour Party to form a new 'Socialist Labour Party.'

In his paper setting out his views, Scargill raises two issues. First, what is the basic character of the Labour Party and what scale of transformation Blair has brought about. Second, what politics and organisation should the left adopt faced with the likelihood of a Labour government led by Tony Blair after the next general election?

Scargill's case is that under Tony Blair: 'Labour is now almost indistinguishable from the Democratic Party in the United States, Germany's Social Democrat Party or, nearer home, the Liberal Democrats.' This contrasts with Scargill's view that the party was originally socialist: 'The newly formed Labour Party made clear its aim of abolishing capitalism and establishing a socialist society...' In an article published earlier in *The Miner*, Scargill said that the decisions at the 1995 Labour Party conference represented the destruction of 'Labour's socialist birthright'.

He argues that the rubicon was crossed with the ditching of Clause 4, together with the constitutional and policy changes under Tony Blair: 'Do we passively concede that the party has abandoned Socialism and any commitment to common ownership?' He concludes: today, Socialists in the Labour Party and those who are active in affiliated organisations face the dilemma as did our forebears who broke with the Liberals... I believe that the case for a Socialist Labour Party is now overwhelming...

The problem with this entire argument is that its premise is simply wrong. The Labour Party has never been socialist. Anyone who doubts that should examine the record of successive Labour governments. But neither was — or indeed is — the Labour Party 'indistinguishable' from the American Democratic

Party or the British Liberal Democrats. The latter are parties *directly* representing big capital. They may received the votes of millions of workers, but so too does the Tory Party. They are parties funded and controlled by capital. Their leading personnel merges into the capitalist class.

The Labour Party, on the other hand, is a social democratic party. It is what Engels described as a *bourgeois workers' party*. That is a party, based upon the organisations of the working class and a working class electorate, but conducting a policy which in the final analysis serves capital, not the working class. Social democracy, and the bureaucracy characteristic of it, arose as a mass political force arose at that point — the beginning of the twentieth century — and in those countries, essentially western Europe, where the bourgeoisie was no longer strong enough to prevent the working class creating independent mass political organisations, but still had sufficient resources to contain those parties within the framework of bourgeois politics and society.

While capable of reforms and partial struggles when under working class pressure, the bureaucracy of these parties acts as a break on the movement. *Social democracy is both a safeguard of the bourgeois system when it is in crisis, and, through its mass organisations, a deformed expression of the struggle against it.* In this fundamental sense, the German SPD, the British Labour Party, the French Socialist Party and so on, constitute specific national variants of an international phenomenon — social democracy.

To eliminate mass social democratic parties in western Europe — which is what their transformation into par-

ties indistinguishable from the American Democratic Party or the British Liberal Democrats would mean — would require an historic defeat of the west European working class. The only time social democracy has been eliminated in the twentieth century was under fascism. Fascism is obviously not on the agenda in Britain or western Europe at the present time. Even under Tony Blair, whatever he personally might wish, social democracy is not about to disappear. Blair is as capable as Ramsay MacDonald or David Owen of splitting from Labour. Individually, he may end up as a bourgeois politician, outside the labour movement. But eliminating Labour as a mass social democratic party from British politics is not within his powers.

What are, then, the terms of the struggle which Blair has unleashed within the labour movement? It is not to destroy a 'socialist birthright' which in reality never existed, but to transform the Labour Party into a *particular type* of social democratic party — along the lines of the German SPD or the French Socialist Party. That is a party qualitatively more insulated from the pressure of the trade unions and the party activists.

This arises because of the specific form which social democracy has taken in Britain. In most of western Europe, the first working class political parties were generally initiated by Marxists or other socialists. These parties went on to create the trade unions. In the United States, on the other hand, social democracy was eliminated as a mass political force before it got off the ground, because US imperialism was becoming the richest and most powerful capitalist class on earth — strong enough to keep its working class movement within the framework of support for two directly capitalist parties, the Democrats and the Republicans.

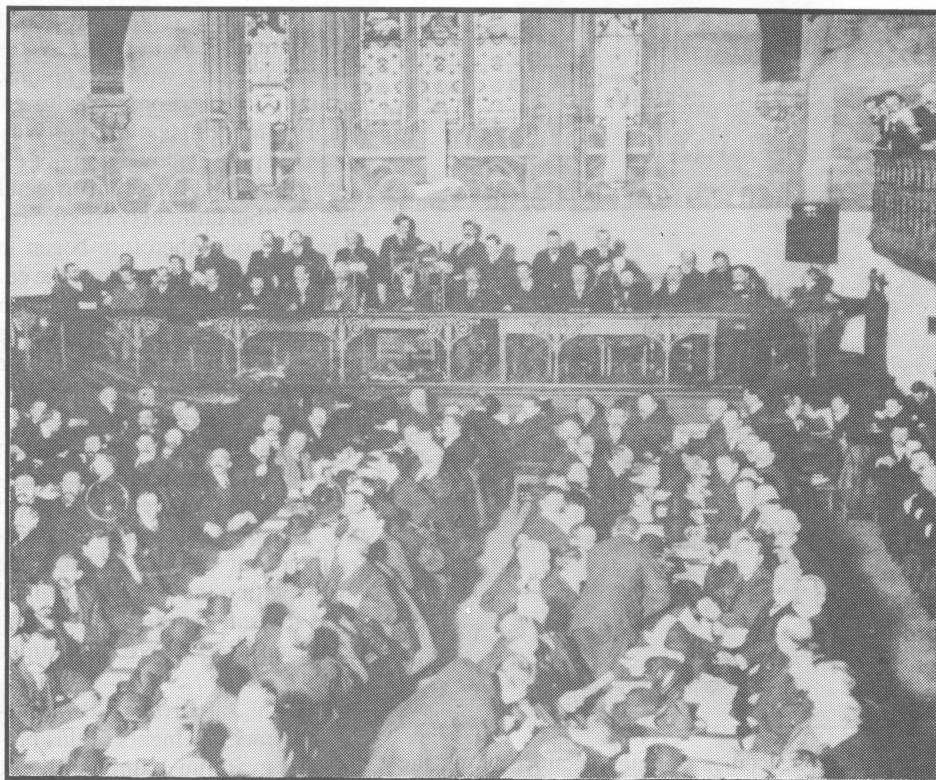
In Britain, the first mass working class political movement — the

---

'The Labour Party has never been socialist. But neither is it 'indistinguishable' from the US Democratic Party or the British Liberal Democrats'

---





The 1906 conference which adopted the name 'Labour Party'

Chartists — arose before Marxism and was defeated by 1848.

This was followed by a period in which the working class organised trade unions representing skilled workers. These gave political support to the Liberal Party. The material basis of this political subordination was analysed by Marx and Engels. As Lenin paraphrased them: 'Neither Marx nor Engels lived to see the imperialist epoch of world capitalism, which began not earlier than 1898-1900. But it had been a peculiar feature of England that even in the middle of the nineteenth century she already revealed at least *two* major distinguishing features of imperialism: (1) vast colonies, and (2) monopoly profit (due to here monopoly position in the world market). In both respects England at that time was an exception among capitalist countries, and Engels and Marx, analysing this exception quite clearly and definitely indicated its *connection* with the (temporary) victory of opportunism in the English labour movement.... Between 1848 and 1868, and to a certain extent even later, only England enjoyed a monopoly: *that is why* opportunism could prevail there for decades.'

**T**he ending of British capitalism's world monopoly towards the end of the last century and the challenge of other rising imperialist powers, provoked the internal crises which resulted,

first, in the mass unionisation of unskilled workers, then in the creation of the Labour Party by the trade unions.

The Labour Party was created, not as a socialist organisation — even purely formally — but to represent the trade unions, whose leaderships' majority outlook was Liberal, in parliament. This led to a debate in the Second International, in 1908, as to whether the Labour Party should be admitted.

The British sect, the Social Democratic Federation, argued Labour should not be admitted until it expressly recognised the principle of class struggle and socialism. Kautsky moved a resolution for admission which stated that 'while not expressly accepting the proletarian class struggle, in practice the Labour Party conducts this struggle, and adopts its standpoint, inasmuch as the party is organised independently of the bourgeois parties.' Lenin said Kautsky was wrong because *in practice* the Labour Party was not really independent of the Liberals and did not pursue a fully independent class policy. He moved an amendment, supporting admission on the grounds: 'because it represents the first step of the really proletarian organisations of Britain towards a conscious class policy and towards a *socialist* workers' party.' Lenin explained: 'such a formulation would make hundreds of thousands of British workers, who un-

doubtedly respect the decisions of the International but have not yet become full socialists, ponder once again over the question why they are regarded as having taken only the *first* step, and what the *next* steps along this road should be.' (Meeting of the International Socialist Bureau, 1908).

Thus the Labour Party started out as a *non-socialist* party, politically far behind the socialist parties elsewhere in Europe. The belief in some previous 'golden age' of the party to which it must be returned therefore has no factual basis. In the first decade of its existence the Labour Party faithfully tailed and had a secret electoral agreement with the Liberal Party. A decisive part of Labour entered a coalition government with the Tories and Liberals during World War I. The two Ramsay MacDonald governments in the 1920s had ultra-right wing policies culminating in the ignominious split and alliance of the Labour leader with the Tories in 1931. In World War II Labour faithfully followed, not merely the conduct of the war, but also such reactionary policies of Churchill as the military intervention to crush the left wing anti-fascist resistance movement in Greece.

---

'The adoption of Clause 4 in 1918 took place to ward off challenges from the left in the aftermath of the Russian revolution.'

---

The adoption of Clause 4's aspiration to common ownership in 1918 took place to ward off challenges from the left in the aftermath of the Russian revolution. It followed the complete degeneration of international social democracy in the first world war. In no sense did it signify that Labour had become 'socialist'.

**F**rom the outset, the peculiarity of the British Labour Party was the enormous weight of the trade union bureaucracy. Individual membership was only introduced in 1918 and the unions retained 92 per cent of the conference vote, and control of 17 out of 29 places on the Labour national executive, until 1994. For most of its existence this total dominance of the trade union bureaucracy over the party was the mechanism whereby any left challenges to the parliamentary leadership were crushed. After the first world war the trade union vote secured the exclusion of communists from the party. Subsequently, the trade union vote was used, not merely to proscribe organised socialist currents and expel individual activists, but to try to silence the left wing of the parliamentary party by expel-



ling left MPs. In 1955 Aneurin Bevan had the parliamentary whip withdrawn from him and the NEC came close to expelling him.

For most of the Labour Party's history there has existed a division of labour between a right wing parliamentary leadership, completely subordinate to capital, and the trade union bureaucracy, policing the mass party outside parliament. This only broke down at the most acute points of crisis where the interests of the parliamentary leadership and those of the trade union bureaucracy clashed. In each case that clash led to splits from Labour by the right wing of the parliamentary party — that of Ramsay MacDonald to form the national government in 1931, and that to form the SDP in 1981. After 1931, Labour was reduced to just 50 seats in parliament. After 1981, the SDP split helped reduce the Labour vote to just 27.6 per cent in the 1983 general election.

In 1931, the basis of the clash between the parliamentary leadership and the trade union bureaucracy was the savage attacks on the working class demanded by capital, and supported by MacDonald, in the context of the great depression which followed the 1929 Wall Street crash.

The origin of the 1981 split by the SDP, was growing conflict with the union bureaucracy starting with Harold Wilson's attempt to curtail trade union rights with the 'In Place of Strife' legislation at the end of the sixties and then successive in-

comes policies, against which the unions rebelled in the course of the 1974-79 Labour governments. By the 1970s, the division of labour between the right wing parliamentary leadership and the trade union bureaucracy had started to break down under the pressure of the response from trade union members to the attacks on wages which followed the end of the post-war economic boom.

---

'The main battles in the labour movement, including in the Labour Party, are still to come.'

---

This created something quite new in the history of the Labour Party — the merging of militancy and left organisation in the trade unions with the left wing of the Labour Party — *Bennism*. For the first time a left had started to emerge which was not rendered ineffective by being confined to the constituency labour parties. Although, by the end of the 1970s, the Bennite left dominated the constituency labour parties, that could have been contained. What made Bennism significant and new was its mass support within the trade unions. The trade union bureaucracy's support for incomes policies was overturned at trade union conferences and the left went on to win the constitutional reforms which enabled party conference to elect the party leadership and threatened the right wing control of the parliamentary party by subjecting MPs to mandatory reselection.

From the point of view of capital, what had been the greatest strength of the Labour Party compared to other social democratic parties, the dominance of the trade

union bureaucracy, now threatened the stability of any Labour government conflicting with the unions. Capital's first response was to attempt to marginalise the party by the SDP split. That had a major effect in the 1983 and 1987 general elections, but ultimately failed. Sections of capital therefore began to envisage a re-organisation of the entire British political party system in which the Labour Party would be consigned a subordinate role for the foreseeable future — through proportional representation.

In parallel, it was spelled out in editorial after editorial in publications like the *Financial Times* and the *Economist*, that, given the transformation of the role of the trade unions within the party, the critical issue for safeguarding right wing dominance was to break the trade union link.

The opportunity to implement elements of this programme came with the defeat of the 1984/85 miners' strike. This struggle, the greatest strike in British history, marked a *second* qualitative advance, after Bennism. The democratic reforms, and policy shift, after 1979, had made the Labour left the focus for all of the contradictions compressed in British society by Thatcherism — the shift of the cities to the left symbolised by the GLC, the advance of women in the workforce, the junction of the struggles of the black communities with the labour movement, the struggle in Ireland, lesbian and gay rights, CND, and so on. The miners' strike brought these strands together in a tremendous class struggle which came very close to toppling the Thatcher government. That it did not do so reflected the fact that this political advance — symbolised both by the sheer scale of the strike and the willingness of its leadership to incorporate every progressive force into the alliance around that strike — remained a minority within the labour movement and was desperately opposed by both the Labour Party and TUC leaderships.

The defeat of the miners allowed the right wing to mount its counter-offensive — starting with Neil Kinnock and proceeding through John Smith to Tony Blair. The elements of its strategy have already been spelled out: to eliminate the trade union vote; to replace trade union funding by state funding of political parties; to destroy the power of activists at the base



through one member one vote and dismantling the powers of the local parties; to prevent left MPs capturing the constituency section of the NEC; to eliminate the hard left from the Parliamentary Labour Party; to destroy the sovereignty of party conference over policy-making.

All of these steps are most coherently brought together in the attempts to broker closer relations with the Liberal Democrats. They would be capped off by proportional representation, which would institutionalise coalition government with the Liberals, and remove labour movement influence over Labour in government. PR would also provide a mechanism to eliminate left wing MPs from any list of candidates drawn up by the party leadership. To spell out this programme as a whole does not mean that the entire right wing Labour leadership embraces every element of it — PR, for example, clashes with key Labour interests in local government and the parliamentary party (PR would mean less Labour MPs and councillors). But under Tony Blair a more coherent right wing, ultimately prepared to swallow the entire programme, has emerged.

Tony Blair's attack on Clause 4 was a signal to capital that Blair was prepared to stake his authority on a crushing of the left, when the majority of the trade union bureaucracy would manifestly have preferred to unite the party in the run-up to the general election. That is why Blair's course in the Labour Party is accompanied by a simultaneous assault on the left in the trade unions — for example, the attempt to defeat Bill Morris in the TGWU.

**A**rthur Scargill's wrong analysis of the Labour Party as having been socialist leads him to propose a new party when an accurate appraisal of the character of the party and Blair leads to the conclusion that, for all his victories, Blair still has a long way to go. Thus, the most effective defence of Clause 4 was by those who recognised that what was at stake was, not socialism, but the specific character of the Labour Party, and the role of the trade unions within it, summed up by the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy's slogan 'Keep the Party Labour'.

Furthermore, as Scargill's paper makes clear, to survive, a Socialist Labour Party would have to give high priority to campaigning not

against, but for, PR. That would mean counter-posing a narrow sectarian concern to the broad interests of the labour movement — for which PR would signal a severe political defeat.

**U**nder Tony Blair, a Labour government will face the same economic impasse of British capitalism as has undermined the Tory government. This is expressed in the inability to hold together the economic orientation, system of social alliances and political party system, which has existed for the past century. On the economic level, British capitalism cannot simultaneously fund the legacies of empire — the bloated financial sector and military apparatus, the concessions to the labour movement, the welfare state, and, at the same time, generate the resources to create a manufacturing sector capable of competing within European capitalist integration.

A Labour government under Tony Blair, will attempt to resolve these contradictions by attacking the welfare state and, in order to do this must qualitatively weaken the political pressure of the working class upon the Labour Party by destroying the institutional mechanisms for its expression. Above all this is the trade union vote, but also the influence of constituency activists and the left wing of the parliamentary party. That could lead Blair to concoct a deal with the Liberal Democrats, and ultimately a coalition government.

This would be a serious political defeat of the Labour movement. The issue for socialists is how to base themselves on the advances made by the left since the end of the 1960s in order to prevent this, as the majority learns through experience that they will have to choose between Tony Blair and the welfare state.

The trade unions retain 50 per cent of the Labour Party conference vote, directly elect 12 out of 29 NEC members and have the largest vote in deciding the five seats reserved for women. The individual party members elect seven NEC members, with the Socialist Campaign Group taking two seats and a third of the vote at the last conference. Even in the parliamentary party, not only is there a left wing core around the Socialist Campaign Group, but also the disaffection with Blair is such that some of his favoured candidates in the last shadow cabinet elections did not

succeed in getting elected. Although weakened, the potential institutional bases of a left alternative to the policies of Blair remain powerful enough to secure a majority within the extra-parliamentary Labour Party structures. The chief obstacle to this is the right wing of the trade union bureaucracy.

This means that the main battles in the labour movement, including in the Labour Party, are still to come. They will take place in a context where the ruling class is being compelled to try to change the political party system through which it has exercised its hegemony in British society for the last century. *The relationship of forces between the classes depends not simply on the state of one class or alliance of classes, but also upon the situation in the opposing class camp.*

As Trotsky put it: 'The strength of finance capital does not reside in its ability to establish a government of any kind, at any time, according to its wish. Its strength resides in the fact that every non-proletarian government is forced to serve finance capital, or better yet, that finance capital possessing the possibility of subjecting for each one of its systems of domination that decays, another system corresponding better to the changed conditions. However, the passage from one system to another signifies the political crisis, that, with the course of the activity of the revolutionary proletariat, may be transformed into a social danger to the bourgeoisie.' (Writings, 1934/35)

The divisions within the capitalist class over changing the British political system, the relationship with the European Union and the specific party interests of the Tory Party, weaken capital as a whole, and create the conditions in which it is possible for the working class to politically advance. That will depend on the strength and political coherence of the left alternative to Blair's politics. It is to that issue of the counter-point to Blair that we will now turn.

**E**ach period of political change in British capitalism has liberated political forces advancing beyond the framework of bourgeois hegemony within the labour movement. The idea that the basis of political advance is reducible to industrial militancy is a syndicalist myth. Each qualitative *political* advance of the working class movement brought together and integrated the progressive ele-

---

'Each period of political change in British capitalism has liberated political forces advancing beyond the framework of bourgeois hegemony within the labour movement.'

---

ments and alliances of the wider crisis of society. Furthermore, it is shaped not only by developments in the working class but also the political crises of the capitalist class.

Thus in Chartism the British working class created a *revolutionary* movement for democracy, which ultimately demanded the end of the union with Ireland. This was eventually eclipsed by the defeat of the 1848 revolutions in Europe and the renewed impetus of British capitalism which followed. During the 1880s, the challenge to British imperialism by the rise of the USA and Germany was accompanied by the mass unionisation of unskilled workers and by the link forged by Engels and Eleanor Marx between the left wing of this and the Irish struggle and the Second International. The crisis of British imperialism leading into the first world war, was accompanied by the rise of the struggle in Ireland, symbolised by James Connolly, the suffragettes, symbolised on the left by Sylvia Pankhurst, and a vast wave of industrial struggles. Finally, under the impact of the Russian revolution it produced the Communist Party whose development was then cut short by Stalin's destruction of the Communist International.

The period opened by the ending of the post-war boom, the economic impasse of British imperialism and the decline of the Tory Party created the conditions for a new political advance. As in the past this integrated the elements of industrial struggle, with the changed social composition of the working class — the influx of women into the workforce, the expansion of the white collar work and the expansion of the black communities, revolt of the cities against Thatcherism, Ireland, international movements against the deployment of Cruise and Pershing missiles in Europe with the fight for democracy within the labour movement, culminating in first, Bennism, then the 1984/85 miners' strike.

Since 1985 this entire development has been driven back, but not eliminated. Its parliamentary reflection exists in the form of the Socialist Campaign Group. Its social driving forces continue to develop, with women now a majority of the workforce, the black communities leading the anti-racist struggle, the movement of the white collar unions towards the Labour Party and their participation in industrial

struggles, the continuing struggle in Ireland and so on.

Its next phase of development will be shaped internationally by the break-up of Euro-socialism and the struggles to defend the welfare state in Europe, the responses to the military attacks of imperialism on the third world and eastern Europe and the outcome of the struggle against capitalism in Russia. Those will intersect with the experience of Blair in government.

The nucleus of the next phase of working class political advance within the labour movement is therefore already becoming clear. It began with the united front of the Labour and communist left with the peace movement against the Gulf war. It developed further with the alliances defending democratic socialism in the face of Yeltsin in the former USSR. It linked up Gould's break with Smith over the European Monetary Union and the Euro-Keynesian left around Hain to oppose the Maastricht Treaty.

Out of those developments emerged the Full Employment Forum and the Campaign to Defend the Welfare State starting the first serious debate on an alternative economic policy for Labour since the 1970s. It intersects with the development of the self-organisation of women within the labour movement and their reaction to the new bourgeois feminism represented by Harriet Harman and Patricia Hewitt's attacks on the national minimum wage and single parents. Its most dynamic ally in struggle at the present time is the black communities, which have won representation within the labour movement, and used this to create more powerful alliances against the rise of racism. This political advance of the black communities is already clashing with the Blair leadership's attempts to block the process of increased black representation in parliament.

A further alliance is starting to emerge in relation to students, where the National Union of Students conference rejected the NUS Blairite leadership's proposal to abandon defence of student grants.

It can and must ally with the struggle in Ireland for a peace process which culminates in British withdrawal and a united Ireland.

As in the past, the decisive impetus to integrate these elements will be a renewal of mass working class struggle already seen in France.

This process of political renewal of the left wing of the labour movement conflicts with forces moving in the opposite direction and degenerating. In the 1880s, Marx and Engels clashed with Hyndman's Social Democratic Federation over its support for British imperialism and its sectarianism towards the broad labour movement. In the 1910s and 1920s, Marxists collided with British socialists who saw the Easter Rising in Dublin as a putsch and refused to support the suffragette struggle. In the 1980s, Militant's opposition to the self-organisation of women and black people, support for British imperialism in Ireland and the Falklands war, collided with and was to the right of, the stand of the Bennite Labour left and the Scargill leadership of the NUM on these issues. In the 1990s, a tiny group like *Workers' Liberty*, which has some influence in the Socialist Campaign Group Network, plays a similar role — calling for Yeltsin to ban the Communist Party in 1991, for NATO to bomb the Serbs, opposing black leadership in the anti-racist struggle and refusing to oppose the Maastricht treaty.

The renewal of the left wing of the labour movement occurs in conflict with such political currents just as much as with the SDF or Militant in the past.

On individual issues this emerging political alignment of the left has already led significant struggles against the Gulf war, against racism, against the Maastricht Treaty and in defence of the welfare state. The critical issues for its relations with the wider labour movement will be developing and winning acceptance for a viable alternative economic strategy to that of a Blair government. Past Labour governments have destroyed their support by attacking the living standards of the skilled and better paid white collar workers through incomes policies and taxation. Blair proposes something worse — to avoid this by attacking the poorest and most oppressed sections of the working class, pensioners, students, single mothers, the disabled and the low paid.

The starting point of an alternative is a united front of the labour movement, women, the black communities, the student movement and pensioners to defend the welfare state. The link with the labour movements throughout Europe is opposition to the Maastricht Treaty and its con-

---

'Since 1985 the working class advance represented in Bennism and then in the miners' strike has been driven back, but not eliminated.'

---



sequences.

Secondly, a Labour government will not generate the economic growth necessary to maintain the welfare state without sharply raising the level of investment in the British economy. The only way this can be done, while defending the living standards of the working class and its allies, is by reversing the massive transfer of wealth from wages and the welfare state to profits and top salaries which has taken place under the Tories. That in turn is impossible without attacking the dominance of the finance sector by sharply reducing the share of dividends in the economy; transferring the burden of taxation to capital with a new top rate of at least 60 per cent on those earning more than £50,000 a year; and setting a national minimum wage to start at £4.26.

Thirdly, to maintain the welfare state and generate resources for investment, and weaken the military threat to the third world and eastern Europe, defence spending must be cut.

Finally, private enterprise will not channel the necessary resources into investment, for that government intervention is necessary, starting with the re-nationalisation of the public utilities, mines and transport system.

**T**hese bare bones of an economic alternative have to be fleshed out in dialogue with trade unions, women, the black communities, the student movement, organisations of disabled people and pensioners groups.

The dismantling of the welfare state and the refusal to seriously attack low pay threaten to undermine the social position gained by women since the second world war. The Labour Women's Action Committee has rightly stressed the link between the gains that women have made and an advance in the position of the entire working class, against the attempts by right wing women to 'hijack' feminist ideas to justify attacking the poorest and most oppressed sections of women, particularly single parents.

A Blair government will result in a racist reaction of the type already witnessed in France, Italy and Austria. The exact form this will take — fascist organisations, a Portillo Tory Party or both — remains to be seen, but the trend is clear. The decisive advantage that exists in fighting this is that the leadership of the anti-racist strug-



gle has been assumed by those with the most powerful interest in winning it — the black communities. This has evoked a response in the labour movement as with the TUC's 'Unite Against Racism' campaign. But the key next step is to create a national framework for united struggle against racism through the National Assembly Against Racism and individual campaigns like the Campaign Against the Asylum and Immigration Bill.

The fight will proceed on the political terrain of defence of the democracy of the labour movement, in both the trade unions and the Labour Party, of the union link and against the introduction of proportional representation.

On the international level, opposing NATO's expansion into eastern Europe and imperialist attacks on the third world, alongside support for democratic socialism in the former Soviet Union, will, together with the fight against Maastricht in western Europe, constitute points of linkage with the international recomposition of the labour movement.

Within the trade unions, the decision at the 1995 TUC not to fight Blair on the level of the national minimum wage clarified that the union bureaucracy will not challenge Blair this side of an election. This was underlined by the agreement with trade union leaders which allowed Blair to win on every policy at the 1995 party conference. But this dependence of Blair on the trade union bureaucracy is also his achilles heel — which is why he wants to get rid of the union link altogether.

In fact, under a Labour government there will be even greater pressure on the trade union bureaucracy not to rock the boat. But the pressure from the union members pay-

ing the price of Blair's economic policy will be enormous.

Furthermore, Blair starts out with great opposition to his policies in the unions, as shown by the re-election of Bill Morris against the Blair-backed Jack Dromey in the TGWU, the victory for the left candidate Davey in the AEEU general secretary election and the vote for Bickerstaffe and candidates to his left in UNISON. There is strong support for left economic policies in the major unions and for campaigns such as the Full Employment Forum and Campaign to Defend the Welfare state, and in opposition to racism.

This agenda is the basis for the left to consolidate its alliances and unity — bringing the Labour left together with the left in the unions, in the black communities and around specific issues. A good example has been the alliance between *Socialist Campaign Group News*, the *Morning Star* and *Tribune*, in stimulating debate on the left's strategy and jointly organising and sponsoring events such as the 'Choices for Labour' conference.

**B**etween now and the general election will be a difficult period for the left wing of the labour movement. But the scope and power of the next political leap forward by the British working class will be significantly determined by the breadth of support for a coherent alternative economic policy, its ability to achieve political clarity on issues such as PR and European Monetary Union, its alliances with women, the black communities and the international class struggle of which it is part, and the extent to which the left is organised and united on this basis.

---

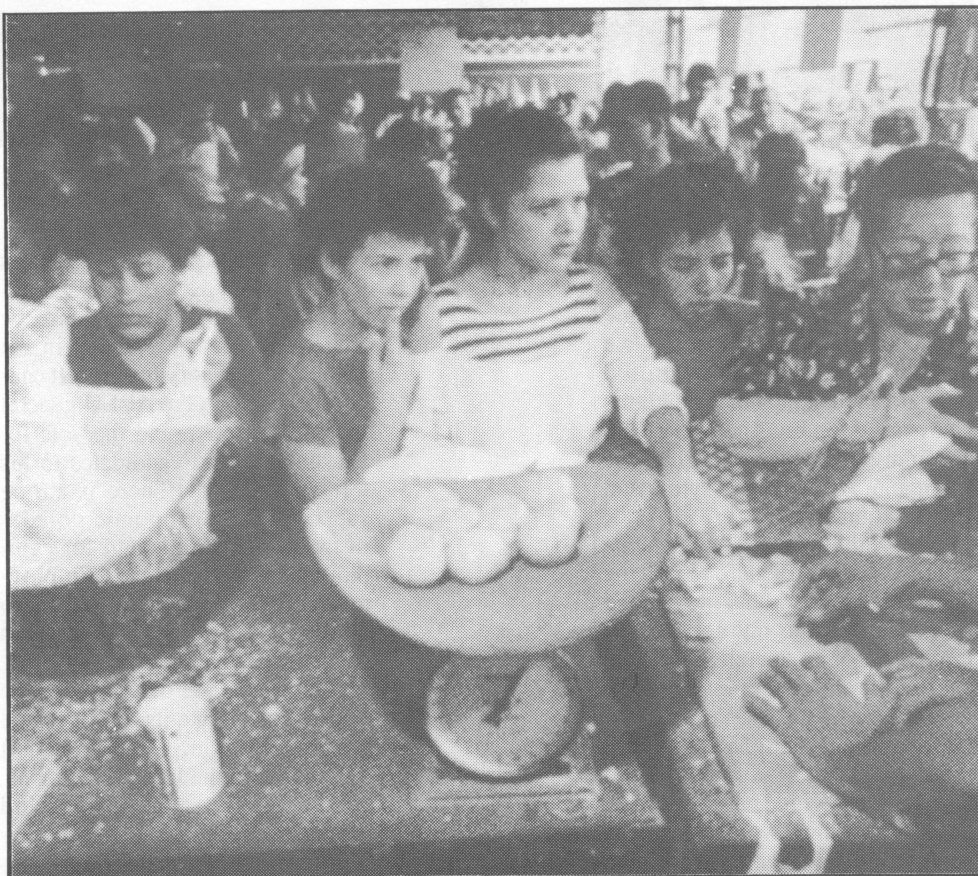
'The starting point of an alternative is a united front of the labour movement, women, the black communities, the student movement, disabled people and pensioners to defend the welfare state.'

---

By Louise Lang

# Cuba adopts 'Chinese' economic reform

The dissolution of the USSR and the re-introduction of capitalism in Eastern Europe have allowed the US to concentrate its efforts on cracking a little tropical island 90 miles off its coast.



Farmers' markets under the economic reform

**T**he US has dramatically intensified the economic blockade on Cuba. The latest aspect of this is the Helms-Burton bill which intends to apply economic sanctions on third parties for the 'crime' of engaging in trading activities with Cuba. Thus, more or less overnight, Cuba found itself facing what appeared a terminal economic crisis.

Many of the indicators of 1993 seemed to have warranted such a catastrophistic conclusion: Cuba's external trade came crashing down from \$8.8bn to \$2.7bn, that is to say, the country's capacity to import declined in less than a year by about 77 per cent. Cuba's national output fell by more than 50 per cent. Exports fell by over 50 per cent. The rate of growth of GDP fell by 20 per cent (25 per cent in 1991). GDP went down from \$32.5bn in 1989 to \$16.2bn in 1993. The budget

---

'Clinton has maintained the approach of every US administration since Eisenhower, to crush Cuba by any means necessary'

---

deficit (as a percentage of GDP) skyrocketed from \$4.6bn to a staggering \$31.5bn in 1993.

In 1993 the social and economic consequences of this enormous economic crisis for the Cuban people were horrendous. They are still recovering from that shock. The mass exodus of August 1994, when thousands of *balseros* (rafters) took to the sea to try and make it to the United States in order to escape from scarcity, and ostensibly, go to the land of abundance and high consumption, led many, especially in the US, to rub their hands with glee at the thought that the Castro's regime was on its last legs.

The Cuban government responded to the economic crisis and to the intensified pressure of the US by declaring an austere 'Special Period', whose main features were essentially to reorganise its

economy as though it was faced with war. However, they were painfully aware that in the context of a world capitalist economy and intensified US economic and political hostility, if the revolution was to survive, it would have to make significant concessions to this horrific reality and find ways to re-insert Cuba into the world economy. The challenge facing Cuba was that of recovering its capacity to import goods from the world economy which it hitherto used to obtain from its Eastern European trading partners. Achieving this has involved making concessions to capital. These have included courting foreign private capital investment in the island's tourism industry, decriminalizing the holding of dollars by Cuban citizens, turning state farms into cooperatives — a step towards privatization — individual self-employment and expanding the setting up of small companies. The regime has also allowed the operation of free markets for agricultural goods (where demand and supply, rather than the government plan, set the price).

The most spectacular aspect of the 'reinsertion' has been in the tourism industry: gross revenues rose from \$165 million in 1989 to over \$850 million in 1994. Foreign capital from Spain, Mexico, and Canada in particular, has been invested in Cuba in a big way, taking over whole sections of the tourist industry. Before reinsertion, ordinary Cubans could enjoy the benefits of their country's magnificent beaches and other holiday resorts, but the 'dollarization' of nearly all the tourism sector has *de facto* excluded peso-earning Cubans (who are the majority). Although, the massive amount of foreign investment in this industry has represented a life-saver for the economy, there is significant resentment from Cubans accustomed to more egalitarian practices.

**A**dditionally, Cuba has liberalized legislation to facilitate direct foreign investment in key sectors of the economy such as energy, industry and services. By late 1994 over 150



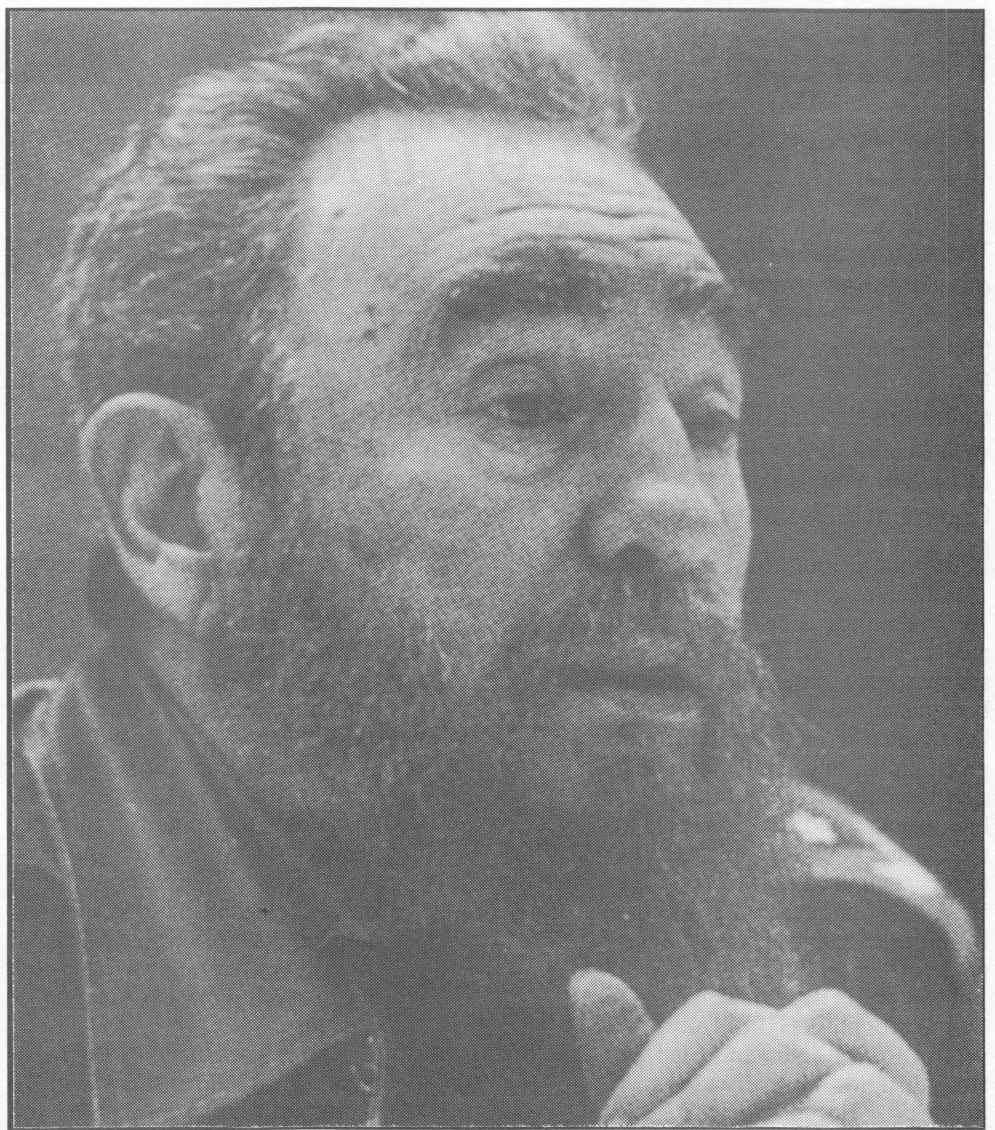
joint ventures with foreign capital, with a money value of over \$1.5 billion were in operation, the bulk of it in tourism. The problem here is that the rate of return is extraordinarily high allowing foreign private capital to recoup investment in less than three years, and since the repatriation of profits is in dollars, the injection of hard currency into the Cuban economy has been much less than the figures for gross investment imply.

**U**S imperialism is aware of how difficult it is for the Cuban revolution to operate in the world capitalist system in a context of a deteriorated international relation of forces for the working class since 1989. Cuban economists estimate that even a partial lifting of the US embargo could very rapidly double the country's import capacity and lead to a 25 per cent increase in national income. The Clinton administration has maintained the fundamental approach of every US administration since Eisenhower, to crush the revolution by any means necessary.

In terms of long term political and social effects, the reforms to agriculture are perhaps even more significant than foreign investment in the tourism. Most state farms have turned into worker-run cooperatives where the land is ultimately owned by the state. But this represents a move towards privatization given that coop members were granted permanent use rights over the land.

Free markets for agricultural goods at unregulated prices have been reintroduced. A similar policy was banned in 1986 due to the huge disparities in income it was creating. These open markets have proved to be a huge success in the present context, judging by their rapid spread through the country and by the fact that it has made available previously scarce foodstuffs. Another sign of their success is the evolution of the dollar-peso exchange rate: in 1993 at the trough of the economic crisis it was 1:120, whilst at present it is around 1:25-30.

Despite what looks like a steady economic recovery (the economy grew by 0.7% in 1994 and it is likely to grow by over 2% in 1995), the impact on the provision of universal health, education and other social gains has been negative. The partial 'dollarization' of the economy will allow for urban social differentials to emerge and to widen. There are already visible signs of this in unemployment, un-



deremployment, prostitution, and growth in crime. The political manifestations of these phenomena will emerge in some form. This will be compounded by the decision of the government to allow Miami *gusanos* ('worms' — the name given to counter-revolutionary Cubans living in Miami) to come back and invest in Cuba.

It would be totally foolish to conclude from this, as some superficial commentators would have us believe, that the Cuban leadership is bent on clinging to power at any cost and has embraced the capitalist road. What should never be lost sight of is the essential ingredient that inform all these changes, namely, to maintain the standard of living of the population as high as it is possible in the specific circumstances (or at least minimise their negative impact), as well as a deepening of the democratization of the political system whereby the working class and its allies are brought ever more centrally to the decision-making process.

The socialist revolution is alive and kicking. The fact that it has survived much harsher consequences, from a much weaker position than the Eastern European countries, reflects the high degree of popular support. Any improvement in the international relations of forces will make it much easier for the revolution to be defended. That does not depend solely on the Cuban people but lies elsewhere, in particular in the efforts and success of those in the west fighting to remove the criminal US blockade.

**I**n November 1995, both Fidel Castro and a central leader of the Vietnamese Communist Party visited China. Before the visit Castro stated Cuba was applying the Chinese economic model; as is Vietnam. Its overall result has been to halt the decline of the Cuban economy and provide the revolution with a breathing space. That time should be used to intensify the campaign to lift the blockade.

**By Javier Mendez**

# Hungary — *the record of the Socialist Party*

The victory of Aleksander Kwasniewski in last month's Polish presidential elections has consolidated political power in the hands of the Democratic Left Alliance (SLD) by adding control of the Presidency to their existing control of the government. Kwasniewski's opponent, former Solidarity leader and Polish President Lech Walesa, tried to mobilise support for his campaign by referring to the injustices of the previous communist regime with which Kwasniewski was associated but clearly this was not a convincing argument for the majority of voters. This is part of a pattern of re-election of former communists in Central and Eastern Europe.

**P**oland and Hungary have been run by governments dominated by former communist parties since autumn 1993 and summer 1994 respectively, and in both instances these governments have shown serious commitment to privatisation, huge public spending cuts, sweeping reforms of the welfare systems, and eagerness to join the EU and NATO. If anything, the former communists have been more effective in implementing IMF-endorsed policies than their right-wing predecessors.

Hungary is a particularly stark example of this. Gyula Horn, the veteran former communist, led the Hungarian Socialist party to victory in the 1994 elections, defeating the conservative Hungarian Democratic Forum (HDF), which had ruled since 1990. The HDF government was criticised by the Socialist Party for being hard-hearted and uncaring, which led the electorate in 1994 to think that the Socialists would be the best option for preserving their extensive welfare system — hence the Socialists' massive overall majority in those elections. However, contrasting their records one year on, it seems that the HDF government had actually been more inhibited by popular criticism from making significant cuts in social welfare or from proceeding very rapidly with privatisation.

Clearly, the voters did not think that they were voting to reduce the state's social and economic role, but Horn's view is clear: 'I'm accused of pursuing very right-wing policies. These are not right-wing policies, they are realistic policies. We have to pursue them. If we don't no one will be able to save Hungary. This is the reality, there is no alternative.'

Horn points out that social and economic reform are not new for

---

'The referendum on NATO membership, forced by the collection of 140,000 signatures by the Workers' Party, will be the first opportunity for the Hungarian population to express its opinion on the government it elected to defend the welfare state'

---

Hungary's communists, even prior to 1989, and this is undoubtedly true: in 1988, the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party government (the communists) introduced a Law on Foreign Investment allowing 100 per cent foreign ownership and favourable rates for repatriation of profits; in early 1989, the Budapest Stock Exchange was opened. In other words, even before the Hungarian communists had reformed away their leading constitutional role, they had introduced a considerable amount of the legal and institutional framework necessary for the introduction of capitalism.

Horn's assessment of his government's record is the following: 'To appreciate what we have done you must realise that we have abolished what Hungarians grew up to accept as sacred rights'. Horn's Finance Minister, Lajos Bokros, who has given his name to last March's controversial austerity programme, is clear about the Party's purpose: 'The historic task of the Socialist government is to roll back the frontiers of the welfare state'.

**B**okros' austerity programme was designed to cut government spending and lower interest rates in an attempt to reverse the widening of the trade and current account deficits and reduce the cost of financing enormous levels of domestic and foreign debt. The impact on the average Hungarian, who earns around \$300 a month, has been an 11 per cent cut in real wages in 1995 with a planned further 3-4 per cent decline in 1996. This cut in living standards has been compounded by further promised radical reforms of the whole social security and health systems. The 1996 budget, conforming to IMF targets, includes a budget deficit set to fall below 4 per cent of GDP, in contrast with 9.5 per cent in 1994.

Recent strike waves, particularly in the public sector and most notably in the currently privatising energy sector, indicate that the labour movement is dissatisfied with the government's policies. Dissatisfaction also exists within the left of the Socialist Party, particularly from the Left Platform, under the leadership of MP Paul Fillo. The Left Platform submitted an alternative economic strategy document to November's Socialist Party Congress, hoping to shift the ground of debate away from IMF-inspired policies, but was disappointed. Although there was some debate on the document, the congress majority supported Finance Minister Bokros and his austerity programme.

In this environment, with the party congress backing the austerity programme, the left does not consider it practical to launch any new challenge at the moment.

**T**he main thorn in the side of the government currently comes from the Workers' Party — the other party created by the division of the former ruling Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party. The Workers' Party receives around 4 per cent of the popular vote and is currently placing a constitutional obstacle in the path of Hungary's NATO membership. The government is eager to join NATO and has agreed to have a NATO base in southern Hungary to service the NATO intervention in the former Yugoslavia. Since the summer, the Workers' Party collected 140,000 signatures on a nationwide petition against Hungarian membership of NATO. Under the Hungarian constitution, over 100,000 signatures on a petition necessitate a referendum and therefore the government is now constitutionally obliged to ballot the population over NATO membership.

With the next general election not scheduled until 1998, this referendum — presuming the government fulfils its obligations — although over the question of NATO membership, will actually be an opportunity for the Hungarian population to express its opinion of the government it elected to preserve the welfare state.

**Kate Hudson**



# Riff-Raff

Earlier this year a member of the Muslim Brotherhood received the death sentence for the attempted assassination of Naguib Mahfouz. The attack upon an 83-year old man was certainly shocking. Yet the penalty upon the would-be assassin is surely a cruel indictment given that Mahfouz's work is a constant search for progress in Egypt, explains John Church.

An abiding concern of his work is nationalism. In the *Cairo Trilogy* — *Palace Walk, Palace of Desire, and Sugar Street* — we see history shaped by Egypt's national struggle against British imperialism. A petty-bourgeois family is drawn into this violent conflict. Successive family members discover that certainties of identity 'melt into air' as their nation takes a new shape. The youth are faced with new sciences, while the older generation have tragedy stamped into previously ordered lives.

While the nationalism of this novel appears youthful, by the time he wrote *Miramar* (1967) nationalism appears exhausted. Here we see an old Wafdist presented as powerless, and the new Nasserite and socialist nationalists appearing corrupted, cynical. Only Zahra, the peasant maid servant retains a vitality and integrity.

This sense of exhaustion is also apparent in *Adrift on the Nile* where disappointment with the nationalist revolution leads a group of characters to spend constant nights with hashish, drink and sex. But reality refuses to be assuaged, a sobering accident reveals the social befuddlement of the group.

These and other novels speak of Egypt's national drive. But there is a particular feature to this nationalism which burdens not just the characters, but Mahfouz himself. That is the problem of the link between Egyptian nationalism and Arab nationalism.

Modern Egyptian nationalism is to be first found in the 19th Century regimes of Mohammed Ali and his son Ismael. Following the impulse of the French Revolution in the form of occupation by Napoleon's armies, a first

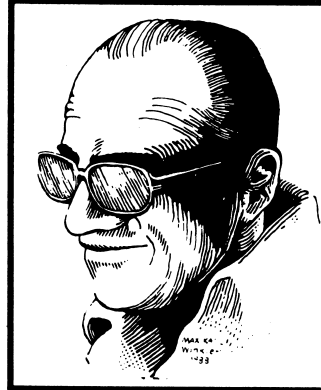
absolutist nationalism was created. The power of these regimes was ultimately limited and partly reversed by the colonial powers. Importantly, these regimes preceded the evolution of a wider Arab nationalism. By the end of the 19th century this latter, more universal, nationalism was enervating growing parts of the Arab world.

It was the impact of the first World War, and the Bolshevik Revolution, which renewed Egyptian nationalism. Whilst still led by an aristocrat, Sa'd Zaghlul, this nationalism drew the masses of Egyptians into political life. The first Egyptian feminists took part in this revolution. The first national party, the Wafd, was established. British imperialism was forced on to the defensive.

This Egyptian nationalism increasingly ran alongside the rising Arab nationalism. The timidity of the reformist, bourgeois-nationalist leadership prevented the liberation of Egypt. It was not until the petty-bourgeois, revolutionary nationalist military officers led by Nasser in 1952, that the defeat of the British was to be made final in the Suez War of 1956.

Mahfouz was more comfortable and certain of bourgeois nationalism than he was of Nasser. The latter he just did not comprehend. There is a notable illustration of this in the evolution of his work. He completed the *Cairo Trilogy* just before the 1952 revolution. It took 5 years of Nasserism before this most prolific novelist was able to write another novel, the extraordinary *Children of Gebelawi*.

This novel (examined below) was the nearest he came to reconciling himself to Nasserism. The subsequent decline of Nasserism from a Pan-Arab revolutionary



programme into a narrow Egyptian bourgeois real politik finds expression in Mahfouz's personal endorsement of the Camp David Accords and Egypt's participation in the Gulf War.

Whatever the limits of Mahfouz's politics, his writing from 1957 onwards displays a more utopian desire. *Children of Gebelawi* was the first illustration. It is an hypnotic tale. The indomitable Gebelawi clears the desert for civilisation and builds the Big House. He expels his son Adham from the estate when Adham is found to be compromised by his relation to Idris, the fallen eldest son. Misery ensues for the children of the alleys. A series of leaders arise to lead the rabble against the powerful thugs who rule the alleys. Gebel uses force to overthrow the chiefs. Rifaa casts out the devils within the alley children to defeat the chiefs. Kassem unites all the alleys with force and love. But it is apparently only Arafa, with the power of magic, who offers a permanent solution to the poverty and misery of the people.

The allegory is transparent. Gebelawi is a notion of God. Adham is Adam. Idris is Satan. Gebel is the Moses of the Jews. Rifaa is the Jesus of the Christians. Kassem is the Mohammed of the Muslims. Arafa is based on the Arabic 'to know', and therefore is science personified.

This wonderful story was followed by others which engage a wide range of philosophical and political ideas. Uniting them all is a deep love of Egypt's toilers and poor.

In *Arabian Nights* and

*Days* Mahfouz revisits the classic 'Thousand and One Nights'. This is not the vulgarised version presented to children in the west. Mahfouz takes the spirit of enquiry, and delight in knowing the world, from the original. All to the end of creating a vivid life from the commonplace, revealing the potential within the poor and oppressed.

In *The Journey of Ibn Fattouma* we have what reads like an ancient chronicle of travellers to unknown continents. Yet the cities and societies encountered bear upon the contemporary. Ibn Fattouma leaves the Abode of Islam, believing that falsity has entered into it. He visits the Abode of Sunrise, matriarchal society; the Abode of Bewilderment, a fierce absolutist society; the Abode of the Arena, a modern capitalist society; the Abode of Security, a bureaucratic distortion of socialism; the Abode of Sunset, a society in transition to the Abode of the Mountain, the ideal society.

In *The Harafish* we have the most beautiful portrayal of Mahfouz's worlds in renewal. Here we have a grand epic of ten tales spanning sixteen generations. In the alleys of an unspecified city, in an unspecified time, leader after leader arises to promote revolutions amongst the poor. Some of these for ill, some for good. What is right? What is just? And what can be lasting for the alley's Harafish (riff-raff)? This most marvellous novel combines the quandary of leadership with the passion for change.

There is much more to examine in Mahfouz. His psychological and realist novels especially deserve reading.

As more translations are being made so does Mahfouz's stature become clearer. Those who share his love of the riff-raff will surely love his novels.

● All novels cited published by Doubleday; with the exception of *Children of Gebelawi* and *Miramar* published by Heinemann.

# British Communism

*The dissolution of the USSR and the crisis of Eurosocialism have disoriented much of the left in western Europe rendering large swathes of what passes for left wing writing incoherent and defensive. In this context, the reprinting of **A History of Communism in Britain** is not only a valuable contribution to the renewed interest in the history of the British Marxist movement, but, writes Ian Robertson, a breath of fresh air.*

The essays in this book are written from the perspective of Marxists seriously grappling with the developments within the Communist Party of Great Britain in order to draw political conclusions for action, as opposed to a purely academic exercise.

First published in one volume in the 1975 *A History of Communism in Britain* is a collection of essays written by two former CP dissidents in the 1950s and 1960s.

One of the weaknesses of the British left is its failure to relate working class politics to Britain's role as an imperialist power, or to accept that sections of the labour movement themselves reflect imperialist pressures.

The main essay in the collection is Woodhouse's *Marxism and Stalinism in Britain*. Woodhouse's contribution is impressive precisely because it challenges the economism of the British left by placing the development of communism in Britain in the context of Britain's imperial status, and draws out the need to break with methods which pre-dated Bolshevism.

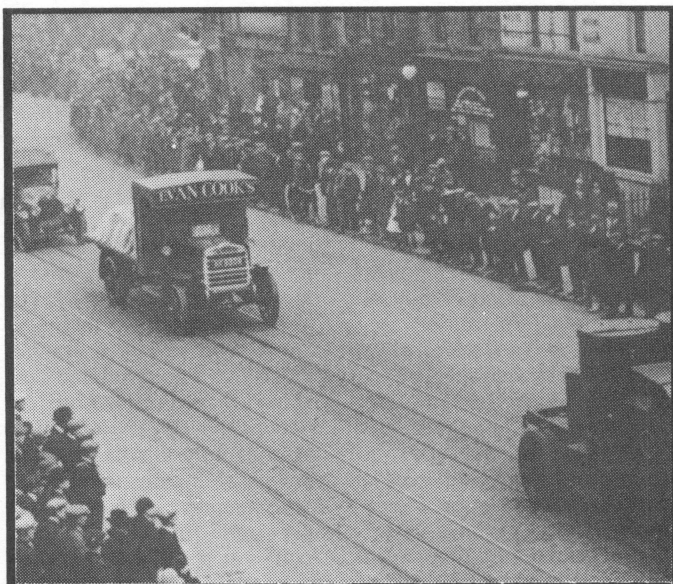
'Marxism and Stalinism in Britain' is a detailed history of Marxism in Britain up to the General Strike, whose purpose, argues Woodhouse, 'is to understand the process whereby the CPGB became 'Stalinised' by the mid-1920s and a tool of Stalin's policy of rapprochement with imperialism in this period, from which flowed the failure to prepare for revolutionary struggle in the General Strike.'

He describes the considerable inadequacies of the first British Marxist party, the Social Democratic Federation, which Engels called a 'mere sect', which had 'contrived to reduce the

Marxist theory of development to a rigid orthodoxy.' He outlines the contributions made by the Socialist Labour Party, the British Socialist Party and other workers' organisations, which had a tendency to submerge themselves in syndicalism. For a period of time these methods seemed to work: 'in a period of expansion, with booming profits and full employment, capitalism could afford to meet the demands of organised workers...In these conditions it seemed to rank and file militants that they did not need to look beyond the forms of trade union activity advocated by Syndicalism'.

*A History of Communism in Britain* has gained relevance since its first publication because it reasserts the contribution of the Communist Party of Great Britain in the struggle to overcome the syndicalist inclinations of even the most advanced workers in order to construct a Bolshevik organisation.

The CPGB could only do this as part of an international which had made a decisive break from the imperialist framework of right wing social democracy. The experience of leaders such as JT Murphy, who attended the Second Congress of the Comintern as a delegate from Britain, was essential in breaking such people from the inadequacies of British Marxism: 'My experience in Russia had shown me the real meaning of the struggle for political power. Instead of thinking a Socialist Party was merely a propaganda organisation for the dissemination of socialist views, I now saw that a real socialist party would consist of revolutionary socialists who regarded the party as a means whereby they would



*Armed escort of food convoy during the General Strike*

lead the working class for the fight for political power.'

This understanding, directly linked to the Russian revolution, was a huge step forward for British working class politics. The struggle of early communists to apply Lenin's line in the British communist party was a significant contribution to the political life of the working class.

But this was a *process*: it involved a struggle against the established practice of the British left.

This was reflected in the reorganisation of the party in 1922-23, after a Reorganisation Commission had found the party to be dominated by old conceptions: propagandism, loose and undisciplined organisation and spontaneity. But Palme Dutt and Harry Pollitt applied the reorganisation in exactly the manner the Comintern warned against, leaving the Party more centralised but with a top heavy and complex structure.

The absence of a serious theoretical life within the British party explains the low level of debate around the challenge of Trotsky and the Left Opposition to the unfolding line of the Comintern in the 1920s.

Woodhouse's argument is basically that the CPGB did

not have time to overcome the limitations of militant trade union politics before the degeneration of the Comintern set in, was consequently more reliant than many other CPs on the international leadership, and therefore more prone to accept its line uncritically. On the basis of this, the British party was not politically prepared for the one moment in the twentieth century when the British working class was directly posed with a potentially revolutionary struggle: the General Strike.

By dealing with these issues in such a serious way Woodhouse and Pearce have made a contribution to British Marxist history which will be of interest to communists of different traditions.

However, this publication is not without its faults, not least of which is the introduction by Chris Bambery, which fails to deal with the historical context of these essays in an attempt to pretend that the Socialist Workers Party led the militancy of the 1970s, and occupies a position of leadership in the class struggle today which it clearly does not.

*A History of Communism in Britain, Brian Pearce and Michael Woodhouse  
Bookmarks, 1995, £6.95*



# European monetary union unravels

As the final 1999 deadline laid down by the Maastricht Treaty for European Monetary Union (EMU) approaches, it is already clear that as a real 'European' system, monetary union is dead. Italy, Britain and Spain will not take part because they will not be able to politically sustain the convergence conditions laid down in the Maastricht Treaty. The only serious question is whether France will crack politically under the strain of the welfare cuts and mass unemployment which are necessary to get its budget deficit down to the level prescribed at Maastricht.

**E**ven if it succeeds, the implications of a monetary union of France and Germany are explosive. First, it will mean permanent economic crisis in France. Second, it will inaugurate a formal two tier Europe — with Spain, Italy and Britain undergoing competitive devaluation against France and Germany. There are growing demands from both of the latter countries' industrial capitalists that this should not be tolerated.

The original motivation for the single market and monetary union was to strengthen European capital which, from the beginning of the 1970s, had been losing ground to both Japan and the United States. Between 1951 and 1973 economic growth in western Europe exceeded, and unemployment was lower, than the United States, after 1973 this situation was reversed. In 1995 unemployment stood at 2.9 per cent in Japan and 5.9 per cent in the US, compared to 10.4 per cent in the European Union.

The underlying cause of this turnaround, was the shift in the economic relationship between the United States and western Europe as the US economy took the strain of the Vietnam war. Until Vietnam, capital flows from the US had aided the western European capitalist economy. From the beginning of the 1970s, far from aiding western Europe, the United States struck economic blows against it.

The fundamental dependence of west European capitalism upon the US dates from the first world war. Having dominated the world for 400 years, in 1914 western Europe imploded. From that point, it became incapable, on the basis of its

own resources, of restoring capitalist stability.

The wave of social revolution which followed 1917 was blocked, and capitalist stability restored, only on the basis of the inflows of United States capital under the Dawes and Young plans. When that capital flow ceased, after the 1929 stock market crash, western European capitalism was again plunged into chaos.

The same process occurred on an even larger scale after world war two. Without massive economic and military support from the US, European capitalism could not have survived in the relationship of class forces created by the Soviet Union's victory over Germany, the destruction of western Europe's empires in Asia and the deep discredit attached to the capitalist regimes in western Europe.

**V**ietnam marked a turnaround in that post-war economic relationship analogous to 1929. From the beginning of the 1970s growth in the US domestic economy was at the expense of western Europe, Japan and the third world.

This started with devaluation of the dollar and consequent collapse of the Bretton Woods system of fixed exchange rates in 1971. It was followed by the drastic increase in oil prices engineered by the United States with the Middle East oil producers in 1973 — which drastically increased energy costs in Japan and western Europe. It culminated in the enormous flows of capital into the United States in the 1980s and 1990s and the further devaluation of the dollar.

Western Europe found itself

caught in a vice between the more efficient economy of Japan and the economic blows of the United States. The consumption of the world's savings by the US economy drove up interest rates when the US economy expanded and the devaluation of the dollar imposed a gigantic external strain on the attempt to maintain fixed exchange rates within the European Union.

**T**he moves to respond to this situation through the European Union involved a much broader project than simply creating a single market. From the point of view of capital, Europe's key relative weaknesses with regard to Japan and the United States are fourfold.

First, its fragmentation into a series of relatively small states, with consequently smaller scales of production and markets, compared to the US.

Second, the social relationship of forces for European capital is qualitatively worse than that confronting the US: the dominant military force in Europe after 1945 was a non-capitalist state — the Soviet Union — and the strongest capitalist state — Germany — was divided until 1989. The trade unions are more powerful in western Europe and mass social democratic and communist parties simply do not exist in the USA.

Third, and flowing from this social relationship of forces, European capital has had to concede a far more developed welfare state than the United States or Japan.

Finally, while Germany, for example, has closed the productivity gap with the United States in much of manufacturing industry, not only does Europe still lag behind the US in the productivity of crucial high technology sectors like computers, but in addition productivity in agriculture and services lags far behind the US. This situation also derives from the different social relationship of forces. The hegemony of the west European capitalist classes, outside Britain, was based

---

'The goal of big European capital is to eliminate the disadvantages it faces relative to the United States and Japan'

---

upon the preservation of a significant petty bourgeoisie in agriculture, the retail sector and other service sectors, as a counterweight to the urban working class.

The goal of big European capital is to eliminate these disadvantages. This requires not merely moves towards a European super-state, but most fundamentally an historic change in the relation of forces between capital and labour in Europe, and, simultaneously, the destruction of much of the petty bourgeoisie and small capital, to create large scale agriculture and service sectors capable of competing with the US.

It was the new relationship of forces created by the capitalist unification of Germany and the re-introduction of capitalism into eastern Europe which made possible the first practical plan for knitting these objectives together — the Maastricht Treaty, adopted by the European Community in December 1991.

The Treaty, via its convergence conditions, limiting total debt to 60 per cent of GDP and budget deficits to three per cent of GDP, set a European framework of starting to dismantle the welfare state. At the same time, it laid down that monetary policy would be insulated from political pressure in individual countries by being brought under the control of an independent European central bank which would be dominated by the German Bundesbank.

But German unification also recast the relationship between the different capitalist classes within the EU.

France wanted to push ahead with economic and monetary union at Maastricht in order to contain the resurgent united Germany within a supra-national entity. Germany agreed on two conditions. First, that the European Union intervene to break up Yugoslavia — extending German hegemony in the Balkans. Second, that the conditions for monetary union be sufficiently tight to avoid Germany having to finance budget deficits of the weaker European economies.

But the reality of German dominance was rapidly, and brutally, demonstrated in the break-up of the Exchange Rate Mechanism of the European Monetary System (the ERM). The ERM was brought down in August 1993 quite deliberately by the German bourgeoisie which would neither lower its in-

terest rates, to help the rest of the European Union out of recession, nor continue to prop up their currencies under attack in the money markets.

During the 1980s the European Community had functioned on the basis of a simple deal — the ERM stopped weaker economies devaluing against the D-mark and harming German exports, whilst the German trade surplus subsidised the rest of the European Community. Unification brought that deal to an end. Germany could no longer afford the subsidy. On 16 September 1992 Italy and Britain were forced out of the ERM and major devaluations followed. In August 1993, amid massive speculation against the French Franc, the entire edifice collapsed and the ERM's 2.5 per cent fluctuation bands were replaced by 15 per cent bands — effectively floating exchange rates.

Monetary union, originally scheduled to start in 1997 had to be put back to the latest possible date envisaged in the Maastricht Treaty — 1999. Furthermore, the proposals for its practical implementation, published by the European Monetary Institute, the forerunner of the independent European Central Bank, on 14 November this year, delayed EMU further by envisaging a transition to the single currency lasting until 2002.

The consequences of the Italian, British and Spanish devaluations set the terrain for the crisis which broke out at the end of this summer, when German Finance Minister, Theo Waigel, flatly declared that Italy would not be allowed to take part in monetary union because it would not be able to meet the Maastricht convergence criteria. This signalled an offensive by Germany to tighten the criteria. Germany covers 70 per cent of total expenditures among countries who pay more into the EU pot than they receive from it. A common currency would mean that the most productive economies would subsidise the budget deficits of the less productive economies taking part in the system. That would simply weaken the German economy from another angle.

As, David Marsh put it in *The Bundesbank: the bank that rules Europe*: 'Permanently fixing exchange rates between countries of different structure and performance would remove an essential element of flexibility in their economic relationships. Economic adjustments

could no longer be made by exchange rate changes. So they would have to be carried out through alterations in costs and output, as the less well-off nations adapted suddenly to a hard currency. The outcome had already been seen in east Germany. Similarly, binding sterling to the D-mark in October 1990 subjected Britain to a milder form of the same unpleasant competitive stresses. On a community-wide scale, this would confront the better-off nations with large demands to compensate for the problems in poorer EC countries. The volumes required to accompany monetary union would add to the large payments being channelled to East Germany. The main country to be asked to foot the bill would be, as always, Germany.'

German public opinion is strongly opposed to monetary union. Having been through the experience of monetary union with east Germany, it is well understood that EMU might well present Germans with a large bill to cover the budget deficits of weaker economies. The German Social Democrats recently picked up on this fear to question the feasibility of proceeding with monetary union on the timescale envisaged at Maastricht.

Thus, even the existing criteria, which currently are only met by Germany and Luxembourg (see Figure 1), are insufficient for German capital. German Finance Minister, Theo Waigel, demanded in a letter to other EU states on 10 October, even tighter restrictions. He proposed a 'stability pact' limiting public deficits for participating states to just one per cent of GDP in 'normal' periods and requiring that, for each one per cent of budget deficit in excess of the Maastricht criteria, offending countries be required to deposit 0.25 per cent of their GDP with the European Union. This would be turned into a fine if the deficit is not reduced to within the Maastricht limits within two years. If, for example, Britain had been a participant in monetary union since 1991 this would have meant deposits of more than 3 per cent of GDP by the end of this year, equivalent to £22bn (or 11p on the basic rate of income tax), of which two thirds would have been a fine.

The Maastricht criteria, let alone Germany's additional proposals, imply massive cuts in the welfare state, accompanied by deflation and even higher levels of unemploy-

---

'The Maastricht Treaty set a European framework of starting to dismantle the welfare state, however, even the existing convergence criteria are insufficient for German capital'

---



ment in the weakest economies in Europe. As David Roche observed in the *Wall Street Journal* on 16 November: 'Currently, the southern European countries — and those with bloated state sectors in the north too — are growing faster than the European core. That's because of competitive devaluation of these weaker economies' currencies. but implementation of a broad-based Monetary union would end the use of that safety valve... This overlooked fiscal dimension means that Monetary union, if ever achieved, won't last. By condemning poor southern Europe (and those rich northern European countries with bloated state sectors) to low growth and high unemployment, Monetary union is a self-destructing time bomb.'

**T**he political problem is that any government imposing that policy would find it very difficult to survive even before the deadline for monetary union is reached — the decision on who is fit to qualify is due to be taken in mid-1998 on the basis of the 1997 economic data. This is shown by the governmental crises in all of the countries attempting to qualify for monetary union on the Maastricht timetable — Italy, Austria, France, Sweden.

Germany is perfectly aware of this and proposes, therefore, to exclude from Monetary union those countries which do not meet the criteria. This means that, to take the major economies, Italy, Britain and Spain would be outside Monetary union. Secondly, Germany's wants greater control of the economies of those states which do participate.

That is the real meaning of the Theo Waigel's "stability pact" and the independent European Central Bank. Waigel's proposal envisaged that exceptions would only be allowed in 'extra-ordinary circumstances' such as natural disasters and: "only with a qualified majority of the monetary union participants." To decide which countries will be granted exceptions, a special "stability council" would be created, which would meet at least twice a year after deficit figures are released in the spring and autumn. The council would then draw up public recommendations for the offending country's fiscal policy.

Thus the pact would give a decisive influence over the fiscal policy of offending states to European Union quasi-state institutions dominated by Germany.

Germany's insistence that greater political union accompanies monetary union — majority voting in the council of ministers, a common foreign and security policy, for the West European Defence Union to be incorporated into the European Union and for steps towards a European Union army — also flow from its grasp of the fact that monetary and fiscal policy cannot be separated from political control. Wolfgang Schauble, parliamentary leader of CDU, recently called for a "European army" specifying that in military conflicts where the US did not want to become directly involved: "We need to give Europe the capacity to act."

Germany's constitutional court decided in October 1993 that unless it was clear by 1997 that the EU would be institutionally strong enough to ensure political, economic and monetary stability then Germany would have the right to unilaterally withdraw from monetary union.

France and Germany are negotiating to try to arrive at a common position on this for the Inter-governmental conference scheduled to take place next year.

**B**ut political union runs up against the problem that European institutions simply don't have the political legitimacy to impose Maastricht upon the population of Europe.

A second intractable problem is what to do to stop the EU states which are outside of monetary union from continuing to devalue their currencies. In an interview in the *Financial Times* this summer the chair of Daimler-Benz, Germany's biggest industrial company, explained that the present situation is worse than in the 1950s before the European Union was created, because the effect of the devaluations is greater than the tariff barriers abolished by the Treaty of Rome. They act as a de facto tariff against German goods (and those of countries trying to maintain fixed exchange rates with Germany) and, worse, open up the German market to other countries' exports. German and French industrial capitalists want a single currency to prevent devaluations against them.

As the *Financial Times* Survey of Germany put it on 23 October: 'The one sector of society which appears virtually unanimous in its support for the single currency is German industry. Having suffered from a long-term appreciation of the D-



mark, especially against the lira, the pound and the peseta, many German industrialists are hoping the Monetary union would act as a protective wall against appreciation... The notion of a hard-Monetary union core around Germany has met with a degree of alarm in German industry'.

In late October the European Commission published the report of an inquiry on the impact of the devaluations by five currencies (Italy, Spain, UK, Portugal, Sweden) which have depreciated by 20 per cent or more. The study found that as a result Germany's EU market share fell from 30.95 per cent to 24.26 per cent 1987-94 and France's fell 0.6 per cent 1992-94, while Britain's EU market share rose from 9.86 per cent 1987 to 12.14 per cent 1994 and Spain's from 3.75 per cent to 5.48 per cent. Nonetheless the Commission rejected the French-led campaign for special assistance to protect strong currency economies against devaluations.

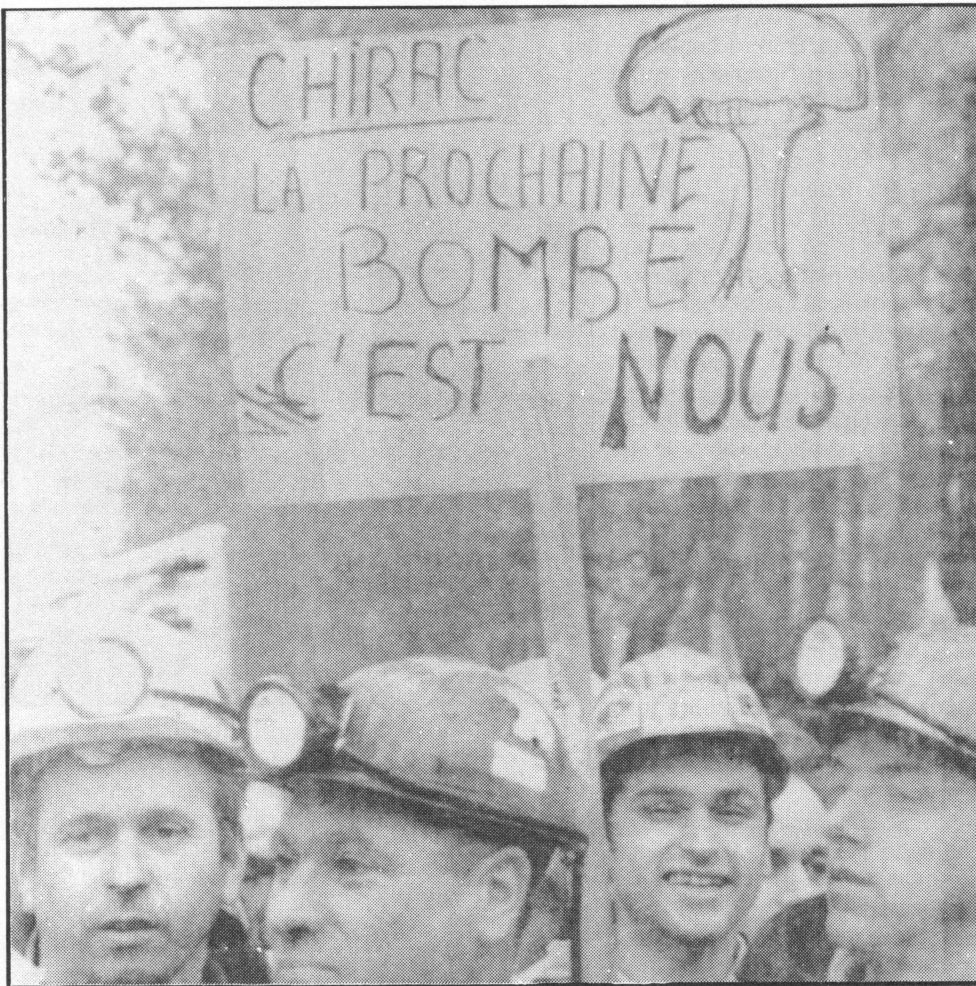
The inevitability that the main devaluing countries will not qualify for monetary union when the decision is due to be taken in 1998 means that demands for protection against them are growing in France and Germany. But such moves would disintegrate the European Union.

**U**nderlying these tensions is a simple political reality: the population of western Europe is not prepared to accept the dismantling of the welfare state which would result from

---

'German capital is concerned with how to stop EU states which are outside of monetary union from continuing to devalue their currencies'

---



the implementation of the Maastricht treaty. Political systems throughout the continent are being strained by the simultaneous crushing of sections of the traditional petty bourgeoisie in consequence of the concentration of big European capital and its further penetration into agriculture, the retail sector and so on, and, on the other hand, the resistance of the working class to the attack on its living standards. The way this has manifested itself in the different national political formations has followed a definite pattern.

**F**irst, super-imposed upon the fortunes of the individual parties and currents, is the fact that incumbent government's attempting to carry out policies in line with Maastricht found themselves deeply discredited and frequently ejected from office. In Sweden, anti-EU parties did best in the Euro-elections which followed accession to the EU this year. In Portugal, the government lost office. Italy faces chronic political crisis. In France, the new government appointed by Chirac, following the collapse of the Socialist Party, has already lost massive support. In Austria, the government

---

'As Euro-socialism has collapsed political currents opposed to Maastricht have consolidated support'

---

recently collapsed. In Britain, John Major's government has been at a complete impasse since the ejection of the pound from the ERM.

**S**econd, in terms of the dynamics of the individual political parties, the pure political parties of big European capital have never been able to transform themselves into the dominant political parties of the major west European countries because their economic policy collides with such large sections of both the petty bourgeoisie and the working class. In Germany, for example, the Free Democrats have fallen below the five per cent of the vote necessary to enter a number of regional and city parliaments.

The electoral base of the traditional national bourgeois parties is being fragmented by the elimination of small farms, workshops and shops in favour of big capital. This provides one part of the electoral and political cadre, of the parties emerging on the extreme right. Thus the Italian Christian Democrats have seen their base collapse, passing over to the racist Northern Leagues in the north and the neo-fascist National Alliance in the south. In France, Jean Marie Le

Pen's National Front is already the dominant party of both the small shopkeepers and the unemployed. In Austria, the far right Freedom Party, whose leader praises Hitler's employment policy, takes 20 per cent of the vote and may significantly raise this at the next general election. Throughout the EU the mainstream parties have responded to this situation by escalating their own racist campaigns against immigrants and asylum seekers.

This crisis of the traditional bourgeois political parties within the EU, allowed right wing European social democracy to come forward at the beginning of the 1980s as the champion of European capitalist integration. It effectively proposed a bloc with big European capital against both the petty bourgeoisie and the poorest sections of the working class. While the German balance of trade surplus was subsidising the EU this allowed capital inflows and reforms which were the basis of the rise to dominance of Euro-socialism throughout southern Europe. As the German subsidy disappeared, and the southern European economies were thrown into crisis by the fixed exchange rate system of the ERM, Euro-socialism collapsed ignominiously. The Italian Socialist Party has virtually disappeared. Its historic leader of the 1980s, Benito Craxi, is in exile to avoid a prison sentence for corruption. The French Socialist Party was crushed at the last parliamentary elections. Felipe Gonzales' Spanish Socialist Party has lost its parliamentary majority and is likely to lose office at the next election. And the German SPD is at its lowest standing in polls since the second world war.

Naturally, the demoralisation engendered by the reactionary policy of Euro-socialism gave further impetus to the far right in Italy, France, Austria, Belgium and elsewhere. Tony Blair, who represents a kind of pathetic tail-end of Euro-socialism in Britain, will produce similar results on the basis of his present policies after the next general election.

**A**s Euro-socialism has collapsed political currents, opposed to the economic course embodied in Maastricht, have consolidated serious electoral support to the left of, or outside the control of, the social democratic bureaucracy. Thus in the recent Berlin city elections the combined vote of the Greens and former commu-



nist Party of Democratic Socialism exceeded that of the SPD. In Italy, the Party of Communist Refoundation retains roughly eight per cent of the vote. In Spain, the United Left, in which the Communist Party is the dominant influence, wins more than 10 per cent of the vote. In France, the last presidential vote saw a significant vote for the Communist Party and five per cent for a candidate presented as Trotskyist. In Britain, within the Labour Party, the Campaign Group of Labour MPs have campaigned against Maastricht.

**T**his whole tempo of political crisis is now being accelerated wherever governments try to carry out the budget cuts necessary to qualify for monetary union by the 1998 deadline.

The most acute political crisis exists in Italy whose public debt is nearly double the Maastricht limit. Bourgeois democracy is seriously threatened. The main bourgeois party, Force Italia, led by tycoon Silvio Berlusconi, who has forged an alliance with the neo-fascist National Alliance, controls most commercial TV. In the south, the neo-fascists have replaced the Christian Democrats in many areas. In the north, the Northern Leagues have launched a viciously racist campaign. While the Party of Democratic Socialism, challenged on its left by Communist Refoundation, recently accepted new racist legislation to crack down on so-called illegal immigrants. The main problem for the Italian government is the massive opposition from the working class to cutting back the welfare state — last year saw the biggest demonstration in post-war Italian history against attacks on pension rights.

In Spain, with a budget deficit at 5.9 per cent of GDP, the Socialist Party government has announced the biggest public spending cuts on record in the country which already has the highest level of unemployment in western Europe.

In Belgium, whose budget deficit is projected at 4.3 per cent of GDP this year, but with public debt at more than 130 per cent of GDP, the government coalition, which includes the Socialist Party, plans education and transports cuts together with an increase in VAT from 20.5 to 21 per cent. Teachers and students have organised joint demonstrations against the cuts and railway workers plan strikes against line closures.

In Sweden, with a budget deficit at 10 per cent of GDP and public debt 85 per cent, the Socialist Party government has been taking an axe to the welfare state, with the result that its poll ratings have collapsed.

**B**ut the fulcrum of the struggle against the Maastricht assault on the welfare state at the present time is France — because the outcome there will determine whether or not EMU is anything more than merely Germany plus its tributary economies. The French budget deficit stands at 5.2 per cent of GDP nearly double the Maastricht limit. At the end of September Prime Minister Alain Juppe declared that France was in “a state of national peril” in danger of dropping out “of the leading pack and being among the weak currency countries... It’s the moment of truth.”

With public sector wages already frozen, Juppe, presented a plan to parliament on 15 November to savagely attack the welfare state. This includes a 0.5 per cent tax increase across the board; transferring control of the social security system from employers and trade unions to the government; higher health charges for pensioners and the unemployed; taxing family allowances; tightening controls on medical costs by hospital closures and spending limits on doctors; and raising public sector pension contributions.

With unemployment at 11.5 per cent as a result of the high interest rates which have been necessary to defend the Franc’s Deutsch-mark parity, the welfare cuts are likely to depress economic growth and increase unemployment further.

On 10 November millions of public sector workers brought France to a standstill in strikes against the pay freeze. New strikes have been called against the welfare cuts by the communist-led CGT and the social democratic Force Ouvriere trade unions. Doctors and students have also demonstrated. Juppe said he had three months to see whether he could succeed. If he does not a blow will have been struck that benefits the working class throughout Europe.

Since December 1991, the west European working class has passed through an enormous learning experience. European Monetary Union has been shown to herald the biggest attack on living standards since the second world war. Far

from promoting internationalism, it has inaugurated the most vicious wave of racism since the 1930s. The left propagandists for EMU — in Britain John Palmer, the Socialist Society, *Red Pepper*, *New Left Review* — have been discredited.

Even *Guardian* writers like Will Hutton, while still stating: ‘Waigel and Chirac are right to accentuate the need for budgetary probity..’ (15 November), are taking cover. Launching a conference (timed to clash with the left’s Choices for Labour conference on 2 December) entitled ‘Wherever next — the future of Europe’ (with Tony Blair and Neil Kinnock speaking), Will Hutton and Martin Kettle were forced to admit: ‘The Treaty of Maastricht may come to be seen in some parts of Europe — perhaps even Germany — as the Treaty of Versailles came to be seen in inter-war Europe: the source of the problem, not the answer.’

That is indeed the case and the left should draw the appropriate conclusions about those who have spent the last four years trying to sell that treaty to the labour movement.

The reality of the European Union is that German Capital now reigns supreme. If France succeeds in meeting the Maastricht criteria and EMU begins in 1999, it will exclude a large part of the EU and Germany will seek to lock them in via a revamped version of the Exchange Rate Mechanism. If EMU is postponed, as the German government’s thinktank of economic advisors has suggested, this will open an equally vicious struggle to break down the welfare state and create more militant bourgeois political forces.

Whatever the outcome between now and 1998, the new united Germany will be in a position to ensure that the development of the European Union is even more tailored to the demands of German capital. This will become more and more understood to be the primary organising centre for the onslaught which the west European working class will face over the next decade.

**T**he forces of the labour movement which will advance — and must coordinate their strategies not only in west, but also eastern, Europe — will not be those sowing illusions in the plans of big European capital, but those who fight them every inch of the way.

**By Geoffrey Owen**

---

‘The fulcrum of the struggle against the Maastricht assault on the welfare state at the present time is France.’

---

# *Socialist* **Action**

## **Subscription rate (6 issues)**

- £6 inland subscriptions
- £12 multi-reader subscriptions
- £9 European subscriptions
- £13 all other international subscriptions
- £36 airmail multi-reader subscriptions

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Subscription to start from issue number \_\_\_\_\_

*Cheques to 'Quality Futures'*

Return to *Socialist Action*, PO Box 7226, London E8 2QS