

Specialist OUTLOOK

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Wealthy few join £500 a plate celebrations, while workers suffer

Twelve months hard Labour!



A YEAR AGO the whole labour movement celebrated the demise of John Major's vicious Tory government and the end of almost 20 years of brutal attacks on the working class.

Tony Blair's government swept to office with Labour's biggest ever majority, leaving the rump Tory opposition splintered and demoralised.

The new Labour team could literally do anything they wanted: and what they wanted to do was ... implement Tory policies!

They have been ruthless, and consistent. They have offered "fairness" only to the rich and the ruling class, while the "firmness" consists of attacking the working class movement that created the Labour Party

and put them in office.

12 months on we have student fees, but no moves for a minimum wage, no rights to union recognition, no let-up in the cuts in health and local government, and no reprieve for the asylum seekers and refugees. Nobody expected the Blair team to offer us socialism, but it didn't have to be this bad!

One welcome result is that there have been signs of a revival of anger, activity and militancy in the labour movement. The few illusions in Blair have quickly begun to be dispelled.

Fighting back for our rights is the best hope of winning real gains after 12 months of frustration and betrayal.

No to a bosses' Europe! Demonstrate in Cardiff June 13

Hillingdon strikers approach victory

Simon Deville

AFTER MORE than 2 years of struggle, a partial victory at least is in sight for striking workers at Hillingdon Hospital. A representative of Pall Mall, the company that sacked the strikers, has written to at least 20 of strikers conceding that they were unfairly dismissed.

Their case will now go back to the Industrial Tribunal in the middle of May, but the admission from Pall Mall will mean that a settlement in their favour is almost certain.

Having been refused support for continuing the strike from their own UNISON branch, the Hillingdon women had their branch membership revoked under the cover of a union rule that says that members who have been unemployed for over 2 years do not have an automatic right to remain in the branch.

This victory is a testament to a courageous struggle that could have been ended years ago if the national leadership of UNISON had put in half as much time and energy into supporting their dispute as it did in trying to prevent the strikers even speaking at various union conferences.

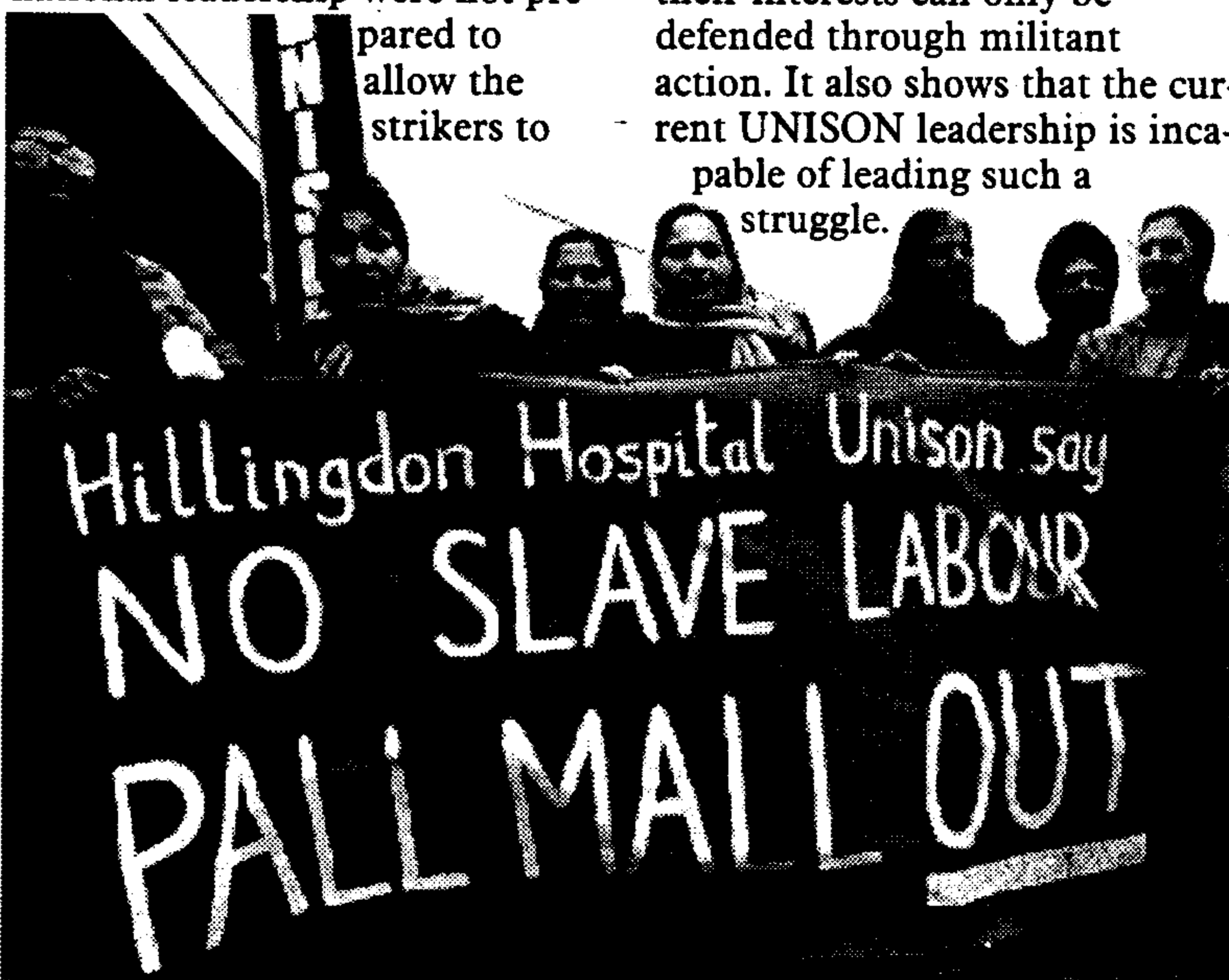
UNISON officials withdrew official support for their dispute at the beginning of January 1997 year after they failed to impose a settlement that the strikers had already rejected. Since then the only official support has been to fund lawyers to mount the legal challenge to Pall Mall.

Whilst UNISON is supposedly a "member-led" union, the national leadership were not prepared to allow the strikers to

even have a say in whether or not to continue the strike.

The strike started when Pall Mall tried to impose an attack on pay and conditions on the already low paid workers. UNISON leaders constantly talk about defending the interests of low paid workers, of part-time workers, of black people and of women members of the union.

This dispute has shown that their interests can only be defended through militant action. It also shows that the current UNISON leadership is incapable of leading such a struggle.



Magnet strikers vote to end dispute

AFTER 21 months on strike, Magnet workers voted by 47 to 34 to accept redundancy.

After heated debates the strike committee were unable to reach an agreement on a recommendation to the strikers and the deal was put to a secret ballot without one.

340 workers were sacked from Magnet kitchens in Darlington after going on strike for a minor pay rise. Since then they have organised a picket throughout the dispute facing physical attacks and intimidation.

Magnet, along with the numerous other long-running trade union disputes (Critchley Labels, Hillingdon, Liverpool Dockers), was always going to be extremely difficult in a period where the wider labour movement has been so passive.

Without a militant trade



union movement that can mobilise support for such disputes it is no surprise that many of the strikers felt unable to see any strategy that could win back their jobs.

At the same time, disputes such as Magnet have proved an inspiration for working class militants across the country and have exposed the myth of 'partnership' between bosses and workers that is currently being peddled by union leaderships.

Ian Crammond, secretary of the strike committee, told *Socialist Outlook* 'If the trade union leaders would get their heads out of the sand and stand up for the people they are supposed to, we wouldn't be in this situation in the first place.'

'If they stood up for ordinary workers and not the flashy suits and Tony Blair we wouldn't have had to go on strike.'

Privatised Tameside care workers say "Enough is enough"!

Adam Hartman

TAMESIDE Care Group workers are on strike against attacks on their pay and conditions.

Almost 300 UNISON and GMB members, employed by the company in 11 residential care homes and one nursing home, voted on March 30 by an overwhelming majority to go on strike, in response to receiving notice that they were to be issued with new contracts.

Tameside Care Group proposes to cut basic pay by up to £2.08 per hour, cut paid annual leave by a week, abolish sick pay and reduce the enhanced rate for Bank Holidays. The strikers have until May

Day to sign the new contracts or be dismissed.

These attacks follow a five year pay freeze, previous cuts in sick pay and maternity leave and the ending of enhanced rates for overtime and weekends.

In 1992, the staff took a pay cut, by up to 35 per cent in some cases, only two years after the homes were transferred from local authority ownership with guarantees to staff that local government pay and conditions would be protected.

Tameside Enterprises Ltd and later Tameside Care Group were set up by the Council as "non-profit making" trusts, to run

their elderly people's homes in a "hands-off" arrangement. The trusts have used repeated financial difficulties to pressurise staff into accepting pay cuts. However, despite again claiming difficulties the Group made £750,000 last year.

Bankers

According to a report in *Tribune* (February 6 1998) the Group is believed to have come under pressure from the Royal Bank of Scotland to cut staff costs, presumably to safeguard the bank's profits on capital loaned to the Trust. If true, this illustrates the damaging impact of private finance on employment conditions and patient care in health and social services.

Management has accused staff of neglecting the needs of residents by taking strike action. The strikers reply that care cannot be provided on the cheap, and that as permanent staff they are more committed to the residents and understand their needs better than the agency workers now in their place.

The strikers have received support from the residents and their relatives, with one 90 year old man even joining the picket line for a while!

In reality, care assistants do a difficult job involving high levels of skill and responsibility. Yet in capitalist society this work is not properly rewarded, not least because in Britain alone, tens of thousands of mainly women do

the same work for free in the home. The skill is not recognised because it stems from women's supposedly "natural" role as carers.

The strikers have issued a hardship appeal. To donate, send cheques payable to "UNISON Tameside Branch" at UNISON, 29 Booth Street, Ashton under Lyne, OL6 7LB. Also write letters of protest to Alan Firth, Managing Director, Tameside Care Group, Enterprise House, Grange Road South, Hyde SK14 5NY, sending copies to UNISON at the above address, or phone the Group's Head Office on 0161-368 9099.

● In neighbouring Manchester, hundreds of care workers are balloting for industrial action, possibly including strikes, against plans by Manchester Care to cut pay from £120 to £90 for 25 hours work.

Manchester Care took over 18 homes from Manchester City Council in 1991. The company now also plans to close two homes, using the excuse of imminent financial crisis - sounds familiar?

These disputes highlight the fact that privatisation is just the start of a whole series of attacks for workers in public services.

The struggle to defend public services and the pay and conditions of those who work in them doesn't stop with privatisation. Ongoing attacks need an ongoing fightback.

Camden strikers threatened with mass sackings

As the Camden libraries dispute enters its 10th week, Camden's Labour council is becoming more open with its threats to sack all the strikers and recruit a scab workforce. Up until now 11 of Camden's 13 libraries have been shut throughout the dispute.

A demonstration of around 500 took place at the end of April and the strikers' supporters include Maureen Lipman, Michael Foot, Dorris Lessing, Michael Palin and numerous other well known radicals from Hampstead and Highgate.

Whilst the council are unlikely to carry out any mass sackings prior to the local elections it is clear that the council are digging in their heels, and may even be prepared to lose some councillors from the Labour group in order to defeat the workforce.

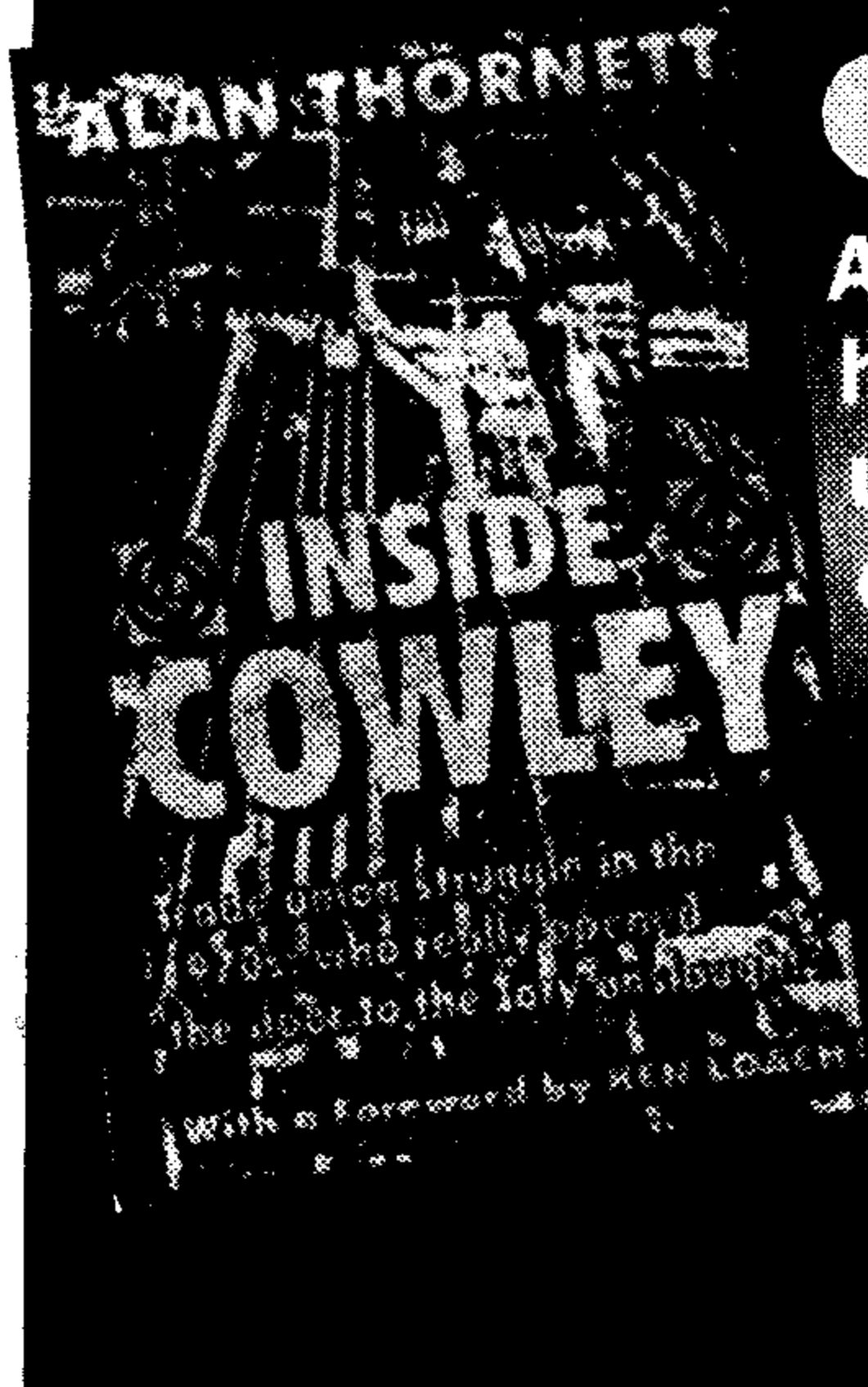
It is also clear that the strikers will need to spread the dispute in order to guarantee a victory in their fight against restructuring and down-grading of posts.

Get your copy!

INSIDE COWLEY

Alan Thornett's first-hand account of trade union struggles in the car industry from the 1970s, with serious lessons for trade union activists today.

Pocupine Press. 448 pages, illustrated. £11.95 plus £2 post and packing, from Socialist Outlook, PO Box 1109, London N4 2UU.



Time to sink the Euro

AS THE GOOD ship Euro prepares to set sail on the choppy world financial waters, an unseemly fight has erupted on the bridge as to who should be the captain.

EDITORIAL

France boss Jean Claude Trichet should get the job.

The Dutch-German stitch-up has apparently broken a secret deal struck by Helmut Kohl and Francois Mitterrand in which the bank would be in Frankfurt, but its first president would be French.

Repeated efforts to resolve this angry bust-up have failed - even Tony "Mr Peace Process" Blair has been unable to soothe French feelings, while Duisenberg supporters have rallied all the main political parties in the Netherlands in the run-up to their general election, with the Finance Minister warning that "If he does not get the job it would be even worse for us than losing to Ger-

The key factor in maintaining the single currency will be the authority and tight-fisted monetarist commitment of the European Central Bank, a continent-wide quango whose six board members will be appointed for an 8-year term, and who will not be subject to the control of any elected government or the European Parliament.

Control of the ECB is therefore a vital issue, and the German government has been pressing hard for Wim Duisenberg, a Dutch banker, to take the top slot as president, with Bundesbank fat cat Otmar Issing as his deputy.

This has triggered a major row with the French government, which has insisted that Bank of

Vote Labour - but fight on to stop the cuts

Neil Murray

IT IS NOT just the Tories who attacked local government for 18 years. The Labour government has continued with this, only making cosmetic changes, like releasing some of the money from the sale of council housing.

Privatisation of services continues under another name - 'Best Value' - as does capping of Council budgets. Cuts in services have continued without respite since Labour won the general election.

The government has spelled out its plans for local government. Directly elected mayors on the model of that being put to a referendum in London - essentially unaccountable - will be gradually introduced around the country.

To date no Council has been willing to resist this, but rather grudgingly or otherwise, making the cuts that capping requires. The main 'selling point' for Labour in the London council elections was how low they have kept the Council tax (and photos of one Tony Blair. No mention of the fact that over the government's policies and their compliance, they have only done so by making cuts.

Labour is bound to lose seats, and probably Councils, in this round of local elections. Last time they were re-elected Labour won a

record number of seats, and while resistance to the government has not yet built up, there will hardly be a wave of enthusiasm to rush out and vote on June 7th.

Nevertheless, *Socialist Outlook* calls on its readers to vote Labour as a class vote. Labour, despite Blair's best efforts, still represents the aspirations of the working class for better local services and conditions.

However, simply voting Labour will not change anything. It needs to be linked to a building of anti-cuts campaigns which can halt these attacks.

Where candidates to the left of Labour are standing, and have a real base we call for a vote for them. Some are the product of serious local campaigns, some are respected Councillors who have now left the Labour Party.

We do not call for a blanket vote for left-of-Labour candidates, since we consider some of them to be ill-judged and without a base, seeking merely to 'fly a flag' for a sectarian cause.

The main task for socialists remains one of building a serious, mass political opposition to Blairism within the labour movement, tapping the growing vein of working class resentment and resistance.

simply voting Labour will not change anything



Spring 1997: striking French junior doctors protest at health cuts which have continued as part of the Maastricht squeeze

many in the World Cup".

This is just one expression of the tensions that are being carefully covered over as the main players drive on towards the single currency.

Missed target

Last month's announcement that eleven EU countries had qualified to join European Monetary Union was rather soured by the publication of figures showing that six of them - including Germany and the Netherlands - had failed to meet the target of reducing government debt to a maximum of 60% of Gross Domestic Product.

In the case of Italy and Belgium, despite frantic fiddling and massaging of figures, the debt figure - at 118% of GDP this year - is almost double the target set by the Maastricht Treaty, and far worse than the 107% notched up by Greece - the only EU country ruled out of applying.

These problems have not gone unnoticed, and there is growing opposition to Italy joining the new currency, especially in the Netherlands, where the government has threatened to vote against it unless there is a tough

new austerity budget, and among conservative German bosses, fearful that the new currency would be weaker than their beloved deutschmark.

Duisenberg has nailed his colours to the mast, warning that countries entering EMU will have to take further steps to cut public sector debt - policies which seem likely to trigger new cuts in welfare spending.

The complications of imposing a single currency are underlined by a new survey showing enormous variations in levels of poverty across the EU member states. Parts of Greece, Spain and Italy receive less than 20% of the annual income of the richest regions. The EU "poverty belt" includes the whole of Portugal except Lisbon. Average per capita income in Britain (£11,400) is less than the £12,000 EU average.

Any new austerity package would further widen these gaps - and with this price tag, as French Communist Party leader Robert Hue said in April, the Euro would benefit only the bankers and financiers. Far from a step towards internationalism, the Euro will intensify national rival-

ries and conflicts, and leave no democratic levers of control over the European economy.

Opinion polls in Britain show that support for the Euro is largely confined to those on the £50,000-plus income bracket. Even the Guardian's chief cheerleader for the Euro, Mark Atkinson, has warned that in many prospective member countries it is seen as "something which has been thrust on them from above by the financial markets and political elites."

Tied to Maastricht

Nevertheless Tony Blair has declared his ambition to press forward with the launch of the single currency, while Gordon Brown's economic policy is already tied in to the Maastricht criteria and the demands of a future European Central Bank. He must be stopped.

This is why it is so important to build a major protest demonstration to challenge the single currency and Maastricht austerity at the EU summit in Cardiff on June 13.

Much of the British left is now committed to support this initiative, with the promise of strong support from other European countries. There is still time to sink the Euro, before it drowns more jobs and welfare services in its wake.

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NO to a bosses' Europe!

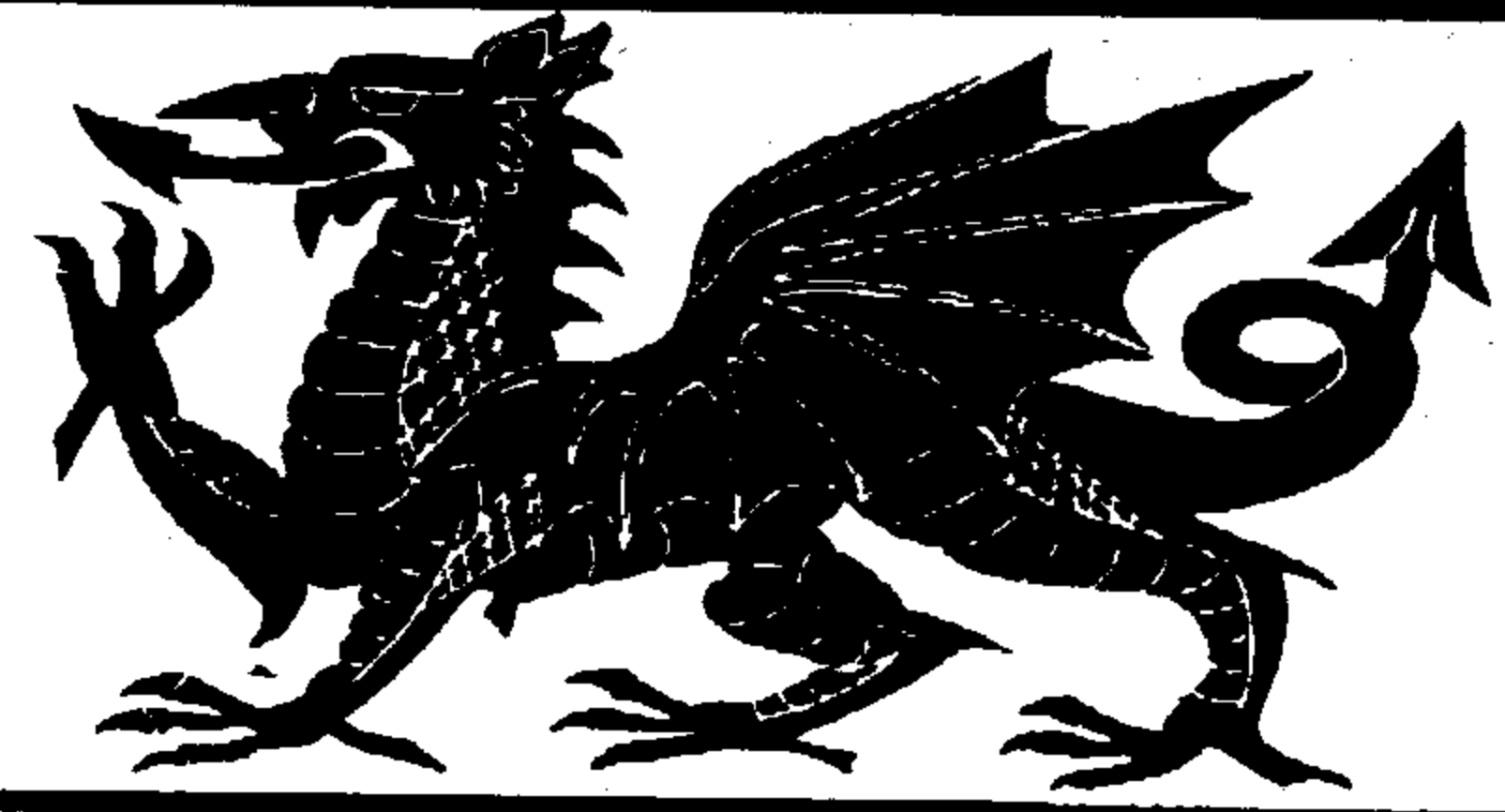
YES to Jobs, Public

Services and Democracy!

MARCH through Cardiff June 13. ASSEMBLE 1.30pm Cooper's Field (behind Cardiff Castle). RALLY with international speakers

Details Euro Summit Demonstration Committee, CCTUS, 131 Crwys Rd, Cardiff CF2 4NH, Wales. or ring 01222 302324. fax 01222 302325.

EURO DEMONSTRATION CARDIFF JUNE 13 '98



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Labour Party - back left NEC slate

Pete Firmin

DISCUSSIONS among the Left and 'Centre Left' in the Labour Party have produced an initial slate for the constituency section of the National Executive Committee.

While this slate is in many ways a good one, the same cannot be said for the process by which it has been arrived at. For a slate to command maximum support, it needs to be debated by as large a forum as possible.

Instead, this was essentially sewn up by a few individuals. Later, a very limited participation was permitted by representatives of the wider left, but more to secure their support than to offer any real say in either the platform or the candidates.

Thus candidates put forward by the Network of Socialist Campaign Groups were simply passed over with no discussion. A candidate in the 1997 general election, Nick Holden, and Maria Exall, CWU National Executive member, were apparently regarded as too left wing for the slate. So was ex-MP Mildred Gordon, currently campaigning strongly among pension-

ers.

Attempts to improve a politically weak platform were similarly brushed aside on the grounds that the proposed changes were not acceptable to Labour Reform. Sections of the Left, in particular the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy, used Labour Reform as a smokescreen to avoid arguing their own politics.

Similarly ignored were arguments for a slate based on candidates with a strong base in different regions, in favour of a slate which very much has the look of the 'London Left.'

Labour Reform put forward two right wingers, Terry Thomas and Michael Cashman at stages of the discussion, and were prepared to ignore the protests of some on the Left about their track record. However, neither appeared to be willing to stand on a slate with people well to their left.

Anni Marjoram of the Labour Women's Action Committee was also accepted on to the slate, despite reservations expressed because of her role in the *Morning*

Star dispute (defending "management's right to manage"), but has now withdrawn under pressure.

While these withdrawals are welcome, their effect, together with that of the refusal to countenance other candidates, has been that this 'alliance' has only 6 people seeking nomination for 6 places (at least 3 of

places.

The best response to this method of deciding the slate is to build a Left which is open and democratic throughout the election campaign.

At this stage the crucial thing is to secure nominations. Previously candidates had only to secure the nomination of their own Constituency Party. Although the changes made at last year's conference under 'Partnership in Power' left the details suitably vague, the leadership have introduced additional hurdles this time.

Candidates have to get not only the nomination of their own CLP, but also those of two others in other regions of the Labour Party. Given that MPs are no longer allowed to stand, this makes it much harder for lesser-known rank and file candidates. It means that unless a candidate is in their CLP, activists should only nominate candidates from outside their region.

The candidates proposed are: Kathy Jamison, member of the Scottish Party Executive; Christine Shawcroft, former Tower Hamlets Councillor (kicked off the panel of candidates for opposing cuts) and member of the London Regional Executive; Liz Davies, former Islington Councillor prevented from standing as a candidate in the general election; Mark Seddon, editor of *Tribune*; Pete Wilsman, member of the Conference Arrangements Committee; and Andy Howell, Labour Reform member.

Nominations have to be in by June 5, which leaves little time in those branches and CLPs closed down for council elections.

Once nominations close, it will be an immense task to publicise the candidates and get out the vote. The ballot papers will be sent out at the end of July, and activists should begin now to plan meetings with the candidates.

The election campaign has to be used to build resistance to the government's policies and the leadership's continued erosion of democracy in the Party.

Kathy Jamison (Scotland)
Christine Shawcroft (London)
Liz Davies (London)
Mark Seddon (Southern)
Pete Wilsman (London)
Andy Howell (W. Midlands)

whom must be women). Given the difficulties of securing nomination, this makes it possible that the slate will have less people on it than there are



NHS staff defeat wage cuts: but the key is strong, recognised unions

Trade union rights: campaigns unite

Paul Wozny

DELEGATES met in London on April 18 as the practical follow up to successful Reclaim Our Rights Conference on March 28.

In practical terms the conference was intended to unify different campaigns: Reclaim Our Rights, dominated by members of the Socialist Labour Party (SLP); the Campaign for Free Trade Unions, dominated by supporters of Workers Liberty and the Communication Workers Union's trade union rights campaign.

Also invited, but refusing to attend were the Liaison Committee for the Defence of Trade Unions (LCDTU), dominated by old-time Stalinists.

The secretary of the LCDTU sent an insulting letter to the unification conference.

The key decision on April 18 was to finally set the date for the proposed national demonstration. May 1, 1999, which is a Saturday, was agreed. Although some may be disappointed at yet another postponement, it gives us plenty of time to organise what should be one of the most important labour movement demonstration Britain has yet seen.

Building a powerful and united national campaign will be an enormous challenge for the traditionally fractious British left. If next year's march is successful, the success will be determined by the work done now.

Momentum is the key to that success. A whole range of local, regional and national events, meetings, etc, will be required. Effective intervention into this years round of trade union conferences will be an important part of that process.

Unfortunately, proposals for activities which could have helped this were not allowed to be put to the vote. Bob Crow, Assistant General Secretary of the RMT and Chair of the new campaign referred these proposals to the new steering committee. Even the decision on the new name for the campaign was referred to that committee, leaving the campaign without an identity.

The officers are Bob Crow the Chair, and the joint sec-

retaries John Hendy QC and Lol Duffy. Also include are two representatives from the three groups merging into the new campaign, with two places reserved for the LCDTU, if they change their minds.

Representatives of those national unions which have affiliated are also included.

The new committee is 'interim', because there will be a recall national conference of the new campaign in July. There is general agreement that the affiliated national unions should be represented on any national committee. The leaderships of those unions now affiliated are clearly ardent supporters of the campaigns.

Problems could emerge if supporters succeed in winning other unions, with less friendly leaderships. If the campaign is marginal, those unions will send a token supporter to the national committee. If the campaign takes off, Blair will put pressure on the union leaders to apply the brakes.

Care will have to be taken to ensure that these bureaucrats are allowed representation, but not a stranglehold over the development of the campaign.

The support of union conferences and general secretaries will be useful, but the work of rank and file trade union activists will change the campaign from a 'good idea' to an effective movement for change.

TUC retreat on recognition

A SPECIAL meeting of the TUC General Council was called on April 20 to discuss the dispute with Downing Street over the interpretation of Labour's election pledge to legalise the right of workers to union recognition where a majority in a workplace vote for it. But the result was to offer further compromises beyond the original TUC position.

Blair has lent heavily towards the CBI proposals, which were originally to require the participation in the ballot of a majority of those eligible to vote, and now call for 40% of those eligible to vote - an almost equally impossible figure to achieve under the

conditions the ballots will take place.

Having already backed off of the original TUC position of requiring a simple majority (51% of those voting in the ballot) the special meeting agreed to accept that a minimum of 30% of those eligible to vote should vote yes, as well as and some form of exemption for "small firms".

Crucial

The debate over the detail is of crucial importance if what goes into the government White Paper "Fairness at Work" in the next few weeks is to have any positive effect in the workplace. For the TUC and the trade

union leaders it is a crucial issue: union recognition was the one thing they thought they were going to get out of New Labour.

The was reflected at the recent STUC conference in Perth, which rejected the TUC formula, and where John Monks was criticised by UNISON chief Rodney Bickerstaffe for the concessions which have been made.

For Blair, however, the most important thing is his relationship with the employers. He will not allow the TUC or its views to get in the way of that, particularly if no serious pressure is being mounted to force him to do so.

Stop scapegoating the Campsfield 9 Labour's immigration policy should be on trial

Bill MacKeith

THE PROTESTS that erupted inside Campsfield immigration detention centre on August 2 1997 put detention policy in the dock once more, and triggered two developments that have now come to the fore.

The first was the commissioning of two reports, one by the Asylum Rights Campaign, the other by the government - from its own Chief Inspector of Prisons.

The second development was a show trial staged to intimidate refugees and nip any future protests by detainees in the bud.

Nine young West African refugees have been selected to be scapegoats for the protest that nailed the failure of the UK's detention policy on that day in August.

50-100 detainees of many different nationalities and both sexes protested at yet another sudden, arbitrary and violent removal to prison, in this case of two detainees. During the protest, placards were hastily made up said 'Prisoners of Conscience', and Freedom for all'. They appeared on our TV screens.

The nine are charged with riot and violent assembly. Their trial opens at Oxford Crown Court on Monday June 1 and will last weeks, maybe two months. Eight of the nine have been in prison since August, after months (up to 17 in one case) in detention.

Six of the nine are from Nigeria and sought refuge in the UK from the Abacha regime: two of these are Ogonis from lands devastated by Shell. The others are from Gambia, Ghana and Liberia.

Three of the nine have attempted suicide. Two of the nine are minors - kids of 16 last August; one of them is now in a secure psychiatric unit, driven sick by

at the hands of the UK government. Two of those charged have now been officially granted full refugee status (a rarity indeed, for some 1,000 individuals in a year), and one is free on bail.

Labour ministers are involved in the trial. Immigration minister Michael O'Brien made remarks prejudicial to a fair trial immediately after the protest. A phone call "right from the top" of the Home Office, according to a police officer at Banbury police station, urged reluctant police to pursue charges. A special incident room was set up. One estimate of the cost of the prosecution is £2 million.

The bringing of charges is a "first" for any British government in such circumstances. After the protest at Campsfield on June 4 1994, during which damage of a similar order was done, no charges were brought against any protesting detainees. Labour seems determined to be tougher than Tory immigration minister Charles Wardle and his cohorts.

These seven men and two boys should not be in the dock. The British government, on the other hand, should be tried for its denial of human rights in breach of conventions to which the UK is a signatory.

The many authorities for such a charge, including the United Nations High Commission for Refugees' UK representatives, have now been joined by David Ramsbotham, HM Chief Inspector of Prisons. His report (which can be obtained free from Home Office, 50 Queen Anne's Gate London SW1) flays the government.

Perhaps it is not surprising they refused to publish it for five months, until forced to by Ramsbotham's leaked letter denouncing the "suspicious" of the UK's asylum and detention process.

The report says the UK is in breach of international conventions because decisions to detain asylum seekers or other migrants are not taken under judicial supervision (courts of justice).

Further, it is the government, not Group 4 which runs Campsfield, that is responsible for a regime that is "unsafe for detainees". There is "too much secrecy associated with immigration detention". Immigration detainees should not be held in prisons alongside criminals and those on remand.

In this context Ramsbotham states; "In my view, money would be better spent on expanding Immigration Service places, if legislation still requires such numbers to be detained, than requiring the prison service to continue to hold too many" (emphasis added).

In fact the 1971 Immigration Act does not require the government to detain, it empowers immigration officials to decide to detain in individual cases. But the point

is made: how many people are detained is up to the government of the day, and it could be fewer.

It beggars belief that the immigration minister can claim that the Ramsbotham report vindicates government policy on detention. Such misrepresentation, and other remarks by Michael O'Brien that give the lie to the claim that a serious review of asylum and detention policy is going on.

Michael O'Brien should resign: the effect of his public statements can only be to prevent a thoroughgoing review.

At the time when the government is supposedly considering such matters as part of its review, it recently planted "rumours" in the press that an amnesty was in the offing for asylum seekers whose applications have dragged on for years; the government promptly issued a statement denying such "misreporting". Hey presto - a key demand of refugees and campaigners goes out the window, without debate.

So, some, even a surprising amount of ammunition for campaigners in Ramsbotham. But the ex-army general's report is bound to have limitations. One is the rousing defence of private companies whose work is inflicting misery - Group 4, and Wakenhurst, which runs Tinsley near Gatwick, subject of another Ramsbotham report. They are "doing a good job".

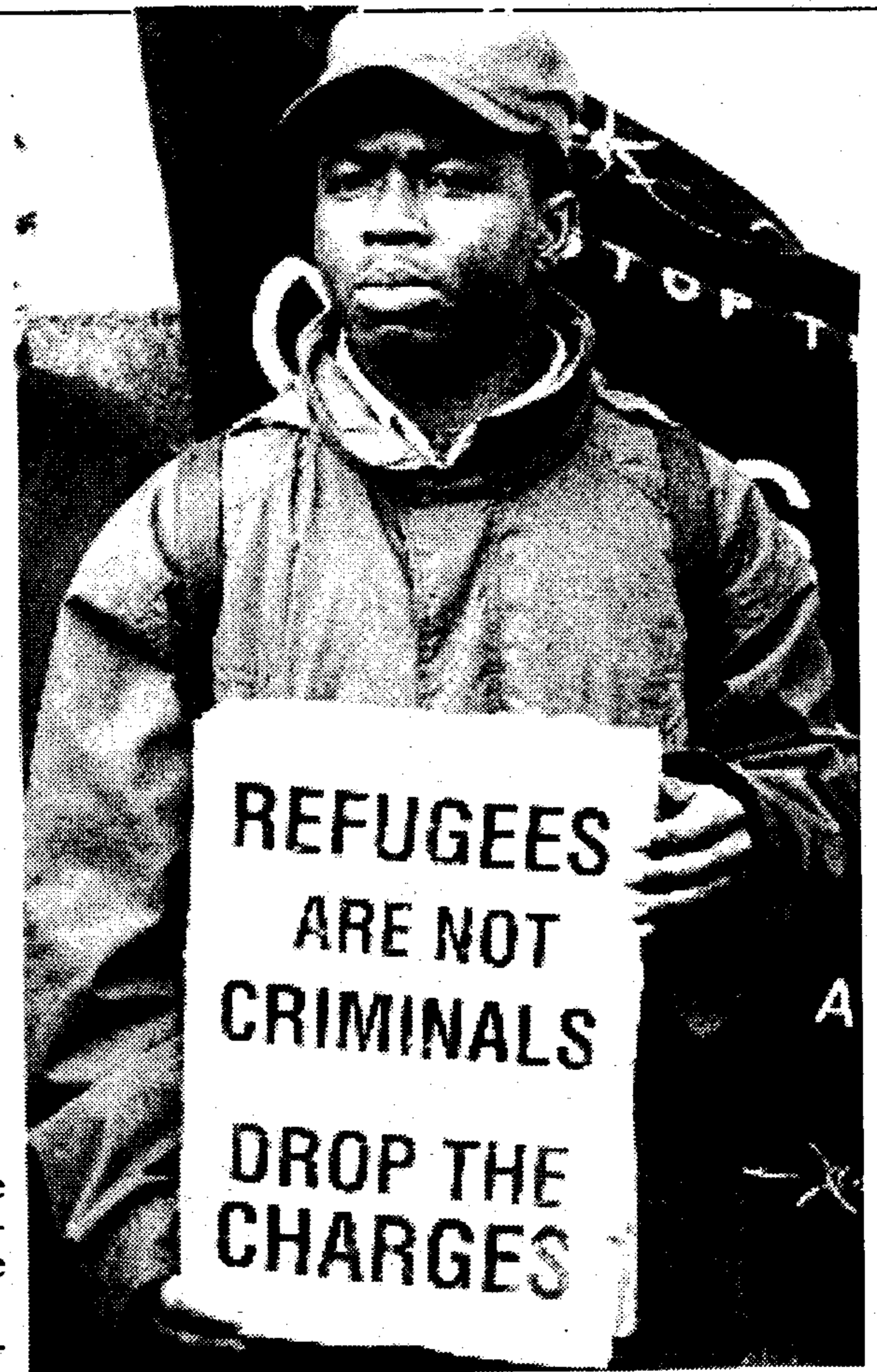
Apart from not questioning their ghastly trade, Ramsbotham fails to credit or pursue the many reports by detainees of racism in Group 4 guards. By contrast, some detainees' reported statements are thoughtfully "corrected", presumably with information provided by Group 4 and Immigration.

Manifestly false statements from Group 4 and Immigration such as 'there had only been three children received at the centre since it had opened' are reported unchallenged, when they contradict what is on public record. Twenty-seven children have been taken into care from Campsfield by the nearby Bicester Social Services office; for example.

Ramsbotham's 94 recommendations include the important one that detainees should be given reasons for their detention in writing, and suggest changes to the complaint procedure and to mental health cover.

However, the "secure-hostel" regime of detention centres which does allow some free-association, should be replaced by one that is more prison-like. Despite the fact that, inside, Campsfield currently "only operates with the consent of the detainees", detainees should from now on

The message is loud enough and clear to all but Labour's ministers, stuck on Tory policies



be subject to more regimentation, with clear rules and regulations, incentives (and punishments); "it should be stated control rests with staff".

It will be no surprise if these latter recommendations are the only ones that Mike O'Brien and the Labour Front Bench take heed of.

In all the furore over the Ramsbotham report, the Asylum Rights Campaign's report sank almost without trace. The Home Office erected a 'wall of silence' to keep out the authors, Sue Lukes and Leonora Lloyd, but there are quotations from Group 4, official and anonymous, from detainees past and present, from visitors, lawyers, and some utterly craven and racist members of the Home Office-appointed Official Visitors' Committee.

The ARC report endorses "Providing protection", an anti-detention statement authored by JUSTICE, the Immigration Law Practitioners Association, and the Asylum Rights Campaign (which however fails to call for the closure of immigration detention centres). This useful report should have been published months ago when it was completed, not sat on by ARC.

Government policy is based on the belief that politicians can only lose votes by being just to refugees and other

migrants. It is up to others to point out that you can win votes with just and anti-racist policies. The Socialist Parry was elected to government in France last year making gestures in that direction.

A new wave of church occupations is currently under way' by sans papiers in towns in France, and also by refugees in Germany, which with the UK has the worst record of immigration detentions in Europe - more people detained but not so long as here.

To make real progress, to have an impact on governments, campaigners against detention have to take the argument further into trade unions and link up with other movements - in Europe and in the UK - for an end to detentions, and to all miscarriages of justice, for cancellation of all debts allegedly owed by poor peoples to international banks, for an end to arms exports to dictators.

This last was the theme of last Saturday's demonstration outside Campsfield - the 51st monthly demo since that refugee prison opened.

It beggars belief that the immigration minister can claim that the Ramsbotham report vindicates government policy

- Campsfield 9 Defence Campaign: Public meetings, Oxford Town Hall 7.30 Tuesday 22 May, and Justice Room, Houses of Parliament, Tottenham 26 May; speakers include one of more of the accused, other ex-detainees including Abdul Onibiyo, MPs etc.
- Monday 1 June Mass Lobby of Oxford Crown Court, 8.30am St Aldegates
- Europe Behind Barbed Wire: a report of the proceedings of the conference held in Lille, France, last year on the growth of immigration detentions in different countries in Europe. Copies £3.40 from c/o 60 Great Clarendon Street, Oxford OX2 6AX
- Campsfield 9 Defence Campaign: Campaign to Close Campsfield: c/o 60 Great Clarendon Street, Oxford OX2 6AX. 01865 556143 01865 726804 01865 557252

Blunkett leaves teachers unimpressed

Keith Sinclair (Hull NUT delegate - personal capacity)

THE PRESS attacks on "militant" teachers 'howling' at David Blunkett at Easter's NUT conference obscured the real significance of the Education Secretary of State's reception.

A year ago Blunkett was given a standing ovation by at least half the delegates at the conference, whilst this year an attempt by some of the platform to engineer a repeat performance fell flat as a pancake.

This lack of enthusiasm by delegates reflects a real problem for the leadership of Britain's largest teaching union. Members are increasingly cynical about Labour's attitude towards education.

The NUT leadership has for years adopted a policy of waiting for Labour. The idea was promoted that the incoming Labour government would represent the answer to the problems created by years of Tory misrule. However, despite certain positive steps, the overall balance sheet is negative. Not only have New Labour failed to reverse Tory education policies, in certain cases they have introduced policies that are worse.

The union's attitude towards Education Action Zones was a key dividing line in the conference. Education Action Zones

(EAZs) are to be introduced in deprived areas as part of Labour's attack on social exclusion.

Labour is correct to identify the need for urgent action to be taken in depressed areas but their solution is totally wrong. The proposed zones will be run by an Education Action Forum which will include business interests. Labour has stated publicly that they hope at least one of the early zones will be led by private business.

This has led to American companies such as Edison trying to enter the English education system in order to make a profit out of kids and teachers. Edison have submitted a bid for an area in Tameside.

The union has urged NUT local branches to negotiate certain conditions with LEAs to enable the NUT to go along with EAZs. The issue of retaining pay and conditions is highlighted here along with the need for local education authorities to take the "lead role".

The problem is that once EAZs are here they will spread and attacks on pay and particularly conditions will appear in the future. The sad reality is that a

few years down the line an EAZ forum could change pay and conditions.

The left narrowly lost the conference vote on complete opposition to EAZs. However, the campaign against them will go on.

Despite the anger of teachers over the staging of this year's pay increase, the issue of pay was not a major issue at conference. This was due to the national executive proposing that a special one day conference be held in September to consider our pay claim including proposals for salary restructuring.

For the last few years, the left has correctly focused on the need for action over pay. The need for action remains but there

is also a need to quickly discuss through and agree proposals on restructuring of the pay scales. The danger is that any talk of a real fight on pay will be submerged into the minutiae of changes in the structure.

Just before conference, both the NUT and the NASUWT announced large ballot majorities for non-strike industrial action over workload issues. There is some confusion as to exactly what

pressure from delegates and members meant the leadership had to criticise Labour on a wide range of issues



Scientific tests confirm no trace of socialism or radicalism in David Blunkett

this will entail. However, the ballot victory, albeit on a turn-out of only 28 per cent, does give the opportunity to hold school union meetings to decide what members will decide to do. Collective actions are key here so that individuals are not isolated.

Towards the end of conference, the tabloids screamed about the demands of teachers for a four day week. This was a blatant misrepresentation of a debate which was about the left trying to step up the workload action by means of a Contract Week in the Autumn term.

NUT conference has excellent policy on the need for a national contract. Unfortunately, there is no sign of the current national leadership doing anything to lead a real fight on this issue.

Throughout the conference, the leadership faced two ways. On the one hand, they were insistent, especially General Secretary Doug McAvoy, that this was a

government "we could do business with". On the other hand, the pressure from delegates and members meant the leadership had to criticise Labour on a wide range of issues such as the naming and shaming of allegedly "failing" schools.

These tensions are likely to continue. The leadership is going to be unable to satisfy the demands of members and keep a cosy relationship with the government. It is the job of the left in the union to push forward members' demands to ensure real pressure is put on Blunkett and Blair and their supporters running local councils.

The Socialist Teachers' Alliance is organising an important conference on EAZs in London on 9 May. This conference will be used as a springboard to launch a national campaign including a national march in one of the EAZ areas, possibly Tameside.

Union anger at tube privatisation

Prescott runs off the rails

by Greg Tucker (RMT National Executive, personal capacity)

EVEN BEFORE the General Election it was obvious to most rail workers that New Labour was not going to be rushing to re-nationalise the railways.

But frustration at lack of progress has now turned to anger at John Prescott's announcement that the government will be privatising most of London Underground.

To add insult to injury, his plans are deliberately focussed on attacking his fellow trade union members in the RMT. Indeed, at his behest LUL management have drawn up their strategy for the privatisation which has as its first stage, plans to smash the RMT organisation on LUL, which they admit is the only force trying to stop Prescott's

plan.

The RMT is to respond in kind. At a mass rally on April 30 Jimmy Knapp will announce that all LUL members will be balloted during May for industrial action against (the effects of) privatisation.

To rub home the message LUL Northern Line Guards will be holding their third day of industrial action the following day, in furtherance of their dispute over the introduction of One Person Operation.

On the main rail network things go from bad to worse. Whilst a small handful of ex-BR managers are becoming overnight millionaires, the full weight of privatisation is falling on passengers and rail workers alike. As services deteriorate rail workers are facing pay cuts, job losses and the imposition of worse conditions.

It is becoming evident that

whilst there are some winners, some other rail companies are close to financial collapse. In particular, for rail infrastructure workers (track and signal maintenance etc), this has meant increased uncertainty as contracts pass hands between different companies.

The RMT answer has been to present a single national claim to all the infrastructure companies, demanding a major restructuring of terms and conditions on our terms, alongside a significant pay increase.

Faced with little serious response from the companies, ballots are now to take place in all eleven key companies across the country. Along with LUL, June could now see effectively a nation-wide rail dispute.

As an indication of the workers' mood signal maintenance workers at Euston are set to start

action on May 1 on a week long stoppage over local issues.

And on South West Trains, Guards are being balloted over the introduction of Driver Only Operation. With around 200 jobs threatened RMT members are in no mood to allow the management to roll over them. A series of mass meetings have been held and the Guards are determined that they will protect their jobs, taking whatever action is necessary.

Having had the industrial agenda set for them over recent years by government attacks, core rail workers are now saying enough is enough and trying to respond with their own demands. The task facing the



Letting train crews take the strain: Prescott

RMT is how to unify this broad feeling and shape it into a forceful campaign of action over the summer.

The rally and lobby of parliament on April 30 is only the first step in this campaign.

International support pledged for Cardiff demonstration

Alan Thornett

NEARLY 400 activists attended the fourth international "assizes" of the European marches held in Brussels on April 18/19. The conference was called to report the ongoing work of the Euro-marches and plan future activity.

Delegations were present from most countries of the EU and beyond (Poland for example), with the biggest from France Belgium Germany and Italy. There was a delegation of 17 from Britain, which included members of the demonstration organising committee in Cardiff.

The two main reports were from France and Germany where the Euromarches have had a major impact since they were completed at the mass demonstration in

Amsterdam last June.

In France the marches and the coalition they assembled have played a key role in the mass occupations and other protests against unemployment and social exclusion for most of this year. In Germany there have been a series of protests and demonstrations involving over 250 towns and cities and collectively involving over 300,000 people.

The conference supported a range of initiatives across Europe over the coming period but it focused on two as its key priorities: first the Cardiff demonstration in June this year and secondly a mass demonstration in Cologne in June 1999 when the EU is under the German presidency.

This will be the next major event of the Euromarches and is aimed to match the size of the Amsterdam demonstration last year. Marches are planned to it from across Europe as they were to Amsterdam.

At the same time the conference appealed to national campaigns to organise delegations to Cardiff,



June 1997: tens of thousands marched against Maastricht austerity in Amsterdam. Now for Cardiff!

and a number immediately pledged to do so in particular the campaigns in: France Belgium, Germany and Greece.

This along with the other networks which have agreed to organise across Europe for

Cardiff such as the European Network of the Unemployed (ENU), will ensure that the demonstration have a truly international character.

The conference overall was a big success, possibly the most

successful yet, certainly the most focused on campaigning. Most importantly it demonstrated the ongoing strength of the Euromarch campaign and the role it an play in uniting the struggles across Europe.

Hitting back at the G8 bankers

AS FAMINE again raises its ugly head in Africa, the world's richest nations are poised to meet in Birmingham at the G8 summit.

Many of their bankers are concerned not to relieve poverty and hunger, but to recover debts from bankrupt African countries. Estimates suggest external debts of African countries add ed up to over \$200 billion in 1995 - more than double the 1985 figure.

Plans for "recovery" drawn up by the World Bank and the IMF assume that African countries can sustain an external debt equivalent to twice their annual export earnings - incurring massive interest charges, and imposing new austerity on workers and peasants to line the coffers of Western bankers.

An alternative view will be spelled out at the People's Summit, coordinated by the New Economics Foundation to coincide with the G8 Summit on May 15-17.

Discussions on Friday 15th will include an African and Caribbean People's Summit, a debate on Sustainable Employment, and a session looking at Crimes Against the People.

Saturday will see a People's Forum on Globalisation, a Jubilee 2000 Coalition rally on cancelling the debt, and a P8 Summit, with eight of the poorest countries.

Details from 0121 616 2000, or People's Summit website <http://www.gn.apc.org.peoplesummit98>.

Reclaim Europe!

THE EUROPEAN Union has become an agent of neoliberal policies, designed to serve the interests of transnational corporations (TNCs). The EU promotes globalisation strategies for fragmenting our resistance and for throwing us all into greater competition with each other.

The EU's central project is the 'single market', a European 'free' trade zone. Officially this aims to make production more efficient, to make European industry more 'competitive' against foreign rivals, and so to protect employment.

In reality, this project frees capital from local or national constraints, helps capital to become integrated globally, especially across the Atlantic Ocean, and intensifies competition amongst countries to attract investment.

The Single Market creates a buyers' market for the cheapest wages, the most 'productive' workforce, and the lowest environmental standards. As GNP rises overall, most of us lose out in this competition; social inequalities deepen between the regions and within them.

In the name of 'international competitiveness', the EU has imposed many harmful policies:

- * EMU with its convergence criteria, requiring massive budget cuts (whose first targets are social welfare programmes), and requiring higher productivity in order to keep down inflation;

- * further deregulation, privatisation, job insecurity, and exploitation of labour, with Britain leading the way for the rest of Europe;

- * Massive investment in transport infrastructure, especially the Trans-European Network (TEN), which underlies the recent motorway developments in Britain;

- * R&D subsidies for information technology, which helped the TNCs to displace and discipline labour, as well as for agriculture biotechnology, which intensifies competitive pressures on farmers and dependence upon 'genetic fixes'.

The EU has also promoted neoliberal globalisation beyond Europe. The EU has been a leading proponent of the MAI (Multilateral Agreement on Investment), which would provide legal enforcement of global deregulation, e.g. by guaranteeing companies equal access to markets world-wide.

Rather than protect us from TNCs, the EU has imposed neoliberal globalisation on their behalf. Reclaim Europe was established to catalyse a network or resistance to that assault.

Our aims stand in contrast with nationalists who oppose European Integration as a threat to 'national sovereignty'. For us, the main threat is the neoliberal policies, regardless of which state promotes them.

The EMU convergence criteria have been imposed on us for many years, and we will continue to suffer the effects, regardless of whether Britain officially joins EMU.

In June 1998 the EU ministers will meet in Cardiff to promote these neoliberal policies. In response, we are planning a

counter-summit, as the sequel to the event held in Amsterdam in June 1977.

The counter summit will bring together groups campaigning on

Labour, environmentalist, anti-racist, feminist and other issues - from all over Europe. All groups and activists are invited to participate.

June 12-14, Cardiff

Reclaim Europe Counter-summit

Two and a half days of debates, criticism and discussion of the EU, aimed at national and international campaigners, following on from previous counter-summits, particularly Amsterdam last year.

- Friday evening: Meeting with international speakers
- Saturday: Forum on the EU, covering four main themes: Employment; Social Welfare; the Environment; and Implications for the rest of the world.
- Sunday "Alternatives to the EU and campaigning strategies."

Contact Reclaim Europe c/o Temple of Peace, Cathays Park, Cardiff
 011 348 01222-220347, e-mail Reclaim.Europe@btinternet.com
 Web site <http://www.geocities.com/Rainforest/5581/>

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Green paper on welfare reform

Field fenced in

John Lister

FEARS that junior minister "Mad Frankie" Field would be unleashed to mount a full-scale axe attack on social security and the welfare state have been somewhat exaggerated, according to the relatively tame formulations in the new government Green Paper.

It appears that Field has been unable to persuade his New Labour colleagues of the viability of embarking on a root and branch demolition of state-funded services.

There is little hint in the document of Field's deep, public affection for the privatised pension schemes forced upon the people of Chile in the aftermath of the brutal military coup of 1973 which smashed the trade unions and working class political parties. Perhaps his fellow ministers are saving this for a later stage in the evolution of the Blair government.

The relative blandness of the Green Paper should not however imply that it has anything progressive to offer working people. It represents a wholesale ideological retreat not simply from "socialism" – of which Field, Blair and co have never been supporters – but from any notion of redistributing wealth, and from any policy of progressive taxation.

Thatcher's gap

It begins by drawing attention to the widening gap between rich and poor under the Thatcher government: "Between 1979 and 1994/95, households in the top fifth of the population saw income rises in excess of 50 percent; but the incomes of those in the bottom fifth barely rose in real terms."

The increased inequality "has been particularly marked among pensioners," while children are also suffering: "nearly 3 million children are growing up in workless households".

But these developments are discussed almost as if the effects have been accidental, rather than the outcome of deliberate and cynical Tory policies: of tax cuts for the rich; wage cuts for the poor; creating a pool of unemployment to drive down wages and weaken union resistance; and the conscious decision taken by Thatcher's government to axe the link between the state pension and average earnings – thus rapidly devaluing it.

Of course we can immediately see why the Green Paper does not draw attention to these policies – because New Labour has already declared its determination to preserve almost all of them intact!

Gordon Brown's pledge not to increase taxes on the rich for the lifetime of the government effectively rules out any attempt to redistribute wealth and narrow the gap between rich and poor.

The Green Paper echoes previous statements by government ministers that New Labour has no intention of restoring the link between pensions and earnings. And the "New Deal" schemes to press-gang the unemployed into subsidised jobs are just a new way of using unemployment to hold down wages.

Of course the rhetoric of the Green Paper is one of moral concern for "inequality" and "social exclusion". But it has no tangible perspective on how these problems are to be tackled.

An old-fashioned Labour view might be



that a decent minimum wage might make a significant contribution to those at the bottom of the pay scales, a first small step towards closing the gap. But we already know that the government is looking to fix the minimum wage at a pitifully low level – perhaps £3.50 an hour, with a host of exemptions to allow some of the worst skinflint employers to escape any extra costs.

A trade union view would be that organised workers could be given a chance to fight for wage increases if the Labour government would simply sweep away the battery of anti-union laws brought in by the Tories and give a legal right to recognition: but again it is clear that for New Labour this simple option is "unthinkable".

With progressive taxation, a decent minimum wage and the option of trade union action all effectively ruled out, all the Green Paper can offer is empty phrases expressing concern and endless ritual references to education and training as the way to bridge the gap between abject poverty and the prosperity of Blair's new-found City slicker friends:

all the Green Paper can offer is empty phrases and the endless ritual references to education and training

"This third way will take us into the third stage of welfare. The welfare system will become pro-active, preventing poverty by ensuring that people have the right education, training and support. We will widen the exits from welfare dependency by offering tailor-made help for individuals."

This will no doubt be of tremendous comfort to Britain's poor pensioners, who are offered precisely nothing by the Green Paper.

But such abstract nonsense flies in the face of the daily reality of millions of unemployed and low-paid workers, for whom there simply are not enough decent jobs to go round, regardless of how many qualifications they may have.

Worse off

Indeed, while ministers set out to foster the Tory myth of the work-shy, feckless unemployed wilfully deciding to live on lavish state hand-outs, the Green Paper tacitly admits that the opposite is the case: hundreds of thousands of people are working for lousy, cheapskate employers despite the fact that they are worse off than they would be on the dole!

"Prior to the implementation of the

reforms announced in the Budget, 740,000 people lost 70p for every £1 they earned because of benefit withdrawal. 130,000 families gained less than 10p for every extra £1 earned. ... Almost one in seven people who moved from welfare to work said they were worse off in work than unemployed." (Chapter one para 16)

The government answer of course – which they have picked up and continued from the Tories – is to offer a range of benefits to low-paid workers which effectively subsidise the lowest-paying employers. Pay packets insufficient to cover the cost of renting or buying accommodation can be increased by Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit, while the employers pocket the difference.

Threshold

Brown's latest Budget handed more incentives for employers to keep wages low, not least by raising to £81 per week the threshold at which earnings require employers to pay National Insurance contributions: workers below this figure will now cost even less to employ!

The Green Paper persists in ignoring the realities of low-paid workers in Britain. We are told that "A pay packet gives people independence and status in the community, and the chance to insure against risk and save for retirement."

But of course this depends how big the pay packet is. Elsewhere we read that "For many people the absence of paid work is a guarantee of a life on a low income": but for millions, paid work IS a life on low income – and many pensioners are still suffering as a result of spending their entire working lives on low rates of pay.

Comfortably insulated from reality, Field draws up schemas through which low-paid workers are expected to find extra cash for savings ("we will also encourage people on low incomes to save more through Individual Savings Accounts"), or for additional pension schemes to supplement the dwindling state pension ("we will introduce low cost Stakeholder Pension schemes which will give low paid workers the chance to save for a decent private second pension").

A similarly cynical approach means that the Green Paper stands as a new threat to

for millions, paid work IS a life on low income – and many pensioners are suffering as a result of spending their lives on low pay

people with disabilities, which again begins with acceptance of the Tory legacy – Incapacity Benefit, which introduced a controversial new All Work Test in an effort to reduce the numbers receiving benefits.

Field, too, seems concerned above all that too many people are "passing" the test and being ruled eligible for benefits.

The problem with the Test says the Green Paper is that "it writes off as unfit to work people who might, with some assistance, be able to return to work, perhaps in a new occupation. It is an all or nothing test ...". Despite this, there is not even a passing question raised over those unfortunate individuals who are deemed to "fail" the test and lose benefit, despite being clearly disabled and unable to work.

The Green Paper accepts the ruthless All Work Test, and also appears to accept on face value a report which suggested that two thirds of claims for Disabled Living Allowance had presented "insufficient evidence to support the benefit claim". Over 20% of awards made for life have allegedly been made to "people whose condition might have been expected to improve". (Chap 6, para 15)

Other sections of the Green Paper rehearse the feeble New Labour arguments for charging fees to university students, and for the New Deal.

Throughout the Green Paper, there is an overwhelming whiff of victim-blaming, an overtly moralistic, patronising advocacy of the "work ethic" which makes clear the government's refusal to take any radical action.

One clear example of victim-blaming comes in a section dealing with reducing teenage pregnancies. We are told that "there is good evidence to show that education is the best defence against early pregnancy": however this is not practical education on contraception, but New Labour's vague and abstract education. "Young women with a good education – and thereby something to lose – are less likely to become pregnant early."

Pensioners are implicitly reproached for not having saved enough, and for living on in excessively large numbers: "in 1953 there were 4.6 people of working age for every pensioner. Today there are 3.4 and by 2040 the ration will have dropped to just 2.4, even allowing for the equalisation of the retirement age" – (in which Labour is again endorsing the Tory plan to make women work five years longer).

In fact the "demographic time bomb" is little more than a minor squib in Britain. According to International Monetary Fund projections the "contribution gap" in social security funds for pensions in Britain is likely to be no more than 0.1% of Gross Domestic Product. There is no crisis – and no need for draconian policies to deal with it.

Field's recipe is little more than a manifesto for inequality, a commitment to long-term poverty for the low-paid.

It is significant that in its attempts to give the policy statement a gloss of historical overview, the Green Paper should list the development of insurance-based welfare services, but omit the model of the National Health Service, which was set up fifty years ago to provide comprehensive services on the basis of need, free at point of use and funded from general taxation.

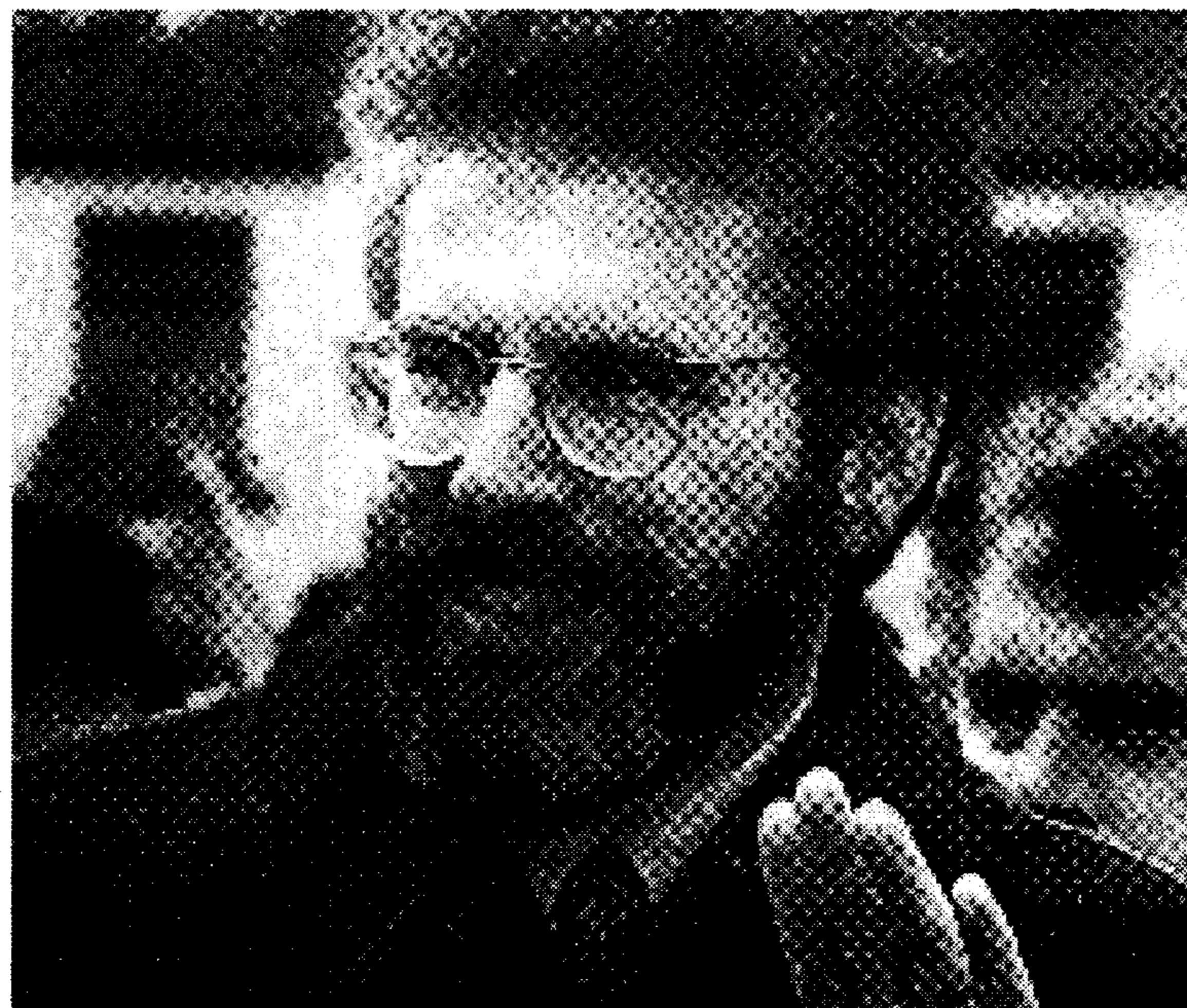
Rather than boosting privatised insurance systems, a genuinely radical policy would expand the NHS model, and look to progressive taxation as ways to ensure the future provision and improvement of welfare services.

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Behind the Ireland 'peace' deal

Socialist Democracy Statement

"A rotten deal that reinforces partition"



High point? - according to Adams

The Stormont deal is being hailed as a new beginning and a defining moment in the search for peace and healing of division. It is nothing of the sort.

The new deal entrenches sectarian division inside the Northern state and strengthens the undemocratic division of the country. It promises a perpetuation of the injustices of the past by endorsing continued British rule.

It is presented by politicians and an uncritical media as a lasting settlement but it is not a solution and cannot therefore promise a lasting peace.

A sober examination of the deal, away from the media hype and spin doctoring shows that the deal is a rotten reinforcement of British imperialist rule and a betrayal of the democratic aspirations of the majority of the Irish people. Its successful imposition would set back the unity of the Irish working class and its struggle against oppression and exploitation.

The deal calls for the amendment of the Southern constitution to include an endorsement of partition and support for the sectarian northern state. The British claim to the six counties is actually enforced, while "balance" is supposedly achieved by the British scrapping the Government of Ireland Act that is not even the fundamental legislative basis for British rule.

A new Stormont parliament is to be set up, which will institutionalise and strengthen the sectarian basis of the state. Sectarian patronage will be dispensed by a majority unionist assembly which will be called upon to share some of its sectarian privileges with the representatives of the catholic middle class. The unionist veto in the new Stormont will ensure that there will be no attempt to dismantle or challenge the sectar-



The "Peace" deal legitimates the continuation of British rule

ian fundamentals of northern society.

The demand by the 'nationalist family' for powerful, meaningful and free-standing cross-border bodies has been brushed aside with the connivance of this same nationalist family. The cross border bodies will be utterly subordinated to the assembly's unionist majority who will have a veto over any decisions. In any case, the proposed functions of these bodies can only be described as pathetic - 'animal and plant health', 'teacher qualifications and exchanges' and 'water quality and waste management', etc.

Prisoners are to be kept as political hostages, with their release dependent on the good behaviour of their movements. There is not even a recognition of their political character, and the struggle against British rule continues to be defined as a terrorist

conspiracy.

The RUC is not going to be disbanded and there is not even the promise of reform. Instead, the British once again promise 'independent commissions' to report back later. We have recently seen that such 'representative' and 'independent' commissions, such as the parades commission, are staffed by middle class Catholics who work for the RUC - and prominent loyalists. It can be confidently predicted that there will be minimal change.

The rotten deal is a blow against democracy and the unity of Irish working people. It has been cobbled together by two reactionary governments and a host of right wing parties. Despite this, it may not satisfy the most bigoted sections of a unionist movement that is not prepared to wait two years for republicans to hand in their guns and does not want to share their partitionist assembly with them anyway.

Peace can only be meaningful and secure if based on justice and an end to inequality. This rotten deal promises neither.

The destruction of the deal by unionists would not represent a step forward, but only shift the agenda of the debate further to the right and lead to further steps to appease orange reaction.

Despite all this, the leadership of the republican movement cannot bring itself to oppose the deal, despite the demand for decommissioning within two years.

In fact Gerry Adams has now claimed 1998 to be a 'high point for republicanism'.

It is quite clear that the leadership of the republican movement has no intention of breaking from its reactionary alliance with the 'nationalist family'. It continues to proclaim its goal of a united Ireland while attempting to persuade its supporters to accept a deal that strengthens partition. It has promised to pursue a 'peace' strategy that must shoulder a heavy responsibility for the new partitionist settlement.

Above all what is needed now is a clear analysis that explains the

reactionary nature and consequences of the deal, and voices a clear alternative to it. Such an alternative must break not only from the failures of the 'peace process' and the 'nationalist family', but also from the failures of physical force republicanism.

Republican critics of the deal are clearly seen as offering no political alternative and no viable strategy to achieve the ending of imperialist rule. The promise of a return to armed struggle will only lead many potential opponents of imperialism to despair and demoralisation.

What is needed is a start to the construction of a new movement based on the demand for an end to British rule and an uncompromising assertion of the right of the Irish people to self-determination.

Workers' unity

The new movement must be based on seeking the unity of the Irish working class, north and south, and on working class struggle against injustice and exploitation. We need to begin the creation of a new campaign that can go beyond earlier movements for civil rights and political status.

Division can only be overcome by unity. Peace can only be meaningful and secure if based on justice and an end to inequality. This rotten deal promises neither.

Socialist Democracy calls on all socialists to demonstrate maximum unity in the months ahead to defeat this reactionary settlement by a united campaign for a 'NO' vote in the May referendums.

The alternative to the new partitionist settlement is a working class movement that rejects the politics of imperialism and green capitalism and trusts its future to a struggle for a new vision, a United Workers' Republic.

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“We need analysis and new thinking”

Gerry Foley from the US paper *Socialist Action* interviewed **BERNADETTE DEVLIN McALISKEY** just before the Stormont agreement was signed. Below we print an extract.

SA: What do you think the possibilities are for starting up new mass protest movements?

BDM: The conditions are very adverse to building mass movements at the moment. There are still very deep illusions among the Sinn Fein rank and file... Unless the Republicans start to see things differently, it will be difficult to get anything going without them.

SA: What do you think about the proposed referendum?

BDM: The best possibility for building a mass movement at the moment is probably the question of dropping Articles 2 and 3 from the Irish constitution. Even in Fianna Fail [traditionally the more nationalist of the two main bourgeois parties] people are worried that the referendum in the South could lead to undermining the constitution. But they are more aroused by constitutionalist issues than Republican ones.

SA: What about polls that show that 51 per cent of Sinn Fein voters will accept a settlement involving the continuation of partition?

BDM: I think they mean what they say. A lot of Sinn Fein's new vote comes from people who simply did not see any reason for voting before. They had not taken an interest in day-to-day nationalist politics and still less in the war. But the prospect of a political settlement attracted them.

They voted for Sinn Fein for peace, and because it has a more dynamic and professional delivery than the SDLP, but not because of any Republican convictions. Pressure from them could lead Sinn Fein further than it wants to go. I think that the present illusions about the peace process will have to dissipate before any new movement is possible.

SA: So, what do you think can be done now?

BDM: Two things. We have to look for opportunities to mobilise people on specific issues, even limited ones. We also try to engage in political discussion, encourage people to examine the basic realities of the relationship between Ireland and England. We need analysis and new thinking.

It has been a problem in the Irish movement for some time that there has been little study of history or political discussion. **That has to be overcome.**

The deeper the understanding that people have of the basic issues, the less likely they are to be misled. That is the first step that has to be taken before we can start to move forward again.



David Coen

WHAT have they got? was the question many asked when the IRA declared its first cease fire in August 1994. Surely, they concluded, watching the “victory” parade down the Falls Road, the Republicans must have been promised something in the secret negotiations with the Major government which had been going on since the Spring of 1993.

The doubts grew when the Loyalists declared their cease-fire shortly afterwards – apparently convinced that there was no secret deal and the IRA cease-fire was unilateral.

It's now clear that although the IRA may not have lost the war they seem about to surrender the peace. It's a good bet that Sinn Fein will not oppose the Belfast agreement.

It's equally likely they will stand for and take their seats in the new Assembly at Stormont, the building which for 50 years housed the Unionist regime until it was abolished in 1972.

Their attitude to the repeal of Articles 2 and 3 of the 26 County Constitution is less clear, but once they accept the principle of partition there seems little point in opposing writing it into

the South's Constitution.

All commentators agree that Sinn Fein made most concessions and have achieved nothing which could be presented as a bridge to further progress.

The harsh fact is that all the effort, heroism and death has been for almost nothing. This is no stepping stone to unity – as Michael Collins claimed of the 1921 Treaty. Return to armed struggle is not an option: a weakened and divided IRA could hardly achieve the victory which 28 years of war could not.

After nearly 30 years of war all they have to show is some cross border committees on fishing, tourism, and spending EU grants, release of the prisoners in two years and a place in the new “powersharing cabinet” at Stormont.

The Irish language is to be officially recognised in the North – just ahead of European Union legislation which requires that anyway.

In return, northern Nationalists are to be made effectively stateless by the repeal of Articles 2 & 3 of the 26 County constitution; the Unionist

minority in Ireland will be given a constitutional veto over Irish unity; the British claim to a part of Ireland will be officially recognised – and there will be a com-

Now it's official: the future is Orange!

mission to look at policing. In other words, the bigoted, murderous RUC will remain to ensure fairness and equality in the revamped orange state. Even by the watery standards of reformism this is an insipid brew.

However loudly Sinn Fein may continue to proclaim their opposition to partition and Unionist misrule, by supporting this deal they are signaling the end of Republicanism as a serious radical force in Ireland.

Campaigning against would at least have kept their base together and perhaps forced some concessions from the British. Agreeing to the new partitionist treaty indicates not only the futility of the last 30 years, but also that they believe there is no alternative to what has rightly been described as a failed political entity.

Worst of all, by participating they will give it a veneer of democracy, having denied for years that it could be reformed.

If the special Ard-Fheis on May 10 votes to accept the

deal then there is likely to be an exodus from Sinn Fein, though many unhappy with it will no doubt remain in the party because the opposition has no real alternative.

The other parts of the “nationalist family”, Fianna Fail and the SDLP, are both in favour of the deal, and the Republican splinter groups offer nothing except discredited militarism. Only the small socialist forces calling for a no vote in both referenda are beginning to point the way forward.

As in the original Treaty of 1921, the leadership of the IRA will come under heavy pressure from the British to hand over arms and to police the new settlement in Nationalist areas, including preventing other elements such as the Continuity Army Council carrying out attacks. The British would be happy if the oppositionists were eliminated by their former colleagues, and there will undoubtedly be pressure

to hand over weapons: whatever the inadequacies of the IRA in this respect, to disarm would be to entrust the defense of nationalist areas against sectarian attacks to the very state which promotes them.

One of Sinn Fein's “gains” from the so called “Belfast Agreement” is British acceptance of the “equality agenda”, a belief that somehow the new arrangement will improve the position of the Northern Ireland nationalists. But it was the very impossibility of equal treatment within the sectarian statelet which gave rise to the present phase of the struggle in 1969.

Reform is not possible. The 6 County statelet was created with a built-in Unionist majority – a built-in Unionist veto against Irish independence. It isn't a sectarian state simply because the Unionists are bigots, though some undoubtedly were and remain so. Sectarianism was and remains the vital necessity for its survival.

If Nationalists/Catholics had equal treatment, then there was no benefit for working class Protestants, and the hold of the Unionists would be weakened.

In fact these workers might (and sometimes did) unite across the sectarian divide against their

Unionist masters. Such unity was always smashed by playing the orange card.

The other reason sectarianism is inbuilt is the fear that population changes would reverse the original Unionist majority. The Catholic population had to be kept down through housing, employment and emigration policies.

A variant of this latter argument has been used within Sinn Fein in favour of the “peace” strategy. If, the argument goes, present trends continue, the current 58/42 split within the electorate could swing to a Nationalist majority in another generation. Sectarian headcounting like this should have no place in a movement which traces its origins to the United Irishmen.

The bigoted, murderous RUC will remain to ensure fairness and equality

The harsh fact is that all the effort, heroism and death has been for almost nothing. This is no stepping stone to unity



Any Catholics in sight? Trimble prepares to step into vacant office of loyalist prime minister.

The fact is that de-politicisation and a falling back by Republicans into narrow, sectarian bunker mentality has been a feature of the whole "peace process". The goal of a democratic, socialist 32 county republic has been set aside in favour of "equality" and "parity of esteem" within a reconstructed Six County State. The aim of the Sinn Fein leadership appears to be to overtake the Social Democratic and Labour Party as the main representative of the nationalists.

Accepting partition and the internal settlement leads to a demand for "equality of the two traditions" within the new setup. To this way of thinking, Nationalism is equated with Catholicism, Protestantism with Unionism and Sinn Fein abandon their Republicanism in order to represent a narrow Catholic nationalism, a mirror image of the bigotry and sectarianism of the other side.

Sinn Fein's commitment to a Republicanism which sought to unite "Catholic, Protestant and Dissenter" may not always have been honoured, but at least it did not abandon Protestant workers to the calculated sectarianism of their Unionist bosses or tie Catholics entirely to the bigotry of the Catholic Church. Contrary to the way it's played in the British press, the "peace process" will not diminish sectarianism but entrench it.

The most important step which need to be taken by anti-partitionists is to spell out a political strategy which seeks to unite all those forces who are in favour of Irish independence and against the attempt to remake the Orange State. But these forces need to think beyond the referenda.

Because the Orange state cannot be reformed, there is every chance the new political arrangements will face continual challenge and crisis. The Israeli/Palestinian situation after Oslo is a possible analogy. The ranting of the Tory right on the likely release of prisoners is a taste of what is to come on what is the sole Republican gain from this process.

And whatever the outcome of

the referenda, north and south (and the amount of effort which the British intend to put in undermines the claims by some journalists that a "Yes" vote is assured).

The direction of developments will be determined by what happens on the ground. A key test is the Orange marches in July, but there will be others around "decommissioning" of weapons, the RUC and the release of prisoners.

The residents' committees opposed to the Orange marches are apparently willing to allow marches through their areas if only the Orangemen will ask permission. Socialists should oppose all Orange marches for the brutal sectarian Taig bashes they are.

The British have paid almost nothing for this deal. Aside from the wounded imperial pride of Norman Tebbit and some *Daily Telegraph* commentators, the reaction has been positive, indeed some have been euphoric. There remains however a significant section of the British ruling class which is itching to liquidate Republicanism and will continue to provide succor to their Unionist friends.

Most Tories and Liberal Democrats seem likely to row in behind Blair's attempt to sell the deal. So will most of the left, on the basis that "peace" will allow the operation of "normal class politics" and a chance to

heal sectarian divisions among the working class in the Six Counties.

Of course it will do no such thing. The Orange state is built on sectarianism - its whole rationale is to divide the Irish working class.

Anybody who doubts this has only to look at the RUC. It remains in being and the "independent" commission mentioned in the agreement will certainly not abolish it. The reason is that it is the armed wing of the Unionist Party and the Orange Order.

It will only be dismantled when the state itself is dismantled. The British have no intention of doing that because it is in the front-line of the struggle against militant Irish Republicanism. It defends Unionism, the foothold

of the British ruling class in Ireland and it is necessarily sectarian.

Because sectarianism (and the marginal advantages which flow from it) is the basis of the alliance between the British and Unionist ruling class and a large section of the Protestant working class, appeals to them to put aside their sectarian attitudes is moralistic whistling in the wind.

Workers unity in action on jobs or cuts in welfare a la the Socialist Workers Party is not going to get around these differences. Furthermore, if there should be any moves towards working class unity by a significant section of Loyalist workers, the British and the Unionists will pull down the "peace agreement".

The defeat of the Republicans would be a big setback in Britain because the biggest obstacle to socialism on these islands, the British State, would be greatly strengthened by such a development. Should the referenda, North and South, show a majority in favour, the British foothold in Ireland and its control over political developments there will be legitimised.

Sectarian divisions among the working class will be cast in stone and the Republican movement divided, isolated and, should they return to war, liquidated.

Possibly the biggest gain for the British ruling class, apart from inflicting a generational, if not historic defeat on Republicanism, is the political victory it gains from being able to portray itself at home and abroad not as an imperial power but as a "peacemaker" in Ireland, while maintaining political control over the whole island.

Even left MPs are going to find it hard to oppose the new settlement, ably abetted by those such as *Worker's Liberty* who view the British State as having a benign role in Ireland.

Winning this one allows Blair to make significant steps towards his goal of restructuring the British State in order to preserve it.

In the long run of course he is likely to fail and therefore provide opportunities for the left, but in the short run the left is likely to be seriously disorientated by this manoeuvre. Our understanding of these developments and strategic orientation to them are critical for the future.

The Sinn Fein Ard Fheis Between a rock and a hard place

Peter Fox

THE AGENDA of the Ard-Fheis (Annual Conference) of Sinn Fein was radically altered in the week before the event in order to make room for the debate on the so called Belfast Agreement.

There was no vote on the proposed Agreement, the decision being postponed to a special Ard Fheis on May 10. Officially this was to allow time for more discussion. Or perhaps the leadership couldn't be confident of winning if they had put it to a vote - and therefore put it off?

The Saturday session began with speeches from several international delegates, who all intervened directly in the debate, heavily advocating support for the deal.

Speakers from the ANC, the Zimbabwean Government, the US House of Representatives, and East Timor gave the deal international prestige and a feeling of huge world support. It can only be a matter for speculation if they were requested to do this by the conference organisers, or if they took this course of action off their own bat.

Either way, the effect was to create a very strong pro-Agreement background, strengthened by the heavy applause people gave to contributions from international guests.

Next came Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness in tandem. Neither of them directly endorsed the deal, but

the hints of approval were obvious. The speeches took up a lot of time, and were padded out with a lot of small detail.

This is especially true of the Martin McGuinness speech which consisted of little more than a list of all the meetings which filled up his diary during the last days of the dealing.

This cut down the time for delegates to debate. Perhaps that was the intention - the leadership certainly knew in advance that opposition to the deal was substantial and widespread.

A poll of delegates published by the *Sunday Tribune* on April 19 disclosed figures of 40 per cent in favour of the deal, 28 per cent against, and the rest don't know. In a real vote, with the abstainers excluded, the figures became 61 per

cent to 39 per cent, too low to alter the constitutional ban on taking seats in the Stormont Assembly which will be elected on June 22.

The "No" figure would have been a bit higher if supporters of the Bernadette Sands-led 32 County Sovereignty Committee had not been expelled before the Ard Fheis.

Nine members of the Balbriggan branch in North Dublin were expelled recently, and Councillor Francie Mackey of the Omagh branch was excluded a few days before the Ard Fheis started.

Delegates contributions were mixed, some even arguing that the Agreement was a stage in British disengagement. One Belfast delegate said there would be a nationalist majority by 2015 and "consent would be turned on its head". Many emphasised party unity.

Some said Articles 2 & 3 and the 1937 constitution of the South "were not worth tuppence" and did nothing to protect the position of nationalists.

There was some evidence of a division of opinion between northern and southern delegates, fuelled by an article in *Andersonstown News* suggesting that Northerners were more likely to vote for the agreement because they had to live under much more oppressive conditions.

There were some criticisms of journalists from the *Irish Times* and the *Sunday Tribune* for what were seen as

critical reports on how much Sinn Fein gained from the talks.

The leadership are likely to call for a "yes" vote in the North and probably will call for

the same in the South. They are likely to move an amendment (for which they need a two thirds majority) to the party constitution allowing them to take seat in the proposed Northern Assembly.

Sinn Fein opponents of this strategy, who think the agreement actually strengthens partition rather than being a step towards Irish unity, are hamstrung by not having a coherent alternative, and some delegates seem likely to go along with the deal reluctantly for pragmatic reasons.

The special Ard-Fheis on May 10 will clearly be a critical one, not just for Sinn Fein but for the Republican movement as a whole.

There is every chance the new political arrangements will face continual challenge and crisis.

A poll of delegates showed 40 per cent in favour of the deal, 28 per cent against, and the rest don't know.

Dail nods through plan to legitimise partition

Not one single vote was cast against the new Agreement when it was debated and approved in the Dail, the Irish parliament. Partition is to be legitimised. A statelet whose only justification is a sectarian one is to be held up as a model of democracy in the new Ireland.

This represents the formal abandonment of the core argument of Irish nationalism by all the leaders of the 'nationalist family'. If the unionist minority in the six counties is to be allowed to deny self-determination to the majority of the Irish people now, why should this not also have been the case in 1918?

The leaders of nationalist Ireland have betrayed the democratic aspirations of the majority of the Irish people. This betrayal has been covered with a mountain of propaganda by almost every party attempting to disguise or justify their actions.

Almost every single media outlet, from television to newspapers has supported the deal. Despite this politicians are

amazed at the large minority who in opinion polls are indicating they will vote against the proposed changes

Just like the original partition, today's 'settlement' is being sold on the basis that the only alternative is war. When partition was imposed, the British threatened the representatives of nationalist Ireland with immediate and terrible war if they did not accept British terms. Today we are told that there is no alternative to the deal except violence. The population of Ireland north and south is being blackmailed.

But no one has paused to examine this argument. Who exactly is threatening the violence? It is usually claimed that the 'extremists' on both sides, the Continuity IRA or the Loyalist Volunteer Force are the only remaining threats to peace. But these organisations

have made it clear there will be no end to their armed activity even if the deal comes into operation.

The real threat to peace does not come from outside the process. It comes from within - from the so-called peacemakers. It is they who threaten a return to war.

It is they who have no alternative to the deal.

Bertie Ahern's argues that the two referenda, north and south represent 'the first exercise of self-determination in Ireland since 1918'. In other words the Irish people will exercise self-determination - in order to deny themselves that right!

It is fitting that on the same day as the vote on articles two and three, there is also a vote on the Amsterdam Treaty agreed by the European Union governments as the next step in the consolidation of a European capitalism.

The Irish capitalist close the door on their historic task of creating a nation state, and open another door in the subordination of the country and its resources to the exploitation of international imperialism. This is what they mean when they talk of being post-nationalist. I

The crippling weakness of those opposed to the deal is a lack of leadership and the bankrupt strategy of the republican opposition to the deal. All the traditional leaderships of the Irish working class are hooked on the crumbs that fall from the table of international capitalism

They feel vindicated by the success of a southern economy that has recorded huge growth rates over the past number of years. The last thing these people - or the Irish capitalist class - want is to upset the present political set-up by challenging

Through Irish Eyes

A column from Socialist Democracy, Irish section of the Fourth International

imperialism

This ignores the continuing chronic poverty and inequality that characterise Irish society. Unemployment is still nowhere near what it was at the start of the decade despite the economic growth and even the optimistic acknowledge that this level of growth cannot continue.

The political and economic programmes of the Irish capitalist class are combined. Despite the hype around both they do not offer the Irish working class a peaceful, democratic or prosperous future.

If ever it had to be said that the only alternative to present society is a socialist one, it is now.

The Irish people will exercise self-determination - in order to deny themselves that right!

Not yet back to the future for unionism

Paul Flannigan

FOR THOSE with seasoned memories the Stormont Agreement has some of the look and feel of the 1974 Sunningdale agreement about it.

Then an incoming Labour government inherited an incomplete political settlement from the Tories. They faced a similar problem to the present one - selling the deal to the unionists.

The main Unionist party was led by Brian Faulkner. Shortly after he had agreed to the Sunningdale package, Faulkner's Official Unionist Party split. Today six out of Trimble's ten elected MPs have already positioned themselves closer to the 'No' camp than the 'Yes' camp.

Towards the end of 1973 Faulkner, supported by the SDLP and the Alliance, formed an Executive to take control of some of the main departments of government.

Within six months the bulk of Faulkner's party had deserted him, forming an alliance with Paisley and Craig to smash the Executive and the agreement. After a ten-day loyalist strike in May 1974 Faulkner and his dwindling band of supporters resigned. All talk of a lasting political settlement was finished with - until now that is.

Commenting on the new mood of triumph sweeping over the

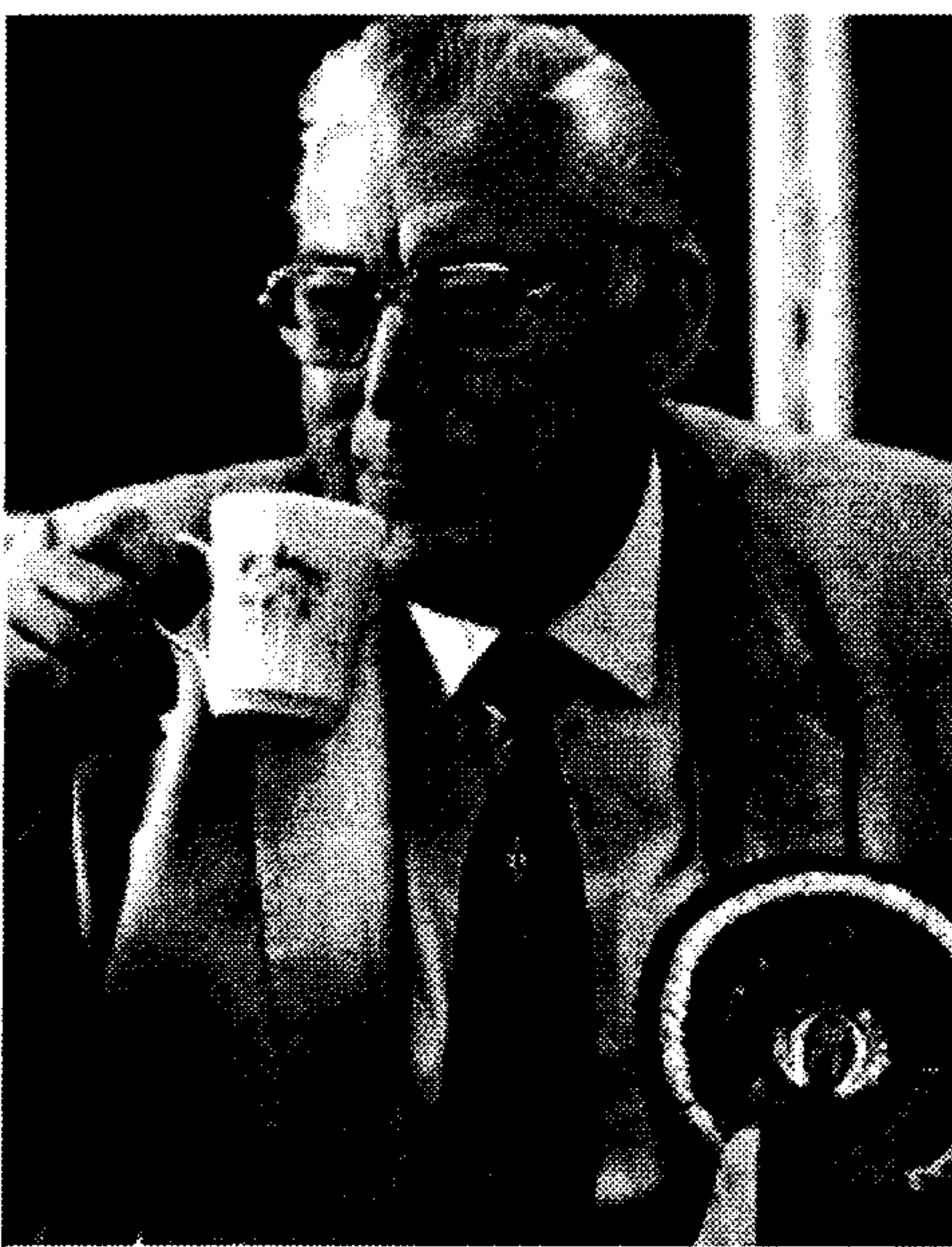
nationalist SDLP, one journalist wryly observed "It's because they're all so old, this is back to the Future for them, a chance to recapture a lost youth. It's as if there has been one big hiatus between 1974 and now until they could get back in."

The leaders of the SDLP, Hume and Mallon believe this time it is going to be different. Back in 74, the IRA were against the deal. They stepped up their bombing campaign to try and destroy it. The IRA onslaught greatly aided the Unionist hard right opposition, organised under the umbrella of the United Ulster Unionist Council.

But today's process has been memorably described by Mallon as a 'Sunningdale for slow learners.' The SDLP belief is that this time the deal will stand because the republicans now realise that they have wasted the best part of twenty four years chasing the unattainable - the mythical Irish republic.

With the IRA now in on the deal, Paisley and the sectarian loyal orders now lining up in the 'No' camp will have little to frighten the ordinary unionists with. Trimble will not be as vulnerable as Faulkner once was to the unionist wreckers, and the settlement will proceed.

The SDLP is confident that this time the deal is going to stick. The nationalists, led by them-



Not his cup of tea: Paisley left adrift

selves, Fianna Fail and Sinn Fein are going to deliver an overwhelming 'yes' vote, and a majority of unionists are going to follow the leadership of Trimble. Paisley and the rest will be lucky to muster twenty per cent of the vote.

Hume's analysis of the Irish problem and the way towards a solution will be vindicated. Award that man a Nobel prize.

The SDLP's optimistic scenario seems plausible. Trimble has a lot of things going for him that Faulkner lacked - including the deal itself.

Ed Maloney, the chief political

journalist of the *Sunday Tribune* newspaper has christened the next deal "Sunningdale minus", referring to the fact that Trimble has been handed a more solid pro-unionist deal than Faulkner was granted. The cross-border Council of Ireland is much less threatening to the unionists than the 1974 one was.

The unionist-inspired 'consent rule' is everywhere. It is mentioned about seven times on the first page of the Agreement. The Irish constitution is even to be changed to include the unionist consent rule.

Trimble is in a stronger position this time around for other reasons. He has the support of most of the loyalist military-political organisations. They played a key role in ensuring a victory for Paisley the last time out.

He can point to the fact that the 'No' camp have no alternative political settlement to offer. But best of all he can justly point out how little Sinn Fein gained from what was supposed to be their

peace process.

So the likelihood is that the SDLP are right and the referendum will be passed.

The watchword for us must be 'don't panic'. A big 'yes' vote for this deal would be a setback, but would not signal the end of the affair. The weakness of this deal is that its success depends on pretence and false hopes.

It is based on the idea that Trimble has somehow transformed himself and his party into something called moderate unionists i.e. people who sincerely wish to share power with

nationalists.

This is utter nonsense. Trimble went all the way with Paisley and Craig in 1974, and he hasn't changed. He has just become more astute. He came to prominence as the hero of Drumcree.

His difference with Paisley is over tactics. He recognises that if unionism it is to succeed it needs to take account of the needs and interests of both the British government and the frustrated local business class. Paisley wrongly believes that the unionists can just do their own sectarian thing and ignore the rest of the world.

Trimble has adapted his tactics to meet some of the concerns of Blair and others: but he has no intention of conceding anything of worth to the working class nationalists represented by Sinn Fein and only as little as possible to the SDLP.

Finally we have the false hope. Sinn Fein encouraged such a charge of expectation on the way to the making of this agreement that they were in no position to turn their backs on it at the last moment. But the political reality of the deal is that it is a near disaster for genuine republicans.

Behind the smiles of Sinn Fein lies fear - the fear that there is so little in this deal to satisfy the high hopes of their 'constituency of struggle'. For now what is saving the deal in the eyes of most working class republicans is the prospect of escaping from the horrors of the 'long war' and the expectation of prisoner releases.

But once Trimble takes to parading himself as the new Orange Prime Minister, the mood will begin to change, and questions will begin to be asked of Sinn Fein. For now the SDLP can have their moment of triumph.

South Africa's aborted revolution

Charlie van Gelderen

"YOUR HOPES and dreams are about to be realised" said Nelson Mandela on his release in 1990.

Four years later, South Africa's teeming millions queued outside the polling stations to vote for the first time in their lives. They believed that their dreams were really coming to be realised; that the long nightmare of apartheid was at last coming to an end.

What were they voting for when they gave the ANC/SACP alliance such an overwhelming majority?

First of all they were voting for The Freedom Charter, the document on which the alliance based their appeal to the newly enfranchised electorate. What is the situation eight years after that historic election?

The Freedom Charter promised that "The People shall share in the country's wealth". Today, 5 per cent of the population control 88 per cent of the nation's wealth and, as in the years of apartheid, the overwhelming majority of that 5 per cent are white; the overwhelming majority of the 95 percent are black.

The legal trappings of apartheid may have been shed with the coming to power of a Black government but this has done nothing to lessen the huge economic gulf which divided Black from white.

The ANC government has simply taken over the role of guaranteeing the continuation of the giant monopolies. It has given South African capitalism a new lease of life. The emergence of a small Black capitalist class does not threaten the domination of these oligarchies.

On the contrary, it acts as an additional buffer between capital and labour. Cyril Ramaphosa, former leader of the Miners and Secretary General of the ANC, today sits on the board of the giant Anglo-American Corpora-



Protesters complain that the "Truth Commission" has not delivered: ex-President Botha will not attend.

tion.

The Freedom Charter promised that "the Land shall be shared among those who work it". This must raise a hollow chortle from the landless millions. Wealthy white farmers continue to control more than 80 per cent of the land. Their existing property rights are guaranteed by the new constitution.

On April 15, a white farmer shot and killed a baby being carried across 'his' land, by her eleven year old cousin who was also wounded. He was not going to have Blacks trespassing on his farm.

"All shall enjoy human rights" declares the Charter. Tell that to the people living in the rural districts of the Eastern Cape where the women have to walk half a mile to draw water from a well where cattle drink and defecate — where there is no sanitation, electricity or other facilities which put quality into life.

There is no work, despite the Charter's promise of "Work and Security".

"There shall be houses, security and comfort for all". Under

apartheid, the former General Secretary of the South African Communist Party, estimated that half the Black population lacked a secure roof over their heads. As the Minister for Housing in the ANC-dominated government, he was going to change this.

There has been no such change. Millions still live in the same squatter camps as they did under apartheid. The police, often under white command, still bulldoze "illegal" settlements.

Why is this the situation? Why has there

been no fundamental change in the condition of the people? The answer is really simple. The ANC with the compliance of its SACP allies has reneged on its promises.

In 1990, Nelson Mandela said that the ANC in power would take over the great monopolies, including the mines and the financial institutions. "That is the fundamental policy of the ANC" he said. "It is inconceivable that we will ever change this policy".

That was before the elections, that was Mandela the world-famous prisoner of the apartheid regime.

President Mandela spoke a different language. "We will reintroduce the market to South Africa", he told a New York audience. These words were balm to the ears of international and South African capital. Capitalism was safe in his hands.

So we have the answer to the question we asked earlier - the perpetuation of capitalism is the root cause of the ills which still persist in post-apartheid South Africa.



There can't much on offer to Palestinians if Netanyahu wants to talk!

Israelis eager to copy sectarian "peace" in Ireland

WHEN ROBIN Cook visited the Middle East last month, Israeli settlers picketed him, jeering "Go back and solve the Irish problem!"

During Tony Blair's visit last week, Israel's leaders were falling over each other in the stampede to encourage him to repeat his Ireland agreement in the Middle East.

It seems that the Israeli right understands more clearly than many British liberals that this agreement is a major victory for imperialism, and a setback to the liberation struggle.

There are many differences between the conflicts in Ireland and Palestine; but there are also many important similarities — notably the rôle of British imperialism in fostering the conflicts and engineering the partitions. In both conflicts, the proposed 'agreements' do not merely confirm partition — they legitimise the sectarian division of the working class.

Many of the issues are paralleled in both conflicts. For example, the Unionists demand the revision of articles in the Irish constitution calling for a united Ireland, while Israel demands the repeal of articles in the Palestine National Charter calling for a united Palestine.

But the most important similarity is one which none of

the major protagonists will admit — the mistakes and defeat of the respective national movements.

Both the IRA and the PLO have engaged in a guerrilla military struggle, leading to diplomatic negotiations. Even the phrases used to describe this process have been similar — Yasser Arafat's "Gun and Olive Branch", Danny Morrison's "Armalite and Ballot Box".

These are both secret, elite modes of operation; neither organisation has really attempted to build a mass political movement, augmented if necessary by popular defence committees, in order to challenge imperialism and overcome sectarianism and partition.

one serious attempt at such a revolutionary struggle — the Palestinian Intifada — developed apart from, and even partly in opposition to, the PLO. The Palestinian and Israeli bourgeoisies had a common interest in suppressing this threat, and entered the discussions leading to the famous handshake between Rabin and Arafat in Washington.

Only such a mass political movement will be able to defeat imperialism, as the latest developments in Ireland and Palestine make clear.

Imperialism's junior partner

SALIM VALLY, a leader of the Worker's Organisation of South Africa (WOSA) spoke to the National Educational Convention of Socialist Action in the United States in August 1997. Here we print part of his speech.

RECENT world events have shown again that the ANC is nothing less than the loyal servant of imperialism and monopoly capitalism. The arms industry for example has enjoyed special protection from the government. Weapons continue to be the second largest manufacturing export.

We saw an obscene spectacle when Nelson Mandela went to Indonesia and promised the dictator, Suharto, arms for external purposes. Suharto's regime of course has been responsible for genocide.

A third of the East Timorese population has been killed by the same regime. And in the 1960s

that regime was responsible for the death of some half-million left wing activists.

The last few years have seen South Africa's mining bosses increase their investments overseas not only in sub-Saharan Africa where their exports have been rising at the rate of 50 per cent a year since 1991 but also in Ghana, Mali, the Indian Ocean islands off Africa, Chile, Australia and many other countries.

A subsidiary of Anglo-American has even been buying breweries in the Czech Republic and Poland.

South Africa's ability to act as a broker in the talks aimed at settling the civil war in the former

Zaire symbolised the country's new role in the imperialist pecking order. This was an attempt to block the ability of the masses in Zaire to take power from the tyrannical Mobutu regime.

In South Africa at the time, the government openly acknowledged the fact that these manoeuvres were calculated to protect South Africa's vested interests in Zaire.

South African mining companies for example have an interest in Shaba Province where there are large copper deposits. In addition South African agribusiness has plans to export its know-how northwards.



Dodgy friends: Mandela

Ecological damage worsens in China

Zhang Kai

The destruction and pollution of China's ecological environment has long been an acute problem.

Although the State Council published a 20,000-word document on June 5 1996, entitled Environmental Protection in China, expounding on the Chinese government's policy of environmental protection and actual practices in this area, the fact remains that the ecological degradation in China continues.

On 18 July 1996, the *People's Daily* editorial congratulated the closing of the Fourth National Environmental Convention and said: "Our country's environmental situation is still considerably severe. Environmental pollution emitting from urban centres is still expanding, and spreading over to the countryside.

"The scope of ecological destruction is also expanding, becoming a constraining factor affecting the overall economic and social development. If more effective measures are not taken, our nation's survival and development will be directly affected."

The recent World Bank environmental report pointed out that China's urban pollution tops the world. Of the 20 most air polluted cities in the world, 10 are in China.

Although laws have been promulgated by the National People's Congress, most cadres pay only lip service to their implementation. The driving force behind the Reform is pursuit of immediate returns of profits, at the expense of other concerns.



A *People's Daily* reporter made the following depiction: "In the past and the present, stupid deeds over environmental pollution and ecological destruction have occurred because some cadres, in particular cadres in leadership positions, are only concerned with developing the economy at the expense of the environment. The result is that more losses are incurred and grave consequences are irreversible."²

River and lake pollution is one example. Statistical data made available during the Fourth National Environmental Convention showed that pollution of China's seven river systems is grave.

The percentages of undrinkable water of category 4 and 5 in the river basins are respectively 67 per cent for Songhua River and Liao River, 60 per cent for Yellow River, 51 per cent for Huai River, 41 per cent for Hai River, 24 per cent for Yangtze River, and 22 per cent for Pearl River.³

These figures may not convey

the severity of the problem. A writer named Chen Guidi toured 48 cities along the Huai River for 108 days, then wrote a report entitled *Warning of the Huai River*. He said that "of the 191 larger tributaries of the Huai River, 80 per cent of the water had turned black and stinky; two-thirds of the river had totally lost any use value."

The Water Works Bureau had organised a survey team of almost 10,000 persons on a 3-year survey, and concluded that the pollution of China's water resources was very serious, with no appropriate control of sewage. Management lagged far behind pollution.

The source of water pollution comes mostly from the factory

1997, 50,000 factories had been closed down.

Another serious ecological problem is the abusive logging destroying forests and causing soil erosion and silting of rivers, which have in turn contributed to more floods and droughts.

almost 300 million people in 1996 were affected by floods and droughts. 18 provinces were hit by droughts and 24 provinces by floods

A researcher from the Chinese Academy of Sciences, Chen Zhongde,

pointed out at a Political Consultation Committee Meeting that there are three major water problems in China. The first one is the lack of water in vast areas, especially in North and

North-west China. Over half the cities in the whole country lack water. Industrial output value losses due to lack of water amounts to over RMB 100 billion every year.

The second one is the flooding which is increasing in frequency. Four major floods had occurred between 1991 and 1996, each time incurring more damage than the previous time. Direct economic loss in 1996 was RMB 200 billion, an increase of almost two times compared to 1991.

The third problem is the pollution of water.

Deputy Minister of the Civil Affairs Ministry, Fan Baojun, said that almost 300 million people in 1996 were affected by floods and droughts. 18 provinces were affected by droughts and 24 provinces affected by floods. In addition are typhoons and earthquakes. The state had allocated disaster funds of RMB 3.75 billion, while domestic and overseas donations amounted to RMB 4.38 billion.

On New Year's Day this year, a new journal *China Green Times* began publication. 135 Fellows from the Chinese Academy of Sciences and Chinese Academy of Engineering issued a joint appeal to save the Yellow River whose flow has cut off almost every year since 1972.

From this appeal one can get a glimpse of the severity of the environmental problem in China today.



March against child labour

THOUSANDS of children joined a march through Lahore in Pakistan on April 14 as part of a global campaign against child labour.

Reports suggest that as many as three million children under 14 may be working for sweatshop employers in Pakistan alone.

The campaign began in the Philippines, and will move on towards Geneva, passing through Iran and Turkey.

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Watch out: you're being EMUed!

Alan Thornett

EVERYONE is being EMUed. That is the message from the excellent pamphlet *EMU and the NHS* just published by Peoples Europe and written by John Lister and Geoff Martin of London Health Emergency.

The pamphlet, a model of the kind of analysis needed in each sector of the welfare state faced with cutbacks and cash limits, demonstrates in closely argued detail how everything in the NHS – from the length of waiting lists to the pay of NHS staff – is connected to the determination of new Labour to prepare the British economy for entry into the single currency as soon as it is politically possible.

The pamphlet is particularly strong in its analysis of the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) and how this is connected to the single currency, its convergence criteria and its so-called 'stability pact'. PFI is both a way of keeping public spending down and at the same time undermining the public status of the health service.

This popularly-written pamphlet (illustrated with very good cartoons) is the best material produced yet, for wide use within the unions, which explains the implications of the single currency and its effects on the welfare state.

It is about time unions like UNISON – with a large membership in the NHS and a conference policy against the single currency – took this kind of initiative and made their policies a reality.

A similar analysis could be usefully made of the threat posed by the Maastricht criteria and a European Central Bank to other crucial areas of public services and welfare provision, such as education, social services, and benefits.

● UNISON's national leadership is frantically back-tracking on the union's conference policy of opposition to the Maastricht criteria.

A UNISON-organised seminar of European trade unions heard Deputy General Secretary Dave Prentis say that UNISON had "grave reservations" about EMU, which "may be deflationary, cause slow growth, high unemployment and worse public services."

But rather than oppose entry, Prentis favours surrender: "EMU is here to stay and therefore we cannot ignore it even if we disagree."

● *EMU and the NHS is available from LHE, Unit 6, Ivey Court, 325 Latimer Rd, London W10 6RA*



Dock wars erupt across Australia

Simon Deville

AUSTRALIAN trade unionists are engaged in a massive confrontation with the Government, port employers and the National Federation of Farmers.

Earlier this month Patrick, the largest employer in the Australian docks sacked its entire union workforce of 1,400 and attempted to replace them with scab labour.

Despite a court injunction ruling picketing of the docks illegal, the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) have responded by blockading the ports.

Patrick attempted to train a scab workforce in Dubai last year, but their plans where scuppered when the MUA threatened to boycott any shipments to and from Dubai.

Chris Corrigan, the company chairman, claimed that Patrick faced losses of £56 million because of the unions' refusal to accept change: "The continued industrial thuggery and the economic realities have made today's events inevitable." What



he didn't mention was that Patrick had syphoned off £68.1 million from the ports last September.

Peter Reith, the Industrial Relations minister has said that the government supports the company's 'right to introduce reform' and has called on unions not to 'over-react' and to examine the company's 'generous' redundancy package.

The dispute is now widely seen

insisted they try to break the picket lines.

In the most important port in Melbourne, hundreds of police moved to break the picket line on the morning of 17 April. 1,500 building workers immediately downed tools and marched to the port on hearing this, effectively surrounding the police – who promptly retreated. The ruling class in Australia is

being thrown into dissaray by the dispute. Government ministers have turned up on the picket line to show their support for the wharfies.

The federal court granted an injunction against the sacking of the wharfies which, as we go to press has been given a stay of execution as Patrick appeals to the high court.

The Australian government has legal teams on standby in Britain and Australia in an attempt to block international solidarity action in support of the dockers. Already protesters in San Francisco have protested to the consular officials and organised a blockade of the Australian Consulate, and Japanese waterfront unions have expressed their support.

Australian Confederation of Trade Unions ACTU officials have warned of a titanic struggle if the sackings go ahead and the Australian Workers Union has threatened a national oil-industry strike in their support.

It is clear that the outcome of the dispute will have an enormous impact on the future of organised labour throughout Australia and internationally. Support and solidarity must be organised throughout the labour movement in defence of the wharfies heroic struggle.

■ The Maritime Union of Australia can be contacted at 46 Ireland Street, West Melbourne, Victoria 3003, Australia Fax: 9328 1682.

General Strikes fight back against austerity in Denmark and Greece

DANISH trade unions have launched their first all-out indefinite general strike since 1985. From midnight April 26 over half a million workers in the private sector walked out. The strike follows the rejection of the employers' final offer in the two-yearly contract negotiations in a secret ballot of the membership.

Wide sectors of industry and services are closed down, including Copenhagen airport and docks, rail and road transport and manufacturing industry. Within hours supermarket shelves were being emptied as shoppers panicked and stocked up against inevitable shortages.

The deal offered by the employers is a 4.5% wage rise this year and 4% next year. The most contentious issue however is holidays. The employers offered only one extra day, against a union



demand for the extension of annual holidays from five weeks to six.

Union leaders who initially urged acceptance of the offer are now backing the strike, at least at the moment. They are in a difficult position with May Day coming up, and don't want to go on Mayday platforms having ended it with a shabby deal.

Likewise the Social Democratic government has no plans to intervene before the

Mayday holiday – and may be reluctant after that. They are concerned about winning the referendum on the "son of Maastricht" Amsterdam treaty on May 28th – and alienating either the trade union leaders or the trade union members is not the best way to do it.

The Danish strike follows the recent one day general strike in Greece. The strike and the militant demonstrations which went with it were the biggest such actions in Greece for many years, and were triggered by plans to cut costs at the state owned Olympic Airways. This included a freeze in wages and a lengthening of working hours.

This attack was seen as the opening shots of a new round of austerity and privatisation in the public sector as the Greek government struggles to meet the Maastricht criteria for the single currency. Greece is the EU's poorest member, and failed to qualify for membership of the single currency in the first round. In the government's view, unless drastic measures are taken now Greece will fail again for membership in 2001.

Economy Minister Yannis Papantoniou has said that public spending would be cut by, among other measures, "using private sector finance to complete several infrastructure projects". Cuts in health and welfare budgets are also planned, as the government aims to hack back spending by the equivalent of one percent of GDP.

The meaning of May 1968

“Suddenly we had a real, live, general strike. It is very good for you!”

THIRTY years ago, a wave of struggles erupted in France which shook the European ruling classes and opened up new possibilities for the left. How do marxists view their importance? What are the lessons of the May-June events of 1968? Should they be looked back upon as grand moments of past history, or seen as reminders of unfinished political business that still confronts us today? **JOHN LISTER** interviewed **DANIEL BENSAID**, then a prominent leader of the student movement at Nanterre university and now a leading member of the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire, French section of the Fourth International.

Could you speak a little on the background to the events of 1968? Everybody saw at once that the students were fighting back against attacks on their rights; but what were the issues that mobilised the working class?

Much of the debate and reinterpretation of these events in France, especially among those who have broken with revolutionary politics, tends to insist on the cultural, ideological aspects of 1968. But what gave the 1968 events real weight, at least in France, was the combination of the student mobilisation – which also happened in countries like Japan and the United States – with the general strike. It seems to me too much forgotten now; but it was a real general strike of between eight and ten million workers which lasted three weeks.

What did it mean? Maybe we tended to overestimate the political content of the strike. Obviously it opened up the possibility of a political crisis. But at the same time we have to say what the limits of that general strike were. Some democratic demands were raised against the strong state of [French president] De Gaulle, a rigid archaic state with very concentrated power; and there were a series of economic, material demands to raise the standard of living; but the fact is that even given the big wave of the movement, the enormous general strike, the politicisation remained small.

There was no big crisis in the reformist parties. For example, the communist party (CP), in spite of its line, obtained good results in the 1969 elections, and it was relatively well able to channel most of the radicalisation. There was no big crisis in the unions either: they grew a lot, especially in the middle-sized and smaller factories. There were no big breaks like we had in France in 1945-47 after the war. There was a break, but of a very limited layer of youth and workers which gave room for a new far left; this is significant because it still exists, but it was a very small break.

The possibilities for action changed, but not the relationship of forces. That, I think, is to do with the limits, the dynamics of the general strike itself. There was also a difference with Italy in terms of self-organisation. There were factory

occupations, yes, but very few elected strike committees or mass meetings. The union officials maintained control and organisation throughout the strike.

Sometimes the commentaries tend to identify the birth of social movements such as the women's movement with 1968. In reality in France this came as a result, if you like, of the '68 events, but two or even three years later. The distinctive demands of the women's movement did not appear in 1968.

I think it was a transitional general strike, which remained under the control of the reformist leaderships, and which, in the framework of the functioning welfare state of the time, served to win more space and social gains, winning back some things that had been lost under the De Gaulle government.

There had been some social security measures designed to increase the weight of the state and the employers against the trade unions, but this was one point which was not won in the so-called agreement. In fact there was no real agreement. There were negotiations but, since the results were rejected in some Renault plants, they remained only as a basis for decentralised agreements. There was no global agreement as there had been in 1936. The main points conceded were on wages, and on trade union rights, but there was no agreement on social security.

The 1968 stoppage was never actually called as a general strike, was it?

No, that's the other point. It was a general strike, but a de facto general strike. Nobody had raised the slogan of a general strike. This is very important, and not a small point. The argument from the union bureaucracies, especially the (communist party-led) CGT, was that 'we don't need to call for a general strike because it already exists': so to call for it would be 'artificial', 'useless' and so on.

But it could have changed the meaning of the strike, because if they had called for a general strike, they would have been obliged to decide on what general platform they would call it, and the decision to call it off would have had to be a general decision too, with consultations. Secondly, if it had been declared

a general strike it would have raised another question on the political preconditions to negotiate: whether they would negotiate with that government, or ask for De Gaulle to be removed before talks began.

Despite the limitations of the strike and dynamics of the movement, there were possibilities to open up a political crisis. We don't say now, twenty years later, it would have been an immediate revolution; but it was possible to open up a political crisis in the context of the 1960s.

Obviously many things have changed, and nobody knows exactly what might have been possible, but 1968 changed the situation in France and in Europe in the early 1970s. We are not discussing whether there could have been a revolution, but the fact that the strength of the movement, in spite of its limitations, promised much more than was achieved.

Obviously the communist party line was central to this outcome?

Absolutely. If we re-read today the literature of the big parties of 1968, mainly the communist party, we see how they were obsessed with the idea of provocation and plots.

They were trying to find an answer to the changes in French society, in which, for the first time, the working class was in the majority. So they had developed the idea of a new coalition of social forces,

expressed at the electoral level by the 'union of the left' (yet the gaullists kept winning more and more elections). At the same time they thought the socialist party (SP) had been pushed to the side by its capitulations on the Algerian War. In a real sense the SP was very reduced in influence in 1968, so the CP thought there could be an opening for them, like the Italian CP, to become the major party of the left and to grow step by step through elections. All this was being disturbed by the 1968 events.

They were also concerned to control the mass movement. They tried to negotiate a broadening of union rights which would strengthen the CP by achieving certain gains and by strengthening its control at the level of union bureaucracy because it legalised a lot of rights in the factories: delegates, hours, pay, a lot of things which the unions had wanted. In the end this was the main result of the strike.

Though it did not want to challenge the government, the CP did change its line during the strike, didn't it, raising the demand of a 'popular government'?

Yes, but that was a very short period at the end of the last week of May. It was between 22 May and 29 May — one week of open political crisis because the agreements were rejected and there was no possibility of stopping the strike just through that kind of agreement.

The specificities of the gaullist regime left no channels to reach a consensus or negotiate: it was very centralised, and the strength of the regime was its weakness when it was challenged. So there was an opening of a political crisis because De Gaulle announced on 24 May that they could not find a way out, and called for a referendum. Everybody, even reformists like Mendes-France and Mitterrand, rejected the referendum. That could mean an open political crisis. There were two answers. The SP was ready to have a 'left government with personalities'; even Mitterrand was ready to propose a new government based not on parties but on personalities, without exclusions and with negotiations — which we termed "inclusive bonapartism".

The CP was afraid of being marginalised and out-manoeuvred, so it raised the question very abstractly of a popular government, not giving this any clear content. But this was only used to occupy the space for four days. Mitterrand said afterwards in his balance sheet of 1968 that this was all a manoeuvre, to say 'we are ready to take our responsibilities' so De Gaulle would withdraw the referendum, then dissolve the assembly and hold elections.

At that time, our position was quite tricky. To raise a governmental slogan in the radical movement was very unpopular because of widespread hostility to the SP and even the CP. However, we had a general answer which was 'yes to a popular government: but no to Mitterrand and Mendes-France!' At that time, Mitterrand was a bourgeois personality, he was not personally a member of the SP. He was in a small bourgeois radical group: only later did he join the SP.

All this lasted just a few days when De Gaulle disappeared to see the army in Germany and then came back. There was a kind of panic at that time, but it was a very short time.

Do you think now, looking back, that a more concrete governmental slogan would have been better — something like 'CP take the power'?

The CP alone could not have taken power. The kind of answer we raised was not very concrete but was not so bad, and was proven in the struggle. There was a big CP-CGT demonstration



There was a deep movement of the working class that shook the bourgeoisie: but there was no "subjective factor", no revolutionary leadership rooted in the working class.

on 13 May or thereabouts. They felt threatened from the right, and threatened on the left because the day before we had organised a rally which was a mixture between the new social democratic left and the new far left and the CP was frightened by this mixture.

They organised their own demonstration - a very big one - and we were the only current from the left to participate, and we were very small. We came with our slogan 'popular government, yes; but no Mitterrand and Mendes-France!', and it was taken up by people from the CP because it expressed the political issue and a solution and at the same time showed a mistrust of the manoeuvres of Mitterrand and Mendes-France.

The other difficulty with the general strike not having been called was that to call for it would also have raised the question of who should negotiate: who should be the leadership of the general strike - the normal union bodies, or the left? In this context we have to be conscious of the fact that we as a current had only maybe 400 members, and in the factories we had very little - a few individuals.

Could you say something about the origins of the JCR?

We were expelled from the CP's youth organisation in 1965 for two reasons. One was the kind of support we gave to Vietnam; we fought for support and active solidarity with the National Liberation Front (NLF), against the slogan of 'peace' which was the official CP line. The other was that we opposed the CP decision to back Mitterrand as the sole candidate in the first round of the 1965 presidential election.

We were expelled in 1965 and formed the Jeunesses Communistes Révolutionnaires (JCR) in April 1966 with 3-400 members, 90 per cent of whom were students. Our main activity was Vietnam solidarity and opposition to university reforms, which started at that time.

We participated in the student movement. When the general strike started, it was obvious we had no real weight to compete: the only thing we could do was to try to organise and centralise in some way the more radical, dynamic part of the movement, through the action committees which appeared. This was not real self-organisation, since the action committees were more like gatherings of radical people. We tried to centralise these gatherings to gain a little strength to push proposals into the movement.

You referred to the student agitation on Vietnam, and it is obvious that international events had a big impact on the French events of 1968. Weren't there also important developments in Germany with the student movement?

In France there is a tendency to exaggerate the extent of the radicalisation and politicisation of the youth and student movement before 1968. The real growth came only in 1968, and afterwards. Before, the communist students were the milieu of the maturing of the radicalisation, and they never reached five thousand members; nor were there such massive demonstrations before 1968. The radicalisation started with the us bombing of Hanoi in 1966-67, but the demos were not so big.

I was at Nanterre university, and we called what we considered a big gathering of people one Sunday - it was 500 people out of 10,000 students at the university. It

was a significant minority of very active people - no more than that. What is interesting is to compare that with the situation now: then there was a kind of happy, spontaneous internationalism, a strong identification not only with Vietnam. Vietnam obviously was centralised, summarised as an issue, imperialism versus black people, a clear-cut confrontation, everything clear, politics, morals, ethics, everything lining people on the same side, no problem.

But at Nanterre the movement also took on anti-bureaucratic struggles; there were some involving students in Warsaw, and other Polish issues.

The Nanterre movement was open to everybody. It had three main axes: it was against bourgeois education reforms; anti-imperialist, and anti-bureaucratic. The only limitation on becoming involved - there were no tests, no programme like a party or anything - was opposition to US intervention in Vietnam: that was the only real criterion that was used. Then it was all very clear, a unified view of the world was a real characteristic of those movements.

The German events had a big impact for various reasons. First, we had established some direct links with the SDS movement of Rudi Dutschke, at the beginning of 1967, with common conferences, meetings and so on. We co-organised with the SDS a big Berlin demonstration in February 1968 before the attempted killing of Rudi Dutschke. Quite a big German delegation had also been here, so there were fairly strong direct links. When Rudi Dutschke was shot we were in a national conference of the JCR, and we started at once mobilising street demonstrations which radicalised very quickly.

How do you assess the other movements of that time, for instance the 22 March movement of students?

The 22 March movement began first at Nanterre university, and changed composition as it spread. It was a confused political movement. At the beginning there were mainly two currents: us and the anarchists. The CP youth always opposed it, and there were some Lambertists (members of Pierre Lambert's Organisation Communiste Internationaliste, OCI) who were very concerned with student unionism.

They considered the 22 March movement was an 'anti-union movement to destroy the student union. We didn't consider it was opposed to student unions. So the really dynamic forces in the 22 March movement were the anarchists and the JCR.

Among the youth, the CP was very marginalised at that time, so there was us and the Lambertists - very sectarian - and the main current was the maoists who were growing as a result of the cultural revolution in China in 1966-67. At the beginning of the 1968 events they were stronger than we were, but we won out in comparison to them through 1968.

Did the JCR grow fast in 1968?

Yes, we had enormous prestige because we were identified from the beginning with the radical wing of the movement, with the 22 March. For example on the night of 10 May, the 'night of the barricades', sticks in everyone's imagination because of the pictures of it, we were the only national political current fully participating.

The growth of the JCR and later of the Ligue came from the combination of two things: our participation in the movement when the maoists were a bit discredited, and the campaign of our comrade Alain Krivine in the 1969 presidential elections, when most of the groups, showing their left infantilism had no idea of utilising those elections. It was not obvious, and it was particularly difficult to do it, but it was a good idea, and it was this which within a year gave us a big space to expand.

And after the strike was over, the JCR was made illegal.

We were made illegal, yes, and again in 1973, but it was advantageous in some ways because if you don't have the crazy line of the maoists and if you have some real links with the workers' movement illegality is a formality and gives a certain prestige. We had to reorganise for four months, and 20 people were jailed until September or October, but it was not a big problem for us.

Do you think things could have been done better? Do you think that the potential of 1968 led some people to artificially high expectations?

Oviously it was a high point, with potentialities which were not used, but we should remember with what strengths we entered 1968. We were formed in 1966, defending the very idea that the working class still existed, when all kinds of people were arguing that everyone was bourgeois now. Suddenly within two years we had a real, live general strike. It is very good for you!

There were obviously other potentialities even for a small organisation if we had only had more experience and more maturity. The real question you are raising is firstly one of an estimation of 1968.

This is not an academic question. Should we say it was a mountain or just a small hill? The truth may be between the two. But what it represents depends on what we do now: if nothing more happens, then it was just a big peak followed by a general decline. Now is the moment we must start from.

Some say it was the last big strike of the nineteenth century working class. But perhaps it was the first big strike of the twenty-first century. We don't know, and it depends on what we do now.

A more balanced view of 1968 is not that it was a revolutionary strike - though sometimes we insist on stressing the polit-



ical potentialities. A colder assessment shows that the consciousness of the working class had been formed by the years of prosperity and expansion, the welfare state, democratic rights. 1968 was not a revolutionary crisis like those of the 1920s or 1930s: that is true, and sometimes in polemics with the CP we insist too much on the revolutionary character of the situation.

Perhaps we have been more objective in our polemics with the Lambertists, though at first we did not know how to express why we felt that the situation was not revolutionary but was *prerevolutionary*. Yes, there was a deep movement of the working class that was shaking the bourgeoisie: but there was no "subjective factor", no revolutionary leadership rooted strongly in the working class. The strength of the bureaucracy has something to do with the level of consciousness of broader layers of the working class. We can now see that better.

It is true that there were also many more illusions in maoist currents, partly because of the view that the working class was finished. They expected revolution now, immediately. They went rapidly into decline. Their very illusions, coupled with the frustrations of what happened in Europe and then in China do not justify but explain why so many right wing intellectuals have come from maoist currents.

Social democrats tend to interpret 1968 in cultural and sociological terms: some say 1968 was a success because of what the SP was able to do in government - realising democratic aspirations, legalised abortion, and so on. Of course this is absurd: in many countries all this and more has been achieved without 1968. It doesn't explain anything about the peculiarities of such a movement, why a general strike involving millions of people took place, and so on.

There is a general move to depoliticise the interpretation of 1968. We have to defend the real political content and the dynamics of 1968, not just to celebrate but to give it some present political meaning.

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Failed BBC "documentary" feeds Israel's propaganda machine

Roland Rance reviews the recent BBC series, *The Fifty Years War*

THIS WAS MORE than a missed opportunity to examine the causes and reality of the Middle East conflict. There is a good series to be made about the hundred years of conflict between Zionism and the Arab national movement; but this is not it.

Instead by repeating, in a modern and slightly revisionist guise, all of the Israeli propaganda myths, this series actually sets back the search for such an understanding.

Even the title, implying that the conflict began with the creation of Israel in 1948, is misleading. Nor are the programmes helped by appallingly inaccurate translations, which frequently omit key sentences or grossly mistranslate them.

One of the most effective early pieces of pro-Israel propaganda was the film *Exodus*. It presented a kitsch, over-sentimentalised view of the birth of the Jewish state, while leaving the Palestinians almost totally out of the picture.

By casting Paul Newman in the



The Palestinian-Israeli conflict is seen as simply a series of Israel-Arab wars

lead part, Otto Preminger did more than anyone to establish the image of the Israeli as tall (Newman wore platform heels), blue-eyed, blond and handsome – in effect, as an Aryan.

The Arabs were presented as shifty, dirty, bloodthirsty and thoroughly unwestern – as Semites.

The Israeli as superhero, the Arab as coward – this image has been repeated ad nauseam over the past fifty years, and even accepted by many Arabs.

In one of the useful extracts of archive film in the BBC series, a

young Yassir Arafat is seen explaining after the 1968 Battle of Karamah, in a striking echo of earlier Zionist language, how he is struggling to create a 'new Palestinian'. But overall, the series reinforces the stereotype of the Palestinian as miserable refugee or vicious terrorist.

The emphasis is on archive film and interviews with military and political leaders. In the same team's earlier series, on Yugoslavia, this proved an effective formula.

But this time, lacking any adequate historical or political

framework, they reduce the conflict to a succession of wars between states. Nothing is said about economic or social developments, or even about internal political situations.

Anyone who relied on this series to educate them would learn that the Palestinian-Israeli conflict (or, as the series sees it, the Israel-Arab wars) began when Arabs refused to recognise the right of Jewish survivors of the Nazi holocaust to establish a state in Palestine.

The previous half-century of conflict between Zionist colonialism and the Palestinian national movement is totally ignored. The expulsion of the Palestinians in 1948 is presented as purely an unplanned result of the war.

This view is no longer seriously expressed even by Israel, where a new wave of young historians has convincingly established the position long argued by the left – that the Zionist movement implemented a conscious plan of 'ethnic cleansing'.

The notorious Deir Yassin massacre is presented out of context, as a one-off crime committed by marginal right-wing militias. There is no acknowledgement that this was just one – and not even the worst – of scores of

massacres, most of them committed by the mainstream army linked to the then-ruling Labour Party.

In a similar vein, the first programme spoke of the Arab 'invasion' in 1948. In fact, Arab armies did not invade the area allocated as a Jewish state by the UN partition plan; they sent forces into the areas allocated as a Palestinian state, from much of which they were driven out by an Israeli invasion.

Through their ignorance of the Middle East, the producers do not recognise a real scoop when they stumble across one.

Thus, they repeat the accepted wisdom that the goal of the Israeli sabotage ring in Egypt in 1954 was to destabilise Egypt and prevent British withdrawal from the Suez Canal – even though, as the interview with an Egyptian diplomat makes clear, the Israeli army's real purpose was to undermine the government's attempt at rapprochement with Egypt and prepare for the 1956 invasion of Sinai.

Overall, the series suggests that the prime conflict is between Israeli moderates and reactionaries, with the Palestinians as mere unfortunate bystanders – a classically Eurocentric, Orientalist view.

Fighting for the 'unpeople'

Terry Conway reviews John Pilger's film, *Apartheid did not die* and his latest book *Hidden Agendas* (Vintage £8.99)

JOHN PILGER'S documentary on South Africa shown on BBC on April 21, has evoked vicious attacks in the press. I read some of the criticism before I had a chance to see the film, and I found it difficult to believe I was watching the same material. The film I saw was incisive, honest and soul-searching.

John Pilger was himself banned by the apartheid regime – he makes no plea to turn the clock back.

His film does not suggest that the long struggle against

apartheid should not have been waged, or make cynical remarks about those who gave their lives literally or figuratively in that battle.

Indeed the central hallmark of his work, whether on film or the written page is the faith he places in the militancy of ordinary people, the 'unpeople' as he calls them in his book.

His 'crime' is that, like the South African socialists whose pieces we print on p13, he does not believe that enough has changed since the election of President Mandela.

He illustrates the way in which the lives of the back majority remain incarcerated in deep poverty and social deprivation.

For that he is pilloried both by those relieved that class privilege has remained entrenched, and those who mistakenly believe that the ANC is infallible.

If Pilger has a weakness it is



East Timor: a hidden tale uncovered

that he seems to suggest that the failure of the ANC is confined to their refusal to implement the Freedom Charter.

While it is certainly the case that that programme promised far more in terms of redistribution than the new government has carried through, the problem goes deeper than that.

The Freedom Charter itself, and the strategy of the ANC and the South African Communist Party behind it, was based on the idea that what was needed in South Africa was not a socialist revolution which would destroy the economic basis of apartheid at the same time as changing its legal basis, but first a change to democracy, and after that thinking about other issues.

This – the classic "two stage"

notion of revolution beloved of generations of stalinists – is what has led to the impasse of today's South Africa. These were the sort of events that led Leon Trotsky to write his classic book, *Permanent Revolution*, which explained that in the epoch of imperialism the only way to win any real gains, even things that might seem very small, was through socialist revolution.

Despite this political weakness, Pilger's work stands head and shoulders above virtually everyone else in the mainstream press.

His importance is precisely that this gives him an audience which is way beyond what this or other socialist papers can reach. *Hidden Agendas*, published last month follows in the fine tradition of his previous books.

This collection of essays cover many aspects of world politics in which the expositions of today's battles are strengthened by telling the tales of what came before.

Whether in East Timor, Vietnam or the Liverpool docks he weaves a graphic picture of the land, of ordinary people's lives and convictions. The craft of his writing and the ideas of those he lets speak on these pages has power to win new friends to these struggles and to further inspire the already involved.

'On the Famine Road', an essay about the Irish Famine, is probably my favourite, though it is difficult to choose in this book of gems. Read it – and borrow a video of the film if you missed it on TV.

SOCIALIST OUTLOOK

Where we stand

IN THE NINETIES, millions of women and men have taken part in mobilisations against the evils of capitalism and the bureaucratic dictatorships. This reflects the fact that humanity face widening dangers. Ecological, military, social and economic devastation faces millions of people.

Many more people recognise the barbaric nature of capitalism. In a situation where the inability of the social democratic and communist parties to provide socialist solutions is becoming clearer, the task of creating new leaderships remains ahead.

Socialist Outlook is written and sold by socialists committed to this struggle. We are the British supporters of the world-wide marxist organisation, the Fourth International. We stand for the revolutionary transformation of society and a pluralist, socialist democracy world wide.

The overall goal which we pursue is the emancipation of all human beings from every form of exploitation, oppression, alienation and violence.

Socialism must be under the control of ordinary people, democratic, pluralist, multi-party, feminist ecologist, anti-militarist and internationalist. It must abolish wage slavery and national oppression.

The working class is the backbone of unity among all the exploited and oppressed. The working class and its allies must uncompromisingly fight against capitalism and for a clear programme of action in order to gradually acquire the experience and consciousness needed to defeat capitalism at the decisive moment of crisis.

The movements of women, lesbians and gay men, and black people to fight their particular forms of oppression make an essential contribution to the struggle for a different society. They are organised around the principle "None so fit to break the chains as those who wear them".

The whole working class needs to fully commit itself to these struggles. Furthermore we fight for a strategic alliance between workers and these organisations - an alliance which respects their legitimate autonomy.

By simultaneously building revolutionary organisations in each country and a revolutionary International, we aim to guide and encompass the global interests of the workers and oppressed. By building a united struggle against exploitation and oppression we aim to ensure the survival of the human race.

If you think this is worth fighting for, and you like what you read in *Socialist Outlook*, why not join us? Drop a line to the address on this page, and we'll be in touch.

Bill Hunter, history and the Fourth International

I WELCOME Martin Ralph's critical observations about my review of Bill Hunter's book *Lifelong Apprenticeship*. If nothing else, it gives the book well-deserved additional publicity.

But I was writing a review, not a polemical theses. Space permitting, I would have liked to deal with many of the points Martin raised and others as well.

I did suggest, in an accompanying letter, that it would be a good idea for *Socialist Outlook* to arrange a discussion round the book, preferably with Bill taking part.

I can not understand why Martin raises the issue of Italy. There was a revolutionary upsurge in Italy after the fall of Mussolini.

But it was a pre-revolutionary situation which could only have been converted into a revolutionary struggle for power, with the leadership of a Leninist party, deeply embedded in the working class, as the Bolsheviks were in 1917. No such party existed.

The vanguard workers were almost completely under the influence of stalinism and social democracy. Pictures of Stalin were everywhere - even in the headquarters of the Socialist Party in Naples.

"Long Live Stalin" adorned every available wall space.

The small Partito Operaio Comunista, which I helped to found, could not fill this vacuum. As for the position of Goldman and Morrow, I was the foremost supporter of their line in the leadership of the RCP.

Gerry Healy once contemptu-

ously referred to me as "Morrow's Creature."

I never referred to WIL being "anti-internationalist". However, like so many others, who consider themselves Trotskyists, (and there are still far too many about today) they never believed the building of the Fourth International as a priority.

To me, the Fourth International (US) is the legitimate continuation of the International whose founding conference I was privileged to attend in 1938.

I genuinely believe that the WRP, under Healy's leadership, and to a lesser degree the Militant Group, were the major obstacles to the building of a viable section of the FI in Britain and, because of their attempts to set up 'rival' bodies in other countries, hampered the growth and influence of the FI world-wide.

The Fourth International (US) is not a monolithic organisation (as Healy's WRP was). There is room in it for all genuine revolu-



Writeback

We welcome readers' letters on any topic. Letters over 400 words may be cut for space reasons. Write to *Socialist Outlook*, PO Box 1109, London N4 2UU. email: outlook@gn.apc.org

tionaries.

Trotsky made valiant attempts to keep Max Shachtman and CLR James in, despite their profound differences. Pablo made the same appeal to Healy.

Bill Hunter was and is a revolutionary Marxist. His place is in the Fourth International, in its British section.

Charlie van Gelderen, Cambridge

EVERYONE'S A WINNER!

The *Socialist Outlook* 300 Club offers readers and supporters the chance to win a £50 cash prize or alternatives each month - for just a £5 donation. We get the cash we need to run campaigns and improve the paper, you get an excellent chance of a bumper pay-out, or the satisfaction of knowing your donation was well spent!

To join the 300 Club, send us a Standing Order for £5 per month, or drop us a line at PO Box 1109, London N4 2UU, and we will send you a form. This month's lucky winners are (3rd prize) Marian Brain (2nd) Keith Sinclair, and the top prize goes to Carl Taylor.

300 Club

WHAT'S ON

MAY

FRIDAY 1 Liverpool Trade Union Council public debate "Which Way Forward for the Unions". Speakers: TUC Deputy General Secretary, Liverpool dockers, Unions 21 and the Free Trade Unions Campaign. 7p.m., Conference room, Trade Union centre, Hardman St.

LONDON MAY DAY MARCH. Assemble 12 noon Highbury Fields for march to Clerkenwell Green. Saturday 2 Liverpool May Day March and Rally. Assemble 12 noon, Myrtle Parade. Speakers include local MPs and union activists.

BIRMINGHAM May Day demonstration. No to Benefit Cuts, Defend the Welfare State, Assemble 10.30a.m. Chamberlain Square, rally 1p.m. Trade Union club.

PROTEST Section Murders in Kurdistan. Public meeting called by the Workers' Communist Party of Iraq, in protest of the murder of two leading members by Islamic fundamentalists in Erbil, in KDP-controlled Kurdistan. 5-7.30p.m., Kurdistan Workers' Association, Fairfax Hall, Stanhope Gardens, London N4 (Manor House tube, Green Lanes BR).

INTERNATIONAL EVENING for May Day, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1. Music and dance from around the world.

SUNDAY 3 Unions' May Free Festival, Finsbury Park London, 11a.m.-6p.m.

LONDON Socialist Alliance Election Rally with Hugh Kerr and candidates from Socialist Alliance and Socialist Labour Party. Small Hall, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square 2pm.

WEDNESDAY 6 Lobby of TUC Special Congress 9a.m. onwards Central Hall Westminster. Called by the

Free Trade Unions Campaign.

FRIDAY 8-SUNDAY 10, Conference of Trades Councils, Sheffield.

SATURDAY 14, 68 Summit, Birmingham.

TUESDAY 12 Oxford public meeting in Defence of Campfield 9; speakers include former detainees, MPs, Abdul Onibyo. Assembly Rooms Oxford Town Hall 7.30pm

SATURDAY 16 Greater Manchester Socialist Alliance Annual General meeting. Manchester Deaf centre (corner of Booth St and Oxford Rd) 10.30 am - 4pm Saturday 23 Network of Socialist Campaign Groups Steering Committee, Leeds.

THURSDAY 24 London public meeting in Defence of Campfield 9; speakers include former detainees, Abdul Onibyo, Bernie Grant MP, House of Commons, Jubilee Room 7pm

SATURDAY 30 Social Justice demonstration, London, supported by the Liverpool dockers.

JUNE

TUESDAY 2 London public meeting called by the Cardiff demonstration organising committee with Tony Benn MP, John Haylett (Editor, Morning Star), Angela Klein (Euro-marches, Germany) and Jacqui Johnson (Trade unionists against the single currency). 7.30p.m., University of London Union, Wake St, WC1.

SATURDAY 13 International Demonstration at the Cardiff EU Summit. Assemble 1.30p.m.

JULY

25-31 INTERNATIONAL Youth Summer Camp, Denmark

AUGUST

6-10 TON delegation to Belfast

May 6: lobby TUC Special Congress

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Socialist Outlook

Disband the RUC - Troops out Now!

FOR SOCIALISTS in Britain, the Irish question has always been a key test - and one that tragically much of the left here has failed. After all "a nation that enslaves another can ne'er itself be free". Socialists who fail to understand the role of British imperialism in Ireland cannot hope to lead a struggle for revolutionary change on this side of the Irish sea.

Socialist Outlook has always argued that the six county state in the North of Ireland is unreformable. But the Stormont agreement does not even attempt serious reforms. In Ireland our comrades with other socialists are campaigning for a vote against the settlement, a position we strongly support. Our job in Britain is both to develop an understanding of the nature of the sectarian state in the North and Britain's role in creating and maintaining it, but also to fight for the end of British involvement.

The hollowness of the supposed peace settlement is graphically

demonstrated by the fact that the agreement leaves effectively untouched the hated Royal Ulster Constabulary. These bodies of armed men exist to uphold and maintain the sectarian state.

Tony Blair has now reportedly invited one of Thatcher's and Major's trusted henchmen, Chris Patten, to "investigate" and possibly reform the RUC. This neatly sums up the limits of the "peace process" - in which the republican and nationalist parties have been pressed to give up any real demands in exchange for the most marginal and cosmetic changes to loyalist rule in the six counties.

The left in Britain needs to use the opportunity of the supposed review - which we can safely predict will lead to few, if any, significant changes - to broaden the debate here on this neglected issue, and demand the RUC be disbanded.

Blair's intervention to prevent the publication of the Parades Commission report illustrates that its recommendation on

Drumcree was bound to set the cat among the pigeons. Drumcree two years ago was what propelled David Trimble to his current position of prominence.

Unfortunately even on the question of the parades Sinn Fein, where they have influence in the residents committees, have given far too much ground to the Orange Order.

In their bid to present an 'equality agenda', Gerry Adams and his friends argue that if the unionists want a veto over the future of the Northern statelet then republicans should have a veto as to whether loyalist marches come through their areas. But unionist parades are by their very nature sectarian - this cannot be negotiated away any more than the essence of the Orange State.

Despite the disastrous settlement, even if the referenda go



through, battles over these issues on the ground will also be critical.

The key problem is that the Sinn Fein leadership has been stuck in a blind alley for some time - the so called peace agreement is only the logical conclusion of this trajectory.

A breathing space is desperately needed in Ireland north and south for the republican and nationalist movement to reorient, to find a different strategy and develop new leaders.

British socialists must campaigning as vigorously as possible both for British withdrawal and against every manifestation of discrimination and bigotry against the nationalist community.