

NS 4

Socialist OUTLOOK

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**WOTE
Labour
but prepare
to fight!**

Welsh assembly plans advance

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THE WALES Labour Party at its recent conference in Llandudno has strengthened its policy on the Welsh Assembly, which a Labour government is pledged to establish during its first year in office.

The Assembly is now to be elected by proportional representation (PR) rather than first past the post (FPTP) as proposed. This represents a small but significant advance on the set of proposals Labour adopted in 1995.

These envisaged an Assembly elected by FPTP with the power to pass only secondary legislation, applying rather than overruling legislation from Westminster. It would be funded by a central government grant rather than having the power to raise its own taxes.

Such an Assembly would obviously have little power to challenge a hostile London government.

The proposals fell far short of Labour's plans for Scottish devolution, promising a parliament with law-making and taxation powers, elected by PR and with equal representation for men and

women (something for which no provision has been made in Wales).

Labour's original proposals did not represent a viable basis for Welsh self-government. Election by FPTP would create an Assembly in the image of the current Welsh parliamentary group at Westminster. It would certainly not be inclusive enough to embrace the diversity of political opinion in Wales.

It could not bridge the divide between the largely rural and politically heterogeneous North and West, where large swathes of opinion would go unrepresented, and

the control of Labour's reactionary South Wales bureaucracy.

Fortunately, Labour has now taken a step towards broadening the base of support for its plans. The party's proposals still stand to deny the Assembly any real powers, but the adoption of PR at least creates the possibilities of fair representation for other parties and an improved gender-balance.

The form of PR chosen, a version of the Additional Member System (AMS) is far from ideal, however. An Assembly member will be elected by FPTP from each of the 40 Westminster constituencies.

Any Assembly worth having will need a popular majority, which won't be the case for a weak and narrow body controlled by Labour's reactionary South Wales bureaucracy.

the industrial south, where Labour's solid block of support would enable it to maintain its stranglehold over Welsh politics. It would also remain male-dominated (only one Welsh MP out of 38 is female).

Any Assembly worth having will need a popular majority, which won't be the case for a weak and politically narrow body under

the control of Labour's reactionary South Wales bureaucracy. A further 20 seats will then be allocated, four from each Euro-constituency, in proportion to each party's percentage vote.

The size of this Assembly and method of election make it unlikely this Assembly will be more representative.

Single Transferable Vote (STV) favoured by many within and outside the party would be more likely

to ensure a gender balance, as faced with multi-member constituencies, parties would have been obliged to field a balanced slate of candidates in order to appeal to all sections of the electorate.

Grass roots

Some credit for the move to PR may be claimed by Welsh Labour Action (WLA), a left-leaning pressure group made up of grassroots party members. WLA has campaigned for PR, gender balance, tax-raising and legislative powers. WLA's efforts, together with behind the scenes lobbying by shadow Welsh secretary Ron Davies and others, put pressure on Blair to instruct the Welsh Labour Executive to include "an element of proportionality" in their proposals.

Ironically the advance towards PR was formally agreed at a conference less democratic and more stage-managed than the Tories' best efforts.

Resolutions from CLPs were dropped in favour of debates on the party's key pledges, at which no votes were taken. The only speakers were MPs and prospective candidates.

There was no opportunity to amend the Executive's proposals

for electing the Assembly, and a unanimous vote was secured by some discreet arm-twisting. This was presented as a one-off necessity in the lead-up to the general election. Activists should however be concerned that this will become a permanent arrangement.

More positively, WLA held a well attended fringe meeting, and had three supporters elected to the Welsh Executive, giving them greater leverage in their campaign for greater democratisation.

WLA members are also working with activists from the left of Plaid Cymru, the Communist Party and Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg (the Welsh Language Society) to organise a conference on the socialist arguments for a Welsh Assembly.

This will be held shortly after the general election but before the referendum on devolution which is to be staged by an incoming Labour government. All sections of the left in Wales will be invited.

This will be central to the efforts of socialists in Wales to build a mass campaign in support of an Assembly which is able to fight any attacks on the Welsh people and the working class which come from a London government, Tory or New Labour.

Fighting council cuts in Scotland

Resist or Resign!

Gordon Morgan

THE TORIES have adopted a scorched earth policy in Scotland. They forced through a needless reorganisation of local government in Scotland in April '96 and have savagely cut funding both in 1996/7 and 1997/8.

In 96/7 Scottish Councils estimated that reorganisation costs exceeded £400million, the Tories estimated £200m – a £200m cut. In 97/8 they have cut these transitional costs and also assumed hundreds of millions of savings when in fact costs have been increased.

In fact 7,000 jobs were lost in 96/7 and it is estimated that 10,000 jobs will go in 97/8. To this is added huge service cuts and rises in Council Tax in both years.

Capping limit

In Glasgow Council Tax rose 17 per cent last year and will rise 23 per cent in 97/8. There were 1,500 redundancies in 96/7. 2,000 are projected in 97/8 together with £80m cuts in services – these are required to meet the capping limit on expenditure. This is impossible without destroying the social fabric of the City.

The Tories control no councils in Scotland. Michael Forsyth calculated that he had nothing to lose and much to gain by savage cuts. Labour Councils on the other hand were faced with the dilemma – defend services and fight back, or cut services and be seen to be Forsyth's servants.

As Labour leaders were insisting on no new money, and demanding Councils set legal budgets, it was clear that Labour councils doing otherwise would embarrass Labour leaders in the lead up to the

election.

Despite huge demonstrations – 30,000 in Glasgow, 20,000 in Edinburgh, a strike and demo of 15,000 in Glasgow – and despite pleading from councillors especially in Glasgow to Forsyth, no more money was offered. Eventually all the Councils decided to implement the cuts rather than fight and embarrass Labour.

All Councils except Glasgow managed to avoid compulsory redundancies.

Glasgow's position is different. It has the worst social problems of any Scottish City and requires extra resources. Under reorganisation however, Glasgow received only per capita funding – Strathclyde's redirection of resources based on need had ended. Massive reductions in funding have resulted.

The people of Glasgow and the workforce understand all of this. However to us the case is simple, the Labour Council was elected on a platform of defending jobs and services – it has chosen to implement massive cuts and job losses and massive tax rises.

From November the Unions and the Scottish Socialist Alliance (SSA) have been calling for a "No Cuts" Budget to be set – a deficit budget given we recognise there is no funding at present available. As it became clear the Councillors were not only not resisting but were prepared to countenance the most savage cuts the slogan "Resist or Resign" was taken up.

At the meeting to set the Council budget on 10th March community groups and SSA members occupied the City Chambers and 5,000 striking workers and activists blockaded the building and prevented all but 21 of the 79 Labour councillors from holding the meet-

ing.

Although there were no arrests during that day, one of the SSA members was arrested attempting to enter the building the previous evening. Tam Dymond, whose only previous offense was blocking Poll Tax Bailiffs over 2 years ago, is being held on remand at 37406 'C' hall Barlinnie for over 3 weeks on remand on breach of the peace charges!

During the picket the demand 'Resist or Resign' was taken up. Only 2 Councillors were prepared to vote against the budget – SSA Councillor Tommy Sheridan and the lone SNP councillor. All Labour councillors were prepared to vote and have thus become the focus of anger.

Blame Tories

If they had set an illegal budget, or resigned and let others take their place or even resigned and allowed the Tories to themselves try to implement the cuts then the Tories would have been the focus of the anger. To be elected on a "No cuts" platform and to savage the City is a breach of democracy.

Further cuts are voted through every other day. Around 100 community halls are to shut. The SSA and community groups intend to occupy many of these to prevent their assets – pool tables and equipment bought by community efforts – being stripped.

Over 100 community projects are having funding withdrawn and these voluntary organisations are being told to pay for their own redundancies out of future collections from the public!

Wardens for the disabled are being removed, leaving disabled people stranded in their homes. The only swimming pool in Glasgow



A glimpse into the future? Glasgow's Labour council opted for cuts

fully equipped for disabled access, on which over £100,000 has recently been spent, is to close. Award winning Museum restoration teams are being disbanded, libraries shut and residential child care services reduced.

Many of the cuts are openly admitted to breach statutory requirements.

Sleaze

Meanwhile as a background motif, investigations into allegations of sleaze and corruption within the Labour Group made by the Group leader are being conducted by Labour's NEC.

The struggle against these cuts will continue. A one-day strike by UNISON is being held on April 3 to coincide with the next council meeting.

A 24-hr picket, and sleep-in around the Chambers has been called for April 2 by the "Save our Services" community groups and the SSA. These decisions were taken at meeting representing thousands of community activists.

Alongside this the SSA will be contesting every Glasgow seat at the General Election, with a central plank resisting the cuts and defending services, and raising the slogan 'Resist or Resign'.

End the Tory nightmare

Vote Labour – Fight for our needs

Major's decision to announce the May 1 election early, giving the Tories a long campaign has massively backfired. That decision was linked to the need to avoid the report of the Nolan committee – a fact which was transparently obvious to all.

Now the Tories are becoming mired ever deeper each day in scandal and sleaze. The decision of stalwart Tory tabloids to back Blair's New Labour is however not just a reflection of the difficulties Major and his party are in but of their confidence that capitalism will be safer in Blair's hands.

Over the last 18 years the Tories have launched massive attacks on the working class. They wreaked havoc on the unions, taking on and defeating section after section of workers, taking advantage of the weakness of the union leaders. They privatised the public sector to the benefit of their fat cat friends and the detriment of services and jobs. They have undermined the NHS, education and every other part of the welfare state.

Unemployment

They have vastly increased poverty and homelessness and used unemployment as a deliberate weapon to discipline workers. Workers' ability to resist has been weakened by eight packages of anti-trade union legislation which make a legal fightback almost impossible. And they plan more of the same – total privatisation of pensions and the London Underground system, and further curbs on the right to strike.

It is time to end the Tory nightmare.

Socialist Outlook is calling for a vote for Labour. A fifth Tory term would create widespread despair while a Labour victory would create higher expectations and new conditions for a fightback.

Most workers are crying out for a government which tackles unemployment and the deterioration of the welfare state. We know that a Blair-led government will not do these things, but it has never been more important that a Labour government is elected, despite the extent to which the Party has moved to the right. Labour losing would be seen as an endorsement of the Tories, who would feel they could continue their attacks with impunity.

Immediately Labour will face decisions which create conflict with most of those who elected it. For Britain even to be a possible candidate for entry into the European single currency means trying to carry out the Maastricht convergence criteria and thus massive cuts in public spending. Labour will continue with much of the Tory programme, its anti-union laws, its attacks on the welfare state.

A Labour government is com-

mitted to building on the Tories' achievements for British capitalism. Gordon Brown is committed to the limits on public spending set out by the Tories, including those on public sector pay increases. Labour has even abandoned one of the basic tenets of reformism, progressive taxation.

While all Labour governments have been capitalist, for the first time they have now adopted wholesale capitalist ideology. Even where Labour is committed to better policies, like the statutory national minimum wage, it will take a fight to ensure that it is implemented, and at a level which significantly improves the 'living standards of the lowest paid.'

The fight for socialism requires not only a recognition of what Labour represents. It also requires an understanding of what most of the working class think and how they see the election. The vast majority of class conscious workers will vote Labour in the general election (unfortunately, a significant minority of workers will vote Tory or Liberal Democrat).

Some on the left argue that Labour has changed so much that it is now unprincipled to support it at all – it is indistinguishable from the Tories and Liberal Democrats. We think that is a serious political mistake. While Blair has moved Labour's programme considerably further to the right than ever before, the class nature of the Labour Party has not changed, though it is under heavy attack.

Despite Blair's worst intentions, the affiliation of the trade unions means the Labour Party is in essence a workers' party, even though it has always had a pro-capitalist programme.

We don't agree with those socialists who believe that in order to break the working class from its support for Blair it is enough to denounce Labour and stand candidates critical of New Labour. While that might attract a small

This election will lead to a reshaping of British politics. The conflict between a Blair-led Labour government and the working class will lead to recompositions in the workers' movement. There will be a shake-up of bourgeois politics too, with a post-election crisis in the Tory Party, and the Liberal Democrats moving ever closer to Blair.

layer who totally reject New Labour, it will have little effect on the vast majority, who will see such candidacies as marginal. The by-elections in Hemsworth, Barnsley East and Wirral South showed this.

Far more productive in most areas is to link a call for a Labour vote with a critique of their policies and build struggles which make de-



Health workers and the public sector are saying 'Enough is Enough' – whoever serves up the Tory policies

mands on Labour around key policies, and fight to force a Labour government to carry them out. Workers who, despite all the evidence, expect Labour to deliver something, will relate to that much more than simple denunciation of Labour.

The job of creating an alternative to New Labour with serious support is ahead of us. There are very few places where candidates to the left of Labour in the election represent serious forces. Whilst calling for an overall vote for Labour we support some of the most credible and well-placed candidates of the left parties and organisations, the Socialist Labour Party, the Socialist Party (ex-Militant Labour) and the Scottish Socialist Alliance.

At this stage, we are calling for a vote for Dave Nellist in Coventry South (standing for the SP), Tommy Sheridan in Glasgow Pollock (SP/SSA) and Arthur Scargill standing in Newport East for the SLP.

Although these organisations

Blairism even though distorted through the way it was established and has functioned since. The Scottish Socialist Alliance (SSA) was set up in the spring of 1996, based on activists who had played a major role in the campaigns like that against the poll tax.

The national question clearly plays a major role in Scottish politics and the Alliance has been able to play a crucial role in debates around this. More recently it has taken a leadership role in the battle over cuts in Glasgow and elsewhere – a battle that is much more advanced than elsewhere in Britain. All this means that it has been able to build up much more significant support than similar forces in England or Wales.

Future fights

The General Election does not stand in isolation. The stance socialists take in the election relates closely to how they see events developing after the election.

Socialist Outlook believes there will be several strands of dispute if Labour wins the election. Principally, there will be conflict between the government and those who have elected it expecting it to be better than the Tories. Brown's commitment, for instance, to keeping down public sector pay, will not go down well with those workers who have already experienced several years of pay restraint from the Tories.

Blair's desire to attack Labour Party democracy in general and, in particular, to prevent the trade unions having any real say in policy is already causing upset, and is likely to be one of the major issues of debate at this year's round of trade union conferences. It is more than likely that Blair will want to make an example of any left MPs who oppose his programme in government.

Moreover, there will almost inevitably be explosions around joblessness, cuts in benefit, state racism, environmental issues and

so on which will draw in wider layers of society.

Precisely how and when these things will unfold cannot be foreseen, but they will. If socialists are to develop a real alternative to Blair it will be through participation in these struggles and attempting to give direction to them.

The exact form that a political alternative to Blair will take is not clear at this stage. But we can be sure it will be built out of those people who want to fight back, in the unions, amongst women and young people, but also including Left forces inside the Labour Party.

This election will lead to a reshaping of British politics. The conflict between a Blair-led Labour government and the working class will lead to recompositions in the workers' movement. There will be a shake-up of bourgeois politics too, with a post-election crisis in the Tory Party, and the Liberal Democrats moving ever closer to Blair.

It is precisely in relation to such events that the tactics of socialists in the election are important. Not only will the election of a Labour government lift the air of gloom over the working class, it will also release the class from the arguments of their union leaders over the last decade that any struggle would damage the chances of a Labour victory. It will begin to show the limitations of Labour in government and allow socialists the scope to put forward alternative policies to a much wider audience than has been possible in the recent past.

Blair will be tested out in government and we will be there fighting to provide an alternative. Although Blair can expect a certain 'honeymoon' period while he is given the benefit of the doubt, this is likely to be short.

Struggles will develop against a Labour government from those expecting it to reverse the actions of the Tories. Those who rule out support for Labour in the election either rule out or refuse to relate to such crucial developments.

Fight to defend a Woman's Right to Choose

Build the campaign against "Pro-Life" Alliance

Susan Moore

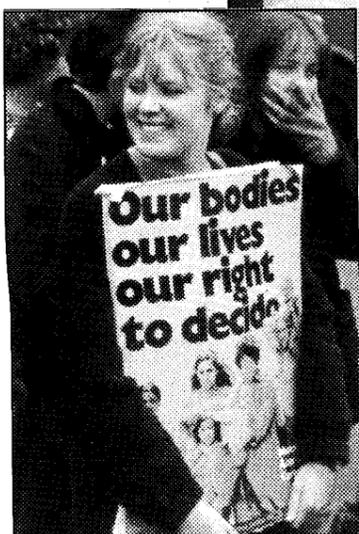
THE NATIONAL Abortion Campaign (NAC) has won an important first round battle against the anti-abortionists of the so called "Pro-Life" Alliance (PLA) who are standing over 50 candidates in the General Election. Despite this success there remains an urgent need for activists to get involved in the campaign.

On Saturday February 1 NAC held a successful picket outside Harrod's in London on the last day of the January sale. This was to protest against the fact that Harrod's owner Mohamed Al Fayed was funding the PLA to the tune of £25,000 - which would have underwritten the deposits for the election candidates.

Before the picket, Michael Cole, spokesman for Al Fayed, told journalists that "Mr Al Fayed decided to help the Pro-Life Alliance to field 50 candidates".

After the picket, the tune had changed. Mr Cole said after the official launch of the Alliance "Mr Fayed is not funding it. He doesn't want to get involved in party politics". Al Fayed's retreat has undoubtedly been an irritation for the PLA but they have other powerful and rich friends such as the Quintaville family.

Their manifesto makes clear that they want to see the complete repeal of the 1967 Abortion Act



No return to the back streets!

and indeed beyond this "to secure legislation which confers the full protection of the law on all human life from fertilisation to natural death".

Further they are calling for the repeal of the Embryology Bill and opposing some forms of contraception which they argue are in fact early abortions.

They are targeting constituencies where candidates support a woman's right to choose - mainly Labour candidates but a small number of others, including Theresa Gorman in Billericay.



They have claimed that their party political broadcast will show remains of aborted embryos at various stages of development.

PLA director Bruno Quintaville says these were found dumped outside an abortion clinic in Houston, Texas.

While they are very unlikely to even retain their deposit in any seat, they are gaining a large amount of publicity through this campaign - although NAC has already been able to use debating them to gain a wider profile for its stance in support of a woman's right to choose.

If your MP is being opposed by a "Pro-Life" candidate it is important that you get in touch to offer support.

There is a danger that some could feel intimidated and back down from a pro-choice stance. NAC is also organising a postcard campaign, particularly in the constituencies where the PLA are standing. Get involved and help defeat the anti-abortionists.

Contact NAC at The Print House, 18 Ashwin Street, London E8 3DL or on 0171 923 4976.

Local government workers must reject single status agreement

Veronica Fagan

THE THREE local government unions UNISON, GMB and TGWU are trumpeting the new single status agreement and the associated pay deal as a major step forward for their members.

The associated pay deal would give pay increases of above 2.51 per cent for most manual workers and the very lowest paid of officers while the rest would get an increase of around 2.5 per cent.

There are some important improvements in the proposals it is true. Most significantly it would introduce generally equal treatment for manual workers and officers. Other benefits include improved rights for part timers, training for all employees and cancer screening for all.

These positive aspects are massively overshadowed by the attacks on conditions that are also involved both now and in the future. Integral to the whole package is a new proposed Job Evaluation Scheme which will not be compulsory for local authorities to use and which will not even be available before mid-April.

All jobs will be subject to local grading reviews and pay is protected for only up to three years. Whole areas of conditions which are currently determined nationally will only be subject to minimum terms at this level.

The main negotiations will take place locally. Other immediate problems include the introduction of a "code of conduct" and attacks on various existing provisions for leave.

Within the glossy literature produced by the unions nationally some of the key issues are hidden away.

Working hours will be set for all full time employees from April 1

1999 at 37 hours (36 for London). A step forward for those on contracts with longer hours - but then we are told: "Where ever possible efforts will be made to offset the increased hourly rates of pay by more productive working methods."

You would think that any trade unionist worth their salt would see the problem with that - and the looming threat of job losses it involves.

Despite this on March 11 a Joint meeting of the Manual and APT&C (officer) union side agreed the document with only four votes against.

"Socialist"

The pompous language used to sell it to the membership is unbelievable. Jane Carrolan, Chair of the APT&C referred to the document as a "socialist agreement" and Local Government Officer Keith Sonnet said that "It is UNISON's destiny to bring in this agreement."

Some of the media have used an image of an office worker emptying dustbins to illustrate stories about the agreement. Such proposals on flexibility are not actually part of the package.

However there is a worrying phrase in the "principles" set out at the beginning which talks of "a flexible approach to providing services to the community, which meets the needs of employees as well as employers."

One wonders if the press have been told something that trade union members have not?

In any event the left has a major task on its hands to mobilise opposition to these proposals. UNISON is holding a special conference on May 20 and after that the proposals will go out to a ballot of individual members. These proposals must be rejected.

Women's TUC faces the future

Marian Brain

Women's TUC in Scarborough threw down a challenge to the whole trade union movement. It is possible and necessary to recruit hundreds of thousands of women in the next five years, but only by rising to the challenge of attracting and retaining them.

This means that trade unions have to become flexible organisationally, but more importantly, they have to be fighting organisations that defend and extend the conditions under which people work and the social environment in which they live.

Conference understood the importance of fighting for equal rights at work and the importance of full rights for all workers from day one of employment, and the rights of all workers to join and be represented by an independent trade union.

Women's TUC also debated the whole question of bullying at

work and the need to combat this.

The conference unanimously passed an emergency resolution which expressed concern at the contents of the Amnesty International Bulletin of 7 February regarding the imprisonment of Roisin McAlliskey.

The resolution calls on the "Women's Committee and the General Council to support the call for bail to be granted due to Roisin's mental and physical condition and to support the campaign for mother and child to remain together after the birth". This was moved by MSF and seconded by the FBU.

Another emergency resolution from the Society of Telecom Executives raised the issue of the attack on working women launched by the Panorama programme. It called on the Women's Committee and the General Council to "highlight and publicise media attacks on

working women" and to "campaign for recognition at work of the demands of all parents, and the need for workplace policies to accommodate working parents and their children".

This resolution linked into the discussion of the NAFTE resolution on the whole issue of women's rights. Moving this resolution, Mary Davies made the point that it is necessary to combine theory and practice. We cannot let the right wing ideological offensive against women go unchallenged.

They blame women for all the ills of society and try to strengthen the traditional family. We must defend the gains of the women's liberation movement of the sixties and fight for women's right to choose how they live and the material conditions which allow us to do so.

Aerospace strikers fly into action

WORKERS at Project Aerospace are linking up with other disputes to try to spread support for their struggle.

They will be on the "Social Justice" march on April 12. They are frustrated that despite official support from their union, MSF, little is being done to spread their message.

The full-time official is hard to contact and rarely visits the picket line. Only four of the union's regions have so far given any support.

In December, 1996, two weeks before Christmas, forty-one sheet metal workers were locked out and then dismissed by Project Aerospace Ltd in Coventry.

The workers had made a claim for the establishment of a sick pay scheme and a company pension as well as a reasonable increase in wages.

They had serious concerns about health and safety - when it rained, water cascaded through a flaking asbestos roof onto electrical equipment below.

No discussions

The company offered a wage increase of 3 per cent, refused to discuss anything more and demanded the workers to sign a new contract or else.

Following limited industrial action in November and early December, the forty-one were dismissed on the very day that discussions were due to take place between the union and the company.

Since then the company has refused approaches from ACAS and has begun negotiations with another firm to register a new company.

The workers believe that even though the struggle will be protracted they can win. There are already indications that the company will not be able to survive without the workers' specialist skills.

They need support on the daily pickets at Canal Road, Foleshill, Coventry and financial assistance.

Messages, donations and requests for speakers to Project Aerospace Dispute Fund, Coventry Trades Council, Unit 15, The Arches Industrial Estate, Coventry, CV1 3JQ, (01203 474261 or 0976 971796)

Magnet, Hillingdon, Dockers Step up the support!

Pete Firmin

With the General Election campaign underway many Labour and Trade Union leaders would like to see the long running industrial disputes wound up before they embarrass a Labour government. Socialists have to step up support.

The strikers at Magnet in Darlington, where 340 workers were sacked for going on strike for a pay rise, are in a confident mood. Magnet strike support committees are starting to be formed around the country and Magnet outlets are being regularly leafleted by supporters in Glasgow, London, Darlington, Liverpool and Stockton.

The leafleting in Glasgow is being done by the Fire Brigades Union, and a recent meeting in Glasgow established useful links with the GPMU and UNISON branches there. The strikers are now establishing many international links of their own, for instance in Germany.

On Tuesday March 18, TUC chief John Monks met fulltime officials from the four unions involved (UCATT, TGWU, GMB and AEEU) and, surprisingly, offered support to the strikers. The TUC committed itself to an emergency mail-shot to all its affiliates, urging them to get involved in support groups, leaflet Magnet outlets and to support the strike financially. The strike committee is aware of the possible pitfalls that the TUC could turn round and attempt to close down the dispute, but such support is welcomed.

Meanwhile, the company has got itself into a mess of its own making. It had hoped to do deals on the quiet with builders and subcontractors, offering them reductions. This has started a price war between different companies, something Magnet can ill-afford in its current position.

The Hillingdon Hospital strikers, fighting against a pay cut, are still resisting the attempts of UNISON's bureaucracy to ditch them. They have received the support of several union regions, and the next stage of that battle will be at UNISON's conference.



Community Chest: Robbie Fowler displays the Liverpool dockers' T-shirt at Anfield

The hospital is attempting to get strike supporters removed from their property by taking out an injunction, but Hillingdon Council has provided an alternative spot to picket just outside the hospital.

The Liverpool dockworkers are at last getting wider publicity here in Britain. Liverpool footballers Robbie Fowler and Steve McManaman wore T-shirts in support of the dockers at their European Cup-Winners' Cup match against SK Brann, which has received widespread coverage (and which the football authorities are less than pleased about).

42 comedians organised a major benefit for the dockers at the London Palladium on March 16. Through the efforts of John Pilger and Ken Loach more publicity has been gained and more support is therefore coming in from union branches.

The dockers are still building on their international contacts which have led to support action around the world - Akinobu Itoh, Assistant General Secretary of the National Council of Dock Workers' Unions of

Japan, recently travelled to Liverpool to address a dockers' meeting.

The bad news is that the TGWU leadership is still negotiating with the Mersey Docks and Harbour Board on the possibility of establishing a Labour Supply Unit - and keeping the stewards in the dark about the progress of the talks.

No pay-off

Having at last recognised that the dockers are unwilling to accept a pay off, rather than winning their jobs back, the TGWU put forward the proposal that the dockers should form a cooperative from which the company would employ its workforce. The dockers' shop stewards are adamant that this means a monopoly on work and 'scabs out', but it is by no means certain that the TGWU leadership is putting forward anything like this.

Initially it seemed that the MDHC had rejected any such Labour Supply Unit out of hand, this was later denied. It seems that the union bureaucracy persuaded the employer that it was in their interests to seek a deal which the TGWU hopes to

sell to the dockers via a ballot.

The LSU proposal has caused consternation among the dockers international supporters. In an open letter to striking dockers, US dockers' leader Jack Heyman (ILWU Local 10) warned that "At this most critical stage of the conflict it is essential that the dockers know precisely what is being formulated. There must be time to discuss the labour supply question fully before it is put to a vote..."

The Liverpool stewards are now trying to backtrack from the TGWU trap by emphasising their demands. Agencies must be removed from the port along with the strike-breakers.

The sacked dockers must have full reinstatement to ensure continuity of all pension rights whether or not individuals then choose to leave the industry. They must have the right to supply labour to every area of port operations, and working conditions must be under dockers' control.

They are confident that if the TGWU leadership insists on a secret ballot on anything else it will be rejected.

Whatever political pressure the Labour Party and TGWU may feel to end the dispute by any means necessary, their problem remains: why should men and women who have fought 18 months to uphold their right to refuse to cross a picket line now settle for a compromise on the employers' terms?

The strikers from these disputes are working closely together, lending each other support and speaking at each others meetings. They are also making links with other disputes such as Project Aerospace.

All the strikers are calling for support for the April 12th March for Social Justice, which needs to be a magnificent display of solidarity with those who have fought so long.

We need to show the union and Labour leaders that we have not forgotten these disputes.

We must demand if Labour wins the election it take action to see that the strikers full demands are met.

Critchley Labels strikers fight derecognition

Marian Brain

CRITCHLEY LABELS in South Wales was part of British Telecom until May 1993. The workers printed and produced literature in house.

Their union, the Communications Workers Union (CWU) was recognised and there were collective agreements. BT's management and the company's new owners guaranteed that this would remain the case.

In summer 1994 30 per cent of staff left following voluntary redundancies. The company then decided to derecognise the union. Following a ballot for industrial action the CWU and management

reached an agreement on recognition.

Then the company unilaterally declared that 10 CWU members including branch officers were to be made redundant. There was no attempt to seek volunteers. Their cases are still pending industrial tribunals.

The CWU sought to negotiate that any future redundancies would involve prior consultation with the union in line with existing agreements. When this was rejected workers voted for an overtime ban which began in October 1996.

In December the CWU was given three weeks notice of

derecognition, yet another breach of a written agreement. John Monks, TUC General Secretary, has described Critchley as "the worst example of industrial relations in Wales".

Union members voted to escalate industrial action in defence of their rights. All union members at Critchley went on strike on January 22 and January 29. Managers were bullying and threatening to dismiss those who did so.

On February 3 a one week strike started. The next day workers received hand delivered letters saying they would be sacked unless they reported for work on 6 February.

All 31 CWU members at the company, whether or not they had voted for strike action, decided that they would not be bullied and intimidated. They stood by their union and fought for the right to trade union membership and representation.

Harassed

Women at Critchley Labels have explained that sexual harassment has been a problem at the factory for some time, ranging from physical contact to managers leaking personal medical details.

The strikers would rather see the plant closed down than go back to a regime of intimidation under

worse conditions. They have already made many sacrifices in defence of trade union rights. Some are single parents, others the only earners in their household, in an area of high unemployment.

On March 8 there was a demonstration in South Wales in defence of the Critchley Labels strikers. Now is the time to step up solidarity. Their fight is our fight.

Send messages of support and financial assistance to the Critchley Labels Fund, CWU, Greystoke House, London W5 1AW. For more information and speakers contact Sue Hopkins, CWU Chair at Critchley Labels, on 01485 220587.

Election dogs that are unlikely to bark

1) The great pensions rip-off

18 years of Thatcherite rule has led to a decimation in value of the basic state pension, deliberately run down by severing the link between pensions and average wages established by Labour in the 1970s.

Last year's Labour conference saw a set-piece battle between pensioners' campaigns demanding that this link be restored, and Tony Blair's front bench team, determined to evade any such commitment.

Indeed Labour itself has been flirting with ideas of compelling workers into taking out a second, "funded" pension to compensate for the plunging value of the basic pension - ignoring the obvious problem that such a scheme simply widens and perpetuates the gulf in living standards between the best and lowest-paid workers.

But a fifth Tory term could lead to an even more brazen onslaught on this cornerstone of the welfare state, if right wing zealot Peter Lilley gets his way and plans for the privatisation of pensions.

Lilley's plans would not immediately affect today's pensioners or

many of today's workers, but would press-gang new entrants to the labour market into a fully privatised scheme in which £9 per week would be siphoned from pay packets as a "rebate" paid into an "approved" private pension scheme, along with an additional 5% of pay.

Assuming the company did not go broke in the meantime this should create a "pot" of around £130,000 in 2040, sufficient for a pension of £175 per week "in today's money" - which in practice is likely to be little over 20% of the likely average earnings. As one critic predicted "A poor worker will progress to be a poor pensioner."

This miserable level of income would be rejected out of hand by other EU countries, and is far below the existing entitlement of workers who retire now on average earnings, who can expect a basic pension and State Earnings Related Pension Scheme (SERPS) payments of around 36% of their wage on retirement.

The Tory scheme offers nothing but misery for the unemployed, the low-paid, the part-time workers, and for women whose pay tends to be lower and whose earnings record tends to be broken by episodes of childbirth. It would

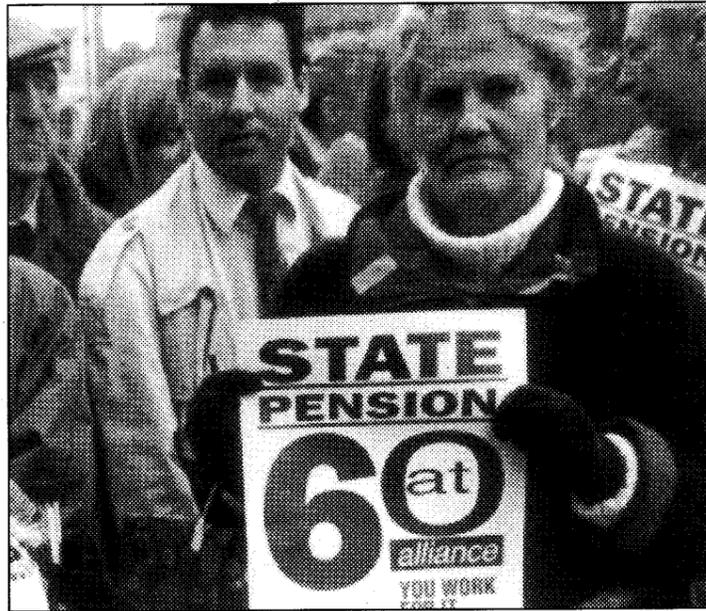
guarantee old-age poverty to over 3 million people.

Even the *Financial Times*, an advocate of the Tory plans, admitted that "The snag ... is that the guaranteed minimum would be so low ... as to make the safety net safe only for ascetics. For the unemployed there appears to be inadequate assistance. Yet the scheme is moving in the same broad direction as Labour policy."

But of course the big pensions firms are eagerly fingering their calculators, totting up their likely commission from the diversion of a massive £40 billion from the state sector into private schemes, and backing the Tory plan to the hilt. One of the first to welcome Lilley's plan was Legal & General, one of the companies at the centre of the massive, unscrupulous sale of inappropriate private pensions to over 500,000 public sector workers in the great pensions scam of the 1980s. Only one percent of those fleeced by these companies has yet received the compensation they are owed.

Labour has ritually condemned the Tory plan - but has no policies that can win the confidence of six million pensioners, millions of whom now live in poverty.

Blair's team will not confront the central issue, that the ever-



increasing privatisation of pensions and the focus on the individual's pension "pot" is designed above all to relieve the employers of any responsibility to contribute: employers' national insurance contributions and taxation are extraordinarily low in Britain compared with more EU and OECD countries.

The result is that the profits are mopped up by the corporations and the pension funds - and handed out to wealthy shareholders, while the burden falls on individual workers to haul themselves up by their own bootstraps. Instead of pumping ever greater sums of workers' cash into these institutions - many of which are the driving force for rationalisation and redundancy in industry - a socialist solution would start by

nationalising them and the banks, to guarantee the security of workers' jobs and wages now and in the future.

Far from opening up what Mrs Merton might call "a heated debate", the Tory plans have underlined how puny is Labour's response and how far the Party has retreated from the collectivist principles which even Wilson's 1970s Labour governments sought to implement.

4) The NHS funding gap

The Tories believe they have neutralised the NHS as an election issue: and from Labour's recent performance it appears that they are right. Without a serious promise to allocate new money, Labour cannot offer any solution to the growing pressures on acute services, mental health and long term care.

The Tory plans for NHS involve a three year standstill budget, with real terms growth of just one third of one percent (0.3%) between 1996 and 1999.

This compares with commonly-accepted assumptions that the increasing numbers of elderly, advances in new technology and other pressures require at least a 2% per year increase to keep pace with demand.

But Gordon Brown has insisted that Labour accepts the Tory spending limits - which leave Britain near the bottom of the international league for the percentage of national wealth (GDP) spent on health, and 30% below the OECD average per capita spending.

Ditched

The Party has ditched promises to restore free dental checks, and will be immediately caught up in a new round of scandals as health authorities set out to ration treatment, cash-strapped Trusts leave patients for hours on trolleys, and health chiefs look for different ways to raise cash through charges for superior meals or other "extras".

A standstill on spending will mean painful cuts. Even if Labour were to raise its much-vaunted £100m savings by cutting bureaucracy, this is far from sufficient to stand still.

Far from an electoral asset, the NHS could rapidly become an albatross around the neck of a Labour government tied to Tory spending policies. No wonder Stephen Dorrell is leading the chants of "It's all gone quiet over there".

2) Social Service cuts and privatisation

Cuts totalling over £100m are being imposed by 31 Social Services Departments in England as they grapple with budget reductions for 1997/98, according to a survey.

The Association of Directors of Social Services found that cuts averaged 4.3%, and have already led to at least 700 residential places and home care packages for the elderly being lost, despite rising numbers requiring care as the NHS backs out of supporting the frail elderly.

Virtually all the authorities cutting back on these vital services are Labour-controlled, as are the councils slashing services in Scotland and Wales: but Tony Blair's office in Millbank has been working overtime to suppress any concerted opposition to the cuts, which arise from Kenneth Clarke's cynical tax-cutting budget, which deliberately short-changed councils while John Gummer at the Environment office



Gone, and forgotten: Labour's pledges - and Margaret Beckett

slapped a brutal "cap" on spending.

Blair's lieutenant Frank Dobson has been touring town and county halls, warning that a May victory for New Labour would reinforce the Tory spending limits, driving councillors to nod through a modest 6.6% average increase in council tax, at the expense of axing cher-

ished services.

The crackdown on council spending forms the key backdrop to Stephen Dorrell's White Paper proposing the wholesale privatisation of social services, reducing councils to the role of "purchasers" of care from a massively expanded private sector.

Dorrell and the Tories are driven by an ideological agenda: there is no popular demand for these services to be privatised, and no evidence that care in private, often desperately under-staffed profit-seeking homes is any superior to that provided by local authorities. Of course they also seek to cut spending, claiming that private residential homes are up to £40 per week cheaper.

This type of cost-cutting has been the driving force pushing councils like Labour-controlled Kent towards wholesale privatisation, following the inglorious examples of Labour councils like Southwark eagerly putting services out to competitive

tender.

And with New Labour's policies targeted towards tax cuts for the well-to-do and revolving around the deluded notion of a "partnership" between public and private sectors, the Party is ill-equipped to combat these latest penny-pinching Tory policies.

* The Law Lords ruling on March 20 that councils are free to slash services even to the most seriously disabled in order to balance their books is a serious reversal of the 1970 Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act.

Conspicuously silent in the aftermath of this landmark ruling, which demolishes the pretence of any entitlement to community care, was Labour's front bench team. Since they have endorsed the same cash limits, presumably Labour, like the Tories, would have backed the Gloucestershire appeal, and will continue the same policies.

3) The great 'Community care' rip-off

The latest Tory plans to mitigate the effects of their own community care reforms, which were introduced with increasingly disastrous consequences four years ago, focus yet again on private insurance.

Health Secretary Stephen Dorrell finally unveiled a scheme through which the government would subsidise the long-term care of the wealthiest 5% of pensioners, if they took out insurance policies to help pay the costs of their own residential care. This follows on Kenneth Clarke's decision to raise the

threshold figure for assets above which pensioners are obliged to pay the full cost of residential care.

Pensioners lucky enough to have a lump sum of upwards of £5,400 available to buy an insurance policy paying £45,000 could, under Dorrell's plan buy their way out of the policy of means-tested charges which have compelled tens of thousands of frail elderly people to sell their homes to pay for their own care.

But the scheme would cost the government a minimum of £200m

a year - meaning that low-paid workers would pay through taxation to subsidise a handout to the most wealthy sections of the middle class.

Easy target

The policy itself was easy meat for Labour to attack: Even the insurance companies, which in theory stand to gain from the scheme, have given only guarded support.

But there is again a booming silence from Labour on what it will do in office to tackle the growing scandal of a "commu-

nity care" system which robs pensioners of their homes and savings, even as it fails to deliver comprehensive services to those most in need.

The ritualistic Labour promise of a Royal Commission is nothing more than a pledge to defer the issue for years to come. But as growing numbers of families confront a yawning gap in care, the problem is one which will snap at the heels of a Blair government from day one.



As long as the crisis lasts, fascist groups will feed off frustration

British fascism – down but not out

Simon Deville

Since the rise of Thatcherism in the late seventies, British fascism has been in decline. The National Front had the rug pulled from beneath them when the Tory Party adopted many of the central points of their policies, from racist immigration policies and jingoistic national chauvinism to saturation policing in poorer inner city areas and the hated "sus" laws.

The BNP have virtually abandoned organising public demonstrations since they have simply provoked mass opposition and humiliating defeats.

Over the last couple of years the BNP has been largely paralysed by internal feuding, banning its members from joining the paramilitary style Combat 18 and a split within the leadership of C18 over money raised through the "Blood and Honour" Nazi music network.

Shortly before the general election was called, the fascist British National Party declared that they would stand in at least 50 seats, hoping that this would enable them to have their own party political broadcasts on TV. Their aim was to stand around 35 candidates, with several contesting more than one seat each.

This plan was scuppered when both Channel 4 and the BBC stated that they would only allow broadcasts for parties that fielded at least 50 separate candidates. As we go to press the BNP are reportedly trying urgently to scrape together the extra candidates needed.

In the forthcoming General Election the BNP have no base of support whatsoever, and are likely to achieve an extremely small vote in most of the seats they contest.

It would be disastrous, though, for the left to assume that this decline will continue and that fascists will simply go away if we ignore them. The far right are likely to re-emerge under a Labour government and we must be prepared to combat this.

The BNP's electoral aim is not to win seats at this election, but rather, to lay down a marker for the future. They are relying on the

widespread disillusionment that may occur if a Labour government is elected which continues or escalates the offensive against the working class that the Tories began.

To prevent fascists from growing requires organising against them now – building anti-fascist campaigns that oppose fascists politically, drawing in all sections of the labour movement, the trade unions, anti-racist and community organisations in opposition to racist ideas that may gain ground among some sections of the working class.

The struggle against fascism will also require organising against fascist meetings and demos, including physical opposition where needed. Communities have to organise to defend themselves against fascist and racist attacks.

The inability of fascists to organise publicly in recent years has played a major role in demoralising their cadre and preventing them from making any significant breakthroughs.

Alternative

Finally, the left must start to put forward a political alternative. In many impoverished areas, Labour councils have been in office for years, presiding over massive cuts in spending and services.

They have implemented Tory policies, using the justification that if they didn't the Tories would carry out even worse cuts. Despite this, most impoverished working class areas are likely to return a massive vote for Labour at the general election in the hope that they will see a change from the last 18 years. With a Labour government councils will no longer have any excuse.

A failure to deliver anything under a Labour government will create disillusionment – the response could be to look either to the left or the right.

If the left fails to put forward a strategy to fight Blair's project that can give hope to working class communities, we are likely to see a massive growth of the far right and a number of electoral defeats for Labour in their traditional strongholds in the 1998 council elections.

What chance for Operation Black Vote?

Mark Jason

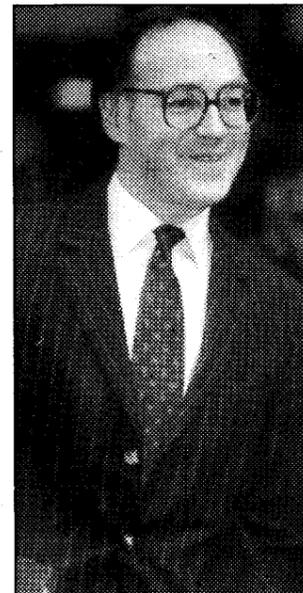
SEVERAL recent surveys have shown that most black people do not intend to vote. This is a cause for concern to some politicians, as according to the 1994 Labour force survey, nearly six per cent of the population define themselves as Black British, (this rises to nine per cent of those under 16).

In response, the 1990 Trust has launched "Operation Black Vote" to encourage Black people to register and vote. Its posters argue that the one million black people should telephone the Conservative and Labour Party leaders to make their voices heard.

We should support the campaign's aims – abstention can lead to demoralisation and atomisation of black communities. At the same time, though, it reflects an astute political understanding amongst the black working class that none of the main parties are likely to do much to change the situation they live in.

It is not enough to urge people to vote when they are convinced that voting will not change a thing. Indeed the Labour leadership, anxious to please big business and "middle England", has spent the last few years trying to dampen working class aspirations in the arrogant assumption that working class people will automatically vote Labour anyway.

Nationally unemployment amongst black people is twice that



Chance to wipe off that grin

of whites. In London a staggering 60 per cent of black youth are unemployed compared to 20 per cent of whites. All the Labour leadership has to say on unemployment is that they will review the Jobseekers Allowance, and they have hinted at introducing their own forced labour schemes for the unemployed.

At every level of the criminal justice system blacks face discrimination. Black people are far more likely to be stopped by the police and arrested. Once arrested they are more likely to be charged than whites for the same offence, and

more likely to be sent to prison.

Again, Labour's response is confined to an attempt to out-Tory the Conservatives on who is tougher on crime.

The Labour leadership's opposition to the Immigration and Asylum Act was pitiful. Their partial opposition to some aspects of the bill was "balanced out" with assurances from party leaders that Labour will be tough on "illegal immigration".

The current Labour policy document outlines plans to bring British legislation into line with the 1951 UN convention on refugees and with international law. It then states that not enough asylum seekers who have their appeals turned down are currently being deported, and supports fast-tracking asylum appeals, which give little time to prepare or collect the necessary documentation.

It is not enough to encourage black people to put their cross on a bit of paper every five years while all parties give equal support to the system that oppresses black people. To encourage the participation of black people in politics, it is necessary to offer a way out of the enormous level of inequalities within society.

If the current direction of the Labour Party goes unchallenged, we are likely to witness wider and wider sections of the working class becoming demoralised and atomised. Only a consistent struggle against racism and for a massive investment in the impoverished inner cities can start to offer such a way forward.

Youth vote vital Don't let Labour get away with it!

George Thomas

MANY traditional Labour voters will stay at home (if they've got one) at this General Election. Labour who have generally relied on young people for support can no longer count on the majority of them even casting a ballot.

It's no surprise youth feel alienated with the system, when both parties scapegoat them for society's ills. It is sickening to see New Labour competing with the Tories to put young people under lock and guard.

Rather than restoring rights to young people after the Tories have removed them through Acts like the CJA, New Labour promises to curtail their freedoms even more through job conscription for the young unemployed, the slammer for young offenders, and house arrest for young kids on the block.

At work youth will still face an insecure future, as Labour refuses to grant rights from day one of employment.

Young people will not religiously vote for New Labour, when it doesn't even crusade against poverty. Blair will be no Samaritan to the young homeless, ignoring their begging for a restoration of grants for 16-18

year olds. He won't reverse the 20% cut in JSA for the young jobless. He wishes to exempt youth from minimum wage legislation.

As well as refusing to tax the rich and redistribute wealth, Labour refuses to spend more money on education, health and transport. Students will sink deeper into debt, more youth will grow up in unhealthy surroundings and traffic will grind to a halt.

The Tories have dug themselves into a hole and their Transport Minister Steven Norris says he can now sympathise with the views of Swampy the roads protester.

Yet Norris won't build any more roads only because the Tories economic programme hasn't the funds for them.

Labour's adoption of this very same programme will prolong the transport chaos created by privatisation of bus and rail services.

Youth are being told by Labour and Tories the capitalist economy has not the money to meet their urgent needs. Young people must then turn their backs on



capitalism and struggle for something altogether different.

Whilst youth should exercise their democratic right in this election, our votes will not rock the system. Yet we shouldn't resign ourselves to the idea nothing can change, across Europe the situation has changed and is changing dramatically.

Millions of youth are voting with their feet in protest against the future being offered by Europe's capitalist leaders.

Recently Belgian school students have filled the streets demonstrating against government corruption and young Germans have demonstrated against Kohl's nuclear programme.

Thousands of youth will descend on Amsterdam in June in support of the Euromarch for Jobs and against Europe's leaders plotting Maastricht 2. If you want to start a new term of struggle, join supporters of SO on the march!

Down with Fortress Europe! Lille conference calls for end to detentions

Bill MacKeith

IN DETENTION centres across Europe more and more migrants, including refugees and people without the "correct" immigration papers are being imprisoned.

Opposition to this brought together over 200 people from 15 European countries at a conference on "Barbed Wire Europe" organised by France's Federation of Associations in support of immigrant workers (FASTI) in Lille on March 15-16.

Most of those present were involved in practical work assisting detainees. From Britain they included representatives from the London and Gatwick Detainee support groups, Detention Advisory Service, the Refugee Legal Service and five from the Campaign to Close Campsfield. Dr Christina Pourgourides, who reported on her study on the psychological harm inflicted on detainees was also present.

Conference opened with a strong address from the President of the Assembly of the Nord/Pas de Calais Region. She demanded that the arms trade, third world "debt" should be challenged and anti-

colonial policies be pursued as well as the detentions of innocent people being ended.

During the reports from different countries it emerged that Brit-

ish procedures, and visiting rights for humanitarian, legal and medical support groups.

The mayor of Fernay-Voltaire on the border with Switzerland told how his town successfully opposed the building of a detention centre nearby. He invited delegates to Fernay for a recall conference. Proposals for this and for international day of action will be considered by a conference steering group from the conference. A full report will be published.

Contact 01865 558145.



The Sans Papiers has become a mass movement of black people

ain is exceptional in that it detains refugees and other migrants in common prisons.

Unique

The numbers of people involved, the length of detentions, the lack of "proper" judicial procedures and the involvement of private security firms also make it unique.

The Conference sent support to the "sans papiers" on hunger strike just a few minutes walk away (see adjacent report).

It also sent a letter to the European Commission President Jacques Santer calling for the closure of detention centres, proper judi-

whose hunger strike, last year, attracted mass support throughout France.

With the latest Government anti-refugee measures there are now estimated to be 750,000 "Sans Papiers" in France. Their existence is one in which they can not work legally, can not claim benefits, are supposed to report to the police and they are picked up and imprisoned

for not having papers. It is an end to this persecution that is the main aim of "regularisation".

There were speakers at the rally from the national organisation of "Sans Papiers", from Saint Bernard, from the local Lille organisation and from the Asylum conference that was taking place that weekend.

It is plain, from the way that this



TV special

An English sub-titled version of the "Ballad of the Sans Papiers" is shortly to be shown on Channel 4 TV. Made in Paris by l'Yeux Ouverts and IM'Media, this 90-minute documentary chronicles the "sans papiers" movement from 300 Africans' occupation of St Ambroise church, Paris in March to the police eviction of the hunger striking "sans papiers" from St Bernard on August 23 1966.

Rochester leads anti-racist protests

Derick Colbert

The hunger strike by asylum seekers incarcerated in Rochester Prison is highlighting the appalling treatment of asylum seekers, refugees and other migrant workers by the British government.

This is a key part of last year's racist Immigration and Asylum Act which welcomes the rich Britain but imprisons poor, black asylum seekers fleeing from persecution or poverty.

The hunger strike at Rochester, which ended on March 10, was in protest at the courts' refusal to grant bail to detainees and the continued rejection of their request to reside in safety in Britain. A peaceful demonstration inside the prison last year was violently smashed by riot police, and many of the detainees suffered injuries.

Two of the hunger strikers from Nigeria face certain torture or death if returned into the hands of what the Nigerian High Commission in London has referred to publicly as the "strong arms of Nigerian justice". Despite the overwhelming justice of their case, the two men were isolated in the notorious 'basement' wing of Rochester prison in almost solitary confinement, seeing only prison and Home Office staff.

A Tunisian asylum seeker, sent air tickets and papers in order to join his brother in Italy, was denied permission to fly by the Home Office and told he should return to Tunisia - from where he had fled persecution!

Initially bail was refused to all these men. They remained locked up alongside convicted criminals in degrading and dehumanising conditions. Pressure on the government and the courts by the hunger strikers and by protests outside meant bail was granted to five hunger strikers, but many other detainees remain locked up.

At the end of the protest, the hunger strikers issued the following statement:

"When we started our hunger strike we thought we were alone. We were not. We would like to thank all those who supported us throughout the hunger strike, for the faxes and letters of protest sent to the Home Office. There were so many faxes of protest sent to the Governor of Rochester Prison that they disconnected and discontinued that number.

"We would especially like to thank the international support we received from the people of France, Germany, the Netherlands, Portugal and Argentina who faxed and wrote on our behalf. We send greetings to the refugees on hunger strike at Lille (Palais de Cal) and to the sans papiers in France.

"As our demands have not been met, the struggle continues.

Yours in solidarity, the Interned Rochester Asylum Seekers."



"Sans Papiers" hunger strike gains support

3000 people demonstrated through the streets of Lille, in Northern France, on 15th March. The march was calling for the "regularisation" of "Sans Papiers" in France and in support of the Lille hunger strikers.

Most of the people were young and there was a lively grouping from Saint Bernard "Sans Papiers",

whose hunger strike, last year, attracted mass support throughout France.

With the latest Government anti-refugee measures there are now estimated to be 750,000 "Sans Papiers" in France. Their existence is one in which they can not work legally, can not claim benefits, are supposed to report to the police and they are picked up and imprisoned

for not having papers. It is an end to this persecution that is the main aim of "regularisation".

There were speakers at the rally from the national organisation of "Sans Papiers", from Saint Bernard, from the local Lille organisation and from the Asylum conference that was taking place that weekend.

It is plain, from the way that this

movement speaks of the way that Western governments are squeezing the underdeveloped world through debt and arms sales to western trained dictators, that this is the strongest movement of black people in Europe at the moment, which is also black-led.

The march ended at the MNE building in Lille, which is occupied by the 20 or so hunger strikers, who had reached their 62nd day of not eating solids.

On March 15, a delegation from the International asylum conference in Lille visited the hunger strikers, to show solidarity. The hunger strikers had been forcibly removed to hospital for 2 days a week and they were desperate for support.

The British media have ignored these hunger strikes, which reflect the increased desperation of the "Sans Papiers".

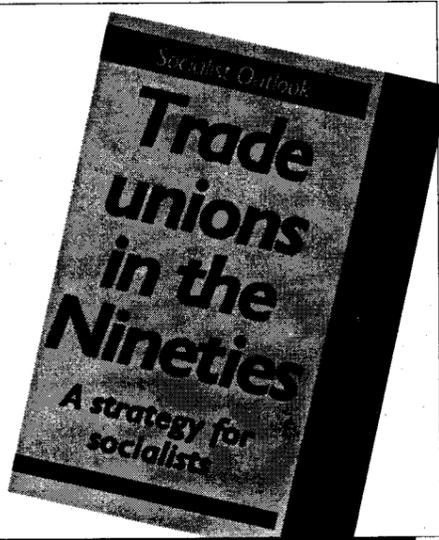
Demonstrations are regularly held and these should be supported where possible and messages of solidarity can be sent to MNE Building, 23 Rue Gosselet, 59,000 Lille, France.

Calls for "regularisation" should be sent to the Prefecture in Lille, and the French Embassy.

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Closure triggers Belgian fightback

Jurgen De Wit in Vilvoorde

The announcement from union secretary-general De Virville came like a bombshell to the workers at Renault-Vilvoorde on 27 February. Only a few hours before the scandalous decision contracts had been promised to twenty or so workers. Now the entire plant was to be closed.

Renault had decided to move production to France and Spain and in the process were asking for funds from the European structural fund in order to facilitate the transfer.

The unions decided to immediately occupy in order to keep the machines in the plant. The same evening the first demonstration was taken to the town hall.

In total 3,100 jobs are threatened. Those at Renault-Vilvoorde had already paid a heavy price for flexibility, with management imposing a flexible working week of between 27 and 45 hours depending on what was on the order book.

This added to the unbearable pressure on workers to increase productivity. The result at Vilvoorde was that workers were producing 53 cars per person each year – a grim record. Already a large number of workers had been forced out on early retirement – 500 in 1989 and 150 in 1993.

An atmosphere of resignation, bitterness and repressed rage prevailed at the meeting of workers held the day after the announcement. There were messages of solidarity and numerous delegations from many factories – Volkswagen, Caterpillar, Delhaizen, Mercedes and also from France.

The unions organised a response – a big assembly on March 2 with representatives from the unions of the other European factories to coincide with a special meeting of the municipal council. On March 3 a successful demonstration took place in Brussels.

After meeting at 7am the workers' massive bus convoy followed the route to Brussels, to meet up with workers from many other branches of industry.

Workers from the bankrupted forges de Clabecq steel mill were present in their hundreds together with delegations from Caterpillar, Volkswagen, Sabena, Nova and many youth. Around 4,000 people joined the demonstration, the slogans of which were opposition to capitalist Europe's creation of unemployment and job insecurity.

After a national car industry meeting on the March 7, a demonstration was called in Paris for March 14 just before the mobilisation for jobs on the 16th which had been called by Belgium's two main union federations.

The leaders of the Flemish federal region have condemned Renault's decision in nationalist tones. "This is a French decision taken against the excellent Flemish workers" was the declaration of Van den Brande, Prime Minister of Flanders. He demanded a meeting with Louis Schweitzer, chairman of Renault.

Brande went on to emphasise the powerlessness of the politicians in the face of an economic choice even speaking of 'savage capitalism' in such a way as to suggest there was such a thing as 'social capitalism'. The unions recognised that there was still widespread support for capitalist economic choice but



they still wanted the cancellation of the Renault group's decision.

Important to their struggle has been the combined support of the eight European unions who organise

workers throughout Renault. This, together with the continuing occupation and a prospective boycott of French goods means that a significant change is beginning.

Internationalism on the march, as car workers and other trade unionists joined forces to protest at the impact of the bosses' Europe.

Workers' solidarity shakes bosses' Europe

March 11 1997 was a day that deserves to be remembered for a long time to come.

Thousands of German miners occupied Bonn in protest at the threat to their jobs from Kohl's proposals to slash subsidies to the industry. The sight of the Free Democrats, Chancellor Kohl's coalition partners who are always championing the "free market" being locked out of their offices by miners chained round the building was very uplifting.

Perhaps the most telling image from Bonn was when the miners built a mock grave outside Kohl's office with the inscription "Three, four, five, six, seven million unemployed, that's not important. But the European Union is".

There could be no doubt the

miners were clear on whose altar the government sought to sacrifice them.

At the same time Renault workers from across Europe were gathering outside the companies head office near Paris to object the closure of the Vilvoorde plant in Belgium with the loss of 3100 jobs. The protest followed Europe wide strike action on March 7.

Joint protest

Workers from Renault plants in France, Spain, Portugal and even Slovenia joined with the sacked workers in protesting. Other supporters included Belgian supporters from Volvo, Volkswagen, Ford and General Motors.

This magnificent display of solidarity led to the media telling us

that the "Euro-demo" had been born. While this may be because they have ignored previous events, certainly the mood is building.

The sharpening competition in the car industry which has led to the closure at Vilvoorde is as much a product of the bosses' Europe as the attacks on the welfare state and the withdrawal of subsidies from the German coal industry. The battle for the single currency leads to restructuring of private industry too.

Other signs of this are apparent with the decision of Mercedes and Rover to move into the small car market. The sell-out at Halewood meant that workers there were unable to test out the potential of international solidarity against this relentless drive for profits.

In the steel industry too the bat-

tle lines are being drawn. It is being predicted that between 60,000 and 70,000 jobs in the industry are under threat as more companies succumb to takeovers and cut capacity. This would bring numbers in the industry down to below 200,000 the lowest since the industrial revolution.

British Steel announced on March 21 that it would be "accelerating" its planned job cuts from the current 500 to 1000 per year but denied that it would be cutting 10,000 jobs over the next five years-nearly a quarter of the workforce.

In Germany, Krupp is planning a £5bn hostile, Anglo-American style take-over of Thyssen which would lead to the biggest firm in Europe. Thyssen say this will lead to the loss of 10,000 jobs but Krupp

deny this.

Despite the denial, Gerhardt Crommer, Chairman of Krupp has to be protected from angry Thyssen workers by riot shields when he met them at Essen in March. Krupp workers have also joined the protests.

The European steel trade association (Eurofer) explains the process rather clearly. A spokesman (sic) said "the restructuring process has become permanent, with costs having to be cut to maintain competitiveness".

The message of bosses and governments is becoming more blatant – the need to answer them has never been more acute. In building on the gains of the last weeks we can begin to do that.

Why Maastricht matters

John Lister

WORKERS across Europe are linking up to confront the austerity of the Maastricht criteria: but there are those in the labour movement who argue for a different approach.

From the political right comes the reformist argument that the "Social Chapter" of Maastricht offers workers a significant improvement in employment rights and working conditions.

Trade union bureaucrats who years ago gave up any perspective of fighting against British employers for decent pay and conditions hint to us that these things might be achieved through the back door of economic and political integration. Instead of seeking crumbs from the bosses' table, we are now apparently waiting for scraps of paper from Brussels.

Others, like the TUC (in common with the CBI) go further, and link any improvement in workers' living standards to a future expansion of capitalism, supposedly to be ushered in by the launch of the Euro.

Reluctant to admit their real motives, many of these bureaucrats shelter behind the claim that action against Maastricht is somehow "nationalistic" or "Little England" in approach.

Unfortunately for these Euro-reformists, the laws of the capitalist market, spurred on by the austerity package required for most EU states to meet the Maastricht criteria, are leading to a full-scale Thatcherite offensive.

Renault workers were the first to see the flimsy protection of the Social Chapter contemptuously torn

up by a management hell-bent on matching the levels of exploitation achieved under 18 years of Tory rule. German miners, too have had to resort to old-fashioned class action rather than Euro-laws to defend their jobs.

The spread of unemployment across Europe – and the accompanying onslaught on benefits and on welfare state provision give little comfort to those who argue that the Euro will open up a new golden age of benevolent capitalist expansion.

But there are those on the left, too, who stand back, arguing that



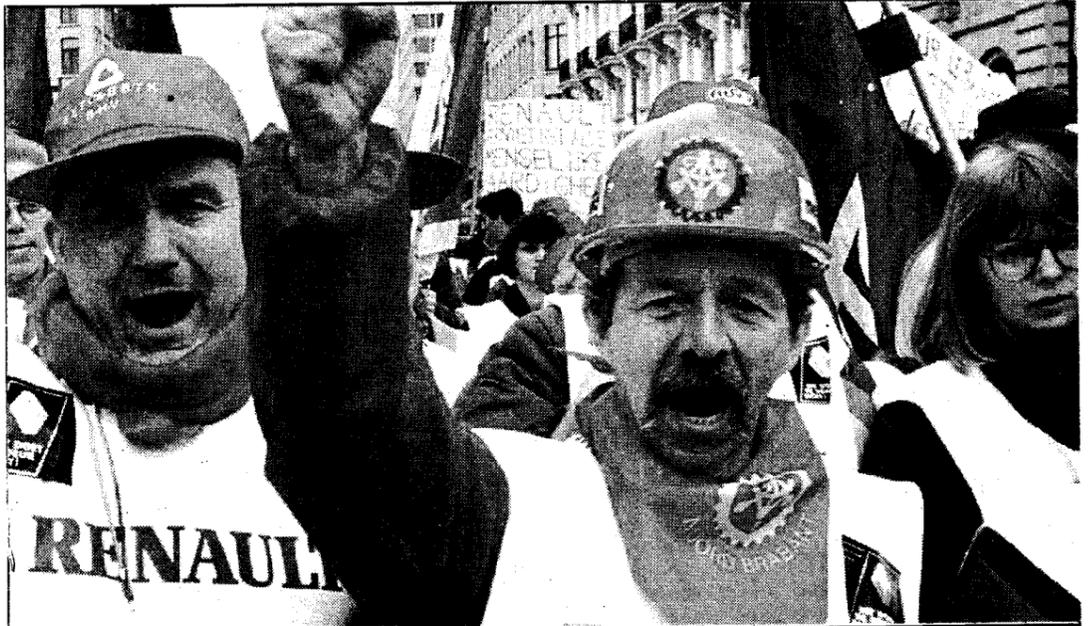
Andrew Wiaard

Defeatist bureaucrats like Monks pin hopes on EU laws

Maastricht is an irrelevance, and that the capitalist class would in any event be attacking workers throughout Europe.

The key issue, they tell us, is that during the Thatcher years the British working class has allowed the bosses to cut real wages and cut their contributions to pensions and welfare benefits.

But the problem of such a simplistic "class struggle in each country" approach is that it ignores the concerted attack being waged by bosses and capitalist governments right across Europe, each spurring the others along towards



Renault: dispute over closures has opened eyes across Europe, showing how flimsy is the "Social Chapter"

their 1999 deadline.

And it ignores the fact that if the Euro is established, along with a European Bank policing the actions of member states, the scope to force concessions from any genuinely left wing or socialist government is virtually non-existent.

While leftists who ignore Maastricht denounce the "nationalism" of those fighting back, they have no answer to the fact that the oppressive power of an unelected central bank would create new national divisions and conflicts between member states.

As millions of workers are becoming painfully aware, with their cherished pensions, jobs and living standards under attack, the Maastricht process is driving forward a continental offensive.

If workers throughout the EU are not to be driven down to the conditions imposed in Tory Britain – and then progressively further in the name of competition with low-wage economies world-wide – they must unite in common struggle.

The fight is not for the pound, the mark or the franc, or even against the concept of a single currency: it is against the concerted effort of Europe's bankers to solve their crisis at our expense.

The only genuinely social Europe will be one in which the wealth and the means of production are socially owned and democratically controlled by Europe's workers.

TIE binds workers' struggles together

OVER 200 trade union activists from all over Europe, as well as delegations from the USA, Canada, Turkey, South Korea and Belarus attended the third international conference of the Transnational Information Exchange (TIE).

Entitled "Towards a New Transnational Labour Response to Lean Production and Neo-liberalism", the conference was called by TIE and "Express" on 6-9 March. It was well organised with simultaneous translation in 7 languages.

The starting plenary had an introduction by Rob Van Tilder of the University of Amsterdam. In a wide ranging contribution he debunked the idea of "Globalisation" and showed how Europe is doing less trade with the rest of the world. Companies receiving outsourced work are often themselves major world companies!

Workshops were held on Turkey, Mexico, South Korea and Belarus and there were also sessions on politics in the trades unions, the battle to change the unions including contributions from the "Black Workers for Justice USA".

There were other workshops on company unionism, AND on the fight against partnership and participation programmes.

One of the workshops was led by

workers from the NUMMI/USA and CAMI/Canada plants, both of which started off as exemplary plants for the employers but which have now changed for the better in terms of resistance by workers in the form of negotiated agreements.

The Canadian Auto Workers reported on their highly militant contract negotiations and there was a lively debate about outsourcing that arose from the fact that they had more or less successfully opposed it.

One of the most interesting debates was on Works Councils, which several of the German delegates were involved with. The general conclusion seemed to be that membership of such councils was not a matter of principle and that it is important to have a genuinely independent organisation of shop stewards.

"Interest group" meetings took place at the conference on the European Marches against unemployment, which Express are sponsoring, and on the Renault dispute in France.

TIE is the only organisation that is holding European wide meetings on the main issues now facing trade unionists and it is important that socialists and trade unionists give their full support to these initiatives.

Which Europe can defend jobs?

Those striking and marching in defence of Renault workers at Vilvorde have posed the question of a different Europe. Manuel Fernandez from Renault in Seville argued that workers must press for a "social Europe" instead of a "sweatshop Europe".

He told journalists "This movement proves that workers throughout Europe can get together in the face of employers who just want to play the European subsidies game and divide us".

Those politicians on the

other hand who have raised the issue of Renault have concentrated their objections on the supposed infringement of European law that the closure procedures are meant to have made.

Such a stance has been given credibility by statements from the European Commission itself that it was displeased with Renault.

In fact European law gives workers little protection. The real concern is that workers, even in the heart of Europe, are increasingly beginning to look for a different alternative

Rouge, the paper of the French Ligue Communiste Revolutionaire, interviewed Eliane Vogel-Polsky, lecturer in social law at the Free University of Brussels on some of these questions:

Rouge: Has Renault infringed European law?

Eliane Vogel-Polsky: Yes and no. Renault has not infringed the directive on works councils within European businesses, because its works council was formed before this directive came into force. Its functions are minimalist and in line with the directive.

They relate solely to giving information on certain matters. The

workers' delegates cannot demand information. The directive does not stipulate warning the unions of changes within a minimum timescale. Renault has met its obligations in organising a works council after announcing the closure.

Renault's only infringement of the directive has been its failure to inform the Belgian works council of its intentions. There is no real sanction in European law, though, as any infringement of the directive is just referred back to the law of the European member state.

Rouge: Some Euro-MPs repeat that Renault shows the need for "more Europe" – that is stronger powers to intervene.

E. Vogel-Polsky: "More Europe", but which Europe? That is the question.

If the directive on large scale redundancies in case of restructuring of companies which are not in financial difficulty were implemented, closures would be very expensive for companies.

Movements to other EC countries would be more difficult. This would create more favourable conditions for trade union struggle, for the reduction of working hours, for example.

You can imagine European law which would be more beneficial to workers, but it will never be more than a minimum demand, and should not replace social struggles. In this capitalist system, we need to fight for jobs, as the trade unionists are doing at Renault.



Getting by on the bare essentials: German miners stripped to their underpants and paraded through Bonn with placards asking "Where would Germany be without coal mining?"

German resistance confronts Kohl's austerity drive

Hans-Jurgen Schulz reports from Germany

A miner expressed the general mood on the demonstration in Bonn when he said "we've stayed quiet too long".

The willingness to resist is growing against a background of falling real wages, the dismantling of the welfare state and rising unemployment (4.7 million). 400,000 demonstrated in Bonn on the 15th June 1996. In October a hundred thousand struck successfully when it was proposed to reduce sick pay to 80% of wages. Now there is resistance from individual sectors, initially the miners and building workers.

Coal mining receives 10,000 mil-

lion marks of state subsidy a year. In the 'free market' very little runs without subsidy. In Germany this amounts to 185,000 million marks. This money is now supposed to be drastically reduced. At the beginning of February 200,000 people demonstrated against this in the Ruhr region.

When plans became known on March 7 that 66,000 out of 90,000 bituminous coal miners would lose their jobs in the next few years, an undeclared general strike spontaneously broke out in the two mining regions, the Ruhr and the Saar. All pits were occupied and closed. Miners blocked roads and motorways and demonstrated through the towns.

They knew that if they continued to protest peacefully, they would be without a job. So they drove to Bonn. On the March 10 20,000 demonstrated, blocking the streets and the party offices of the Free Democrats (FDP, junior partner in the coalition government and rabid 'free marketeers') and breaking through the cordon around parliament.

In each case the police bided their time (in Germany the individual states are the police authority, the responsible state, North Rhine Westphalia, is a social democrat-green coalition government).

Chancellor Kohl refused to negotiate 'under pressure from the streets'. With difficulty the trade

union leadership persuaded the sceptical miners to leave Bonn. However, they only went as far as nearby Cologne, and 10,000 awaited the outcome of the negotiations on an improvised mass camp site.

The government obviously feared that further sectors could be drawn into the struggle. However the union leadership did not organise any kind of solidarity.

Under this pressure a compromise was formulated: the subsidy would not be reduced by as much as planned. Over the next 8 years the number of jobs will fall by 48,000, but nobody will be sacked. The miners accepted this because nobody will be fired.

The building workers' situation is more difficult. Over one and a half million work in this sector. Because 400,000 foreigners work on building sites either illegally or at lower rates, unemployment is high (400,000) and wage rates are coming under pressure.

In addition, this winter 'bad weather pay' (if work is not possible because of bad weather, particularly in winter, building workers still get paid) was scrapped, and workers were made unemployed instead. The employers had agreed that the wage rates for east German building workers would be raised to the west

German level. Suddenly, they changed their minds and insisted on an 8 per cent reduction in wage rates.

All this led to an explosive mood. Starting on the March 10, the union organised a week of action in Berlin, a centre of building activity. Union activists were also mobilised to Berlin. All week between 8,000 and 15,000 building workers demonstrated every day.

The actions went further than the union planned and they turned a blind eye to them. "We know nothing, but do what you must" said an internal circular.

An activist declared "We are many, we are angry, and we can do things which the union won't." Action was organised over mobile phones which couldn't be overheard.

Streets were blocked in Berlin too. The massive building site on Potsdam Square was occupied. The unthinkable happened: there were calculated acts of sabotage causing considerable damage.

A building trench ran with water because the safety mechanism suddenly failed, and expensive machinery broke down. Militant resistance was carried out for the first time in a long time.

The battle of Gorleben

Hans-Jurgen Schulz reports from Hamburg

20 YEARS AGO the salt mountains of Gorleben, in a thinly populated, isolated region 150 kilometers south of Hamburg were chosen as a store for highly radioactive waste. A massive 'intermediate store' was built there, secured like a fortress. This area, which once voted conservative, has been the stronghold of resistance against atomic politics ever since.

As the atomic power stations have long been in operation - the last was opened in 1989 - the opposition has been concentrated around the unresolved question of the final storage of radioactive material. Waste intended for Gorleben was stored until now either in the individual atomic piles or in the reprocessing plants in The Hague or Sellafield.

In the last three years the resistance has been able to slowly rebuild a mass basis, despite the fact

that it is not supported by any party or trade union. The Social Democrats (SPD) tolerate atomic politics despite the fact that they have been for withdrawal from it for more than a decade.

The Greens content themselves with public declarations, but don't even support the movement financially. The resistance is a real grass roots movement, but not at all spontaneous, but rather well organised and highly motivated.

The core of the opposition is citizens initiatives in the region around Gorleben (farmers, petit bourgeois and intelligentsia), small groups of veterans of the anti-nuclear movement of the '70s and above all very young people who are prepared for action. The movement is an expression of a new youth radicalisation.

At the beginning of March, 6 wagon loads of atomic waste were brought from southern Germany to Gorleben. There were demonstrations against it in many towns, in some cases of a few hundred, in a few cases of up to 3,000 people.

On the weekend before the transport about 30,000 people assembled in neighbouring Lüneburg

and the region. 573 farmers participated in a parade with their tractors and combine harvesters.

The transport of the waste took place under extreme security measures. There was much sabotage of railway installations. In the area around Gorleben, roads were tunnelled under, railway lines pulled up and barricades built.

One road was blocked by 70 tractors. About 30,000 police were mobilised to break the resistance, 19,000 of those in the region around Gorleben. The authorities announced a ban on demonstrations on the route of the transport, which was simply ignored.

The transportation took place during the week when people are tied up at work and school. Despite that over 10,000 people awaited its arrival in the region. Some concreted themselves on to railway facilities and held the train up for

hours.

Gorleben has no railway connection, and at the point where the waste was transferred to heavy lorries 7,000 people occupied the road for a whole night in temperatures of minus 5C. The next morning the road was cleared after a struggle lasting several hours with the deployment of water cannon and police batons. Thousands tried to block the rest of the route

They were only able to delay the transport for a time. The police went in brutally. 665 demonstrators have been charged so far. However, the resistance has not been broken, it will become stronger. And it became an example for others: a few days later the miners and building workers also ignored the rules of legal action.



Benn supports Euromarch message of hope

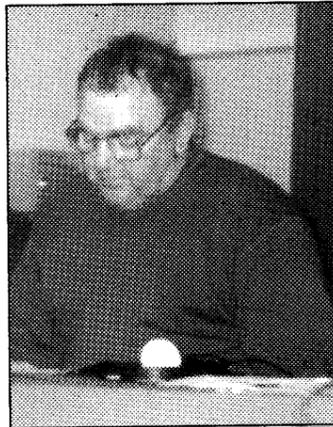


"We are witnessing the rebirth of European internationalism" was Tony Benn's central point at the Euro-marches press conference in the House of Commons on March 18th.

Benn gave strong support to the European marches, and the two British legs, saying it was necessary to understand that unemployment is not the result of a policy - it IS the policy.

In that context he said that a united action across Europe against unemployment represented "a message of hope and comes at exactly the right time".

Also speaking at the press conference, which was chaired by Alan Simpson, was Bob Crowe, the deputy General Secretary of the RMT (who said he was speaking on behalf of Jimmy Knapp who could not be there). He said that the RMT fully backed the marches and attacked Tory unemployment figures saying that if they manipulated them any more "we would all wake up one morning to find that unemployment had disappeared and everyone had a job".



Herbie speaks in Brussels

He said the RMT was against the Maastricht Treaty, its convergence criteria, and the EU.

Geoff Martin, the convener of London Region UNISON, said he was there to put the view of his union which was opposed to Maastricht and the convergence criteria on the grounds that, under the criteria, it was impossible to carry out key parts of union's policy such as an adequate minimum wage and

improvements in welfare.

He pointed to the dangers of an incoming Labour government taking us into the single currency, but said he was encouraged to see that Tony Blair had said that this seemed less likely.

Glenn Voris, the secretary of the Euro-marches in Britain, pointed to the rising opposition to the single currency across Europe citing the German miners and the French and Belgian Renault workers.

He said the marches were growing right across Europe precisely because they reflected the anger of the working class at the attacks being carried out in the name of the single currency.

Herbie, representing the Liverpool dockers, expressed the support of the dockers for the marches and Denise from Bolton Unemployed Workers' Centre, who will be on the march, said she was marching because every day in the unemployed centre she sees the effects of unemployment and the cuts in welfare provision - and something has to be done.

TUC 'Day of Action' May 28

TUC policy on the Euromarches is full of contradictions.

Having denounced the Euro-march and circulated affiliates urging them not to support it, the TUC are supporting the Amsterdam demonstration and sending a coach load of young people to join it.

Presumably the Amsterdam demonstration on June 14th is far enough away from London and the general election to make it acceptable.

The distinction, however, is bizarre, since the Amsterdam demonstration is the culmination of all the marches from across Europe including the marches from Britain. Nor are the demands of the Amsterdam demonstration any different to those of the marches in Britain.

The TUC has called a day of action for May 28 against unem-

ployment across Europe - in line with the call of the ETUC.

The day of action is a good initiative, and should be fully supported, but there are problems. The TUC are protesting about unemployment - but support the Maastricht Treaty, the single currency and the convergence criteria, which directly create unemployment.

They promise a pamphlet to build for the day and explain their position. We await with interest.

At the same time it has become clear that the day of action itself, as called by the ETUC, is a direct response to the Euro-marches.

The letter from the ETUC [reproduced right] urges affiliates to make the action effective in order to avoid being out flanked by the Euromarches.

To member organisations of the ETUC European Marches against Unemployment

Dear colleagues,

A number of member organisations have informed us of the plans in their respective countries for "European Marches" against unemployment, which should culminate in a demonstration in Amsterdam on the 13 or 14 June, on the very eve of the European Summit.

We have been able to establish that the platform on which this initiative is based is at considerable variance with our own positions as trade unionists and the promoters include a whole range of organisations whose activities have often opposed our own, even though certain trade union organisations are included (see document enclosed).

Under the circumstances, I feel



that we should keep a distance from this initiative.

However this event makes me still more certain that it is vital to ensure that our European day of action on May 28 is a complete suc-

cess, in order to avoid leaving a gap that others will certainly hasten to fill.

Fraternal greetings
Emilio Gabaglio, ETUC Secretary General

Internationalism theme of dockers' rally



IN ANOTHER show of their remarkable solidarity and tenacity five hundred dockers and several thousand supporters marched through Liverpool last Saturday demanding reinstatement.

There were banners representing a cross section of the trade union movement and dockers support committees.

The rally at the end reflected the tremendous internationalism which the dockers have generated in the course of their struggle. Dockers leaders spoke from as far apart as Germany and the USA representing the international solidarity action which has taken place (also taking place over the weekend was a meeting of the international

solidarity committee which the dockers have built).

Speaker after speaker talked about the need for international solidarity. The speaker from Germany stressed that struggles were European wide and that unity across the continent was essential.

Jeremy Corbyn linked this to the European marches, saying that workers faced not only the challenge of the global economy but within Europe the threat of the single currency.

If the single currency was introduced, he said, it would involve a massive effect on the welfare state. He said that the march would be coming through Liverpool from Preston on its way to Amsterdam and protest at the single currency and

the convergence criteria at the Intergovernmental Conference.

The chair of the rally and chair of the port shop stewards committee Jimmy Nolan said that the dockers would be organising a mass rally for the Euromarch when it came through Liverpool.

Arthur Scargill raised the issue of the role of the TGWU, given that the dockers are getting massive support from around the world but nothing from their own union here in Britain.

He called on the TGWU leadership to mobilise their members in support the dockers, win the dispute and get the dockers back to work.

Strengthening the British leg

THE BRITISH leg of the European marches continue to gather strength.

A meeting of the steering committee of the marches on Saturday 24th of March finalised most of the details of the routes of the marches from Preston and Jarrow through Birmingham to London.

The march from Preston will start on Saturday May 17th and from Jarrow on Monday May 19th. The two marches will converge in Birmingham on Saturday May 31st for a demonstration through the city and then march south together reaching London on the afternoon of Thursday June 5th.

There will be a range of activities and events in London over Friday with a central London demonstration on Saturday afternoon with a rally and a social on

the evening.

There are now also plans for a Scottish march, which would march and campaign from Glasgow to Edinburgh and then join the marches in England as a delegation.

New sponsorships include the RMT as a national union and the SWP as a political organisation.

The political imperative for the marches gets stronger by the day as the logic of the single currency and the convergence criteria assert themselves across Europe.

The coalition already built in Britain is unprecedented for such an event. However, resources, particularly money, are necessary if this is to be fully realised.

Send donations, messages to Glenn Voris, c/o St Helens TUC Resource Centre, 21-31 Barrow St, St Helens WA10 1RD.

Rwanda: getting to the roots of the genocide

TOO LITTLE is known about one of the biggest genocides in human history more than three years after its completion.

In less than three months, between 700,000 and over a million Rwandans were exterminated simply because they were or were thought to be Tutsis.

Several tens of thousands of Hutus were killed at the same time: either political opponents of the then regime, or people who refused or might have refused to join in the genocide. Before the killing took place, the population was estimated at about 7.5 million.

With few exceptions few have yet been brought to trial for this outrage. The victims' families – hundreds of thousands of them – are contending with terrible material and psychological conditions.

The direct complicity of (in particular) the French and Belgian authorities is being covered up or is simply denied. The deadly role of the macro-economic policies imposed by the multilateral financial institutions – World Bank and IMF – is being obscured. Worst of all, the survivors are being forced to pay for the weapons that were used to massacre their families and neighbours.

Eric Toussaint reports:

THE ANTI-TUTSI genocide was planned beginning in the early 1990s by the authoritarian regime of General Habyarimana which exuded a genocidal ideology at every level of the system. The army increased eightfold in size from 1990 to 1993. The creation of the Interahamwe militias ("those who fight together") in 1992 was the finishing touch to the arrangements.

At the end of 1993 the killing machine was in place: in each of Rwanda's 146 municipalities, 200-300 armed men, about one for every ten families, were ready to act.

The massacres started as early as 1992-93. By the beginning of 1993 2000 people had already been assassinated. Each action was preceded by a meeting, often organised at the highest level, at which the targets were painstakingly defined. The necessary means were put at the killers' disposal: petrol coupons, vehicles – often cars or trucks belonging to the municipality – and weapons. The gendarmerie or the army provided the operation's cover.

In January 1993 the Rwandan Federation for Human Rights published a report that stated, "The pre-conditions are present for

genocide."

During this whole preparatory phase, General Habyarimana's regime enjoyed considerable international support especially from France. The Interahamwe militias were trained by French troops stationed in Rwanda. According to Janvier Afrika, who took part himself in massacres in the early 1990s, "The French taught us how to catch people and how to tie them up."

French support for Habyarimana goes back to 1975, when a first military co-operation agreement was signed by Giscard d'Estaing. Before this time Rwanda did not seem to be an active part of France's foreign policy.

Belgium on the other hand, the former colonial power, was omnipresent in Rwanda. It provided military aid to the Rwandan army until the genocide began on April 7 1994. Habyarimana regularly visited the Belgian king and queen at the royal palace. When King Baudouin died, Habyarimana graced the official ceremony (an honour which Mobutu did not have).

The MNRD, the ruling party Habyarimana created, was largely financed and supported on the internationally by the Christian Democratic International and the Flemish and Walloon Christian Democratic parties.

France greatly increased its military aid after the rebels of the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) launched a military offensive from Uganda in October 1990. Mitterrand sent paratroopers stationed in the Central African Republic to support the Rwandan regime and evacuate foreign residents.

Saved

More than 1000 French troops saved Habyarimana's bacon several times between October 1990 and 1993, even though Paris saw where the Rwandan regime was heading. When the Arusha accords were signed in January 1993 – accords for a democratic transition between the Habyarimana regime and the RPF – Mitterrand reaffirmed his total support for the regime. He was afraid of the accords being implemented, since they would mean a reduction of French influence.

On 6 April 1994, the signal was given to begin the genocide when a missile destroyed the plane bringing Habyarimana and his Burundian colleague from a negotiating session in Dar-es-Salaam. In a few hours hundreds of Hutu political opponents were assassinated according to a minutely prepared plan. The prime minister herself was assassinated. Ten Belgian paratroopers, members of MINUAR – the UN multinational force – were massacred while trying to defend themselves. The MINUAR command let it happen.

The provisional government that took over held its meetings in the French embassy. The massacre of opponents and the launching of the genocide was directed from there.

Several hundred thousand people died in a few weeks. At the end of June 1994, the genocide was an accomplished fact. The figure of a mil-

lion dead is commonly given.

Operation Turquoise was launched by France ten weeks after the massacres began, essentially in order to allow what was left of the Rwandan army and the genocidal militias to retreat into Zaire, bringing hundreds of thousands of civilians with them as hostages.

The policies imposed by the international financial institutions, the Habyarimana regime's main funders, accelerated the process leading to genocide. The negative effects of these policies are generally ignored in explaining the tragic outcome of the Rwandan crisis.

In the early 1980s, when the Third World debt crisis broke out, Rwanda (like its neighbour Burundi) had very little debt. World elsewhere in the world the World Bank and IMF abandoned their active lending policies and preached abstinence, they adopted a different attitude towards Rwanda.

Dictatorial

The dictatorial regime in power since 1973 guaranteed that Rwanda would not adopt policies of progressive, structural change. It was actively supported by the Western powers: Belgium, France and Switzerland.

It was seen as a potential bulwark against countries in the region that were clinging to old notions about independence and progressive change (neighbouring Tanzania, for example). During the 1980s and up until 1994, Rwanda received many loans, of which Habyarimana appropriated a considerable share.

These were meant to insert the Rwandan economy more tightly into the world economy by developing its potential exports – coffee, tea and tin – at the expense of crops meant to satisfy local needs. The model worked until the mid-1980s, when first tin prices collapsed, then coffee prices, and finally tea prices. Rwanda, for which coffee was its main source of hard currency, was hard hit by the US-provoked break-up of the coffee cartel.

Several weeks before the RPF launched its offensive in October 1990, the Rwandan authorities signed an agreement with the IMF and World Bank to set in motion a Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP). This took effect in November 1990, whereupon the Rwandan franc was devalued by 67 per cent. In return the IMF granted credits and hard currency to enable the country to keep up the pace of imports.

This made it possible to keep the balance of payments in balance. Import prices increased dizzyingly: petrol prices went up by 79 per cent. By selling these imports on the national market, the government was able to finance the pay of the troops, whose numbers were growing geometrically. The SAP forecast a cut in government spending. There was a wage freeze and layoffs in the civil service, but part of this spending was transferred to the army.

While import prices were rising, the purchase price paid to coffee farmers was frozen, as required by the IMF. This meant ruin for hundreds of thousands of small-scale



Profitably for the arms dealers, the Rwanda crisis has spilled over into Zaire

coffee producers. These farmers and the most impoverished city-dwellers constituted from then on a permanent source of recruits for the Interahamwe militias and the army.

Ninety per cent of the population lives in the countryside, and 20 per cent of the peasant population has less than a half-hectare of land per family. Between 1982 and 1994, there was a massive process of impoverishment of the majority of the rural population, with an impressive accumulation of wealth at the other extreme of society.

According to Professor Jef Matton, the richest 10 per cent of the population took in 20 per cent of rural income in 1982, 41 per cent in 1992, 45 per cent in 1993, and 51 per cent in early 1994. The catastrophic social impact of the policies dictated by the IMF and World Bank and the fall of coffee prices on the world market (which also had something to do with the Bretton Woods institutions' policies) played a key role in the crisis. The enormous social discontent was channelled by the Habyarimana regime towards genocide.

Weapons spree

Both the hard currency and the particular credit mechanisms given by the World Bank after 1990 enabled the Rwandan authorities to finance massive purchases of weapons for the genocide. Military spending tripled from 1990 to 1992. The World Bank and IMF sent several expert missions during this period: the experts stressed various positive aspects of Habyarimana's austerity policies but threatened to suspend payments if military spending continued to grow.

erly hidden: trucks bought for the army were covered by the Ministry of Transport budget; petrol used by army vehicles was covered by the Ministry of Health budget, etc.

Finally, the World Bank and IMF turned off the financial aid tap in early 1993. But they did not block the bank accounts that the Rwandan authorities held in major banks abroad; major sums in these accounts remained available for arms purchases.

Rwanda's main arms suppliers in 1990-94 were France, Belgium, South Africa, Egypt and the People's Republic of China.

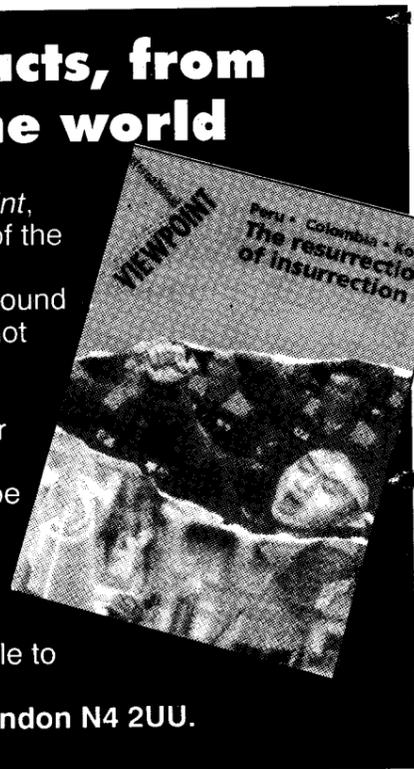
Once the genocide was under way, while the UN had decreed an arms embargo since 11 May 1994, France and the British firm Mil-Tec supplied arms to the criminal army through the Goma airport in Zaire.

Once Kigali was taken by the RPF, several high officials responsible for the genocide were received at the Elysee palace. The Rwandan authorities in exile, with the help of the French army, set up the headquarters of the Rwandan National Bank in Goma. From this office they continued payments for arms sales until the end of August 1994. Several private banks accepted orders of payment from the perpetrators of genocide.

Today, Rwanda's foreign debt is almost \$1 billion, almost entirely contracted by the Habyarimana regime. From 1998, Rwanda will have to pay back \$155 million each year to its creditors, mainly the Bretton Woods institutions. Can we accept that those who survived the genocide will be forced to pay for the weapons with which the crime was carried out?

Get the facts, from around the world

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Bhutto defeat leaves corruption unchanged

Pakistan went to the polls on February 3. The result was an unprecedented landslide win for the Pakistan Muslim League (PML) headed by Nawaz Sharif and electoral humiliation for Benazir Bhutto and her Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP).

B. Skanthakumar discusses the election with London-based journalist and activist ARIF AZAD who was a student activist and leader while at medical college in Lahore and involved in protests against the martial law regime of General Zia-ul-Haq.

Socialist Outlook : What's your analysis of the election result?

Azad: In one sense the result is an extension of the old order. Nothing has changed for the majority. The huge mandate that Nawaz Sharif [leader of the Pakistan Muslim League] has received was the result of a stitch-up between President Leghari and the military to the advantage of this pro-establishment candidate.

The Muslim League is now the national party of Pakistan and has expanded from its base in Punjab province. It has solid representation in Sindh, Baluchistan and North-West Frontier Province.

The Peoples Party on the other hand has been reduced to its strong-hold of Sindh province - where the Bhuttos have family connections and are landowners. But even many of her core supporters deserted her by not voting in the elections at all. [Voter turnout was only 36.36%, down from 43% in 1993].

The Mohajir Quami Movement, party of Urdu speaking migrants from India has made a comeback in its fortress of Karachi in Sindh. Benazir Bhutto did the military's dirty work for them by crushing the MQM and 'order' has been restored in Karachi though political and sectarian murders continue. The MQM will form the next provincial government in Sindh with the support of the Muslim League.

What happened in Baluchistan is interesting. The Baluchistan National Movement was formed only a month before the elections by Ataullah Mengal, a regional autonomist and a key figure in the past insurgency movement there, who was later exiled to London. This new party has won a sizeable number of seats in that province.

In North-West Frontier Province, the Awami National Party (ANP) was runner up to the Muslim League. The ANP is no longer a regional autonomist party (1). They know that they can only rule their province with the support of the military and in collaboration with a Punjabi party. They have



ditched their commitment to social justice and are now simply a party for the Pashtun people.

Many bourgeois centrist politicians who had previously been pro-military openly criticised the role of the military in the dismissal of the Bhutto government and accused them of rigging the elections to oust them from the scene in a clean-up of politics. Even a leader of the religious party Jamaat-ullami-Islam, which is traditionally pro-military was extremely critical of them.

Meanwhile Benazir Bhutto didn't have a word to say against them, mindful she needed their support to save her future political fortune and to protect her family, particularly her husband, Asif Zardari, who is under arrest on corruption and murder charges.

The dismissal of Benazir Bhutto's government by the President on November 5 1996 was mainly met by popular indifference and even some support. Some influential columnists and newspaper editors advocated this course of action four or five months in advance. This strengthened the President's hand.

Benazir was associated with the struggles against Zia-ul-Haq's military regime and benefited enormously from the populist legacy of her father's administration and the "pro-poor" rhetoric of the Pakistan Peoples Party.

Despite this, she was voted out on her record in office. She really disillusioned the whole country. Her government is associated with high inflation. People are groaning under the burden of the rising cost of living.

Benazir was perceived as being very arrogant. Even during her election rallies she never apologised for her mistakes and instead

denounced the President for dismissing her, at every opportunity.

Nawaz Sharif spoke at rallies which were far larger than his rival's. He was contrite about the record of his government while Prime Minister between 1990 and 1993. He seemed to be more in touch with the grievances of ordinary people.

There was also the Asif Ali Zardari factor. Bhutto's husband and his enrichment through corruption was her greatest liability. From Mr Ten Percent, he became known as Mr Thirty Percent [his commission on business deals he negotiated using his influence].

She never reined him in, and in fact is completely loyal to him. When the President asked her to clamp down on Zardari's business activities, she delivered a snub to him by appointing her husband as Minister for Investment the following day!

The scandal of "Surreygate" contributed to her downfall.

The Bhuttos are rumoured to have a 350 acre estate and mansion in Surrey, England. Zardari imported a stable of horses which were fed on an expensive diet while the poor are scraping by. This swelled public anger. The press went to town on these facts. Even die-hard PPP activists were ashamed to identify themselves with the Government.

During the election campaign, Benazir was low-key and conciliatory. She probably wants to strike a deal with the new government for her husband's release and was prepared to lose the election for this purpose.

Many members of the PPP believe Benazir should cut her ties with Zardari and concentrate on revitalising the party organisation and return to the populist tradi-

tions of her father in the early 1970s.

While her government didn't attack the interests of the business class, bureaucracy and the military, Benazir herself said that her dismissal was the result of a conspiracy by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. These institutions are using the rhetoric of "good governance" to criticise the kickbacks and rampant corruption, which reduces the profits of foreign capital.

Socialist Outlook : What has happened to the Islamic fundamentalist parties which were so influential in Pakistani politics and seemed to define the agenda even of mainstream secular parties? The Jamaat-i-Islami boycotted the elections, though the Jamaat-Ullami-Islam did win a few seats.

Azad: Ideology has taken second place for most people to the sheer struggle for day to day living. In Pakistan people pay lip service to Islam but very few want an Islamic state. They know the record of fundamentalist movements in areas where they do have influence.

Secondly, the new Prime Minister, Nawaz Sharif appeals to the same layer that is most supportive of these fundamentalist parties especially the bazaar merchant and the petty bourgeoisie more generally. He has captured this vote. Interestingly the rhetoric of these movements has also changed. They are less strident in their use of Islam as ideology and now focus on social justice questions. In fact they out-flank the Peoples Party to its left on a number of issues.

It is the state of the economy which pre-occupies people. Many voted for Nawaz Sharif on the ba-

Pakistan: countdown to chaos

1947-1957 Multi-party system with Muslim League and Republican Party.

1958 -1969 Field Marshal Ayub Khan's martial law regime.

1969-1971 Ayub Khan forced out by popular movements and hands power to new army chief, General Yahya Khan

1971-1977 Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's Pakistan Peoples Party comes to power.

1977-1985 Bhutto ousted in military coup and subsequently hung to death. General Zia-ul-Haq becomes Martial Law Administrator.

1985-1988 Non-party elections. Zia becomes President. Martial law is lifted.

1988-1990 Zia dies in plane crash. Benazir Bhutto's PPP comes to power.

1990-1993 Benazir Bhutto's government dismissed by President. Caretaker government of Moeen Qureshi takes over. When elections are held, Nawaz Sharif's Muslim League elected.

1993 -1996 Nawaz Sharif's government dismissed by the President. Benazir Bhutto returns to office.

November 1996, PPP government is dismissed by President. The caretaker government is headed by Prime Minister Meraj Khalid though many believe that President Farooq Leghari holds real power.

1997 Nawaz Sharif is elected.

sis that as a businessman he would manage the economy well and at any rate he couldn't be any worse than his predecessor!

I don't think that the economy can be turned around by the new regime but that is the popular perception. At present it appears that fundamentalist movements have lost their influence but given Pakistan's history and its *raison d'être* as a state created for Muslims, these parties are not going to go away. Their electoral representation has always been low but these cadre based parties are the best organised.

Over the past few years they have expanded their activities throughout the country and in every sector of society. They have cells in the armed forces, in trade unions and in universities. There is a sizeable presence in the Railway workers union and in the Pakistan International Airlines union.

The fundamentalists have moved with the times. When I was in student politics, the student wing of the Jamaat banned students in hostels watching videos, because these would import decadent western values and Indian popular culture or could be pornographic.

Now at their rallies they play popular music. Televisions are no longer frowned upon. Like other fundamentalist parties around the world they have a welfare wing which draws them political support. This has brought them into contact with the poor and they are

the most vocal on social questions.

When – as frequently happens – the police harass and abuse common people, it is the youth wing of these parties which marches to the police station and demands an end to this misconduct. If the Left doesn't get its act together, unite its forces and rediscover its role as tribunes of the people for economic justice, social justice including women's equality, land reform and so on the Jamiat will reap the benefits.

Socialist Outlook: The western media lavished a great deal of attention on the former international cricketer and lately social activist Imran Khan. They were intrigued by this Oxford University product, socialite and now son-in-law of the billionaire businessman Sir James Goldsmith. However Khan's Tehrik-i-Insaf (Movement for Justice) polled very poorly.

Azad: By highlighting the issue of corruption which was the sole plank of his party's electoral campaign, Imran Khan really played into the hands of the establishment. He was given a lot of air time to call for corruption charges to be slapped on the Bhuttos. In other words he was furthering the agenda of the military.

Hidden corruption

The establishment sees corruption only in politicians because they are public figures. The corruption of the bureaucracy and the military is hidden. People are encouraged to loathe politicians. They are being persuaded to lose belief in the electoral process.

This of course can only strengthen the argument for a political role for these unelected forces. Imran Khan had nothing to offer in his political programme. He campaigned on the basis of his personal charisma. He didn't have a team or a vision.

Whatever he may think he is not a man of the people. He is aloof and arrogant. The allegations made about his fathering a child which he has refused to accept as his own also damaged him.

He keeps company with the most corrupt individuals in Pakistan and invited many of them to his wedding but at his election rallies he promised to hang the corrupt upside down. He was always going to be a marginal figure and it was only the western media which gave him prominence.

Socialist Outlook : One of the measures of the caretaker government before the elections was the creation of the Council for Defence and National Security. This body provides for an institutional role for the President and the Armed Forces.

Azad: The Council will act to deflect any demands made by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund for the reduction of the military budget which consumes 40% of national income. All economic policy has to be vetted by this institution.

This means they can strike a bargain with multi-lateral lending institutions, to protect their privileges and pass the social costs of the structural adjustment program onto the poor. Another dimension is that under the aegis of this Council, the President has improved his own standing vis-a-vis the office of the Prime Minister and has concentrated more power in his own hands.

There are tensions between the Chief of the Army Staff, General



Losing her grip: Bhutto on the campaign trail that led to defeat. But the high-profile corruption of politicians masks the graft of the military and state bureaucracy

Jahangir Karamat and the President on this score. General Karamat may suspect the President is trying to undermine the role of the military through the Council. The military has certainly strengthened its vice like grip over the country and the Nawaz Sharif government recognises this.

Socialist Outlook : The caretaker government nominally headed by Meraj Khalid as Prime Minister appointed a senior Pakistani economist and serving vice-president at the World Bank, Shahid Javed Burki as Special Economic Advisor. This unelected technocrat also introduced an economic reform program which has been inherited by the new government. This is a disturbing development.

Azad: The World Bank and Pakistani governments have a long relationship going back to the early 1950s when economic policies were framed by the Harvard School of Economics.

“The World Bank and Pakistani governments have a long relationship going back to the early 1950s when economic policies were framed by the Harvard School of Economics”

Harvard university had a scholarship scheme through which it attracted the brightest Pakistani students and trained them.

Mohammad Shoaib, during Ayub Khan's regime, was Finance Minister and when he wasn't - he was working for the World Bank. Then came Mahbub-ul-Haq who likewise served military regimes and when not doing so, was attached to either the World Bank or later the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

He was the architect of the first Five Year Plan, Finance Minister, Chairman of the Planning Commission. The two most recent Caretaker governments in 1990 and between November 1996 and February 1997 have been effectively headed by current employees from senior levels of the World Bank.

This has paved the way for the introduction of anti-poor austerity measures which even nominally democratic governments could not

afford to bring in. Shahed Javed Burki is also the author of a book on the Zulfikar Ali Bhutto government between 1971 and 1977 which was extremely critical of its economic record. In that book he also argued that if any democratically elected government tried to revert to the populist policies of that period it would be ruined.

Well he finally got his shot at handling the economic portfolio. Burki was shuttling between Islamabad and Washington DC to plead with the World Bank to release more loans for Pakistan which they didn't do. However what they did give him was a blueprint for an incoming government.

A few days before the election, Nawaz Sharif was given a briefing by Burki and his team on this economic plan and left certain that he would be expected to stick to and implement it once in office. The foreign debt is around US\$30 billion and debt-servicing consumes 45 per cent of the budget. The Caretaker government removed state subsidies for staple foods and

necessities.

The price of sugar increased four times in those few months, from Rs. 10 per kilo to Rs. 31 per kilo. [60Rs. = 1 US dollar] The price of ghee [cooking oil] has reached Rs. 80 per kilo. Similarly with wheat flour, milk-powder etc. and cement, electricity and gas. The cost of transport from bus fares to rail fares. You can see the effects of these policies on the faces of the poor. They are so hard pressed that they find it difficult to even breathe.

Socialist Outlook: Privatisation will be accelerated by the new government. How are trade unions responding?

Azad: Since 1990 there has been large-scale privatisation. Nawaz Sharif's political and business friends profited by this and likewise under Benazir Bhutto, her friends have been the major beneficiaries of these sell-offs. There hasn't been widespread opposition

to privatisation. Many trade unionists see the floating of the Allied Bank of Pakistan as a model.

The bank workers and management bought a majority stake in this bank and its financial situation has improved. Trade unionists see this as a future strategy. A way to protect jobs while maintaining profitability.

Trade unions were prominent in the 1960s with the expansion of the industrial working class and a left wing movement. If trade unions confine themselves to wage bargaining and do not understand the ceaseless clash between Capital and Labour, then they cannot go forward as a political movement.

Trade unions and the Left supported Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and propelled him into power. However their militancy was too threatening to him and he curbed them. However I am optimistic that they are beginning to revive themselves.

There is a small core of independent trade unions and left wing activists who are trying to

lines.

Socialist Outlook : It has been fifty years since the end of the British Raj (empire) on the sub-continent. While the ruling class in India and Pakistan gear themselves up for the anniversary celebration, among other layers there seems to be some soul searching about the record of post-colonial rule and the antagonisms that exist between India and Pakistan.

Azad: Partition has not improved the lives of the poor majority.

It is only the land-owners, the educated elite from Uttar Pradesh in India who migrated to Pakistan, the higher echelons of the bureaucracy and the military which have gained. This country was created in the name of Islam.

However the reality is that Muslims today cannot say their prayers in public without armed police protection because worshippers are likely to be fired upon by rival religious sects. The ideology of Pakistan as a nation for Muslim people has been a smoke screen to protect the ruling class.

Partition has been a very painful experience, Muslims in Pakistan have been cut off from the four to five centuries of civilisations they were part of in India. Family relations, language, culture, all these have suffered.

Instead we have this selective amnesia about our past so that we are told to believe that our history as peoples only begins from 1947 and that our greatest enemy is across the border.

This theology of national security permits the military to maintain its drain on the national budget. Yet the military know they are no match for the Indian army. A retired Air Marshall, Asghar Khan, has said that the Pakistan army wouldn't last ten minutes in battle with the Indians.

Only fundamentalist parties like the Bharatiya Janata Party in India and Jamaat in Pakistan stand to gain from the current situation. There should be more contact at the level of peoples' organisations. Working class movements need to collaborate and share common experiences.

Campaign grows to free Roisin International solidarity exposes British "justice"

Terry Conway

FOLLOWING successful protests across the world in support of Roisin McAliskey on March 8, International Women's Day, British authorities have been forced to concede that she will be able to keep her baby with her when it is born in a few weeks:

While the decision to allow her to keep her child is an important step forward it is vital that the campaign maintains momentum to secure her release.

McAliskey has been imprisoned since November 1996 for supposed involvement with the bombing of the Osnabruck bombing in Germany.

She is likely to become the only Category A prisoner to have ever given birth in prison and the civil liberties implications of her treatment is beginning to raise objections from many who have taken little interest in Irish politics.

Over the past months she has been strip searched hundreds of times despite the fact that on most

occasions the visits she has been allowed have been "closed" – that is to say that a perspex screen from floor to ceiling has separated her from her visitors.

On March 7 her status was changed from Category A high risk to Category A standard risk as a result of the growing campaign in her support. This will mean a reduction in the number of strip searches and more possibility of mixing with other women.

The German government have made clear that they have no objection to her being bailed – it is the British state and the RUC who are responsible for her incarceration.

Her solicitor Gareth Pierce told a packed London meeting organised by Fuascailt (the Irish republican prisoner support group) that "if she were charged here tomorrow there would be no requirement to prepare to defend the case; there isn't a case" Pierce also explained that she had never seen a prisoner treated so badly – some

feat given Pierce's involvement with other Irish prisoners who have been abominably treated such as the Guildford Four.

Some might have been surprised that Bernadette McAliskey, addressing the same meeting on March 7 spent little of her time dealing with the specific plight of her daughter. But those who know anything about her were not.

While clearly angry about what has been happening to Roisin she concentrated on an exposition of the history of anti-Irish racism and its relationship with the racism faced by the black community in Britain.

In London over 300 mainly women protesters festooned with balloons in International Women's Day colour of purple, green and white gathered outside Holloway prison to show solidarity with Roisin.



Pouring scorn on British courts: Bernadette McAliskey

Hundreds of bouquets had been delivered from supporters across the world but only a token number were allowed into the prison. Roisin asked that the rest go to Women's Aid refugees – marking her own commitment to the primary area of her political activity.

The all-women platform at the rally included contributions by Shelia Kitzinger from the Birth Control Trust, Bernadette McAliskey, Ann Rossiter from Women and Ireland and many others. Entertainment was provided by the Women's Choir and by Southall Black Sisters.

The latter adapted songs they have sung in campaigning for the release of Kiranjit Allowallia,

Sarah Thornton and other women imprisoned after defending themselves against domestic violence.

The sing-along choruses which resulted may not have told Roisin's story in the most tuneful way, but they were an important part of the day's energy and strength.

This was one of the most lively and committed International Women's Day mobilisations in London for some years. Other actions took place in Germany, Ireland, Norway Australia and the USA.

Let's build on the momentum to demand Roisin's release.

Israeli arrogance sets Oslo accords burning

Roland Rance

VIOLENT clashes between Palestinians and Israeli troops in Bethlehem, Hebron and Jerusalem over the decision of the Israeli government to build a new settlement on the outskirts of Jerusalem are said by the press to, "endanger the Oslo peace process".

Anyone who has followed developments in the Middle East over the past few years will know the Oslo agreement has not brought peace to Palestinians, nor to Israelis.

Rather, by recruiting the leadership of the PLO to act as Israel's mercenary army in the suppression of the Palestinian struggle for liberation, the agreement has reinforced Israel's occupation of the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and crucially Jerusalem.

What has been endangered in recent weeks is the sleight of hand which has permitted Israel to pretend that it is taking steps towards ending its military occupation.

Socialist Outlook has consistently argued that, far from ending the century of conflict resulting from the Zionist colonisation of Palestine, the Madrid and Oslo agreements attempt to legitimise and perpetuate it, and sooner or later will lead to a renewal of the Palestinian mass uprising.

It is still too early to assess whether the latest confrontations will be swiftly crushed, or whether they represent the beginnings of this new *intifada*. But it is no surprise that, once again, the spark for clashes has been Israeli settlement activity in Jerusalem.

Jerusalem is the economic, as well

as political, centre of Palestine. Until 1967, it was the largest town in the West Bank, the commercial heart of the Palestinian economy, and the centre of communications, not only within the West Bank but with Transjordan. However, since the 1967 war, in the course of which Israel occupied those parts of Palestine – including East Jerusalem and the Old City – which it had not seized in 1948, the municipal borders of Jerusalem have been greatly expanded, and the entire metropolitan area annexed to Israel.

As a result, many thousands of Palestinians have been required to obtain Israeli residence permits in order to remain in areas where their families have lived for centuries, not only in the centre of Jerusalem but in villages many miles away.

In recent months, these controls have been tightened; in some cases, Palestinians in villages annexed to Israel have been arrested for stepping from their front doors into Israel without the necessary permits, which they have been denied.

Only 5 per cent of Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza are legally permitted to enter Greater Jerusalem.

Stepped up

At the same time, Israel has stepped up the pace of its building plans, designed to surround Greater Jerusalem with a ring of Jewish settlements. The continuing expansion of settlements now threatens the Palestinian towns of Ramallah and Bethlehem, both subject to increasing Israeli encroachment.

This expansion is part of the cantonisation of Palestine. By denying Palestinian access to Jerusalem, Israel does more than isolate those Palestinians remaining in the city and its surrounding villages from the rest of Palestine.

Communication between the north and south of the West Bank, and between the West Bank and Jordan, has been broken. Travel from Hebron to Nablus – a distance of only 40 miles – has become a major test of initiative and endurance, over poor quality mountain tracks.

This is further impeded by the construction of 'security roads' – roads for Jews only, linking settlements with each other and with Israeli cities, and thus further dividing Palestinian areas.

Annexed

The Golan Heights and large parts of Jerusalem have been formally annexed to Israel. In addition, 44 per cent of the land of Gaza (one of the most densely populated areas in the world) and 78 per cent of the land of the West Bank has been confiscated to build settlements, army bases and roads – all allocated for Jews only.

The development of separate administrative, legal and economic realities for Jews and Arabs in the same geographical region indicates that Israel is bent on establishing a new apartheid regime in the Middle East.

Palestinians are still subject to constant brutality, from settlers and soldiers alike. In recent months, there have been several reports of undercover soldiers, in plain clothes, conducting training exercises with live ammunition at night in Palestinian villages.

In one such incident in March, villagers, understandably believing that they were once again being attacked by settlers, gathered and started to defend their homes. The troops opened fire, wounding several Palestinians.

One man, who was shot in the leg and thus unable to flee, was then beaten mercilessly with a radio for twenty minutes until he died. His

son, meanwhile, had been attending a Jewish-Arab reconciliation meeting in Jerusalem.

Ten years ago, in December 1987, a road accident was the spark which ignited the *intifada*. This was not initiated, led or organised by the PLO, which had to struggle for several months to establish its authority over the popular committees established by the uprising.

These committees were led by activists who had been formed by twenty years of struggle against the Israeli occupation, in the refugee camps, slums, campuses and prisons.

At the time, the PLO still had the legitimacy of a fighting, exiled leadership, however compromised, and it commanded mass support in Palestine. Since then, Arafat has reached a deal with the Israeli occupiers, and has returned as their agent in policing the Palestinians.

Desperate

The Palestinian masses, increasingly impoverished and desperate, have not yet established an alternative leadership.

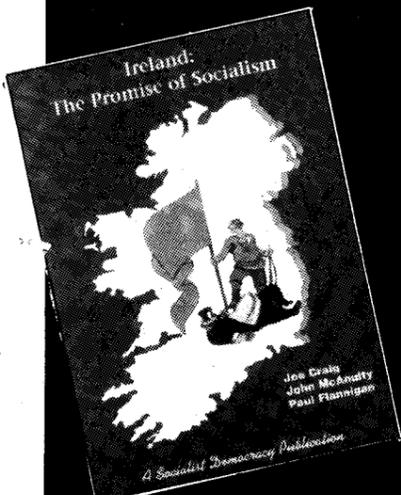
The organisations of the Palestinian left, the Popular and Democratic Fronts for the Liberation of Palestine, weakened and demoralised by decades of fruitless compromise with Arafat, seem unable to offer such an alternative. In this vacuum, it is understandable that many are attracted by the the suicide bombers of Hamas.

It remains to be seen whether the latest events will peter out, or will develop into a new uprising. In any case, we can expect further clashes in the occupied territories, and further bombs in the Israeli heartland.

The task of building a new leadership which can not only halt the extension of the settlements but take on the task of the liberation of Palestine has never been more acute.

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Neil Murray looks back at the last time Labour was in government

“It’s the economy, stupid!”

THE MEDIA delighted in showing the contrast between Tony Blair’s stage-managed conference last year and Labour conference in 1976 when Denis Healey, as Chancellor, was almost booed off the podium.

With Labour likely to form a government for the first time since 1979 it is important to look at what happened last time round.

Labour fought the February 1974 election on its most radical manifesto since 1945. The shift to the Left since it had lost power in 1970 was unlike any seen since 1931. This was caused by the traumatic effect on both parliamentary and union leaders of the conflict between the Labour government and the unions over Labour’s attempt to introduce anti-union laws (*In Place of Strife*) in 1969 and the conflict between the unions and the Heath government of 1970-74.

Between 1970 and 1974 leading Labour MPs ‘rediscovered’ the need for a fundamental shift in the wealth of society away from the rich. Shadow Chancellor Healey promised to ‘squeeze the rich’ through progressive taxation and Labour Leader Harold Wilson defended industrial militancy.

The parliamentary leadership and the TUC General Council developed widespread agreements, based on an understanding that there would be no return to the compulsory incomes policy pursued by Labour in 1966-67 and continued by Heath. An agreement drawn up in 1973 had no mention of incomes policy but committed Labour to various progressive measures.

Progressive tax

These included price controls, particularly on food and the large-scale redistribution of wealth through steeply progressive tax. Prescription charges were to end, pensions to rise and thereafter be linked to average earnings. Public ownership would be increased and ‘industrial democracy’ extended. The Tories’ Industrial Relations Court was to be replaced by ACAS and the extension of trade union rights. A more far-reaching policy of the nationalisation of the top 25 companies had been rejected.

Yet by the time of the next election in May 1979 unemployment and inflation were rampant, and there were widespread strikes against the government’s pay policy (the ‘winter of discontent’). Thatcher won that election – as we know all too well. How did the Labour government go so terribly wrong?

Mainly because Labour’s leaders were unwilling to reject the framework of the capitalist economy. They jettisoned their own promises of reformism in favour of squeezing the working class in an attempt to restore the health of the capitalist economy.

When Harold Wilson came to office in March 1974 the economic situation was dire – industry was still on the three-day week imposed by Ted Heath in response to a miners’ strike. Inflation was accelerating; unemployment was the highest since 1940 and the balance of payments in chronic deficit.



Learning nothing, forgetting nothing, successive Labour leaderships since 1979 have trodden the same road to failure, rejecting any defence of the working class

The dominant (and determinant) issue throughout the 1974-79 government was the economic recession.

The guiding principle for the Labour government was its ‘Social Contract’ with the unions and working class, of which the agreement in February 1973 was the first version. Initially this was posed as action against “the excessive dominant role of irresponsible private hands and crude market forces”.

But from the start this ‘contract’ was given a different emphasis by different people. Union leaders insisted there could be no return to any incomes policy, while party leaders said that future policy would require ‘closer mutual understanding’ – the basis for talks on a voluntary incomes policy.

Coming into office in March 1974, despite being a minority government, with sincere aspirations for reforms, Wilson’s government imposed a freeze on private and council rents, introduced tough price controls and brought in subsidies on basic foodstuffs.

They set out to re-negotiate Britain’s terms for entry into the European Economic Community (now EU), and introduced a wealth tax on assets above £100,000. A new Industry Department (run by Eric Heffer and Tony Benn) was created.

A White Paper on changes guaranteeing equality for women (which became the Sex Discrimination Act) was produced.

After the October election (with

government clamped down on price increases, improved the ‘social wage’ (pensions, benefits etc), then the working class would voluntarily submit lower pay demands.

This informal bargain became phase I of a formal Social Contract in July 1975, which introduced a voluntary limit of £6 a week on pay rises. This received the overwhelming support of TUC Congress in September and of Labour Party conference in October (though against strong opposition from the CLPs, where the Left was then strong). £6 was in fact interpreted as the *norm* for all increases. While it appeared to contribute to a reduction in inflation (the Retail Price Index stood at 30% in May 1975, but only 14% in June 1976), it also meant a 2.5% real cut in pay over a year.

At the same time it was obvious that the other side of the bargain – ‘equal sacrifices for all’ was not happening either. In the July 1975 budget Healey took £1012 million off public expenditure after a run on the pound.

Stage I of the Social Contract became phase II, with a 4.5% norm (again ‘voluntary’) for pay increases. This actually achieved an 8% gap between prices and earnings.

During these first two years of the formal Social Contract unemployment increased above 1 million. Ministers and union leaders paid lip service to the ‘unacceptability’ of this, but did nothing about it.

Growing awareness that the government was setting out to resolve the financial crisis of capitalism at the expense of working people led to a rise in industrial unrest in Spring 1977.

Labour having an overall majority of 3), with persistently high inflation, low investment rates, heavy foreign debt and periodic currency crises, the government steadily slipped away from its left commitments.

Orthodox

From November 1974 onwards, Denis Healey became an ‘orthodox’ chancellor – no more talk of an ‘irreversible shift of wealth’ to the working class, but instead the beginning of extensive cuts in local authority spending.

The original idea of the Social Contract, at least in the minds of the Party leaders, was that if the

Union leaders has been able to keep under control what limited opposition there was to Stages I and II of the Social Contract. However growing awareness that the government was setting out to resolve the financial crisis of capitalism at the expense of working people led to increasing disgruntlement and a rise in industrial unrest in Spring 1977.

There had been no major industrial opposition to the December 1976 round of cuts, falling living standards or rising unemployment, but as the effects hit home workers were less and less willing to put up with this.

The pay policy began crum-

bling with unofficial strike action, often to restore differentials eroded by restraint.

Skilled workers

In March and April 1977 skilled workers in Leyland cars struck for eight weeks, with parallel strikes by skilled workers at British Steel’s Port Talbot works and Fords. At Heathrow 4,000 engineers defied their union to fight for better shift pay.

More than 1700 shop stewards from car plants, docks, mines, engineering works, building sites and offices met in April to reject a third year of restraint. In the first two months of the year alone over one million days were ‘lost’ through industrial action, and opinion polls showed a significant fall in support for pay restraint.

Although Leyland workers rejected a call by their stewards for an all-out strike for a pay claim of £31 in August, union leaders were in no doubt by the summer that they could not deliver another pay deal of the Stage 1 or Stage 2 type, and any Stage 3 would have to be implemented by the government alone.

But this did not prevent union leaders giving tacit support to the government’s imposed 10% limit. They managed to persuade TUC Congress to accept that there would be a twelve-month gap between wage settlements, and the willingness of the majority of trade union leaders to respect this was responsible for delaying large numbers of major pay claims into the spring and summer of 1978.

The one section of workers to take official action against Stage III were the firefighters. Their strike lasted for eight weeks from mid-November 1977, over a 30% pay claim. The TUC, despite their supposed opposition to the 10% limit, refused to support them, even when the Labour government used troops in ‘Green Goddess’ fire engines to break the strike. Eventually the firefighters conceded defeat, accepting a staged offer, and the pay policy remained intact.

Permanent pay limit

The Labour leaders had by now effectively decided that pay restraint should be permanent and moved to impose a 5% limit and sanctions against employers who paid more – Stage 4 – from July 1978.

By now even many national leaders of unions were rejecting

the idea of another stage of pay restraint. Both TUC Congress and Labour Party conference (by 2:1) rejected stage 4. Parliament eventually threw out the sanctions element of the policy.

The first challenge came from the Ford workers in August 1978. After a nine-week official strike they won a 15% increase. They were followed by petrol tanker and road haulage drivers, an unofficial strike by water workers in the North West and the train drivers.

The height of opposition to the pay policy came with the public sector low pay strikes which began at the end of January 1979. NUPE continued this after the other unions involved settled (although itself eventually settling for the same amount) and it dragged on until the end of March. The two unions representing 250,000 civil servants struck from February 22.

Concordat

Despite this clear rejection of pay restraint by workers, in the run up to the General Election Labour Party and TUC leaders drew up a ‘Concordat’ in early 1979, which set out ‘voluntary’ restrictions on picketing and secondary strike action.

The cause of Labour’s failure (and subsequent defeat at the polls) was that they operated solely within the confines of capitalist economics. Faced with a recession, their ‘solution’ was to ditch any commitment to ‘social justice’ and insist that the working class pay for the crisis through a fall in living standards, unemployment and cuts in public spending.

Healey went cap in hand to the International Monetary Fund (the cause of that boozing in 1976) for loans, accepting their terms. This in turn meant even greater cuts because of the interest which needed to be paid.

An electorate whose living standards in late 1978 were no better than in 1973, and who needed a 14.5% increase in pay to keep pace with inflation was not enthusiastic at the thought of re-electing Labour. On top of this, Labour had lost its big idea of a ‘social contract’ between the government and the working class.

While union leaders, under pressure from their rank and file, eventually rejected the Labour government’s solutions, they had no alternative of their own. Eighteen years of Tory devastation were the result of this historic failure.

From dream to romance

Brian Gardner reviews Anthony Minghella's film – The English Patient

"The English Patient" is in the tradition of the great epics of British cinema. One thinks of David Lean's grandiose projects of several decades ago, in particular, Lawrence of Arabia – for this is also a film in which much of the action takes place in the desert and in which the hero must traverse it in a journey which means life or death.

Adapted from Michael Ondaatje's 1992 Booker Prize-winning novel of the same title, it has as its starting point the interwoven lives of four temporary occupants of a bombed-out villa in Tuscany at the end of World War Two.

After the medical convoy in which she is travelling runs into a landmine which kills her lover, Hana, the Canadian army nurse stays behind with the pilot. His body is so badly burnt he is unrecognisable, and he is known only as the English patient.

Seemingly he himself is unable to recall his true identity but when Caravaggio, the sometime thief and intelligence officer enters the scene, even though the English patient continues to dissemble, it is plain that the two men recognise each other.

Meanwhile Hana falls in love with the Sikh sapper, Kip, who is deployed to deal with unexploded mines and bombs in the villa and its environs.

Here then are four of our central characters but whereas as in the novel, the slow unravelling of all of their histories comes to explain their tragic present, in Minghella's screenplay, only Caravaggio and the English patient have any clear past.

The film emphasises the story of the titular hero and in doing so turns Ondaatje's story into something which is nearer to romantic adventure than the poetic discourse of the novel.

Bringing the story to the screen has inevitably diluted its complexity but this is not to say that Minghella fails. His screenplay is in many ways a marvel, translating as it does Ondaatje's dream-like nar-



Stunning performance: Juliet Binoche as Hana

rative and internal dialogue of character into something which works cinematically.

But this is not straightforward naturalistic film-making and the way in which the whole comes together through the editing amounts to an elegiac and dream-like illumination of the past as it clarifies the present.

The burnt and bedridden patient is revealed to be the explorer, Count Laszlo Almasi, who though Hungarian, is possessed of English aristocratic bearing, speech and manners. In the course of trying to rescue his doomed lover Katharine, whose husband has crashed their plane in the desert, Almasi's encounter with the British military leads to his being mistaken for a German agent. This in turn leads to the downing of his own plane and the tragic conflagration.

Always at Almasi's side is a copy of an ancient book – Herodotus's *Histories of the Greeks and Barbarians*, the central part of which is the account of the conflict between the Greeks and the Persians. Herodotus's interest in the culture of

peoples who were not Greek often had him labelled as a 'barbar-

ophile'

Into this volume, Almasi inserts extracts from other works and fragments and artifacts from his own life so that symbolically the original story is converted into his own.

In Ondaatje's novel, Almasi talks of his time spent in the desert thus:

"There were rivers of desert tribes, the most beautiful humans I've met in my life. We were German, English, Hungarian, African – all of us insignificant to them. Gradually we became nationless. I came to hate nations. We are deformed by nation states."

And it is the conflict between such states which leads to his own tragic undoing.

Though the film has received a plethora of critical plaudits, my own view is it is not quite the masterpiece we have been led to expect. It is nevertheless vastly superior to most of the product currently on offer on the commercial circuit.

Minghella's direction and John Seale's cinematography refer back to the best of Lean.

There are also stunning central performances from Juliette Binoche as Hana, Willem Dafoe as Caravaggio, Kristen Scott-Thomas as Katharine and most breathtak-

ingly of all, Ralph Fiennes as Almasi/the English Patient.

As his attraction to Katharine grows, we see that Almasi's initial coldness towards her has been nothing more than a disposition which he has feigned in a vain attempt to shield himself from erotic inevitability.

The consummation of the affair leads not only to a betrayal of Katharine's husband but also to betrayal of the nation states to which it might be assumed the explorer has some loyalty.

Overblown

Thus the ending of the central character's story reduces simply to a romantic notion of love being placed above loyalty to country and morality. Somewhat one-dimensional and overblown, this is not, I think, quite what Ondaatje originally intended.

So yes, go and see this film for its beauty, its technical perfection and its fine performances.

On the other hand, if you haven't already done so, read the book as well, for in this, while the story of the patient remains central, it is also much more clearly a metaphor for scars inflicted on all of the characters and which change them forever.



Romance – and betrayal – are in the air for Ralph Fiennes and Kristen Scott Thomas

Redemption Song on tour

Banner Theatre have are one of the few alternative theatre groups to have survived into the 90s with their unique form of theatre.

Banner Theatre's latest show highlights two crucial questions of contemporary injustice - the sacked Liverpool dockers and the Asylum and Immigration Act.

The play was written by African-American author Cheryl Martin and follows the story of a Janine, 16-year old student from the Ivory Coast. Her flight to Britain from rape, torture and almost certain death at home is rewarded by imprisonment in a

detention centre.

As usual in Banner's productions, it is their use of multimedia that makes so clear that this is much more than the powerful story of one individual but the story of countless thousands of black people whose voices are rarely heard.

The links between the struggle of asylum seekers and the Liverpool dockers are likewise made through these mechanisms.

Don't miss it when it comes to your area.

Ring 0121 440 0460 for details of tour dates.

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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 faces 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 worldwide 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 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.



FEEDBACK

Send us your letters on any topic, to PO Box 1109, London N4 2UU. Letters over 400 words may have to be edited for length.

A forgotten frame-up

AS VERONICA Fagan notes in her article on the release of the Bridgewater Three, "we should not believe the press when they tell us that this is the last great miscarriage of justice case". Your list of other innocent victims of British courts is far from exhaustive - and the list is still growing.

Samar Alami and Jawad Botmeh are among the latest casualties of a miscarriage of justice. Samar and Jawad, Palestinian postgraduate students living in Britain, were convicted last December, after a highly political trial, of 'conspiracy to cause explosions' at the Israeli embassy

and the Zionist headquarters in London, and sentenced to twenty years' imprisonment, to be followed by deportation.

In highly prejudicial and emotive terms, the media have portrayed them as Islamic fundamentalists motivated by antisemitic bloodlust. To those who know them, this characterisation would be laughable if it were not so damaging.

Samar and Jawad are secular activists, critics from the left of Yasser Arafat's leadership of the PLO and of the Oslo agreement. Samar in particular has many Jewish friends. In a bizarre example of legal logic, her real interest in Jewish matters was used by the

prosecution as further evidence of a lot against the Jewish community.

Samar and Jawad are entirely innocent of the acts for which they were convicted. Indeed, the actual bombings in London were never even mentioned in the charge sheet. The only person charged with responsibility for the bombs, with whom they were alleged to have conspired, was discharged on the judge's instruction after the case against her collapsed entirely.

The conduct of the trial, the contradictory nature of the evidence, the judge's biased summing-up, the crude attempt by Israel to intimidate jurors, and the total absence of any evidence linking Samar and Jawad to any explosions or conspiracy in this country all provide grounds for the appeal which their lawyers have lodged.

Being Palestinian, like being Irish, is not a crime; but to the British police and courts, it might as well be.

We will continue to campaign for their release and vindication.

Roland Rance and Sue Spilling

**Friends of Samar & Jawad
BM FOSA London WC1N 3XX**

No victory on HE pay

I AM WRITING in response to a letter by Andy Kilmister and Mike Pixton (SO 3) about an article I wrote about the recent HE strike (SO 2).

Firstly, I fail to see how a pay offer barely above inflation for the current year, and likely to be less than inflation for 1997-98, can be described as a "victory" for staff in Higher Education.

After inflation, a rise of 2.9 per cent for lecturing and administrative staff and 3.9 per cent for manual staff for next year probably amounts to a pay cut for many staff.

It is true that manual staff have been treated in an appalling way by managers in HE for years, but is an extra 0.5% meant to set that treatment aside?

Secondly, Kilmister and Pixton

comment that the "huge amount... required to restore the value of the pay of many sections of staff" was "never on the agenda". The whole thrust of last November's strike was the fact that huge injections of cash are needed for Higher Education as a whole and for staff pay in particular.

The massive level of support for the strike demonstrated willingness by staff to actively campaign on this issue. Despite years of attacks, feelings of vulnerability and despondency are beginning to be outweighed by this new mood of combativity.

This offer which, although improved, still did not redress the effective cuts in pay over recent years, it seemed only logical that the two year deal from the employers should be rejected.

Union branches across the country were already preparing to step up the dispute. The ballot result on this offer - overwhelmingly in favour - reflects the fact that if you ask people a particular question (i.e. do you accept a better deal than an absolutely appalling one?) you are likely to get a particular answer.

When asked a matter of weeks previously if they were in favour of industrial action over continued falling levels of their pay, the same members of staff overwhelmingly said yes to that question too. In my article on the dispute I did not mention the phrase 'sell-out', despite it being used as a headline above the Kilmister & Pixton letter. But now that you mention it...

Paul Urwin, London

WHAT'S ON

SUNDAY MARCH 30 - Easter Rising commemoration, 12.30p.m., the Irish Centre, 127 Mount Pleasant, Liverpool.

FRIDAY APRIL 4 - Coventry Trades Council Public Meeting: Unite the Struggles. Speakers from Liverpool Dockworkers, Women of the Waterfront, Hillingdon Hospital Workers, Magnet Strikers and Project Aerospace lockout. 7p.m. Herbert Art Gallery, Jordan Well.

SATURDAY APRIL 5 - 'Keep the Link' Organising Meeting, 11a.m.-1p.m. Queens Head, Acton St. London WC2.

SATURDAY APRIL 5 - National Steering Committee of the Network of Socialist Campaign Groups. 10a.m. Calthorpe Arms, Grays Inn Road, London WC2 (10 mins from Kings Cross).

SUNDAY APRIL 6 - Monthly Picket for immediate transfer of all Irish POWs. 12-1.30p.m. Downing Street.

SATURDAY APRIL 12 - March for Social Justice. Assemble 12 noon, Kennington Park for march to Downing Street and Trafalgar Square. Called by the Merseyside Port Shop Stewards Committee jointly with the Hillingdon Hospital and Magnet strikers and marking the start in Britain of Euromarch '97.

SATURDAY APRIL 12 - Na-

tional Abortion Campaign 'SPEAK OUT on Abortion'. 1-4p.m., Institute of Education, Bedford Way, London WC2.

THURSDAY MAY 1 - Kick Out The Tories!

THURSDAY MAY 1 - London Mayday Demonstration, Highbury Fields to Clissold Park, Hackney.

MONDAY MAY 5 - London Mayday Festival, Old Oak Common. SATURDAY MAY 10 - MSF Campaign for a Democratic Union conference, University of London Union.

SATURDAY 17 MAY - British Leg of Euromarch leaves Jarrow.

FRIDAY MAY 30-SUNDAY

JUNE 1 - National Conference of Trades Councils, Blackpool.

Saturday May 31 - 'After the General Election - what next for Labour' - Conference called by the Network of Socialist Campaign Groups, 10.30am-5pm, London Welsh Centre, 157 Grays Inn Road, London WC2.

SATURDAY JUNE 7 - Euromarch demonstration, London.

SATURDAY JUNE 14 - Mass demonstration in Amsterdam against the EU Inter Governmental Conference.

19-26 JULY - International Youth Summer Camp, Central France.

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Pressure grows for education
spending boost from Labour

Can NUT conference show the way?

**Roy Leach, NUT
Executive (personal
capacity)**

With the General Election only a matter of weeks away, this year's NUT conference comes at a crucial time. By far the most important of the teacher unions and the only major union to be meeting in the election period, the 1000 plus delegates gathered in Harrogate are uniquely placed to put increased pressure on Labour as education continues to be central to every party's election campaign.

It is significant that Gillain Shephard turned down the controversial invitation to address the NUT conference whilst David Blunkett has likewise declined to address the NAS/UWT. Only the moderate ATL is to be 'graced' by all three education spokespeople.

As an opinion poll commissioned by the NUT graphically illustrated, teachers have shifted their voting intentions massively in favour of Labour – from only 30 per cent in 1979 to 59 per cent now (at the same time the Tories share of votes has fallen from over 50 per cent to just 15 per cent).

Expectations of an incoming Labour government are high but are New Labour set to deliver?

The answer to this decisive



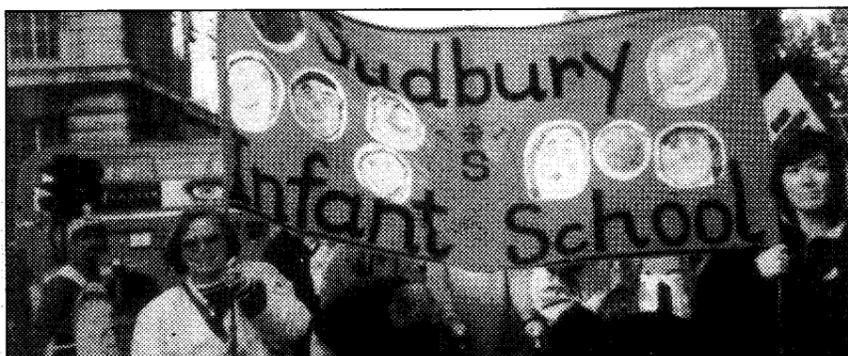
question hinges, in part, upon decisions taken at Harrogate. The right wing – holding a perilously slender 3 seat majority on the National Executive but facing a hostile conference – are desperately seeking to avoid an early confrontation with the Labour government that they have sat back and waited for, for over 17 years.

Where once they would have sought to substitute lobbies of Parliament in place of calls for industrial action, even that approach is seen as too dangerous: Labour MPs, whilst in opposition, could readily agree that education was underfunded and that Tory policies harmed working class children. Once in

power, however, a lobby of a Labour government would pose uncomfortable demands and expose their hypocrisy.

Calls for a mass demonstration before the autumn statement, along the lines of the October 19th demonstration last year, have been grudgingly accepted by the right wing as a major success. Unable to reject it outright the approach is to make its organisation conditional upon local branches underwriting the excessive inflated cost (rumoured to be approaching £1 million pounds!).

The past couple of years has seen the NUT leadership (including part-time General Secretary Doug McAvoy) trying to



previous manifestation). The very limited commitment to reduce class sizes for 5, 6 and 7 year olds – to be funded by phasing out the assisted places scheme – is looking increasingly shaky.

Not only don't the sums add up (honouring the extension to prep schools and further delaying the release of money) but without a commitment to a legally enforceable class size maximum or the abolition of the Local Management of Schools (LMS) it is hard to see how the policy can be delivered.

Likewise, the abolition of nursery vouchers will remove the bureaucratic nightmare but the resources released won't pay for the necessary expansion of nursery education to provide for all four year olds.

This could only be achieved by allowing local authorities to increase public expenditure but Brown and Blair have already committed themselves to continuing with the Tories fiscal policies and capping.

No doubt there will be a honeymoon period where Labour's meagre promises will be put to the test: but it is necessary to put increased pressure on Labour to deliver far more – the role of the NUT left is to ensure that the union is prepared to wage the campaigns necessary to do this.

That is why the outcome of the NUT conference is so critical.