



## Election Special

# VOTE LABOUR

## Kick out the Tories

MILLIONS of workers will be turning out to vote Labour in the general election. This time they will be joined by a significant section of former Tory voters and we should surely see the back of the hated Major government.

Despite 18 years of systematic attacks on the working class, the Tories have been unable to halt the decline of the economy. They have smashed up the old industries and privatised 70 per cent of the state sector, with the loss of thousands of jobs. Through a combination of high unemployment, deregulation and anti-union laws, they have turned Britain into the inward investment capital of Europe. But they have not been able to fulfil the

promises they made to the middle class and the skilled workers. Taxation has gone up, services have been slashed, health, education and transport are in crisis, and job insecurity has become a fact of life.

Central to the Tory strategy was a confrontation with the trade unions. The defeat of the miners in 1985 by the Thatcher administration, along with the capitulation of the TUC, opened the door for an onslaught on workers' rights. Most restrictive have been the anti-union laws, which ban effective picketing, secondary action and workplace democracy. Paradoxically, these laws have strengthened the hand of the union bureaucrats, who can use them as an excuse to

derail any militancy among their members. Never has the description 'labour lieutenants of capital' been more appropriate.

With the workers bridled, the Thatcher and Major governments have proceeded to dismantle the gains of the last half-century, rolling back the welfare state and creating a cheap labour economy. For all their talk about re-skilling the workforce, the Tories have actually reduced standards of general education with their narrowly-based national curriculum, NVQs and training for work schemes.

Benefits and pensions have been cut, hospitals have been closed and the health service has been placed on a commercial footing with the

creation of NHS Trusts, an internal market and GP fundholding.

Since 1979, there has been a marked growth in inequality – the rich have got richer and the poor have got poorer – homelessness has risen sharply, and diseases associated with poverty have reappeared. A barrage of racist legislation has been introduced. The most recent Asylum and Immigration Act allows for widespread racial harassment under the guise of 'immigration checks', while asylum seekers are denied benefits or left to rot in detention centres and prisons. This xenophobia extends into a revolting moral crusade which scapegoats black people, gays, single mothers, youth and the unemployed

for all society's ills. The latest Criminal Justice Act gives the police unprecedented powers.

Yet behind the reactionary bravado lie deep divisions over Europe, reflecting, in turn, a ruling class uncertain of how to keep British capitalism afloat. With the whole of British politics in a state of flux, there will be opportunities to lift the class struggle from today's historically low level. Workers have some expectations of Labour, despite its right-wing leadership. Putting Labour into office is the first step towards transforming elementary class consciousness into serious militancy, and establishes the best conditions for a struggle against the Blairite modernisers.

# And fight the modernisers

# Build a militant rank-and-file movement

THE TORY election campaign has predictably included further attacks on the unions. There were accusations that the Labour Party and the unions were 'joined at the hip and the wallet', and promises of further legislation that would make trade unions liable for damages in the event of strikes having a 'disproportional effect'. No less predictably, the Labour leaders have responded by pledging that they will not give in to union 'bullying', going out of their way to woo big business, and condemning the Essex firefighters for taking strike action in defence of jobs and services.

Despite the protests of some union leaders, Blair wants to keep almost all the anti-trade union laws, particularly those which outlaw solidarity action, limit picketing and enforce balloting before industrial action. This is a calculated insult to the millions of trade unionists who for nearly a century have financed and built the Labour

Party, and have suffered the Tory onslaughts of the last 18 years.

It is essential that socialists do not desert the unions. They remain the most important organisations of the class, and a collision with a Labour government is almost inevitable, in spite of the intentions of the bureaucrats.

There are naive people who think that Blair is simply playing a game with the Tory media, and that, once in power, he will deliver the goods. The union leaders have largely gone along with Blair's line that there should be no special favours for the unions under a Labour government, although, like the Campaign Group of MPs, they are hoping that they will at least be able to influence events by a little back-stage lobbying.

This completely underestimates Blair's aim, which is to remove the unions from any significant role in policy making, with the option at a future date of dispensing with their organisational input and fi-

By Richard Price

nancial support via public funding of political parties. Until they have been used up like squeezed lemons, the only role earmarked for the union bureaucrats is to uncritically support every aspect of 'modernisation' and police their members.

But to achieve this scenario will not be plain sailing for Blair. Traitors though they are, the union leaders are obliged to take account of their own base of support, which, once it comes under attack from a Blair government, will become increasingly difficult to control. In addition, although they have made endless policy retreats, sections of the union bureaucracy have become increasingly incensed by their steadily declining influence over a party which remains heavily reliant upon trade union funding.

The stage is therefore set not only for a deep rift between the trade unions and a Labour govern-

ment, but also within the trade union bureaucracy itself. A foretaste of this came with Blair's blatant interventions into both the 1996 TUC Congress and the election of the TGWU general secretary.

Socialists must be in the front line of defending the trade union link – the one factor which is most central in defining Labour's character as a bourgeois workers' party. Those who argue light-mindedly that the link is not worth defending are pulling in the same direction that Blair is pushing. Only under conditions where a viable mass political alternative exists do we call upon the unions to voluntarily sever their links with Labour.

Socialists must use the union link not only to make specific policy interventions (for a minimum wage, repeal of the anti-union laws, against cuts, etc), but to defend every element of collective democracy in the Labour Party against the modernisers.

Since the defeat of the miners

in 1985, the character of most trade union struggles has been defensive. At the same time, the 'new realism' of the dominant wing of the union bureaucracy has gravely undermined the unions' capacity to wage defensive struggles. Serious opposition to redundancies by industrial action or occupations has become a rarity. Traditional methods of class struggle have been increasingly replaced by high profile no-strike deals and single union agreements. With the notable exception of the Royal Mail and London Underground, unofficial action has dwindled to a fraction of its former level.

The focus of trade union action has shifted to what remains of the public sector. There has been a corresponding decline in most of the key areas of class struggle of the 1960s, 70s and 80s – engineering, mines, shipyards and other manufacturing industry. The 'leading role' within the trade union movement in terms of action is now occupied by public sector unions. This reflects the ongoing assault by the Tories on the public sector, which has placed trade unionists in local government, the utilities, and the health and civil services under continuous pressure.

These struggles, however, do not carry the same strategic economic weight which the industrial struggles of previous decades did. But a revival of trade union militancy is likely to occur under a Blair government, which will continue attacking the working class where the Tories left off. This will give socialists a real opportunity to agitate for control of the unions to be wrested from the collaborators and sell-outs and back into the hands of rank-and-file members.

We are for the extension of all forms of internal union democracy, and against all attempts to introduce rule by postal ballot and to remove delegate-based democracy by phasing out or downgrading union policy-making conferences.

The main orientation in the trade unions in the next period should be towards existing broad lefts and other opposition movements, whether in individual unions, or across unions. Such an orientation, however, does not mean a political truce with the broad lefts as they are. In many cases they function as electoral machines, linked up to the left of the bureaucracy, and prioritise the winning of positions over delivering effective action. Subordination to such forces on their terms will not lead to any significant advance for revolutionaries. On the contrary, it leaves the would-be revolutionaries covering up for the failures, waverings and retreats of the left bureaucrats.

In place of the existing broad lefts, we are in favour of a militant national rank-and-file movement. It would not refuse membership to sections of the bureaucracy on principle. It would, however, insist that its leaders carry out a real fight for its class struggle policy and union democracy, and be accountable to it. There is no place within such a movement for timeservers, opportunists and careerists.

## Reinstate the dockers

By Jim Dye

Liverpool Trades Council  
(in a personal capacity)

THE STRUGGLE of the Liverpool dockers for reinstatement appears to have reached a turning point. The latest 'final' offer from the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company (MDHC) of £25,000 for each docker, plus £3,000 for three months without reporting for work as a form of redundancy payment, was rejected at a mass meeting earlier in the year.

The dockers have always stated that they want jobs, not bribes to get them to call off the dispute. Besides, the offer is only open to the direct employees of MDHC and not to the other sacked workers from the Torside and Nelson Freight dependent companies, and the dockers are refusing to be divided.

However, while the dockers remain solid, they have been unable to break the deadlock. The reason for this is to be found in the disgraceful actions of Bill Morris and the TGWU bureaucracy who, together with the TUC, have refused time and again to give meaningful support to the dockers. The high level of international solidarity has shown what could be achieved if the labour movement was mobilised, but the TGWU has refused to make the dispute official in cowardly compliance with the anti-union laws, and Morris has spent his time trying to ignore the dockers and attacking their supporters.

First he told the dockers to dissociate themselves from the youth who have attended demonstrations and borne the brunt of police brutality. Then, in the *T&G Record* of Feb/March 1997, he attacked the dockers, along with two 'ultra-left



Dockers and their supporters march through Liverpool on March 22

journalists' whom he described as 'enemies of the union'. He was referring to John Pilger and Ken Loach, who had criticised Morris's handling of the dispute in a *Guardian* article and a TV documentary respectively. He wrote: 'They so often end up in the same place as the politics of the right – attacking the organisations of the labour movement.' Pilger and Loach have been virtually alone in the capitalist media in giving support to the dockers. By contrast, the first coverage the *T&G Record* gave to the dispute was this attack – 18 months after it began. Given all this, it is not surprising that Morris wanted the men to accept the MDHC bribe, and see Liverpool remain a scab port.

Outside the Labour Party and TUC leaderships, support for the

dockers remains strong. Another large demonstration took place in Liverpool on March 22, and in a televised match, Liverpool FC striker Robbie Fowler celebrated scoring a goal by revealing a T-shirt in support of the dockers underneath his Liverpool shirt. In London on April 12, youth clashed with police in Trafalgar Square at the end of a demonstration which saw thousands of supporters from all over the country marching behind the dockers.

We applaud the actions of the dockers in maintaining the dispute for so long, but we don't agree with the offer put to the MDHC by local dockers' leaders – of forming a co-operative to hire their labour to the port. Even though the MDHC has so far rejected the proposal, the idea of a co-operative

may seem attractive. But co-operatives can never be a solution to the problems of workers while they are forced to operate within the capitalist system. In order to succeed, they must ultimately equal the wage cutting and long hours of rival capitalist companies, and so are a false hope.

The dockers have been forced to fight alone for too long. We must take their fight right to the rotten heart of the leaderships of the Labour Party, the TGWU and the TUC. In the fight for jobs, and in the fight for socialism, the removal of these bureaucratic parasites will have to take centre stage. With the election of a Labour government, we must step up demands for the dockers to be reinstated, and for the scrapping of the anti-union laws that were used to sack them.

# Vote Labour, fight Blair

## EDITORIAL

THE FACT that Tony Blair has shifted the Labour Party massively to the right in recent years will not stop most workers voting for it in the general election. Workers correctly see the need to kick out the Tories and put Labour in office. Rather than breaking from Labour, they continue to see the party as the best chance of social change.

Electing a Labour government will increase class confidence and combativity. But since Blair has no intention of bringing about radical change, socialists must not only call for a Labour vote – they must prepare workers for the political struggles that lie ahead.

The Labour Party has a contradictory character. It is a bourgeois workers' party – its politics are pro-capitalist, but its base lies in the working class and the trade union movement. Labour's policies may be worse than ever, but the party's class composition has not changed. Contrary to the claims of many on the left, Blair's replacement of Clause Four, his 'New Labour' policies and his attack on party democracy have not changed the party's defining character.

In other words, what distinguishes Labour from outright capitalist parties is its link to the organised working class, not its programme. We reject Arthur Scargill's view that Blair has somehow broken Labour from its socialist past. Labour never has been and never will be a socialist party. However, the party was set up to give the working class an independent voice, and as long as the trade union link remains the struggles of workers can be taken up inside the party. We are in favour of taking all class

struggle demands into the Labour Party and exerting maximum pressure for them to be carried out. We must fight against the historic division inside the British labour movement between Labour and the unions. All basic demands must be extended politically.

Where revolutionary forces are weak and no significant centrist or Stalinist organisation exists, we assist the working class in asserting its political independence from the bourgeoisie by calling for a vote for a reformist party with a mass base in the working class. For the same reason, we are against alliances with bourgeois parties in order to form coalition governments, tactical voting in seats where the Liberal Democrats stand a better chance of winning, and, in this election specifically, Labour standing down in Tatton in order to support the 'anti-sleaze' candidate Martin Bell. Our role is to help drive out the Tories and force Labour into government, under conditions which enable workers to exert the maximum influence over 'their' party.

No other option is open to us. The British working class is politically wedded to the Labour Party. Labour also enjoys the support of a relatively unified trade union body which is not divided along political lines, and since Britain has never had a strong Stalinist party, Labour has been virtually unchallenged as the political representative of the working class since its formation. The ideology of Labourism dominates both sides of the labour movement, holding the working class in check. This hold will not be broken by socialist propaganda alone, but by material develop-

ments – by workers being forced into struggle against the betrayals of reformism, fighting alongside revolutionaries who do not separate themselves from the class, in the context of a worsening economic and political crisis.

Blair's policies are Tory policies, but whether or not he can put them into practice is another matter. Unlike the Tories, Blair is obliged to carry the labour movement with him, and he has had to work hard to get the support of the trade union leaders for his reforms. A number of major unions are opposed to important aspects of Labour's economic and social policy, as well as any further weakening of the trade union link.

The trade union bureaucrats are caught in a bind. If they go along with Blair's project, they stand to lose influence over their members; if they fight Blair, they put their 'respectability', and their chance of finding a seat in the House of Lords, at risk. In all likelihood, sections of the trade union bureaucracy will be forced into a confrontation with Blair simply because their own material interests will be threatened. We must assist this process by intervening in trade union, Labour Party and other labour movement structures with a series of fighting demands on the Blair government. Although these will be mainly of a defensive character, they should be demands which can mobilise rank-and-file workers and turn defence into attack.

The confidence of the working class is already on the rise. As the election approaches, more strikes are breaking out and workers are beginning to raise demands that they expect a Labour government to address. Blair's twin assault – on the class character of the Labour Party, and on the class more generally – will give socialists plenty of opportunities to raise the stakes.

- Repeal the anti-union laws!
- Renationalise the privatised utilities and industries! Nationalise all industries threatened with closure or cutback!
- For full employment and a cut in working hours without loss of pay!
- For a minimum wage level set by the labour movement, not the government and the bosses!
- Tax the rich, not the poor!
- Abolish NHS Trusts, the internal market and GP fundholding! For an emergency programme of investment in the health service! For free residential care for every elderly person who requires it! For free contraception and abortion on demand!
- For free pre-school childcare and nursery education available for all! No to selection in secondary education! Abolish private schools!

Scrap the student loan system! For free higher education and the restoration of full, living grants!

- Abolish the Job Seeker's Allowance! No to workfare! For full benefits and free access to genuine training and education on a voluntary basis!
- For secure state pensions linked to average earnings!
- For a massive investment programme to create an integrated, publicly-owned transport system!
- End homelessness, profiteering landlords and sub-standard living conditions! For a full programme of council house building!
- Repeal the Asylum and Immigration Act and all other racist legislation! Restore benefits to all asylum-seekers!
- Stop the harassment and criminalisation of youth, the homeless and political activists! Repeal the Criminal Justice Act!
- End the partition of Ireland! Withdraw British troops and administration from the north!
- Abolish the House of Lords and the monarchy!
- No to a bosses' Europe and its single currency! Reject the Maastricht Treaty and the convergence criteria for monetary union!

## Vote Nellist, Sheridan and Scargill

WE ARE campaigning for a class vote against the Tories in the general election. We call for a vote for the Labour Party, not because of its policies, but because of its structural connection to the institutions of the working class. As a result of this, Labour has the support of the great majority of the working class. We are therefore opposed to those candidates who, ignoring this fact, choose to stand against Labour on a sectarian basis.

However, we do not make a fetish out of our support for Labour. We believe that it is feasible to call for a vote for other parties, groups or individuals to the left of the Labour Party provided that they have a substantial base in their locality. On this basis, in Coventry South East and Glasgow Pollok we call for a vote for Dave Nellist and Tommy Sheridan respectively.

We have political differences with Nellist and Sheridan, and with the group they belong to – the Socialist Party (formerly Militant Labour) – which wrongly characterises Labour as a straightforward bourgeois party. We believe that, in standing against Labour, the SP is being sectarian towards the mass of the working class, as well as opportunist in its electoral ambitions. This current has always adapted to the left reformist notion of implementing socialism through parliament,

and it terminated its many years of entry work on the basis that the Labour Party no longer provided a vehicle for such a strategy. From a wrong starting point it has drawn the wrong conclusions.

Despite this, Nellist and Sheridan do have substantial local support. Nellist is a former Labour MP who was expelled from the party by Kinnock's witch-hunters. In the 1992 general election, he stood as an independent and almost beat the imposed Labour candidate. Sheridan achieved a significant vote in the last election as well, and is currently a councillor for Scottish Militant Labour. He won the respect of the Glasgow working class for his principled stand on the poll tax – he was jailed for refusing to pay it. He is standing as a candidate of the Scottish Socialist Alliance, an activist grouping with a significant base in some working class districts.

In Newport East, we call for a vote for Arthur Scargill despite our overall opposition to the Socialist Labour Party's election strategy. Although the SLP does not have a significant local base in Newport, Scargill has a national profile as a radical trade union leader, and still commands the respect of many class conscious workers. He is therefore likely to find a reasonable level of support among workers in the constituency.

## Say no to a referendum

# Scottish Assembly now

NOWHERE has the collapse in the Tories' popularity been more marked than in Scotland. At the same time, there is a healthy suspicion among many Scottish workers of 'Tory Blair'.

Yet although the national question dominates Scottish politics, it is likely that Labour, rather than the pro-independence Scottish National Party, will reap the immediate rewards. This is because there is at present a convergence between those who might otherwise vote SNP, but who see electing a Labour government as a tactic to win a Scottish Assembly, and Labour voters who want an Assembly but oppose independence.

Most Scottish workers do not see independence or autonomy as an alternative to class politics, but as inter-linked. The campaigns against the poll tax, water privatisation and the closure of Ravenscraig steelworks weren't only struggles to defend workers' living standards and jobs. They also took on the character of national struggles against a government ruling in the interests of the English middle class, which used Scotland as a test bed for some of its most reactionary policies. The recent militant demonstrations and strikes against cuts in education

and local government services show that there is currently a higher level of class struggle in Scotland, and this, too, may be driven in part by a feeling of being nationally oppressed.

Scotland is not an oppressed nation in the classical sense. Rather, it suffers from areas of acute deprivation compounded by political inequality. For the past 18 years, Scotland has returned a majority of Labour MPs, only to be dominated by a Westminster parliament controlled by southern Tories.

We defend the right of Scots to decide on the nature of their relationship with England, up to and including complete independence. But while it is clear that a substantial majority of Scots want an Assembly, support for full independence is significantly smaller.

As socialists, we do not seek to impose conditions upon Scottish self-determination. If a majority of Scottish workers decided to take the road of independence, we would argue for a Scottish workers' republic. However, we believe that the best conditions for the struggle for socialism would be provided by mobilising the British working class as a whole.

Although we demand that an incoming Labour government

should stick to its original promise of an Assembly with revenue-raising powers, and not get sidetracked into a referendum to reassure middle England, we do not have illusions that either an Assembly or independence can solve any of the problems faced by Scottish workers. The SNP leaders' goal of Scottish independence within Europe would not make Scottish workers 'independent' of US, German or Japanese multinationals. Nor would it enable Scotland to escape the austerity policies dictated by the Maastricht convergence criteria.

If popular front-type campaigns like Scotland United re-emerge and have the ear of class conscious workers, socialists should intervene and fight along class lines to drive out representatives of capitalist parties and the churches.

We must warn at all times against the fracturing of the British labour movement along national lines. For over a century, Scottish, English and Welsh workers have shared common organisations, and frequently common employers. This does not contradict our support for Scottish self-determination, because we distinguish between the unity of the British working class, and the political form adopted by the British state.

# Renationalise public transport

BRITAIN's transport systems are in a shambles. Public transport is insufficient, expensive and badly in need of modernisation. The car and the heavy lorry reign supreme and travelling by road has become a nightmare, with inner cities and sections of the motorway network frequently gridlocked. The situation is so bad that even the bosses are complaining that goods are being delayed and staff arriving late for work.

What solutions are on offer? More privatisation, new roads, traffic-free zones, stiffer penalties for traffic offences, higher road tax, more parking restrictions, increased petrol prices, motorway tolling . . . the list goes on. But no combination of these would tackle the underlying problem. Traffic levels would continue to rise, public transport would continue to deteriorate, and running a car would become prohibitively expensive for most workers.

Bus privatisation and deregulation resulted in chaos in provincial cities like Sheffield and Oxford, as private operators vied for passengers at peak time on the most heavily used routes. After the initial scramble for custom, the situation

By Dan Gallagher

gradually stabilised as the larger companies took control – and then started increasing fares and cutting unprofitable trips late at night and early in the morning.

The state-owned British Rail has disappeared, to be replaced with a series of regional or route-based private monopolies. A handful of big companies, like bus operators National Express and Stagecoach, Virgin, Sea Containers and Connex, have been sweeping all before them. Having purchased their seven-year franchises at a fraction of their value, with no requirement to improve services or invest in rolling stock, they have proceeded to reduce staff and attack the wages and conditions of those who remain. So keen was the Stagecoach-owned South West Trains to rid itself of effective trade unionism that it sacked a large number of its most experienced drivers, and was unable to provide anything resembling a regular train service for weeks.

The union leaders' response has been to pass pious resolutions against privatisation and hand out

a few leaflets. Nowhere have they mobilised their members in a serious fight. In the bus industry, the TGWU leaders rolled over and collaborated with management to keep the union intact. They accepted the fragmentation of union structures, a bewildering array of locally negotiated wage rates and conditions, and refused to fight even the most blatant of union-busting operations – like the one in Chelmsford.

The Labour Party leaders started out from a position of opposition to rail privatisation, in words at least, but envisaged a 'partnership' with private capital to modernise the system. With privatisation under way, they decided that Railtrack, the company that owns the track, signalling and stations, should remain in public ownership, but that it was too late to reverse the franchising out of train services. Now they have dropped the whole idea of public-sector involvement, and claim that a tighter regulatory body is all that is needed to control fare increases, ensure adequate provision of services, and monitor safety procedures.

The Tory election manifesto pledges to sell off London Underground, then hand the proceeds back to the new owners to spend on modernisation. The Labour leaders vigorously denounce the idea, but they call for private investment to revive the antiquated system, and what is this but privatisation by the back door? Furthermore, Blair announced during the election campaign that Labour is no longer opposed to privatisation, and that the test will be whether it is in the public interest. Clearly, the Tube, the various local authority-run rapid transit networks and airports around the country, and air traffic control are not safe in Labour's hands.

The demand must be raised for the privatised bus and rail companies to be renationalised, and for the creation of an expanded, integrated public transport system. Socialists must take a leading role in building a rank-and-file campaign co-ordinated across the transport unions, which links in with local user groups to hammer out a transport policy for the working class.



Teachers march in London against Tory education policies

## End privilege in education

EVER SINCE 'Milk-Snatcher Thatcher' took the right to a daily third of a pint of milk away from all school-age children, the 'discipline of the market place' has steadily been introduced into the education system. Local management of schools, devolved budgets, 'opting out', central 'funding by quango' of post-16 education and training – all these measures in education have interacted with Conservative policies designed to render councils accountable for, but not in control of, local government.

Both the Tories and New Labour waffle on in unison about poor standards of teaching being to blame for all the negative aspects of society which cannot be attributed to single mothers. They attempt to bamboozle us into believing that the state education system is somehow not a product of the state, but of poor teaching, 'bad neighbourhoods', 'shoddy governing bodies', and most pernicious of all 'bad children' who are bad because they come from 'dysfunctional families'. In turn, we are encouraged to believe that this dysfunctionality has genetic, or moral, causes which can be corrected through teaching people to behave better.

With everyone concentrating on 'Family Literacy' schemes, on decreasing the standards of teacher training while increasing the specialist workload on teachers, and strategies for dealing with children

with 'challenging behaviour', attitude problems, or knives, over the last five years the National Curriculum combined with the National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ, SVQ in Scotland) has been reducing the educational process to the learning of 'competencies'. These are different from what used to be called 'knowledge' or even 'skills'. Through the qualifications system, the levels to which students are educated are being steadily reduced to demonstrations of competence in tasks, verifiable through portfolios of evidence. At the same time as the majority of the population are pushed down the NVQ road, the academic qualifications system has been retained, and is continuing to offer 'knowledge-based' education to a smaller minority of privileged learners.

While we need to support campaigns for increased funding for education, for a return to local authority control, for the abolition of private and selective schools, and for high quality state education for all throughout life, we should also question how it is that the qualifications system is turning out a majority of people who are not educated for employment, but for 'jobseeking'; not equipped with knowledge enabling solid vocational training (if this were consistently available), but with 'competencies' which can become 'incompetencies' the moment the technology changes.

## Defend health and welfare

By Pauline Bryant

EIGHTEEN years of Conservative administration have seen the foundations laid for the dismantling of the welfare state and its replacement by individual insurance schemes for those who can pay, and charity (administered by a voluntary sector funded increasingly through the National Lottery and the European Social Fund) for those who can't.

New Labour promises the voluntary sector a special relationship with government, indicating clearly that if elected it intends to carry on where the Tories left off, until we are all protected from the effects of unemployment, sickness, accident and old age by our portfolio of insurance policies backed up by charitable help for which we can apply if we happen to hear about its availability. Meanwhile, the insurance industry booms into a competitive extravaganza of tempting offers for the relief of every kind of potential disaster, and the grant-funded voluntary sector readies itself to take on the welfare needs of those who find themselves in the morally-reprehensible position of not having bought the right insurance policy.

Many of the gains for the British working class which the welfare state constituted have been lost without serious protest by the leaders of the labour movement. Self-

organisation by affected groups is co-opted and transformed into bureaucratic grant-chasing, and if there is a shortage of money to alleviate poverty, it is simply because someone hasn't filled in their grant application properly.

The internal market, NHS Trusts and GP fundholding have already made inequalities in patient care worse, and are the framework for establishing a two-tier system of health treatment. Many hospital ancillary services are now privately run, and the next step will be to put selected clinical services out to tender. Faced with making huge cuts in public spending, Labour, too, will be unable to escape the logic of introducing fees for those who can 'afford' medical treatment or health insurance schemes, condemning the poor and the low-paid to underfunded, crowded public hospitals.

Socialists must fight for a living state benefit for all who are unable to work, secure state pensions set at the level of the average wage, the reversing of all the Tory changes in the health service, the abolition of prescription charges, and free eye tests, glasses and dental treatment. We must support every campaign against cuts in health care provision, benefits and pensions, and we must agitate around the issue of the transition of state-funded welfare services into the private sector or into voluntarily-funded, localised, charitable organisations.

## Labour must scrap JSA

UNEMPLOYMENT is taking a lower profile than ever in this election. While the Tories claim that Britain is booming, Labour has decided that there aren't many votes to be won among the unemployed.

This has meant that one of the Tories' most vicious attacks on the unemployed has been introduced with little public opposition. The Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA), which replaced unemployment benefit and income support last October, has driven tens of thousands of people off the register – not into work, but into the twilight zone of non-entitlement. By cutting the contributory version of JSA to six months, instead of 12 months of unemployment benefit, the Tories have once again massaged the figures downwards. Those unemployed with working partners find that having paid rising levels of national insurance they are entitled to half as much benefit.

Meanwhile, for those who continue to sign on, a series of traps lie in wait – a 'stricter benefit regime', with regular demands for evidence that they are 'actively seeking' work; the threat of having their benefits 'sanctioned' if they refuse low-paid employment or in any way put limits on their 'availability' for work; and now a new threat for those over two years unemployed – they are to be given four weeks to sign off or face an intimidating set of seven consecutive interviews.

Labour must be forced to reverse its position of merely conducting a review of JSA. It must repeal it, along with all anti-working class changes in the benefits system since 1979. Of course, it is not a question of sitting back and waiting for Blair to do something. Abolition of JSA must be raised as a political demand, alongside strike action by benefit workers and direct action by claimants against ever greater harassment.

## ANTI-RACISM

# Prepare for backlash

RECESSION in western Europe and the collapse of Stalinism in eastern Europe has fuelled the growth of reactionary nationalist, racist and xenophobic movements in the 1990s. Fascists have made little progress in Britain – mainly because the state racism of the Tories stole much of their thunder – but a Labour government could well see a revival in their fortunes.

Although Major has formally distanced himself from the efforts of Midlands Tory MPs to play the race card in the election, his government has introduced such reactionary measures as the Asylum and Immigration Act. There is little doubt that if the Tories are defeated they will swing sharply to the right, creating fertile conditions for racists and fascists to grow. The struggle against racism is not simply a question of equality of treatment. For workers to be able to fight as a class, it is absolutely necessary that they defeat all attempts to divide them along racial lines.

The left has largely failed to develop a consistent struggle against racism and fascism. From time to time, the larger groups on the left have had temporary enthusiasms when a recruitment opportunity presented itself. This has led to opportunist zig-zags on what should at all times be a principled issue. In 1993-4, when racist attacks and murders received wide publicity and there was a revival of fascist activity in east and south-east London, much of the left began talking as if a mass fascist movement was around the corner, held at bay only by the heroics of a small band of anti-fascists.

While we should not downplay the significance of anti-fascist mobilisations such as the 50,000-strong Unity demonstration against the BNP in Welling, this method led both to a wild overestimation

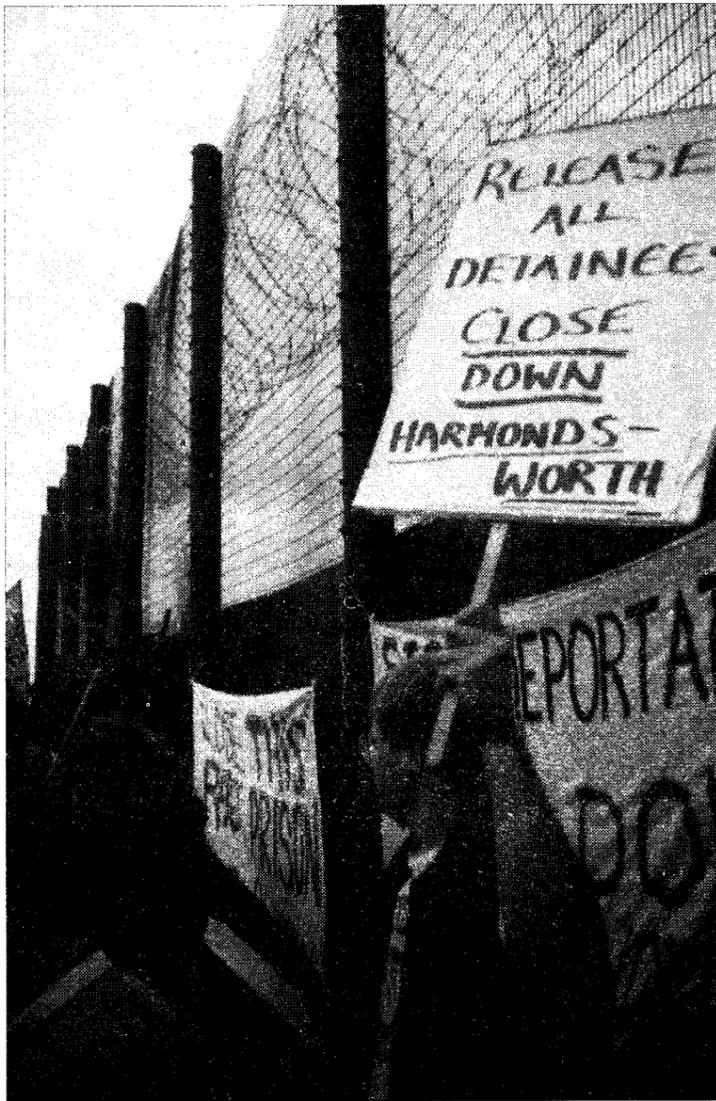
of the BNP's real strength, and, at the same time, to a corresponding underestimation of state and institutionalised racism, and the role it plays. A coherent all-round approach, based upon working class struggle, recognises that state racism and fascist groups feed off each other.

Meanwhile the anti-racist/anti-fascist movement has fractured into a variety of ineffective networking or party-front outfits, all jostling for position, while the mass of black, Asian and other minority workers remain largely indifferent or unaware of such efforts 'on their behalf'.

The proportion of black and other minority activists within the left has declined. This reflects the frustration among such activists at the opportunist tactics of organisations such as the SWP and Militant, which lack a serious ongoing commitment and instead parachute their members into areas where racists and fascists are active, only to evacuate them once paper selling opportunities have receded.

The only viable national anti-racist campaign currently in existence is the National Assembly Against Racism (NAAR). The result of a split in the Anti-Racist Alliance (ARA), NAAR is a loose networking federation. While it stresses black self-organisation, NAAR opposes the demand for 'no platform' for fascists, instead relying on legal anti-racism via the toothless Anti-Racist Charter. The predominance of this kind of reformist campaign, which looks to the state and the courts rather than the working class, is the result of the failure to build an activist campaign.

Another by-product is the growth of a group like the Nation of Islam, which shows that, although it remains very much a mi-



nority trend, there is some space for black separatism.

However, there is far greater support for black self-organisation – a fact recognised by the trade union bureaucrats, who are keen to contain the anti-racist movement within peaceful reformist channels, in order to oppose direct action, and to use the movement as a base of support in alliance with black community leaders. Such considerations motivated the TUC's efforts to promote the ill-fated Anti-Racist Alliance as the official anti-racist movement, whose leading role everyone was supposed to acknowledge, as well as the TUC's own 'Respect' festivals.

Attempts to build party 'front' organisations by the SWP (the Anti-Nazi League) and Militant (Youth Against Racism in Europe) have had little impact. The ANL remains little more than an alternative badge worn by SWP paper sellers on demos, while the YRE has been dissolved into Young Socialist Action, the youth arm of the newly launched Socialist Party.

What is needed is a united anti-racist/anti-fascist movement, based upon the organisations of the working class and the oppressed. In the absence of such a united front campaign, the case for it must be argued within existing campaigns and groups.

## Rebuild Irish solidarity

THE BI-PARTISAN agreement between Major and Blair to keep Ireland out of the election, with the exception of Tweedledee and Tweedledum denunciations of the IRA, is yet another shameful chapter in Labour's record on Ireland.

The 'peace process' is now exposed as a British government 'dirty trick', aimed at dividing the nationalist community, and bolstering the unionist position. In the Six Counties, we call for a vote for Sinn Féin in the general election. In Britain, solidarity with the struggle for Irish self-determination remains a central principled issue for the labour movement.

Although Sinn Féin has gone a long way towards accepting the unionist veto, and hence the partition of Ireland, the unionists still regard the peace process with suspicion, fearful that it may not guarantee their privileges. Indeed, the fact that the process has come to a virtual standstill, and may unravel completely, is largely because of

unionist intransigence and the sectarianism of the Orange mobs and the Protestant paramilitaries.

The events of the last three years have led to a slump in almost all areas of Irish solidarity work in the British labour movement. This is not surprising when the leadership of the Troops Out Movement can support a motion which claims that: 'The Hume-Adams initiative has achieved the greatest advance for the cause of Irish national emancipation since the hunger strike period of 1981.'

The truth is that the gains for the oppressed nationalist community in the north are non-existent, and that the conflict will almost certainly recur. Principled socialists in Britain have a duty to defend republican militants and the cause of Irish freedom no less than before, and a solidarity movement based on the demands for 'Troops out now!' and 'Self-determination for the Irish people as a whole' must be rebuilt.

## Unequal rights

EVERY SO often, capitalist society lets women out of the kitchen and into the work place, making good use of the fact that female hormones do apparently impart more stamina and greater resistance to pain to women than male hormones do to men. During the Second World War, when women were needed in the factories, Rosie the Riveter was encouraged to don a pair of overalls and assure her sisters that 'We can do it!' for the War Effort.

After the war, Rosie was stuffed back into high heels, dressed up in breast- and hip-enhancing corsetry, given a newly-fitted kitchen and told to cook her man a meal, go through his stomach to his heart and become pregnant several times by him for the Peace Effort. But the nuclear family was re-jigged after 1945 – class society remembered that all women, not simply poor women, can actually cook, reproduce, child-rear, clean, shop, look beautiful and also work outside the home without emasculating their husbands in the process.

The 1960's and 1970's, largely aided by the apparently liberating influence of control over fertility through regular doses of cancer-inducing hormones, gave women the chance to experience 'sexual freedom' on a scale never before possible. While this allowed more women to enter the labour market, it helped destabilise the family as an institution and forced into being, after a long struggle not to be born, that phenomenon of the 1980's and 1990's, the 'New Man' – the man who can share in childcare responsibilities and domestic labour, provided of course that everyone is aware of the sacrifice he is making. The involvement of men in domestic labour has raised its profile, and while the 'New Man' is simply the 'Old Man' in a frilly apron, the illusion has been created that the oppression of the female sex by the male sex can be alleviated under capitalism.

Feminism found a scapegoat for the social lot of women in individual men, but the various social movements it inspired gave focus to the social issues we must still campaign around: for free contraception and abortion on demand, for state-funded research into non-systemic forms of contraception, against domestic violence and all male violence against women and children, for state-funded pre-school child-care for all, for non-means-tested child benefit for all, and for equal pay for equal work – assuming women get through the education system into equal work. Feminism, or the set of ideological currents commonly thought of as such, has not changed women, or men, or the relationship of working class women and men to the means of production.

New Labour, like the 'New Man', will doubtless continue, as the Tories have done, to appear through rhetoric and minor legislation to be reducing social inequalities for women, while steadily ensuring that the basis for these social inequalities remains unchanged. The basic antagonistic relation which appears to exist between women and men in class society provides an ideological diversion from the class struggle, but because gender relations are central to all social relations, it is a diversion which socialists must understand and campaign around.

## Protests lack politics

THOSE WHO call for 'new organisations' to be built wrongly believe that workers will leave their organisations en masse by propaganda alone. Equally suspect is the notion that 'community organisation' or 'new forms of struggle' around single-issues (such as the poll tax, anti-lesbian and gay laws, racist legislation or attacks, and now road building and live animal exports) are a substitute for organised rank-and-file activity in the workplace and trade unions.

Animal rights and road protests are not what the left has traditionally understood as 'new social movements'. Given their small scale and localised nature they should more appropriately be called something like 'new protest movements'. And while the more established new social movements are based on fighting for the rights of people – women, gays, ethnic minorities – these new protest movements often prioritise animals or

trees. They are made up of a combination of local residents (in Newbury or Shoreham, say) and 'professional' activists – usually anarchist or new age. Neither of these groups has the potential to form a lasting national movement.

The green movement is more significant and there have been attempts to construct 'red-green alliances'. However, there is no case of such an alliance becoming other than a minor or ephemeral event. The greens are not prepared to take their analysis to its logical conclusion. The solutions they propose are class collaborationist, yet they depend on the capitalists to act against their own material interests. We should argue that the red-green alliance must become red.

Socialists have the task of intervening in the current debates around these issues and countering the claims that old class divisions are out of date and that society has fundamentally changed.

# The roots of Labourism

By Jim Dye

THERE IS a myth in many left-wing circles that the Labour Party was once socialist. In actual fact, the Labour Party was not formed as a socialist party, but rather as the political expression of the trade union leaders. The Labour Party was therefore based upon the working class but expressed a non-socialist ideology, hence the use by Marxists of the term 'bourgeois workers' party'.

The Labour Party started life in 1900 as the Labour Representation Committee (LRC). The LRC arose as a result of a narrow vote the previous year by the TUC to set up an organisation with the sole, and extremely moderate, aim of 'securing a better representation of the interests of labour in the House of Commons'. The LRC had no individual membership, and was not a mass party but rather a loose federation

dominated by the unions.

There were also two main socialist groups represented in the LRC: the Independent Labour Party (ILP), with 13,000 members, and the Social Democratic Federation (SDF), which claimed 9,000 members. A third 'socialist' organisation, the Fabians, were also present, but claimed only 861 members. While the Fabians had always displayed an undisguised middle class hostility to workers, whom they regarded as inherently stupid (Fabian leaders such as the Webbs were of the opinion that only the educated ruling class was fit to govern, and therefore sought to influence the capitalists rather than the workers), they played a central role in continuing the non-socialist political outlook of the LRC. Fabian members also dominated the leadership of the ILP and, in the same way that they do in today's Labour Party, acted as a right-wing caucus.

The ILP was formed in 1893.

Engels had viewed its creation with some hope, believing it could mean the return of the organised political independence of the working class that had been broken with the demise of the Chartists. While ideologically the ILP was extremely weak, Engels had correctly argued that socialists should enter it to fight for a socialist programme. However, by 1900 the ILP still retained a muddled and predominantly right-wing outlook, typified by its founder Keir Hardie.

In contrast, the SDF, formed in 1881, claimed to be Marxist and contained within it many excellent class fighters. However, both Marx and Engels had constantly opposed the sterile sectarianism of the SDF and its founder, who was a former Tory, H.M. Hyndman. Writing in 1894, Engels accused the SDF of turning Marxist theory into 'the rigid dogma of an orthodox sect' but noted that both it and the ILP contained some good members, particularly outside London.

Before the establishment of the LRC, the unions were in general allied politically to the Liberal Party, and may have remained so for longer had they not faced the danger represented by the Taff Vale legal judgement of 1901, which made unions liable to pay damages to employers to cover profits lost in the event of strike action. This gave union leaders the reason to switch support from the Liberals to the LRC, but without changing their own liberal political outlooks.

True to form, the SDF walked out of the LRC just as it began to make headway, after the latter had rejected the SDF demand to adopt class struggle socialism. While the criticisms of the LRC by the SDF were entirely justified, the SDF's sectarian ultimatum led it into the wilderness of impotently 'pure' politics and idealist rhetorical bluster, that stood aside from the actual workers' movement. The many good class fighters

within the SDF who took part in union activity did so in spite of the SDF, which remained hostile to any workers' body that did not accept its leadership. The parallels with modern British sects such as the SWP are obvious, but with the SWP repeating history as a farce.

The departure of the SDF left the liberal-labour reformists of the ILP and the Fabians without any significant opposition. When the LRC changed its name in 1900 to the Labour Party, it signified that it was becoming a mass organisation with the support of millions of workers. Lenin condemned the sectarianism of the SDF, but also the opportunism of the ILP. Recognising that the Labour Party was not socialist, he nevertheless supported its admission to the Second International in 1908 on the basis that it was the political expression of the unions and represented a first step towards a 'socialist Labour Party'.

The Labour Party never displayed much interest in ideology or principle. Instead, it adopted an empirical outlook of timid reformism which, when linked to its working class base, became known as 'Labourism'. From the beginning, the collective nature of the unions was swamped by the individualist nature of electoralism, where workers were encouraged to be passive, and success was gauged by the number of votes received. This, in turn, meant adapting to existing prejudices, and the Labour Party became inherently nationalist and racist in outlook. Furthermore, its parliamentary group always acted without accountability to the wider organisation.

However, it was the organic link with the working class that led the party to formally adopt 'socialism' in its famous Clause Four of the constitution of 1918. In a situation where a revolutionary wave was sweeping Europe, the party leaders recognised the need to appear radical in order to maintain their positions and head off a challenge from the perceived threat of communism – real enough after the Bolshevik revolution the year before. Evidence of the lack of real socialist convictions among the party leaders, who had supported the imperialist slaughter of the First World War, was no better illustrated than by the fact that Clause Four was actually based on a document by Sidney Webb of the reactionary Fabian group!

The fact that the Labour Party remained a workers' party, in spite of its leadership, meant that both Lenin and Trotsky consistently argued that revolutionaries should orient to it in order to influence reformist workers. Tony Blair's 'New' Labour differs little in political outlook to 'Old' Labour. The difference is not the replacement of Clause Four, as Arthur Scargill argues, but Blair's determination to break the union link, and hence ditch Labourism. Some ultra-left sectarians look forward to the end of the union link, on the grounds that it would make the formation of a mass revolutionary workers' party more likely. In fact, under present conditions, it would set the British labour movement back 100 years by leaving it with no parliamentary representation of any kind, and would reinforce existing illusions in 'Old' Labour. In the struggle to forge a revolutionary party and to break workers from reformism, the lessons of history must be learned and the continuing presence of SDF-style 'Marxism' firmly rejected.

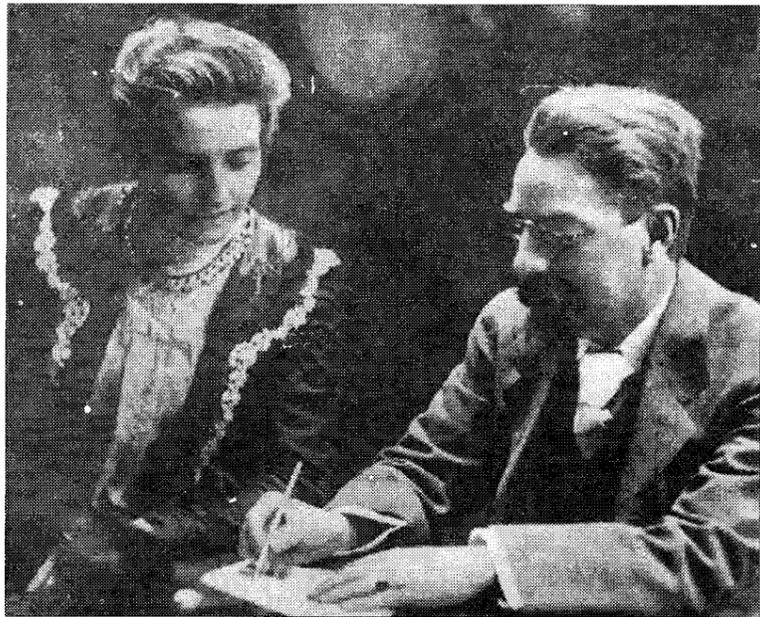


The Labour government  
1974-79

By Richard Price

TO ANYONE under 35, the last Labour government is little more than a distant memory. It's sobering to think that there are young workers signing on the dole today who weren't even born when the Winter of Discontent took place. For some, the mid- to late 1970s evokes memories of things being a bit better and Labour looking after 'their people'; for others, the period is symbolised by callous pickets refusing to bury the dead and a 'weak' government giving way to trade union 'bullies'. What really took place between 1974 and 1979 is now so shrouded in mythology that it is necessary for a new generation to relearn the lessons.

The 1970-74 Tory government under Edward Heath took on the unions, and lost. A matter of months after the election, demonstrations and strikes started against the new Industrial Relations Bill, which became law in August the following year. After major battles with postal workers (1971), Upper Clyde shipyard workers (1971-72), miners, railway workers and London dockers (1972), and the Shrewsbury building workers (1973), Heath decided to go for a showdown with the miners in the winter of 1973-74. But the miners' strike coincided with the Middle East oil crisis, which enabled the government to impose a three-day working week on most of industry. Heath called a general election for



Fabian leaders Beatrice and Sidney Webb in 1918, the year that he wrote the document on which Clause Four of the Labour Party constitution was based

## SLP election madness

THE SOCIALIST Labour Party is a left reformist organisation with a political ideology drawn from the Labourite and Stalinist traditions. Its members may have broken from Labour, but most of them have not broken from Labourism.

Arthur Scargill justifies setting up the SLP by claiming that the Labour Party has abandoned its socialist roots and changed its fundamental character. He is wrong on both counts. Labour has always been a capitalist party, but what makes it different from other capitalist parties is that it is based on the working class. Despite the lurch to the right under Tony Blair's leadership, the Labour Party's base in the working class remains – as the SLP is finding out to its cost.

The SLP is seen by its leadership almost exclusively as a parliamentary party – as an attempt to replace Labour, and not as a party that organises rank-and-file workers in struggle. For all the credit that he must take as a trade union leader, Scargill has never attempted to organise his base either in the National Union of Mineworkers or in the Labour Party.

Indeed, many of his trade union supporters in the SLP are not from the rank and file at all, but are middle-ranking bureaucrats with privileges to defend. At the end of the day, Scargill's methods remain those of a labour bureaucrat – albeit a left one.

This is reflected in the SLP's structure, which ensures that most of the political power rests in the hands of Scargill and a few collaborators. The SLP constitution excludes 'individuals and organisations, other than bona fide trade unions, which have their own programme, principles and policies'. This has closed the SLP off from groups like Militant and the CPGB, whose politics are closest to the SLP's reformism, and who hold similar views on the character of the Labour Party.

The SLP has been portrayed by some as a left split from Labour. This, again, is untrue. The 'party' has less than 2,000 members, many of whom have a Stalinist or centrist background, and lacks any significant base in the working class, a fact which has been exposed in various by-election results. Where they stood in working class strongholds, SLP

candidates polled just 5 per cent of the vote, and in Wirral South this was down to 156 votes. In light of this, Scargill's decision to stand 65 candidates in the general election can only be described as mad since the results will destroy the morale of the membership and place a huge question mark over the party's future.

SLP leaders have tried to draw comparisons with movements in other countries – in particular with the United Left in Spain and Communist Refoundation in Italy. But such parties are quite different, having emerged under conditions of political turmoil as splits from Stalinist parties which had a mass base in society. In contrast, the SLP is already ossifying into a sect. It offers the worst aspects of Old Labour – bureaucracy, top-down paternalism, national-populism and electoralism – and instead of reflecting the struggles of the working class, it only represents their frustrations. We recognise that the SLP contains good activists, and we will seek to work with them in the class struggle. But the SLP itself will not be the tool that advances that struggle.

# Where is Blair going?

By Steve Myers and  
Jonathan Joseph

IF LABOUR wins on May 1, Tony Blair's government, along with the 'Millbank Tendency', will start preparing for major battles with the working class over the next five years. Its commitment to the free market and to most of the Tory 'reforms' make it inevitable that Labour will clash with large sections of workers, particularly those in the public sector. At the same time, the fight to weaken the Labour-union link and remove the last vestiges of democracy inside the party will continue. These two aspects of the battle will interact and influence each other to a considerable degree.

Today's Labour leadership has declared open war against not just its old enemy, the left wing, but the whole basis of the party. It is attacking not just 'Old Labour' but Labourism itself, and the very nature of Labour as a reformist party is under threat. In this latter respect, Blair is following guidelines set by the Tories since 1979. Shackling the trade unions enabled widespread changes in work practices, employment rights and job security to be introduced. Mass unemployment has become an accepted fact, as have poverty wages. In a more deregulated economic environment, with greater global competition, the state's role

has shifted significantly away from public spending and intervention.

This trajectory will continue under the pressure of meeting the Maastricht criteria for European monetary union, and will lead to further restrictions on the unions, erosion of workers' conditions and dismantling of the welfare system. Only then will the budget deficit be contained within the prescribed limit of three per cent of GDP.

Blair has sold himself to the bosses as the man who can deliver the goods. He is committed to continuing the 'Thatcherite revolution' and maintaining the Tories' anti-union, anti-worker legislation. But he is seen as offering the bosses two further benefits - his party is much less divided over Europe, and (and this is deeply ironic considering Blair's offensive against the union link) has influence within the trade unions which may help defuse working class resistance in the transition to a single European currency.

If he is to succeed, Blair must ensure that there are no repercussions inside the Labour Party. That is why the institutional links with the trade unions - representation on party committees, influence in the conference and leadership election, sponsorship and funding arrangements, etc - have to be cut or very much reduced, while at the same time maintaining a relationship with the trade union leaders.

Blair and his 'modernisers' openly talk of the 'project', as they

term it, to transform Labour. Most infamous is Blair's comment in the *Financial Times* back in January: 'I want a situation more like the Democrats and Republicans in the US. People don't even question for a single moment that the Democrats are a pro-business party. They should not be asking that question about New Labour.'

Indeed, Tom Sawyer has been put in charge of work teams that are preparing structural changes to the Labour Party, designed to 'insulate' the government from any 'alternative centres of power'. These would turn the Labour conference into even more of a shop window for the leadership, with only carefully vetted contributions from the floor allowed. All power would rest in the hands of cabinet ministers, while trade unions and constituency parties would be cut out of decision making altogether. As Sawyer explained bluntly to the *New Statesman* magazine: 'A Labour government will have to respond quickly to events and in the past Conservative leaders have been able to do this because their internal democracy is virtually non-existent'.

The National Executive Committee recently agreed to abolish constituency-based General Committees and replace them with small teams made up of Labour councillors. Under the new proposals, the NEC itself is to lose any policy-making role, and dissident voices will be removed. Labour Party/trade union liaison committees are to be abandoned or

ignored, ward meetings will have their powers removed, and local union involvement will be ended. At all levels in the party, 'selected key people' will decide policy.

After the 'inner-circle' has approved them, these proposals will be steam-rollered through the NEC in the summer, and through the conference in October, while everyone is recovering from the general election campaign. As Ken Livingstone has correctly warned, the changes would 'destroy the real mechanism by which the working class can organise for political change'.

Blair and his team would then be able to go about their business of being the most openly pro-capitalist and anti-worker leadership in the Labour Party's history. They have repeatedly stated that, when in government, they will stick to existing Tory spending targets. In reality, that means they will intensify the austerity attacks against the masses, look for further parts of the state sector to be privatised, and continue cutting back in health, education, and welfare provision.

They will quickly move to attack not just the left, but the very nature of Labour as a reformist party. In Blair's opinion, the founding of the Labour Party was a mistake. Last year, he told *The Observer* newspaper that he regretted 'the division of radical politics at the end of the last century and beginning of this, between the Liberals and the Labour Party'.

However, while socialists must oppose the modernisers, they should also oppose the idea that there was some golden age of Labour to which we can return. Old Labour was always pro-capitalist and pro-imperialist. Its post-war role was defined by the capitalist strategy of increased state spending and intervention. Now that these policies have been abandoned by the ruling class, Blair is seeking to realign Labour to a 'modern' vision of capital accumulation based on the need for a single European market and the rolling back of the post-war gains made by the workers.

Breaking Labour from the unions will be difficult. Already, unions like UNISON and the NUT are making demands on Blair, and the election of a Labour government will only increase expectations throughout the working class. Blair will have a real fight on his hands if he attacks the public sector under such conditions.

The task of socialists in the post-election period will be to assist in mobilising the trade union rank and file in defence of jobs, wages, conditions and public services, and to help ensure that every struggle of the working class is brought into the Labour Party. The combination of increased class action and Blair's attacks will cause deep division right through the labour movement, providing the basis for building a campaign to oust the modernisers. While it is likely that some union bureaucrats will come into conflict with Blair, creating opportunities for limited alliances, any serious campaign must guard against becoming merely a pressure group for left bureaucrats, and should anchor itself firmly in the grass roots of the movement. We should fight for the democratisation of the Labour Party and for the strengthening, not just the defence, of the union link. It is through the class struggle itself that the attempt to transform the Labour Party can be defeated.

Government

## Five wasted years

ate February 1974, with the strike and the three-day week still in progress, demanding that the electorate decide whether the government or the unions ran the country. He lost the election, and a minority Labour government led by Harold Wilson took office on the back of these major anti-Tory struggles.

Once in government, Labour proceeded to tackle the acute crisis by trying to patch up British capitalism. Although it had claimed that it would inaugurate a major shift of wealth and power towards working people, the reality was that workers were made to pay for the crisis.

Initially, Wilson was obliged to make concessions to the working class in order to release the head of steam that had built up against the Tories. On July 31, 1974, three months after the engineering workers' union successfully defied the hated National Industrial Relations Court by calling a strike against the total sequestration of its funds, the Industrial Relations Act was repealed and trade union legal immunity restored. In October, after the year's second general election, Wilson was able to form a government with an overall majority of four. Other reform measures, including a far-reaching Rent Act, were passed.

But the Clay Cross councillors, who had fought the Tories' Housing Act, remained surcharged, and the Thrawsbury pickets, victims of the Tory anti-union laws, remained in jail. Wilson's strategy was to demobilise workers by getting the trade

union leaders to police their members' wage demands through the Social Contract. The nature of the partnership was underlined in 1976 when Wilson resigned under pressure from the IMF, and harsh public spending cuts were imposed. Denis Healey, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, became a monetarist long before Thatcherism popularised the term, and a Labour government was the first to close hospitals.

Wilson's successor, James Callaghan, was even more right wing, seeking to tie the unions ever more closely to state wage restraint. In the winter of 1977, firefighters became the first group of workers to call a national strike against wage controls. The response of the Labour government was to organise scabbing, using troops driving 'Green Goddesses'. Rising levels of unemployment, particularly among youth, gave the lie to Labour's 1974 slogan, 'Back to work with Labour'.

The illusion that it was somehow 'our' government became transparent as Labour concluded deals with minority parties to retain its slender parliamentary majority. Not only was there the informal coalition with the Liberals - the Lib-Lab pact - but there were all sorts of shady manoeuvres involving Scottish and Welsh nationalists and, most notoriously, the Ulster Unionists. As a result, Labour's Northern Ireland minister, Roy Mason, probably the most vicious reactionary ever to fill that post, presided over army death squads and the 'dirty protest', when political sta-

tus for Republican prisoners was withdrawn.

With workers increasingly divided by Labour's failures, fascists began to get a hearing among the most demoralised and backward layers of society. In 1978, the National Front polled over 100,000 votes in the London local elections.

The militancy which had characterised the Heath years revived as the Social Contract began to break down. In 1978, it was the turn of Ford workers and lorry drivers to challenge government pay policy. In the Winter of Discontent of 1978-79, one group of low-paid public sector workers after another came out on strike. But the Tories, under the new right-wing leadership of Margaret Thatcher, sensed that the government's back was broken. It had alienated most of its own supporters, without satisfying any section of the ruling class. Those sections of the middle class which had switched to Labour in 1974 were switching back. And, crucially, the Tories were picking up support from significant numbers of skilled workers.

Callaghan's cabinet, meanwhile, was incubating the Gang of Four reactionaries who would go on to form the SDP in 1982. By the time Callaghan was brought down by a confidence motion in 1979, the heady promises of 1974 had collapsed into a shambles, which would pave the way for 18 years of unbroken Tory rule.

But the left cannot escape its share of the blame. It misread the signs

time and again, and replaced a proper sense of perspective with wishful thinking. It believed that the militancy of 1970-74 would simply continue in an upward curve. It mistook trade union militancy for a political break from Labourism. When that break took place among a few tens of thousands of advanced workers, it wilfully attributed it to the mass of the class. In fact, the only mass break of workers from reformism was to the right - to the Tories in 1979.

The left fatally underestimated the strength of reformism, and failed to develop the kind of systematic tactics towards Labour which were necessary to win over the vanguard to revolutionary politics. Instead, the large groups on the left - the SWP, WRP and IMG - all pinned their hopes on independent 'revolutionary parties', delivering shrill propaganda from the sidelines. Only Militant, carrying out dogged entry work, had grown by 1979. Its rivals were all smaller than they had been in 1974.

After the Tories' sweeping election victory, the Labour Party rank and file began to swing sharply to the left. But it was without the assistance of much of the 'revolutionary left' and its 'independent parties', who unfortunately had proved to be independent not only of reformism, but of reality.

This time round, the Socialist Labour Party, Socialist Workers Party and Socialist Party are all preparing to repeat the same mistakes. Marxists must avoid a re-run of the tragic wasted opportunities of 1974-79.

# Thatcherism and the world-wide reactionary offensive

An extract from the Perspectives and Tasks Document adopted by the Workers International League/Committee for Revolutionary Regroupment fusion congress, February 22-23, 1997

IN THE immediate aftermath of the 1939-45 war, major social gains were made by the working class in the advanced capitalist countries of Europe and to a far more limited extent in the United States. These gains were conceded by the ruling class partly as the price for containing working class militancy and strength, partly as inducements to the working class to secure their acceptance of a restructuring of capitalism towards mass production. The working class was promised prosperity on the basis of the far more efficient nature of modern production techniques. How far this process of social reform went in each country depended on the balance of class forces.

The immediate result of the restructuring was a post-war boom which concealed the costs of the concessions that had been made. This boom continued through the 1950s, but began to run into a crisis of overproduction in the 60s. While the crisis was global, it affected different countries earlier or later, depending on the extent of the domestic gains of the working class and the level of modernisation of production facilities – factories and industrial plants – in that country.

Britain is an extreme of this process. The reforms which are generally classified as the 'welfare state' were in advance of, and generally ranged over a wider area than, those in the rest of the world. Because Britain had not been occupied during the war, its economic infrastructure was less damaged than those of the other major European powers and its social institutions (including the organisations of the working class) were intact. At the end of the war, the British working class had very high aspirations, fuelled by the cross-class ideology of fighting 'for a better world' and by its experiences of the 30s. But since it lacked the political experience of the workers in mainland Europe, the British working class was more prepared to follow the advice of its leaders and settle for better conditions within capitalism. This combination of high aspirations but limited political vision led to the particular form of the social compromise that was attained in Britain. However, the fact that there was not the same urgent need to rebuild the industry meant that the modernisation and efficiency benefits later felt in the rest of Europe were realised to a far lesser extent in Britain. At the same time, the cost of the concessions made was greater. Britain therefore entered into the general crisis earlier than other countries and is now more deeply enmeshed.

In the semi-colonial world, the 1970s had seen the problems for the world banking system compounded, and billions of dollars written off as bad debt, as workers and peasants revolted against so-

cial and economic conditions and, in some cases, as sections of the national bourgeoisie rejected the terms of imperialist loans. In Latin America, the policy of shoring up extreme right-wing governments and supporting military coups was an expensive failure for the imperialists, since these regimes were usually committed to some form of economic protectionism, and only succeeded in pushing wider and wider sections of the population into opposition. A notable exception was Chile, from which the imperialist bourgeoisie drew economic as well as political lessons. There, the dictatorship was used to initiate an experiment in free market monetarism which attracted inward investment and eventually re-integrated the middle class and stabilised the economy.

By the late 60s/early 70s, the imperialist political and economic project was unravelling. The failure to develop the reforms in the imperialist countries, or extend them to the rest of the world, led to a succession of struggles by workers, students and peasants. In 1971, with the US economy no longer able to underwrite the world economic order, the fixed parities between currencies established by the 1944 Bretton Woods agreement were abandoned, and the stage was set for the division of the world into competing trading blocs. The need for imperialism to claw back the concessions made to the working class became more pressing, but for almost two decades this proceeded in an ad-hoc and piecemeal way. Early attempts by both conservative and social democratic governments were only partially successful, or foundered completely because of resistance by workers, and it wasn't until the Thatcher/Reagan period that the ruling class opened a direct ideological attack on the basis of the post-war settlement.

The conditions for launching a coherent and sustained offensive against the conquests of the working class matured in Britain by 1979. The Thatcher government elected that year marked the point at which the process of removing the gains of the working class began in earnest. The elevation of Thatcher to the leadership in 1975 had signalled an important shift in the Tory party away from the 'one nation' traditionalists, who had been unprepared for the sharp class polarisation that emerged when Edward Heath introduced the Industrial Relations Act in 1971. After the Heath government fell in 1974, the Tories prepared for their next administration by drawing up a plan to take on and defeat the unions in the industries they needed to rationalise and which they were ultimately to sell off. Meanwhile, the Labour government under Callaghan struggled with the failing British economy, and increasingly came into conflict

with the working class after introducing pay restraint as a condition for receiving an IMF loan. In the absence of an alternative leadership in the working class, the unions were widely blamed for bringing the country to its knees, and the Winter of Discontent of 1978-79, confined as it was to the hard-hit public sector workers, had the effect of driving a large section of skilled manual and professional workers into the arms of the Tories.

After winning the 1979 election with a huge majority, the Tories were in a powerful position to introduce the mis-named 'neo-liberal' economic policies – fiscal and market deregulation, privatisation and the cutting of state expenditure – which were to become the hallmark of the decade, and which are a dominant characteristic of the world economic situation today. Outside the financial sector, the key to carrying through such policies was to undermine the resistance of the working class through a combination of anti-union laws and pitched battles with decisive and influential groups like the miners.

This overt move against the trade unions was the clearest signal of the collapse of the post-war consensus. With the continuing shift of manufacturing capital out of Britain there was no longer the need to maintain a domestic manufacturing working class, kept docile by concessions and with a leadership integrated into the ruling process in exchange for policing their membership. Meanwhile, the second prong of the attack on consensus politics – the attack on the 'welfare state' – was commencing with the plan to create hospital trusts, the initial step towards first a two-tier, and then a privatised health service.

In the United States, a parallel development took place, with the election of a Republican administration committed to the same objectives. 'Neo-liberal' economic theory had been pioneered in the US, but since the US ruling class had not had to make the same post-war concessions as those of the European states, Reagan did not have to carry out the same ideological turnaround as was required in Britain. Moreover, in Britain there remained a relative balance of power between the Tories and a Labour Party still based on the working class, which if it were returned to office would prove (like the Wilson/Callaghan governments from 1974-79) inadequate to the needs of capitalism. This was the reason for the importance Thatcher gave to introducing anti-union legislation – the new laws outlawing many forms of industrial action would not only assist the Tories to restructure industry and cut services, they were also in the long-term interests of the ruling class since they would undermine the link between the unions and the

Labour Party.

In the US, the equivalent industries to those privatised in Britain were already to a great extent in private hands (though within the US there exists a much greater opportunity for state intervention into private industry, which is reflected in US law), a smaller proportion of the workforce was unionised, and there was no bourgeois workers' party capable of reflecting, however imperfectly, the needs of the working class. So it was Britain that became the test-bed for introducing anti-union laws, labour-market deregulation and the privatisation of state-owned utilities, providing a series of models for governments around the world.

The privatisation of British Telecom at the end of 1984 was the largest-ever share flotation. It was an important turning point, economically and ideologically, which took place during the decisive battle to defeat the traditional core of the British labour movement – the miners. BT was transformed into a private monopoly – with competition allowed only at its fringes – and a potential multi-national, operating in a deregulated environment which enabled it, among other things, to dispose of half its workforce over the following decade. This was only accomplished by enticing millions of individuals to buy shares to make up the shortfall from corporate sources – shares which were deliberately undervalued to ensure an immediate return on flotation. Not only was the myth of 'people's capitalism' given apparent substance, but opposition to privatisation among the BT workforce was undermined. In the absence of any serious fight by the trade unions, the overwhelming majority cut their losses and accepted their 'free' shares.

The policy of selling shares to small investors at an artificially low price which ensured an immediate gain in value was to become a major factor in shifting large sections of the working class ideologically to the right. Today, one of the main arguments against re-nationalisation is that it would be opposed by small investors.

If the bourgeoisie was now seeking to increase its average rate of profit by reversing the post-war gains of workers in the capitalist states, by 1985 a process was underway in the USSR which was to have even more catastrophic results. As the limitations of 'socialism in one country' became ever more apparent, Gorbachev attempted to introduce further market mechanisms into the degenerated workers' state, following on from the failed 1970s market reforms, in order to increase investment, raise productivity and counter bureaucratic inertia. The effect of this was to whet the appetite of the masses for economic and political reform, whilst enabling pro-

capitalist tendencies to raise their profile. Gorbachev stirred up a cocktail of popular discontent and restorationist sentiment which he was unable to control, which spread rapidly through the deformed workers' states of eastern Europe, and which, in the absence of revolutionary leadership, led to a series of democratic counter-revolutions.

With the collapse of the Stalinist regimes in 1989-91 and the coming to power of openly restorationist governments, the imperialists were able to extend the attack on workers' gains to include those established by the October Revolution and the overturns in eastern Europe after the war. An event of such significance has clearly left its mark on the current situation. The overthrow of the workers' states and their replacement by weak bourgeois states of a semi-colonial type has dealt the heaviest of all blows to the struggle of the working class all over the world to defend and develop its gains. The discrediting of socialism by the Stalinists has allowed social democrats to lurch even further to the right, while to some extent retaining their credibility in the eyes of workers. Those who claim that the struggle for socialism is made easier by the collapse of Stalinism are living in a fool's paradise – on the one hand, they draw too absolute a distinction between Stalinism and social democracy, on the other hand they reveal that they do not really understand what the difference is. Stalinism shares with social democracy the role of counter-revolutionary agent in the ranks of the working class, but Stalinism gained its privileges through its defence of the workers' states. It is only in a popular, non-scientific sense that, for example, today's Communist Party of the Russian Federation can be called Stalinist since it has not the slightest intention of leading a struggle to turn back the clock and recreate a workers' state. Like most other Stalinist parties, it has reinvented itself as a social democratic party, and a particularly chauvinist one at that.

Notwithstanding these special features of the years since 1989, it is more accurate to locate the start of the present economic and political period at the beginning of the 1980s, with roots as far back as the late 1960s. Key events in Britain were the defeat of the miners' strike and the successful BT privatisation, both in 1984. Since 1989, there has been an intensification of the crisis of leadership in the working class, in the context of a deepening attack on its gains. Where workers have come into struggle (and strike statistics show that this has been in steady decline in the imperialist countries through the 1980s and into the 1990s), it has been under leaderships whose horizons are limited by their belief that socialism has failed.

## The Tories and Europe

# Divided they fall

By Philip Marchant

THE TORIES continue to be at war with themselves over Europe. Why? Is it the political expression of a division among Britain's bosses, or between the financial and industrial wings of the ruling class, over where their future economic prosperity lies, with some favouring an alignment with Europe and others with the United States and the rest of the world? While there are no doubt preferences among individual capitalists, depending on where their business is conducted, the answer to this question has to be no.

As much as 60 per cent of Britain's trade is conducted with other countries in the European Union, and all the evidence points to the fact that most companies look forward to a single European currency as an end to the fluctuating exchange rates which make the long-term planning of production extremely difficult. The City, too, is favourable to the idea, aware that it may relinquish its position as the leading European financial centre if Britain stays outside the single currency.

What the Tory split reveals is not so much an argument about whether there should be a European Union at all, as about what kind of union it should be – that is to say, on what social and economic basis it should be built. If the EU is to fulfil its function of competing with Japan, NAFTA and the Pacific Rim, it has to drastically lower its

production costs, and that means a wholesale onslaught on wages, conditions, benefits and social services – a levelling down rather than a levelling up of the social costs of production.

The move towards a European 'superstate' is driven by external pressures. Financial deregulation, better communications, the growth of monopoly control over production and distribution, the industrialisation of the semi-colonies, and the ease with which not only capital but production itself can shift around the world, demand that the imperialist countries exert control over ever larger trading blocs. What started out as an essentially political project by France to neutralise the threat of a German renaissance after the Second World War has been transformed into an attempt to create a united capitalist Europe.

The tendency world-wide is for weaker countries to be subsumed by powerful ones, and for countries on a more equal footing to come to some accommodation with each other. While Germany clearly has the strongest economy in the EU, it does not have the political and military clout, nor the overwhelming economic dominance, that the United States does in NAFTA. The EU differs from NAFTA, therefore, in that it has to operate much more as an alliance.

This does not mean that the countervailing tendency, for nation states to express their sovereignty, has disappeared; in fact, this is precisely what makes the construction

of a homogeneous bloc out of a group of old imperialist powers in Europe so difficult. In the EU, every national ruling class is to some extent fighting its own corner, which means maintaining a national base either to assist the transition to becoming part of a European ruling class, or as an insurance policy in case the project fails.

If this latter tendency is more prevalent in Britain than in mainland Europe, it is mainly for historical, and to some extent geographical, reasons. Tory opposition to Europe usually takes the form of xenophobia, nostalgia for Empire, and a belief in British exceptionalism. But while it is true that Britain has retained commercial, and especially financial, interests around the world, these have steadily declined as a proportion of the overall volume of Britain's trade, and are paltry compared to those of the United States, Japan or the EU.

Individual Eurosceptic MPs are probably motivated mainly by a desire to hold on to their parliamentary seats, and are saying what they believe the majority of Tory party members, and a good portion of the electorate, want to hear. Arguably, if the Tories had adopted a clear position on remaining outside the single currency, they would have stood a better chance of winning the election. The Tory leadership seems to have come to this conclusion well in to the election campaign, becoming ever more Eurosceptic and going as far as offering their backbenchers a free



The signing of the Treaty of Rome on March 25, 1957, which established the European Economic Community

vote on a single currency when it is debated in parliament. But the fact that they refuse to rule out a single currency completely shows that what is at stake is more than political office; it is the question of the future direction of British capitalism.

In so far as the Eurosceptics bemoan the waning power of British imperialism, they are only voicing a concern shared by the whole political establishment. Their solution is impracticable, and they do not represent a definable wing of the capitalist class, but their intervention, while contributing substantially to the disarray inside the Tory party and possibly sinking its chances of winning the election, has proved useful to the British state: it has driven the Tory and Labour agendas for Europe to the right, and influenced other EU governments.

The more realistic politicians, including the leaders of the Labour Party, recognise the need for Brit-

ish capitalism to broaden its base of operations, and are also quite clear that Britain's days as a world power are finished. They know that Europe is the best option, especially if it conforms to their standards.

Ironically, it is European legislation – the Maastricht Treaty – and the Brussels bureaucracy itself which are forcing EU governments into adopting the Thatcherite policies of deregulation and draconian cuts in public spending that proved so popular with the Eurosceptics in the past. The future face of the EU, if the bosses get their way and the convergence criteria for the single currency are achieved, will bear a strong resemblance to Britain after 18 years of Tory government. The global economy is increasingly dominated by a handful of massive trading blocs, and the EU has some way to go before it can be admitted to the premier league. This is the real project for Europe, and the British ruling class will want be part of it.

# Militancy returns to Sweden

Sweden has been rocked by a number of militant strikes and demonstrations aimed at the Social Democratic government. Below is a report from Gustav Mowitz of the AIF, Swedish sympathising section of the Leninist-Trotskyist Tendency

THE ONCE legendary Swedish welfare system has been under attack since the late 1980s. In 1989, the Social Democrat finance minister, Kjell-Olof Feldt, put forward a plan to ban strikes, cut wages and hold down government spending in order to stimulate the economy, which was heading towards a crisis. The LO trade union confederation mobilised against the proposal and it was defeated.

This resulted in the growth of the Social Democrat left and the launching of a new party called the Workers' List, which initially proved extremely popular – in a 1990 opinion poll, 25 per cent of the population said that they would vote for the WL. However, support for the WL shrank to almost nothing in the 1991 elections due to a

display of sectarian infighting as various left-wing groups competed for the leadership. Since this failure, most splits from the Social Democrats have been insignificant.

In 1991, a bourgeois coalition government took power, but faced an economic crisis just a few months after its installation and turned to union busting and attacks on workers' and pensioners' rights. Meanwhile, the Social Democratic opposition, together with the reformed Stalinists of the Left Party, became very radical-sounding and demanded increased benefits for groups like single mothers and the unemployed.

Not surprisingly, the Social Democrats won the 1994 elections and the Left Party increased its number of representatives in the

Riksdag (parliament). The Liberals and the Agrarians lost a lot of seats, while the Christian Democrats were almost wiped out. The right-wing New Democracy party failed to make any impact at all, and is now concentrating its activity on building an electoral front with the ultra-right Republicans, Swedish Democrats, and those linked with Le Pen. The KPML(r), a Stalinist party stuck in the Third Period which characterises social democrats as 'social fascists', became the second largest party in the working class city of Karlshamn. Although the moderate vote also increased in these elections, it was clearly a victory for the working class movement.

But soon after the new government took office, workers' hopes were dashed. It became obvious that the Social Democrats were going to outdo the previous government in making the working class pay for the crisis. They cut welfare, shut hospitals, privatised public sector companies, bailed out failed banks and slashed unemployment benefit.

From a low level, militancy began to rise, and 358,000 working days were lost through strike ac-

tion in 1995. A union recognition dispute at Toys 'R' Us was supported by national action. There were a number of unofficial strikes in the mining industry, and a big one at a Stockholm bakery which gained wide support from the workers' movement. In the European elections of that year, pro-EU parties and candidates lost ground, while the Left Party made gains by basing itself on the anti-EU sentiment in the working class evident in the strikes. Opinion polls currently put its support at between ten and 15 per cent of the electorate.

Although militancy has receded in the last year, the Social Democratic government fears a resurgence and has chosen the opposite tactic to Tony Blair in its attempt to control the unions. Rather than attacking the unions head-on, the Social Democrats are flattering the bureaucrats and stressing that their party is a workers' party based on the trade unions. This is a rather stupid tactic, since workers can clearly see which side the Social Democrats are on, and the rate at which affiliated union branches are leaving the party is increasing. Even some union bureaucrats are criticising the party – although

their opposition to cuts is often limited to proposing other areas where savings can be made.

In December last year, a rank-and-file transport worker organised a large demonstration in Stockholm attended by delegations from all over the country, and on January 24, 8,000 members of the construction workers' union marched on the Riksdag, protesting against low wages and unemployment. The latter demonstration was supported by workers from Arboga, following news of the closure of the Volvo aircraft factory on which the town is dependent. The subsequent revelation that the government had paid Volvo to shift production to another town led to the resignation of the defence minister.

Swedish workers are clearly becoming more militant, although up to now the action has been on a relatively small scale. The LO is being forced to act more independently, leading large national demonstrations against the austerity programme, which is putting a strain on its relationship with the Social Democrats. Further attacks, coupled with the government's support for the European Union, means many more battles ahead.

# UN troops out of Albania!

THE CATALYST for the Albanian uprising in February was the collapse of the high-interest, high-risk pyramid investment schemes into which Albanians had poured their savings. These schemes acted as a substitute for the private banking system which hardly existed, and were a means of raising capital for the purchase of state assets. They also funded the 1996 election campaign of President Salih Berisha's Democratic Party. About \$1.5 billion, or one third of Albania's GDP, was sucked in to the schemes, and when a short but

bloody interest rate war finished them off, a large part of the population lost everything and the economy effectively collapsed. Financial ruin, combined with the loss of property, focused popular anger on the poverty, gangsterism, corruption, censorship and rigged elections that make the 'new', 'democratic' Albania not so very different from the old one.

What of the revolt itself? A frustrated social democrat, Skender Gjinushi, commented: 'They do not know why they are firing or who they are firing at... it is not

a protest... and we do not know who is in charge.' There is more truth in the second part of this statement than in the first. In many towns, the enemy – the police and the local officials – simply melted away (although Berisha attempted to rally his supporters by distributing guns to them) which is why, so far, this has been a civil war without 'sides'. Where the masses were able to find representatives of the regime, they gave them short shrift, and there were cases of secret policemen, members of the Shik, being pulled from their cars and shot

on the spot.

The revolt began in the south, centred on the town of Vlore, because the investment schemes had been subscribed to more heavily here than in the poorer north. When the crash came, it hit the south harder, and it is this region that remains under rebel control. But the fact that the revolt steadily spread northwards defeats attempts to superimpose on it an inter-ethnic character: north against south, or Gheg against Tosk. Although Berisha and his Democratic Party are undoubtedly right wing, to present the conflict in purely left-right terms only lends credibility to Berisha's explanation to his nervous western backers that he is fighting 'communism'. Certainly, the Socialist Party is stronger in the south, among the Tosks, while most of Berisha's support comes from the northern highlands, but this is more of an elemental uprising, by people who have nothing left to lose.

The rebels are united by one aim – kicking out Berisha. But in the absence of any focused political aims, Berisha is proving remarkably hard to shift. While the revolt concentrates entirely on Berisha's removal, the vast political differences which must exist amongst the rebels are hidden, and the movement runs the risk of being disarmed when he is replaced.

Berisha is but one representative of the new gangster-capitalist class now running Albania. A matter of months ago, he was backed to the hilt by the EU and the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, which gave a clean bill of health to last year's rigged elections, and the imperialist banks and lending institutions. Berisha enjoyed the patronage of a number of prominent British Tories; he was the man trusted by imperialism to oversee the establishment of a market economy in Albania. Now that he has become an embarrassment, someone else has to be found to do the job. An Italian-led multi-national force of 6,000 troops started to arrive in Albania in mid-April, ostensibly to safeguard the supply of aid. Its real mandate, however, is to ensure the holding of elections which will almost certainly remove Berisha from power.

A 'clean' politician will be found to fill the vacuum, and the establishment of a market economy will continue. This market economy will be a brutal, semi-criminal set-up, but like capital-

ism everywhere else, it will make some Albanians rich and the rest poor. On the other hand, the revolt is the start of a fightback by a people too long impoverished and repressed. In the towns under rebel control there must be established a means, under workers' control, of distributing food and fuel according to need. It remains to be seen whether the Committee to Protect Vlore, led by Albert Shyti, represents an alternative government in embryo, or, as some in the town are saying, exploitation of the chaos by a local warlord-in-waiting. Those wishing to substitute their own gangsterism for that of Berisha must be disarmed, and the workers must defend their factories and public services against privatisation and theft.

There is a need for an independent political leadership of the working class and peasants which is socialist and revolutionary – a million miles from the Stalinism which has discredited socialism twice over. Albania endured 45 years of the repressive 'socialist' nightmare of Enver Hoxha, and for the past five years the former ruling party, now sailing under social-democratic colours, has differed only in detail from the Democratic Party over capitalist restoration. The historical legacy of Hoxha and the impoverishment of Albanian political culture mean that this task is a difficult one, but the events of the past few months show that there is no real alternative.

In no single country, let alone one as small and backward as Albania, can there be a realistic perspective of a struggle for socialism in a purely national context. Albanian workers have to make international links, and such links may come sooner rather than later. Western governments are probably less concerned about Albania itself than the possible effects of the conflict on the large Albanian populations in Kosovo (under Serb rule, but 90 per cent Albanian) and Macedonia. The uprising in Albania is an opportunity to strike back at imperialist-backed thugs still in charge in Tirana, and to link up with the long-running struggle of the Kosovars against the Serb president Slobodan Milosevic. Further east, bankrupt Bulgaria, where 90 per cent of the people now live below the poverty line, could be the next to blow. The southern Balkans may be where the project of capitalist restoration and the 'new world order' begin to fall apart.

## Milosevic survives winter of unrest

By Nick Davies

NO SOCIALIST need shed any tears for Slobodan Milosevic's repressive regime, rocked for over two months by mass demonstrations in Belgrade and other cities after it annulled elections which had been won by the opposition. Not least among its crimes is the discrediting of socialism in the eyes of so many Serbs. It is grimly ironic, therefore, that tens of thousands of students were mobilised on demonstrations against a government which claims to be 'socialist', but isn't, by opposition leaders who claim to be 'democratic', but aren't.

The 'democratic' pretensions of the leaders of the parties making up the Zajedno ('Together') coalition don't stand up to much scrutiny. Vuk Draskovic, who leads the Serbian Renewal Movement, is a right-wing nationalist who supported the wars in Croatia and Bosnia, but then changed his mind. Zoran Djindjic, leader of the Democratic Party, isn't too fussy about the company he keeps, attending a barbecue in 1994 with Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic, and openly voicing his solidarity with the leaders of Republika Srpska. Only the small Civic Alliance party of Vesna Pestic avoids strident Serb nationalism.

Zajedno is filling the Serb nationalist space now vacated somewhat by Milosevic, and the Democratic Party in particular wants to open more of Serbia up to western multinationals. The well-heeled appearance of many marchers suggested that they are part of Serbia's growing business class, or members of the ruling apparatus who now regard Milosevic as a liability: too 'socialist', not sufficiently nationalist.

It is important to recognise that not everyone on the demonstrations shared the politics of the Zajedno leadership. Many were marching purely and simply because they hate the regime. While

most of the Zajedno leadership would appear to have little difference with Milosevic's repressive policies in Kosovo, on one march in December there was a minute's silence for an Albanian teacher, murdered by Serbian police.

Milosevic had to adopt a wait-and-see attitude. He knew that a violent suppression of the demonstrations might jeopardise his attempts to attract investment to Serbia and ingratiate himself with western governments. In any case, he was not certain of being able to rely on his police force. When the semi-independent electoral commission eventually announced that the municipal elections in Belgrade, Nis, and other cities, won by Zajedno, would be allowed to stand, it drew the sting from the demonstrations.

Zajedno's poisonous cocktail of capitalism and Serb nationalism offers nothing to the Serbian working class and rural poor. Milosevic was able to prevent any link-up between the demonstrators and the working class, using the government-controlled media to tell workers that Zajedno are intellectual snobs who will let foreigners run the country and lose them their jobs. The presence of workers on the pro-government demonstration of December 24 reflected workers' feelings of job insecurity and the strength of the ruling party apparatus in the trade unions and workplaces. But despite objections to Zajedno's politics, it was regrettable that workers allowed themselves to be used as Milosevic's stage army. It alienated workers from the students attending the demonstrations, and politically disarms the workers for the time when they find themselves in Milosevic's firing line.

There is an urgent need for a 'third force' in Serbian politics: the working class, acting independently, and in its own class interests. Only the working class, organised thus, will be able to combat virulent Serb nationalism and resist the continuing destruction,

at the hands of western banks and the semi-criminal elements in the regime, of the remains of Serbia's collectivised economy.

The working class has suffered the worst in the events of the past five years. Workers conscripted into the army have been killed or wounded in Croatia. Their jobs have been lost and living standards destroyed because of the effects on the economy of UN sanctions, and the loss of markets and raw materials caused by the break-up of Yugoslavia. Their organisations are led, in the main, by supporters of the regime. This has to be seen in the context of the collapse elsewhere in eastern Europe of Stalinist rule, and the emergence of capitalist states, a development made possible, in part, by the defeat of Solidarnosc in Poland and the eclipse, for the time being, of the tradition of militant workers' opposition to Stalinism and capitalism.

The renewal of the workers' movement in Serbia is from a low ebb, but it is the key to the situation. This is not because the working class is at present the section of society most militantly opposed to Milosevic. It is because once it begins to act as a class for itself, its location at the point of production means that it can hold the regime by the throat. By strikes and occupations it can fight back against the attacks on living standards, and frustrate the plans of Milosevic and Zajedno alike to rationalise and sell off nationalised industries. Workers in Serbia are capable of re-establishing links with workers in the rest of former Yugoslavia, in joint resistance to the project of building ethnically 'pure' capitalist mini-states, and of fighting for a Balkan Socialist Federation. Right now, it may seem a tall order, but the recent electoral successes of Seselj's fascistic Radical Party, and the remark by ethnic cleanser Arkan that 'my heart is with the protests, but now is not the right time' hint at the alternative in store.

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# Unite all workers north and south

NOTABLE political victims of the northern Irish 'peace process' are those in Ireland claiming to stand for revolutionary Marxism. The illusions sown by the United Secretariat of the Fourth International in the peace process are the result of years of tail-ending the fast-disappearing forces of 'left' republicanism. On the other hand, Irish Militant invites loyalist sectarian killers to speak at its meetings, while the Socialist Workers Movement uses the facile slogan 'Class not creed' to disguise its increasing refusal to confront sectarianism.

Socialist Democracy itself emerged from this crisis of the revolutionary left, and the appearance of this book is therefore particularly timely. *Ireland: The Promise of Socialism* has no time for those who 'hide behind the rhetoric of a socialist paradise tomorrow to dodge the concrete task of defeating Loyalist sectarianism today'. Equally severe is its criticism of republicanism's twin strategy of a purely military struggle against the British, relegating the nationalist population to passive onlookers, combined with reformist politics which offer nothing to workers in the 26 Counties seeking an alternative to Labour or Fianna Fáil, and nothing to Protestant workers who might be broken from the semi-fascist ideology of loyalism.

The account of the pillage of Ireland and the exploitation of its people, north and south, by imperialist multinationals, with the connivance of the labour movement leadership, is as thorough in its analysis as it is eloquent. It is difficult to disagree with the authors' assertion that: 'only a programme of uniting all workers north and south offers an alterna-



tive to both Loyalism and bourgeois nationalism. It would represent real proof that a Workers' Republic would not be a "Catholic Republic" where Protestants would suffer the sectarianism that Catholics suffer in the north. This is not "Catholic workers' unity", as its opponents claim, thereby revealing their own sectarianism, but the unity of all Irish workers that can finally slay the dragon of sectarianism.'

The book attempts to put the situation in Ireland in its international context, asserting that the collapse of Stalinism and the emergence of the imperialist 'new world order' have not eased the contradictions and crises inherent in capitalism, and have not made a socialist revolution any less possible or necessary. It argues for the continuing validity of the transitional method as against the minimum-maximum (or should it now be minimum-minimum?) demands of the reformists, for the united front tactic to bring about the maximum possibility of the working class, and for internationalism of the

workers to counter the bosses' internationalism - globalisation.

In sum, *Ireland: The Promise of Socialism* is a refreshing antidote to the confusion and crisis of the revolutionary left in Ireland and beyond. That said, it is not without its faults. One important omission is any analysis of the states which have emerged in eastern Europe and the former USSR. The text refers to the 'collapse' of Stalinism, but leaves open the question of the property relations defended by the present state machines. As the authors admit, there is some over-generalisation, which is inevitable in a book of such scope with only 130-odd pages. However, one of the positive things about the book is the modesty of its authors. They present it as a contribution, not an ultimatum. What a contrast to the sectarian 'take it or leave it' mentality!

A political regeneration and organisational regroupment of those standing in the tradition of Lenin and Trotsky is urgently required. We hope that Socialist Democracy will be a part of that process.

## Socialists should join the NAC

THE ANNUAL General Meeting of the National Abortion Campaign in December 1996 approved an agenda for this year which focuses on a revision of the law that would make abortion safe, free and available on request to women in Britain and the north of Ireland.

It was agreed that NAC would no longer simply react to whatever the anti-abortionist minority says and does. It would follow a proactive programme in 1997 to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the Abortion Act. A series of activities was planned, starting with the training of speakers in the early months of the year, encompassing a speak-out in April and the lobbying of parliamentary candidates during the general election campaign, and culminating in a mass rally and a fundraising social event at the end of the year.

That said, NAC could not ignore the fact that the Pro-Life Alliance had announced its intention to stand against pro-choice candidates in the general election. NAC exposed the illegal role played by the anti-abortion organisation LIFE, which is a registered charity, in supporting the PLA, and by picketing Harrods, forced its owner, Mohamed Al Fayed, to withdraw his offer to finance the PLA to the tune of £25,000.

Socialists should join NAC, take part in its activities, and fight for their trade union branches to affiliate. It is important to ensure that the task of responding to LIFE and PLA actions does not lead to the sacrifice of NAC's own programme of work. Contact NAC at The Print House, 18 Ashwin Street, London E8 3DL. Telephone: 0171-923 4976.

## Paul Bellis 1946-97

IT WAS with much sadness that we learned of the death in February of Paul Bellis, one of our regular readers. Paul was never sectarian in his socialism, but never uncritical either. His 1979 book *Marxism and the USSR* contains an excellent overview, from a Trotskyist perspective, of the debates over what mode of production existed under Stalinism, and is still worth reading.

Always modest, Paul had a great knowledge of the political fall-out in the ex-USSR and, in particular, the activities of those Stalinists who became part of the Red-Brown alliance with the nationalists and the fascists. Before being taken ill last year, Paul was planning to write an article for Workers News on this subject. Sadly, he was also unable to complete his PhD thesis.

We extend our sympathy to his wife, Linda, and his two children.

## WIL and CRR fuse

THE FUSION congress of the Workers International League and the Committee for Revolutionary Regroupment took place in London on February 22-23, 1997. A new organisation was formed consisting of the members of the WIL and the CRR, along with three other comrades. It was agreed to keep the name WIL and to retain Workers News as the title of its paper. The new organisation will also maintain the international affiliation to the Leninist-Trotskyist Tendency.

Present at the congress were observers from the AIF (Swedish sympathising section of the LTT), the ISG (British section of the United Secretariat), the PTS of Argentina, Workers Struggle (Liaison Committee of Militants for a Revolutionary Communist International), Workers Voice of the United States, and the journals *Revolutionary History* and *What Next?* All observers had speaking rights, and animated discussions took place between WIL, Workers

Struggle and Workers Voice members, centred on the closely-related issues of the united front, voting tactics, the bureaucracy of the labour movement and Arthur Scargill's SLP.

The main discussion was on perspectives and tasks, and extracts of the documents agreed are printed in this issue of Workers News. The level of agreement signified by near-unanimous votes on detailed documents indicates an organisation with a clear political line. Work remained to be done, however, particularly on Europe and the specially oppressed where the congress felt that the documents presented were inadequate.

The formation of a stronger organisation out of the fusion of the WIL and the CRR is a step forward. We intend to maintain the principled regroupment orientation that marked both predecessor organisations, attempting to bring together scattered Trotskyist forces through patient joint work and political discussion.

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## Workers International League

The WIL is the British section of the Leninist-Trotskyist Tendency. Together with comrades in South Africa, Belgium, Germany, Canada, Sri Lanka and Sweden we fight to rebuild Trotsky's Fourth International. We are for the overthrow of capitalism and its replacement with a worldwide federation of workers' states, based on workers' democracy and planned economy. Only by workers taking power can the unemployment, poverty, starvation and war bred by capitalism be ended.

In Britain, it is necessary for revolutionaries to fight within the mass organisations of the labour movement, as well as participate in the struggles of all those oppressed by capitalism. We aim to build rank-and-file opposition to the trade union and Labour bureaucrats who stand in the way of any serious struggle to defeat the Tories. Only in this way will a genuine revolutionary party, rather than a sect, be built.

We support all struggles against imperialism, without endorsing the politics of any nationalist leaderships. In wars waged by imperialist powers such as Britain against oppressed countries, and in inter-imperialist wars, we are for the defeat of our own ruling class.

In the countries of eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, which are no longer deformed/degenerated workers' states, we are for the defence of those gains of the working class that still exist. The remaining deformed workers' states in Cuba and Asia must be defended against imperialism, and the Stalinist bureaucracies overthrown before they too open the door to capitalist restoration.

For more information about the Workers International League and the Leninist-Trotskyist Tendency, write to:  
WIL, PO Box 7268, London E10 6TX



## EUROMARCH '97 IN DEFENCE OF JOBS AND WELFARE

# Fight for a workers' Europe

THERE IS an urgent need for a working class united front across Europe against the Maastricht-imposed austerity measures. We welcome the launch of Euromarch '97 as part of the struggle to build such a movement.

Our members will be supporting the marches from Britain to Amsterdam, which will be taking place after a general election which should see the Tories thrown out of office. But the Labour Party under Tony Blair is as committed as the Tories to the so-called 'neo-liberal' capitalist agenda, and less divided on the question of Europe. In government, it will push ahead with the anti-working class measures required to comply with the convergence criteria for monetary union.

We will work to build support for the marches in the labour movement, and fight for a socialist perspective as a real alternative to right-wing 'Little Englander' opposition to the Maastricht Treaty. Workers' opposition to the capitalist club known as the European Union can, and must, be distinguished from the reactionary rejection of the economic nationalists, both of the xenophobic proto-fascist type and the reformist-nationalist type.

However, the working class needs a fighting strategy to win its demands, not a tame protest to the EU's political masters. The original programme for the marches adopted in Florence in June 1996 lacked any perspective for building on the industrial action already taken by workers across Europe against the impact of the convergence criteria. Without any proposals for a workers' solution, the declaration was nothing more than an appeal to the capitalists to reverse their current policies.

On the marches, there should be no mixing of banners between work-

ers' organisations and those of any wing of the capitalist class, and no pro-capitalist speakers on the platform. March stewards should be elected who are accountable to, and recallable by, the marchers themselves, and not bureaucratically controlled by trade union leaders who mistrust their own rank and file. There must be 'pavement universities' - open discussion forums - in the communities the marches pass through, in which the marchers fight for the socialist alternative to Maastricht - a Workers' Europe.

● We should try to engage immigrant and non-western European workers. We need to defend unconditionally the right of any worker to live and work in the imperialist countries. Down with the Schengen agreement and all immigration controls! No to Fortress Europe! Defend the right of asylum! Release all asylum-seeker detainees! For full employment rights for all migrant workers across Europe!

● We are for full employment and good, affordable housing; for the defence and extension of workers' rights, and free health, welfare and education provisions; for a minimum wage and benefits level to be agreed by local committees of rank-and-file trade unionists and the non-waged; for equal rights regardless of gender, race, nationality or sexual orientation; for the nationalisation of privatised utilities, and all enterprises threatened with closure or cutback, under workers' and working class consumers' control!

● We must solidarise with the workers of eastern Europe fighting against the IMF-imposed austerity measures introduced by their own governments following the collapse of Stalinism. Down with the capitalist restoration process! No expansion of the EU or NATO into eastern Europe!

● We demand the withdrawal of imperialist EU armies from former Yugoslavia, the north of Ireland, and elsewhere, and the cancellation of debts owed to EU states by semi-colonial countries. We are for the right of self-determination for the oppressed nationalities of Europe.

● We must be for working class independence in the fight against Maastricht. No to the single currency! For a co-ordinated campaign of mass protest and strike action to smash the Maastricht Treaty! For rank-and-file workers' assemblies to lead the struggle!

● No to a bosses' Europe! No to national isolationism! Yes to a workers' Europe! For a voluntary federation of socialist states in Europe!

## Unite against the bosses' offensive

WORKERS across Europe are faced with the same problems. In the run-up to monetary union, every EU government is attempting to make savage cuts in public spending. The Maastricht convergence criteria for joining the proposed single currency translate into attacks on nationalised industries, workers' rights, pensions, health services, education, welfare benefits and jobs.

In Britain, a massive £18 billion still needs to be cut from public spending to reduce the budget deficit to the agreed convergence limit of three per cent of GDP. The Labour Party leadership has pledged to stay within the existing spending targets laid down by the Tories, and is therefore fully committed to making these cuts.

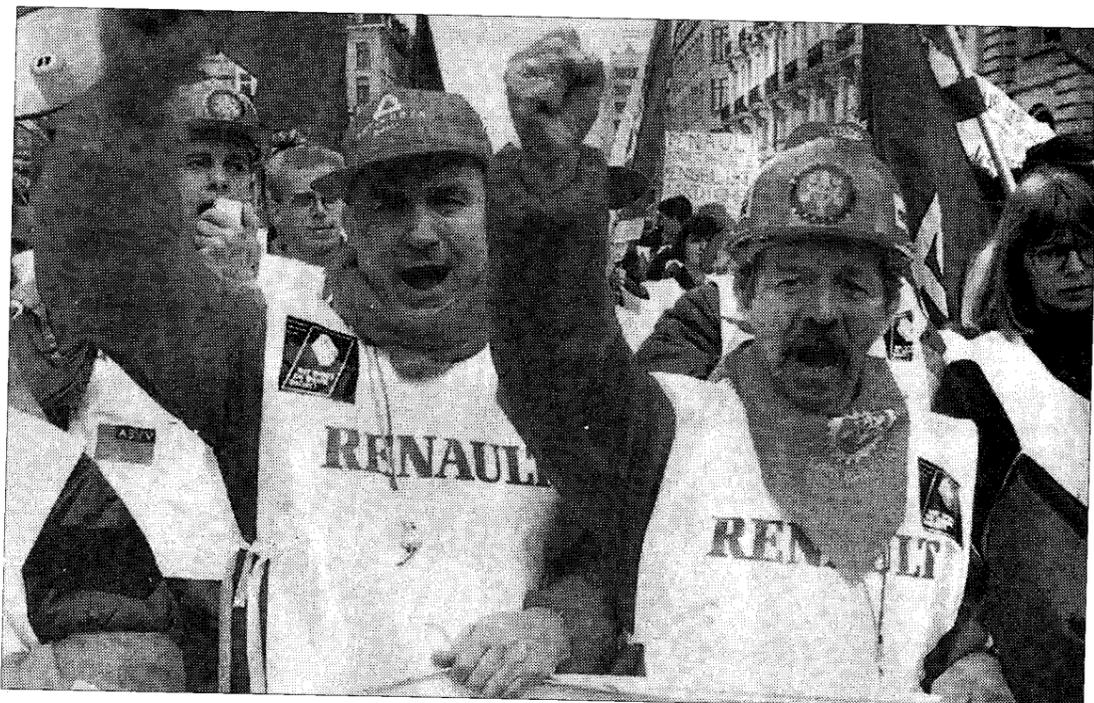
The effects of a bosses' Europe are already being felt, and fought against. In France, Germany, Spain, Greece, Italy, Portugal and Belgium, mass strikes

and demonstrations have taken place over the last two years that are directly related to attempts to fulfil the Maastricht conditions for monetary union. The European capitalist governments want to create a low-wage, competitive bloc to compete successfully in the global economy, but the working class cannot afford to let this happen.

The debate on Europe has not been taken up by the British labour movement, mainly because of the support given to the Social Chapter of the Maastricht Treaty by both the Labour Party and the TUC leaders. And yet the issue of Europe must be actively raised by socialists, since failing to oppose the capitalist EU from the left leaves the door open for the arguments of the far right and the fascists. Against the bosses' Europe, we must fight for a workers' Europe - a united socialist Europe, free from poverty, unemployment and nationalist conflict.

## JOIN THE MARCH!

The British legs of Euromarch '97 in defence of jobs and welfare set out from the north west of England on May 17 and the north east two days later, joining up in Birmingham at the end of the month and reaching London on June 7. Marchers from all over Europe will then converge on Amsterdam for a mass demonstration during the EU's Inter-Governmental Conference on June 14. For details of how to join or sponsor the march, contact Glenn Voris, St Helens TUC Resource Centre, 21-31 Barrow Street, St Helens, WA10 1RX. Tel: 01744-755889. E-mail: 101326.41@compuserve.com



Among the thousands demonstrating in Brussels on March 16 were Renault workers fighting the closure of the Vilvoorde plant