

Socialist OUTLOOK

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How we can REALLY beat the Tories!

Tony Blair's New Labour leadership team have stuck up the proverbial two fingers to almost all those who should be the Party's bedrock support at the next election.

The sick, the pensioners, the homeless, the poor, the jobless, students, school students, five million public sector workers, Labour councillors ... the list is endless of those who have been wilfully insulted or attacked by Blair's team, their needs and demands repudiated for fear of increasing public spending and raising taxes.

Conservative

More conservative than the Tories: less liberal than the Liberal Democrats, Labour has indeed been single-minded in courting the "floating" votes of the affluent middle class, promising them concessions at the ex-

pense of the most deprived.

Despite this, Labour's poll ratings appear to be riding as high as ever - clear evidence of a mass public mood of revulsion against the Tories, a craving for a real change, for something different and better.

Labour's leaders have a historic opportunity to unite millions of the downtrodden and oppressed behind a package of policies that would swiftly change life for the better for the vast majority.

Instead it is promising to keep Tory policies largely intact for two years!

The last time Labour went into an election with a policy which was such a car-

Five points to start the fightback

1. A minimum wage of at least £4.26, moving towards a target of two thirds male median earnings.
2. A 35-hour week without loss of pay, to create new jobs for the unemployed.
3. Abolish the Job Seekers Allowance, Project Work and all forms of workfare.
4. Scrap the anti-union laws.
5. A crash programme of investment to rebuild the welfare state, halting cuts in education, the NHS and social services, and restore the value of the state pension slashed by the Tories.

These policies are to be financed through the imposition of steeply progressive taxation on top incomes, big business and City speculators.

bon copy of the Tories was under Gaitskell in 1959: they lost.

It doesn't have to be this way. Socialists must organise now for the fight to come to ensure a Labour government is not allowed simply

to impose Tory policies which will alienate and demoralise Labour supporters and pave the way for another spell of Tory rule. We offer our five points as the starting point for a programme that could beat the Tories -

for good!

Cut out the five points and keep them for reference. We will be fighting, alongside many more trade unionists and campaigners for these whoever wins the election.

Fighting Fortress Europe - Pages 6-7: Trade unions Pages 9-12

Higher Education workers must reject degrading offer

Paul Urwin

FOLLOWING the historic national strike by all the trade unions in the universities and colleges of higher education on 18 November, the national employers (UCEA) have responded with a new pay offer for the next two years.

For lecturers and administrative staff, the offer is for a 2.9 per cent pay rise for 1996-97 and for 1997-98 (or the March 1997 retail price index), while for manual staff the offer is for 3.5 per cent.

These offers are higher than the original offer made last summer of only 1.5 per cent (2.5 per cent for manual staff). With underlying inflation running at 2.8 per cent they are by no means generous.

The pay dispute centres on continued cuts in central government grants and a massive increase in productivity by staff. Student numbers in higher education rose by 71 per cent between 1989-90 and 1995-96 but funding per student from the fell by 28 per cent.

The effect of this squeeze has been a continued reduction in salary levels for staff while workloads have risen dramatically.

The average starting salary for lecturers in the new universities in 1995 stood at £13,100, in comparison with the average for graduates as a whole of £14,362. During the same period the number of students for each member of staff has increased from 13.5 in 1988-89 to 19 in 1993-94.

Macho-style management, similar to the health service, has operated alongside shorter contracts and cramped and unhealthy office conditions. Some new universities, such as London Guildhall, have responded to the funding squeeze by sacking dozens of lecturing staff.

The trade unions have been slow in responding to the crisis. This is partly a reflection of the pressure that staff are under and feelings of vulnerability.



Cuts in HE staff also hit students

One lecturer at an old university told *Socialist Outlook*, "The pressure on staff is incredible. We work 14 hour days and weekends, and then we are told by our managers that we are not publishing enough academic papers or that teaching quality is inadequate. We are expected to work harder and harder but expected to agree to a piecemeal pay rise". Managers in higher education awarded themselves a 6.5 per cent pay rise last summer.

Some staff in the universities may look at the new offer and decide that as it is an improvement it should be accepted as the best that may be offered this year. But the UCEA stated last summer that 1.5 per cent was their final offer. The industrial action last term clearly had an impact.

Rod Marshall, branch secretary of NATFHE at Buckinghamshire College, commented that "...some staff feel ground down but have started to learn to fight back again. The strike last term was a massive show of strength that frightened the employers. The offer of 2.9 per

cent over two years will see our salaries continue to fall while our workloads will continue to increase. We should respect ourselves and our students and reject this paltry two year offer."

The higher education dispute has shown that industrial action works. Proposals for an escalation of the action, including exam boycotts and further strikes, should be put into practice.

Student unions, whose members are also suffering the effects of government policy, should be involved in the campaign, which goes beyond the pay levels of staff. The squeeze on higher education reflects the overall funding situation in the public sector.

A Labour government is likely to be at least as tight on public spending as the Tories. Public sector workers must unite in campaigning for substantial increases in funding. Demands for increased taxes on the rich and the scrapping of the wasteful nuclear weapons programme and stock exchange need to be raised.

Defend Newham Anti-Racists

Simon Deville

OF THE THREE candidates standing in the Newham Central ward by-election last month, both the Conservatives and the British National Party called for the council to withdraw funding from Newham Monitoring Project.

Unfortunately for them, Newham's Labour council had already beat them to it and cut NMP's grant funding.

An unprecedented "review" of NMP criticised the project for its involvement in anti-fascist campaigns, its support for the Ibrahima Sey campaign (Ibrahima was killed in police custody last year), and criticised its collective methods of organisation (apparently there was insufficient distinction between management and full time workers).

The bulk of the review simply lists a number of minor quibbles, for example where the review investigated alleged financial mismanagement, it pointed to two VAT receipts in a 3 year period which had insufficient details, and the fact that staff members bought tea and coffee from the shop next door when they could have saved money going to a supermarket.

The council had seven different measures they could have taken to address any problems, the last of which being the complete withdrawal of funding.

There immediate response was to opt for the latter. Under their

contract when funding is withdrawn the council is obliged to allow NMP a 3 month winding down period. Currently the council is trying to withhold even this.

It is clear from their actions that the council are not simply trying to prove themselves "efficient" to the new Labour leadership but are determined to ensure NMP does not continue independently of them.

The last Labour group meeting saw a lively, 500-strong picket outside East Ham Town Hall in which supporters of NMP pledged to maintain the project regardless. Mr Natt, who NMP had supported following racist harassment from the police which he had recorded on tape, appeared on the picket following a five day hunger strike in protest at the councils actions.

It is clear from their actions that the council are not simply trying to prove themselves "efficient" to the new Labour leadership, but are determined to ensure the NMP does not continue independently of them.

It should come as no surprise that the BNP, the Newham Recorder, the Tories and now the Labour Council all want to see an end to NMP's activities. Such opposition is a testimony to the effectiveness of the project's militant, class based anti-racism. It is the task of all principled anti-racists to ensure that NMP continues, with or without the support of the right wing Labour council.

For details about the NMP defence campaign contact NMP on 0181-555 8151 or write to 382 Katherine Road, Forest Gate, E7.

UNISON dumps Hillingdon Hospital strikers

Fred Leplat, UNISON London Regional Committee (in a personal capacity)

One of the most important dispute in UNISON's brief history has been sold out when a sub-committee of the union's National Executive voted to withdraw official support.

On Monday January 6, one month before an Industrial Tribunal was to hear the remaining 34 cases, Pall Mall made a 'final' offer at an ACAS meeting £250,000 (double last year's offer) to end the dispute. This sum was to be distributed between the 53 strikers.

On Wednesday January 8, the Industrial Action Committee voted by 4 votes to 3 to withdraw support with effect from the 16 January. This was despite UNISON conference policy adopted unanimously to give backing to the 53 strikers un-

til they secured reinstatement.

Since October 1995, this strike has been a focus for UNISON members and the rest of the labour movement in the fight against private contractors in public services.

Six months after winning a cleaning, portering and catering contract at Hillingdon Hospital, Pall Mall proposed a devastating cut in pay and conditions to the 200 strong workforce.

Wage cuts

These changes meant cuts of £25 to £35 a week to some of the lowest paid staff in the NHS. Fifty six UNISON members, mostly Asian women, did not accept the changes and were sacked for refusing the new terms and conditions.

Although UNISON's leaders rapidly arranged for the strike to be made official, they never threw themselves wholeheartedly into turning the dispute into the national political focus it deserved to

be. A national demonstration was organised in July 1996, but only 30,000 leaflets were printed, when UNISON has 1.4 million members.

UNISON members employed by Pall Mall elsewhere in the country were not organised to take some action, even indirectly, in support of the strikers at Hillingdon Hospital. There was a national meeting of stewards in Pall Mall in December 1996, six months after UNISON conference decided it should take place. At the meeting the strikers were then prevented from moving a resolution for a claim for a minimum wage of £4.26 per hour in Pall Mall.

The decision of UNISON's Industrial Action Committee to pull the plug was taken without a vote or ballot of the strikers on whether to accept Pall Mall's offer of £250,000. A national official for UNISON members in health stated there was no point in balloting the strikers as he knew they would turn down the

offer. When a majority strikers met on Sunday January 9 at their regular meeting, they unanimously voted to reject the offer and continue the strike.

Sell-out

In selling out the dispute the national officials are attempting to dress up Pall Mall's offer as some sort of victory. It has been described as a 'substantial achievement' and that 'there was insufficient support from our members ... for widening the action'. We can now expect that the officials will put more effort in justifying their decision than they have in supporting the strike.

But for the strikers, the dispute continues. A political campaign around a strike such as this one during the general election could put pressure on Pall Mall and a Labour Government. Harriet Harman, when Labour's spokesperson on Health, stated that a Labour Government would fight for re-

instatement of the strikers.

The strikers now need urgent financial and practical support if they are to continue their fight against Pall Mall. UNISON members and branches should protest to the National Executive and Rodney Bickerstaffe. There will be a lobby of the next National Executive. The strikers have also called a conference on Sunday 9 February to discuss the way forward.

What you can do:

- * Send donations and messages of support to Hillingdon Strikers Support Campaign, c/o Councillor Kennedy, Hillingdon Civic Centre, Uxbridge, Middlesex, UB8 1UW.
- * Come to the Strike Support Conference on Sunday 9 February at Hillingdon Civic centre from 11am to 2pm.
- * Lobby UNISON's NEC on the 14 February at Mabledon Place, London

Labour embraces Tory economic policies, leaving millions

Browned off!

The Labour leadership has declared war on the Welfare State. Gordon Brown's speech of January 20 in which he pledged that Labour would freeze public spending for three years and stick to the departmental limits set in Clarke's last budget was a decisive moment. The drastic consequences for already crumbling services if this road is stuck to are spelled out elsewhere (p 8).

Blair's attacks on single mothers back up this stance, not only in the emptiness of their content but in the determination to paint 'welfare' as a dirty word. His arrogant disregard for the reality of real people's lives ignores both the lack of affordable, decent child care provision and the absence of real jobs at a decent wage.

Police Bill

Labour's overall support for the Police Bill will, as we point out (p4) reduce the number of child-minders. Nor does it answer why single parents should be deprived of choice as to whether to spend some of their lives primarily bringing up children if this choice is available to those parents with partners. Single parents have been much scape-goated by the Tories - now Blair takes up the call.

Public sector workers will fare no better. Brown has made it plain that a Labour government will refuse to implement pay review body proposals for public sector workers if they exceed Tory spending limits.

To make sure public sector workers put up with whatever Brown offers them a Labour government will retain every single piece of anti-union legislation introduced by the Tories.

When these laws were being pushed through Parliament, Labour MPs, including the front bench, correctly denounced them as attacks on the unions. Today Labour's front bench refers to them as 'reforms'.

Of course Labour had previously made fairly evident that it would do no favours to public sector workers or those who rely on the hospitals, schools or benefits that have been ravaged by the Tories.

The idea that Labour was the party of 'tax and spend' - ludicrous anyway given that Callaghan and Wilson brought in spending cuts - had already been laid to rest. Despite this, as the unofficial election campaign mounts and the Tories continue to flounder, the leadership clique want to present them-

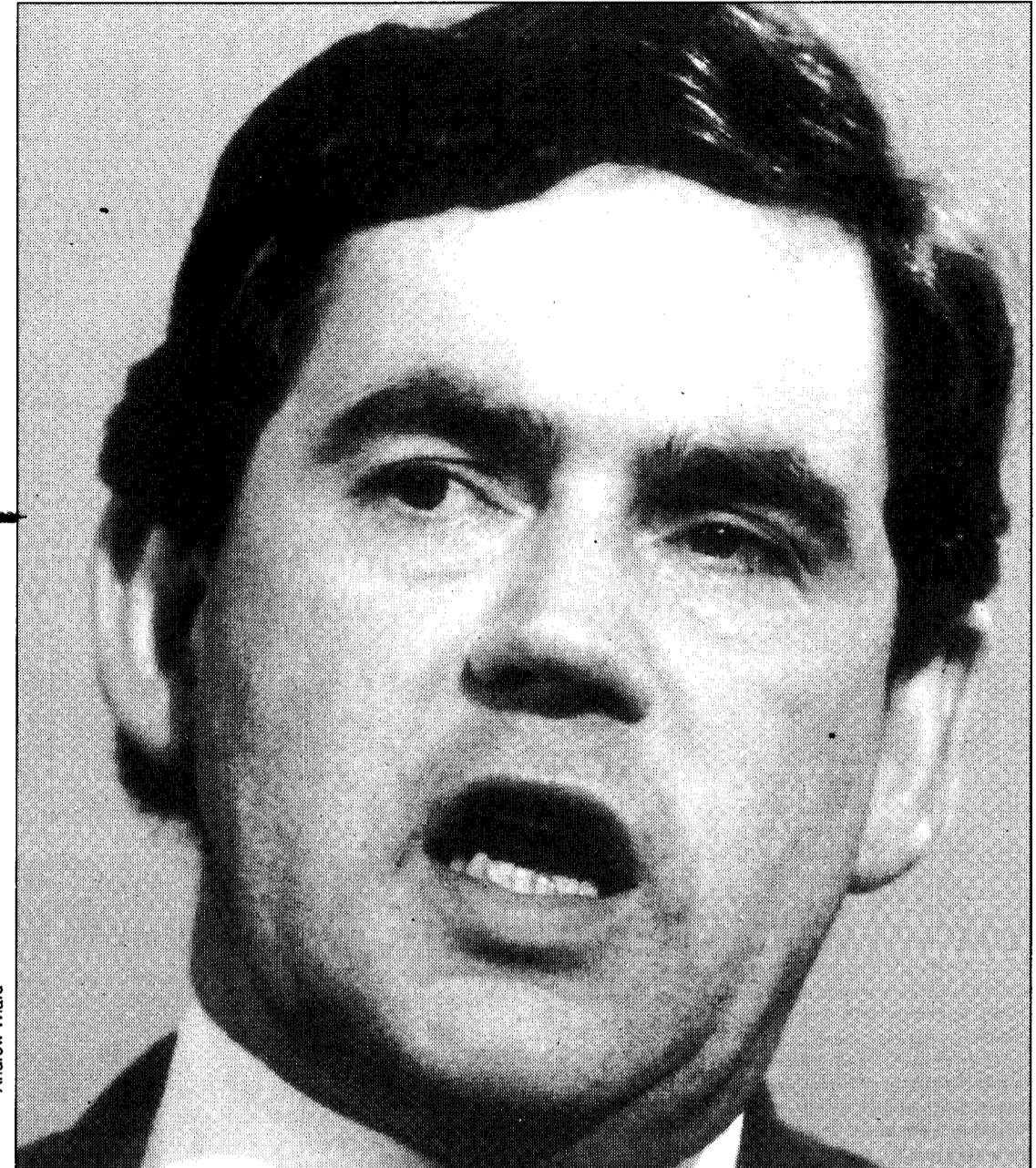
selves as completely different from their predecessors.

New Labour has nightmares about the 'Winter of Discontent' as the media constantly reminds us. So they are determined to try to eradicate any vestige of expectation from working people that their lot will improve under Blair - that there is any point in organising or demonstrating let alone striking.

Pressure

The pressure that has built up for years where trade union leaders and politicians have told those who have argued for action against the iniquities of the Tories that they must wait for a Labour government means that this target is probably impossible.

So the message of Brown and Blair is not only addressed to the floating voters and the city but to Labour's working class base. Workers should expect nothing from Labour that they are not already getting from the Tories. Even Labour's enthusiasm for England hosting the 2006 football World Cup finals - hardly a vote winner in Scotland and Wales anyway - involves a bi-partisan cam-



Andrew Ward

War on the welfare state to cuddle up to the City: Gordon Brown

paigned with the Tories!

But this desire to appear the party of fiscal prudence may well turn out to be self-defeating. There is a danger that their refusal to raise the top rate of tax or announce any other measures to rescue the wasteland of Britain's towns and cities will demoralise those who did believe that Labour would be 'better' than the Tories.

This is already evident in the

NHS.

A recent ICM survey for *Nursing Times* revealed that 78 percent of nurses believed there were already serious staff shortages, and two thirds of these thought that patients were being put at risk.

Hardly surprising therefore, given Brown's support for Clarke's policies, that 41 percent of nurses trusted no party on the NHS.

At best Labour may offer 'jam

tomorrow' - or more likely, in a few years time if Brown decides 'the country can afford it' - as Chris Smith reputedly does in a soon to be made speech. But even 'jam tomorrow' is not going to reverse swingeing cuts in the welfare state and stop the loss of desperately needed staff.

The need to step up campaigning in defence of existing services and to demand the rebuilding of the Welfare State has never been more urgent.

Labour NEC plans to neuter Party

Nell Murray

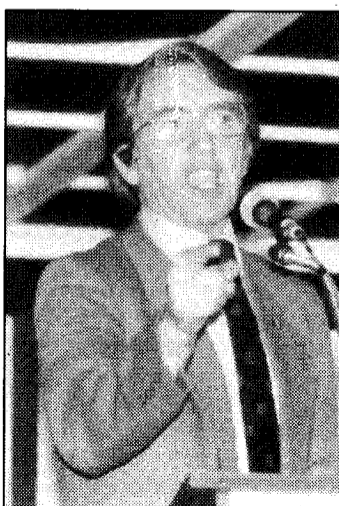
On January 29 Labour's NEC endorsed proposals which could turn the party into a rubber stamp for the parliamentary leadership.

The prime aim of the measures contained in the 30-page document 'Labour into Power - a framework for partnership' is to ensure that the party can no longer call a Labour government to account. In the words of the report "The NEC is clear that neither it nor the party should operate as a kind of shadow or watchdog of Labour in power, seeking principally to police the operations of the elected government."

Thus, for this current, house-trained NEC, a Labour government should not be accountable to the party. The report's explains "with these reforms the Party will be able to support a new Labour government effectively and ensure its re-election."

The purpose of the party is not to decide what policy is in the best interests of the movement and then ensure a Labour government carry it out, but to support it and ensure its re-election whatever it does.

Denials that the proposals are



To be ousted? Skinner

designed to neuter Party conference ring hollow. It is argued that conference will remain the sovereign policy-making body, with both constituencies and unions retaining the power to submit resolutions. In fact CLPs would make submissions to the National Policy Forum rather than conference.

Conference would discuss and vote on reports - but reports drawn up by Cabinet or Shadow Cabinet

members rather than discrete resolutions from component bodies.

The National Policy Forum would be slightly enlarged, but there are no plans to make it more accountable or democratic. The move to make conference a 'presentation' by the leadership is obvious.

At the same time other clauses will weaken the NEC - turning it from a body which, at least at times, however mutedly, can call the parliamentary leadership to account between conferences, into a support group for the leadership.

It would meet only every two months instead of monthly as at present, giving less opportunity to shadow the government's programme. Its sub-committees, which deal with issues such as organisation, finance etc would be abolished and these, together with 'campaigning' (for which read electioneering) would become the main business of the NEC rather than policy. Policy would be shunted off to a joint committee drawn from the government and NEC, but with an in-built leadership majority.

On top of all that, proposed changes in its composition are designed to prevent any of the 'awkward squad' getting elected.

While trade union representation would be retained, the constituency and women's representatives would be replaced by representation for local government, the Cabinet, constituency members and MPs elected by their fellow MPs.

This would ensure that popular left MPs, such as Dennis Skinner, who have widespread support among the rank and file membership, but who are out of tune with the majority in the PLP, could not get elected.

Many will claim these proposals are nothing like as bad as a simple severing of the Party-union link, or those flagged up by the Labour Coordinating Committee. Nothing could be further from the truth.

They are likely to be the first slice of a salami tactic and considerably reduce the ability of the unions (and CLPs) to affect policy.

They would begin to turn the party into the election machine which uncritically supports a Labour government with a once-a-year showpiece conference for the leadership to preen themselves in front of the media.

They must be fought at every union conference and a major war waged against them at this year's Labour Party conference.

Scrap Project Work - Stop the JSA

George Thompson

The Tories' efforts to con the electorate their economic policies are boosting employment are backfiring, as news of job losses at Fords and the Home Office hit the headlines.

Although there is a fall in the unemployment figures this is only because of the draconian measures the government is using to drive people off the register.

The Jobseekers Allowance rules on availability, a crackdown on late signers and home visits to every new claimant are all contributing to strip the unemployed of their right to benefit.

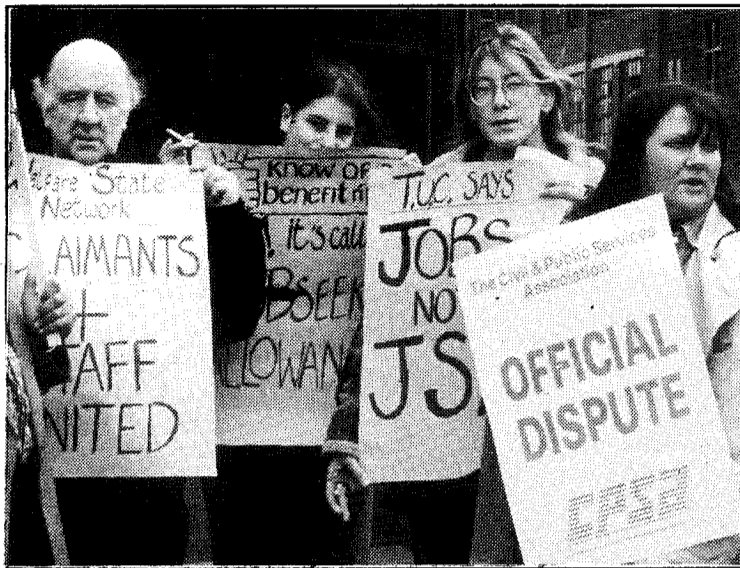
The introduction of Project Work into many areas in February will automatically remove another 100,000 from the official statistics.

The failure of compulsory training schemes like Project Work have been outlined in a recent TUC report which shows only 4.9 per cent of claimants on such schemes actually find work afterwards. Project Work is designed to keep Tory MPs in a job and to make bosses a quick profit by temporarily employing claimants at £10 a week.

Many trade unionists have recognised the JSA and Project Work will force the unemployed into their jobs and drive down the wages of all workers.

In areas where Project Work is being introduced unions are already organising to make their employers boycott the scheme. This opposition must be combined with a fight in the workplace for increased wages for the lowest paid employees.

A statement by TUC leader John Monks condemning Project Work



Today we fight the Tories: but we should be ready to fight on against Blair

as 'rotten' was encouraging, but we need more. National trade unions need to be exerting pressure on Labour councils to boycott and publicly condemn Project Work. Labour must state it will scrap Project Work if its elected, preventing the go-ahead of the work placement side of the scheme at the end of May.

Benefits lost

For the unemployed and civil servants the end to the JSA and schemes like Project Work cannot come soon enough. Many unemployed have joined the homeless and hungry through losing their benefit as a result of the JSA.

Workers' lives are in danger, as they are an easy target for claimants anger at the new benefit laws. In many areas unity has been achieved between civil servants and the unemployed and this should be built

upon.

The role of the CPSA leadership in stifling strike action against the JSA and Project Work have not helped such a relationship. Left Unity in the CPSA must continue to build campaigns against benefit laws irrespective of whether they can win the union away from the Blairite 'Moderates'.

The creation of an unemployed movement is still at an early stage. Yet there are opportunities now to develop it.

The Euromarch for full employment in June can play an important role. Without a movement, it will be easier for a Blair government to keep elements of the JSA and drive yet more young people into poverty.

Today we must fight the Tory schemes: but tomorrow we should be ready to defeat Blair's Project.

Labour capitulates as New Bill boosts the Old Bill

Veronica Fagan

MOST commentators on the Police Bill saluted Jack Straw's supposed U-turn on the Bill and were jubilant at the passing of Labour's amendments earlier last month.

Hugo Young in the *Guardian* on January 23 was one of the few to point out the inadequacy of the 'democratic response' to the fact that bugging has been going on for decades and tolerated by politicians and police alike - despite the fact that it was unlawful.

One of the key purposes of this new Bill is to make lawful what has been going on unchecked since the 1970s at least and which saw between 500-600 buggings a year take place.

Bugging frequently involves breaking into premises and may well be accompanied by the removal of private documents. This is more usually called burglary.

Fantasy

A few years ago Labour leaders would have rejected Hugo Young's statistics as paranoid fantasies. The British police, they would have assured us, do not engage in illegal bugging and burglary. If such allegations could have been substantiated they would have demanded a public inquiry into how and why the police could act illegally.

They would have attacked such threats to civil liberties. Today they no longer pretend that the police act legally - they simply want to decriminalise their activities. So much for being tough on crime!

Labour's amendment is entirely within the frame-work of allowing the police to pretty much do as they want. Straw has backed a role for Surveillance Commissioners, a cadre of 3 or 4 present or former judges appointed by the Prime Minister to pre-scrutinise police requests for bugging.

The loophole that has been picked up by many campaigners is that Straw at the same time agrees that there will be some exceptions - in situations where it will not be 'reasonably practicable' to seek prior approval then this can be waived.

Routine 'emergencies'

It will surely not be hard for the police to present virtually every situation where they argue that bugging and burglary should take place as an emergency requiring this waiver. In this respect the Liberal amendment was stronger than Labour's, arguing that a judge must handle every case.

Labour intends to introduce further amendments which would allow surveillance of large numbers of people supposedly engaged in illegal activities.

Since the police themselves will decide what is an illegal activity this simply gives them the right to bug offices of trade unions, political organisations, campaigns etc as well as the homes of individual activists. Virtually any protest can be seen by the police as criminal activity as bugging of the NUM during

its legal strike shows.

Tragically the voices of the major civil liberties organisations have been more than a little muted in their response to Labour's attempt to appear as champions of human rights while actually maintaining authoritarianism.

Liberty was involved in drafting the Labour party amendments although Director John Wadham has argued that the Liberal proposals are better, highlighting that the Surveillance Commissioners would be directly appointed by government.



Thousands opposed the last increase in police powers

Liberty also comments on other provisions of the Bill which have been ignored in the focus on the bugging clause.

The Bill creates a National Crime Squad and puts the National Criminal Intelligence

Service on a statutory footing but the mechanisms for democratic control of both are sorely inadequate. There are virtually no controls on either the accuracy of the information held or who has access to them.

The issue in the Bill which will have most impact on the greatest number of people is the major extension of criminal record checks. The Bill extends these checks for employment and other purposes and the breadth and scope of the information contained in them will be enormous. There are no adequate ways of checking the accuracy of the information held or its relevance.

This provision obviously affects those with criminal records - some 34 percent of males under 35. Their chances of getting decent employment will be severely reduced. So much for rehabilitation of offenders. However, others are also affected.

Cuts in services

Cash-starved local authorities may have to further reduce services to meet the costs of checking on employees. Local authorities currently pay for police checks under current legislation for those such as childminders who are supposed to register with, but are not employed by, councils.

Under the Police Bill childminders may well find themselves paying for such checks - not only for themselves but everyone in their household over 16.

Given the costs involved it is likely that many childminders or would-be childminders will simply not register with the local authority. The risks are obvious. So much for Blair's desire to get single mothers into employment.

The Police Bill is a threat to civil liberties. It is a threat to the organised labour movement. It is a threat to those active in campaigns. It cannot be amended. We need to campaign to ensure that Labour votes against it and, if it is passed before the General election, repeals it once in office.

Defend Brian Higgins

Mark Jason

Brian Higgins, a leading activist in the rank and file Building Workers Group is being threatened with a high court injunction from Dominic Hehir, a full time official in his own union, UCATT.

Higgins has a long record of militant activity in the building industry. He faced death threats following his activity opposing the Laings lock out at the British Library ten years ago.

Despite being blacklisted throughout the industry he is still secretary of Northampton branch UCATT and led a successful campaign in defence of 12 workers at a Milton Keynes site last month.

The threatened injunction is concerned with charges he made against Hehir in a pamphlet on rank and file trade unionism published by the Collin Roach Centre and a letter in the *Irish Post* last year.

As he was standing for re-election to his full time position, a letter from Hehir appeared alongside his photo referring to a recent successful industrial tribunal, which hehir stated "We made a decision right from the start to defend our man". Higgins sent in a reply pointing out that it was not in fact Hehir but another full time official who

was responsible for the IT case he had referred to.

Higgins also contrasted the difference between that case and that of John Jones, one of two workers sacked by Southwark Council Direct Labour Organisation for refusing to accept a transfer to a private building contractors called Botes.

Jones was sacked alongside a plumber in the EPIU after the council used the TUPE legislation (European legislation that supposedly protects workers rights). In doing so the council refused to honour previous grievance procedures agreed with the union.

No support

Hehir took the side of Southwark Council DLO, refused to support the workers and didn't turn up to Jones' IT, forcing him to go to a local law centre for representation.

Soon after Higgins' letter appeared in the *Irish Post* he received a letter from a solicitor representing Hehir stating "We are instructed that unless we receive from you an unconditional apology and retraction and an offer to pay substantial damages and legal costs within the next seven days, proceedings will be issued against you in the Queens Bench division of the High Court

without further notice."

This attempt to silence Higgins through costly legal procedures is a threat not just to Higgins but to trade union democracy itself. UCATT has well established procedures through which Hehir could have pursued any grievance he might have had.

As a full-time official he has far greater access to union structures and resources than ordinary rank and file members. Hehir chose the courts as he hoped the threat of legal costs would silence criticisms of him from the rank and file members.

The Tory government has done all it can to help courts intervene to prevent militant trade union action. That a union full-timer is attempting this against members of his own union is a disgrace. All trade unionists should support Brian and oppose this attack on trade unionism.

Messages of support, financial donations or invitations for speakers should be sent to - Brian Higgins Defence Campaign, c/o Colin Roach Centre, 56 Clarendon Road, London, E5 8SW, Tel 0181 533 7111

NW TUC steps in to support

The decision of the North West TUC to support the Euro-March by a 2-1 majority at its meeting on February 1 gives an important fillip in the campaign for the march.

Only TGWU, USDAW, PTC and GMB opposed the motion. The support of UNISON was vital in winning this important vote.

Readers should use this victory, together with the impressive existing sponsorship list to deepen the campaign not only for support but crucially for funds.

Every organisation supporting the march should be asked to sponsor a marcher for £250 - as should new affiliates as they come on board.

Smaller or individual donations will also be gratefully received. Why not try and organise a benefit as well - a fun way to raise money and spread the news about the campaign.

Rush money to: European Marches 1997, c/o Glen Voris, St Helens TUC Resource Centre, 21-31 Barrow St, St Helens, WA10 1RX. Tel 01744 755889. Cheques made payable to European Marches 1997.

Magnet attracted to EuroMarch

350 striking workers at Magnet in Darlington, Teeside, have joined the Liverpool Dockers in their support for the Euro-March in defence of jobs and welfare.

The strike, at Magnet's fitted kitchens factory and now entering its seventh month, began when Magnet's parent company, Berisford announced cuts in wages of £35 a week and the axing of bereavement and paternity leave.

In September the strikers were sacked and the company hired unskilled workers at lower pay. Bosses boasted they had set aside three-and-a-half million pounds to cover the cost of the dispute but this was used up within the first eight weeks.

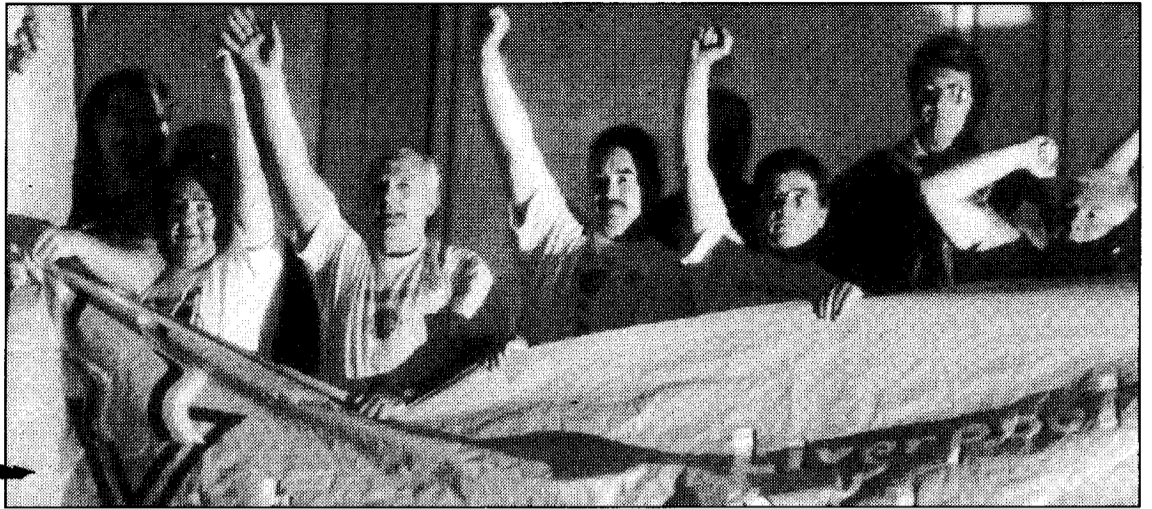
The strikers have achieved great success with a leafleting campaign aimed at persuading people not to buy from Magnet retail outlets. £65 million has been wiped off the company share value.

Enthusiasm

Strikers' leader John Cory is enthusiastic about what they have learned from the magnificent struggle of the Liverpool dockers and following their successful lead, plans to internationalise the dispute.

EuroMarch campaigners are now hoping that workers at Ford's Halewood plant will be the next group of workers under attack to take up support for the march.

Nationwide leafleting of Magnet showrooms Saturday 8 February, 12



noon. MASS PICKET, Friday 14 February, assemble outside Magnet Factory, Allington Way, Darlington.

Requests for speakers - 01325 282839 or picket mobile 04020 72676.

Liverpool dockers have already pledged full support to the Euro-March.

Step forward for Euro-Marches

Pete Cooper

50 delegates and observers from across Britain came together for the second meeting of the Euro-marches sponsors campaign in Sheffield on January 18.

The meeting, chaired by Alan Simpson MP, was addressed by Robert Cremieux of the French ACI campaign against unemployment and the Paris based European Marches Secretariat.

Robert described the development of the campaign in France and across Europe. He told the meeting that the French CGT trade union confederation was about to sponsor the march.

Glenn Voris, the British marches' secretary, reported on the development of the campaign in Britain. Since the Manchester launch meeting in October 1996, big support for the marches had been forthcoming from the trades unions, including the Bakers' Union, and the probable affiliation of the RMT.

Many unemployed workers centres, the TUC Joint Consultative Committee, County Associations of TUCs, trades union councils, union regions and branches had given their support, including five MSF Regions and the NW and London Regions of Unison.

Glen spoke about problems with the National Unemployed Centres Combine who, while claiming to support the European Marches initiative, have effectively declared

war on the British marches in witch-hunting terms, in favour of their roadshow.

The meeting agreed to make further attempts to seek unity amongst those who support the European marches project.

Reports from around Britain showed that local committees are being set up in every region along the proposed routes.

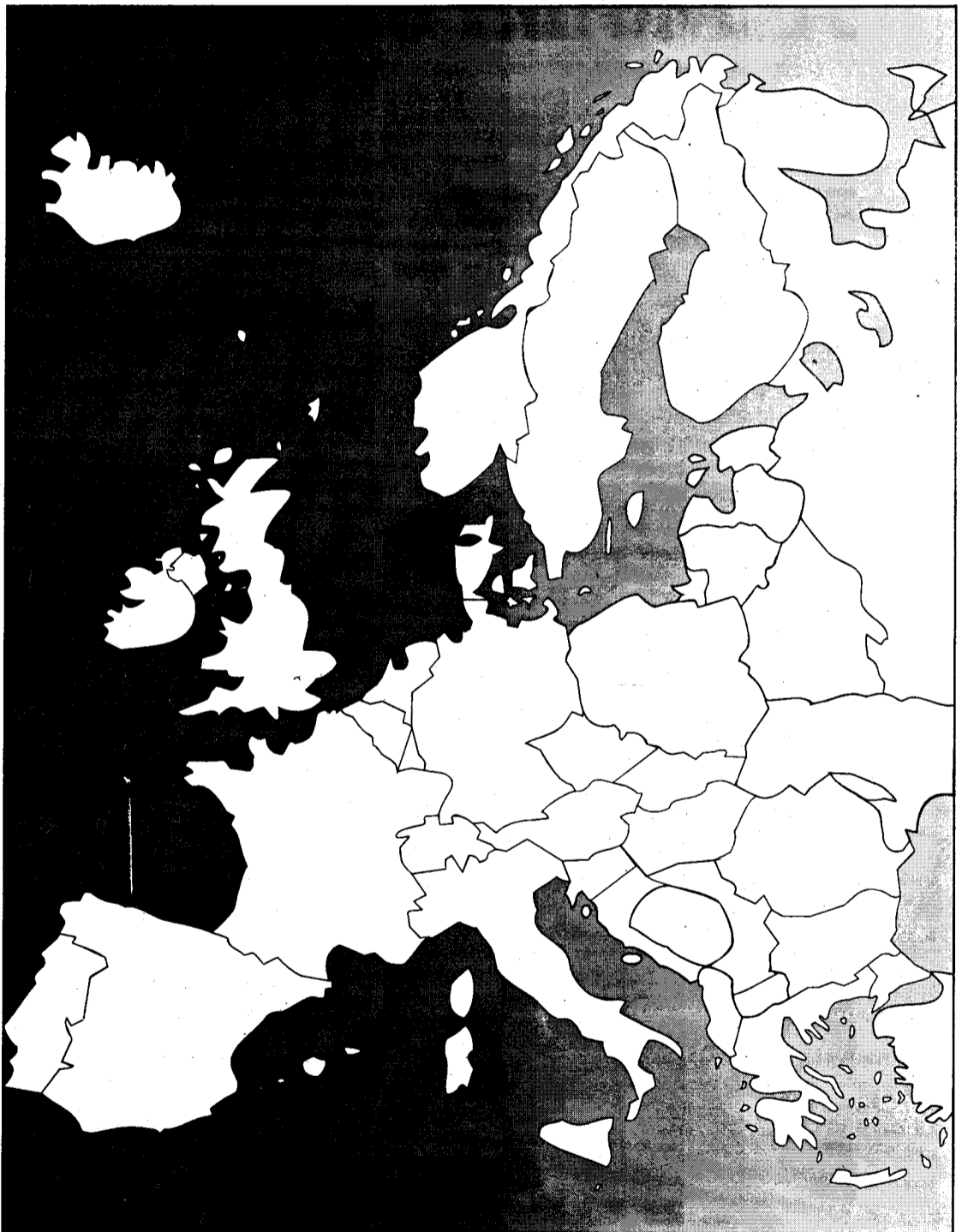
The North West is particularly strong, having a long tradition of unemployment marches. Since the Sheffield conference we have secured support for the marches from the North West TUC, despite the opposition of the Combine on their home territory.

Addresses by Ian from the Magnet strikers and Herbie from the Liverpool dockers ensured that the meeting finished on a high note. Herbie assured us that with their support we should have no difficulty in raising the £30,000 we need to finance the marches - given that they are raising £23,000 a week at present.

The dockers and Magnet strikers have made a commitment to advocate support for the Euro-marches at every meeting they are invited to address.

The meeting agreed to make a major effort to build the Brussels launch conference 22/23 February (details below).

A steering committee was elected, chaired by Alan Simpson MP and Glenn Voris as secretary.



Come to Brussels!

On February 22-23 in Brussels there will be a major conference designed to launch the Euro-marches on a continental level.

Delegations will be present from all the countries participating: France, Germany, Holland, Italy, Belgium, Switzerland, Finland, Sweden, Denmark, Spain, Ireland, Luxembourg, Austria and Britain.

The conference begins at 12 noon on Saturday and will conclude at 3pm on the Sunday, with a social on the Saturday night. Accommodation and food provided.

A large delegation will be going from Britain, including a coach from the north of England.

For details and tickets contact: (North) Glenn Voris 01744 - 755889 or (South) Pete Cooper 0171 - 738 3362.

Hunger strikes expose scandal of racist Tory laws

It seems likely that during February a large number of asylum seekers detained at Rochester prison will continue their hunger strike in protest against their treatment by the authorities. Their persistence has forced the national media to highlight the issue and campaigners are mobilising in support of them. BILL MACKETH examines the background.

THE USE of Rochester prison as a place to detain refugees seeking asylum has caused controversy even within the liberal establishment.

Some of the detainees held there claim they are treated far worse than those convicted of crimes - they are locked up from eight in the morning till eight at night and the diet is appalling.

On January 670 people went on indefinite hunger strike. By the end of the month six had also begun to refuse fluids, and 17 were still taking part in the overall action. On January 30 one man had become so weak that he had to be hospitalised.

The hunger strikers are demanding that their requests for political asylum be finally heard by 'an independent body and judicial committee'. Some of those involved have been detained for over two years. All are detained without charge or time limit and without proper legal and medical provision.

The protesters statement points out that some 45 per cent of detainees have been diagnosed as suffering mental or physical disorders and trauma yet they continue to be held under a prison regime.

Demonstrations in support of the strikers demands took place outside Rochester throughout January. On Saturday February 1 approximately one hundred demonstrators stood outside the prison and when the detainees heard their chants they shouted back.

Demonstrators have vowed to continue their support and will maintain a presence every Saturday at Rochester, while the strike continues. At the same time they will be picketing the Home office every Wednesday evening. Any death occurring as a result of the strike will result in an immediate mobilisation outside of the Home Office.



Campaigners outside Campsfield, the purpose-built detention centre for victims of the Asylum Act

Those campaigning for the closure of detention centres and the rights of refugees have found it easier to mobilise support when those that have been detained have been prominent political figures. On May 2 1995, 500 people marched through London in support of Kurdish nationalist leader Kani Yilmaz, detained since November 1994.

On International Refugee Day in June, 200 gathered at Winson Green prison in Birmingham demanding the release of Raghbir Singh and other detainees. Singh, a Sikh newspaper editor has been held since March 1995 as a 'threat to national security'. As well as support from his local community and anti-racist activists, Singh also won backing from his union, the National Union of Journalists.

Released

Both Kani Yilmaz and Raghbir Singh were released in November 1995 following a judgement by the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg. The court found that Karamjit Singh Chahal, a Sikh separatist, was being denied his legal rights and would be in danger if deported to India. He was freed after being held in Bedford prison for six years and three months without charge. More releases of those who pose a 'threat to national security' are expected.

Regular protests have been organised by local campaigners outside a number of detention centres. November 1995 was the occasion when the regular 'last Saturday at noon' demonstration at Campsfield detention centre near Oxford marked "three years too long" of

detentions at the site. Over 150 people attended the subsequent conference on detentions organised by the Asylum Rights Campaign.

December 1995 saw the latest protest by the Close Harmondsworth Campaign outside the West London detention centre, bringing Christmas parcels as well as solidarity to the detainees.

These types of actions are particularly important for those refugees who were detained immediately on entering Britain and who therefore have few or no friends and supporters to highlight their particular case.

The situation facing refugees in Britain is now worse than ever. The new Asylum and Immigration Act is now wholly in force.

Last week saw the introduction of the measures contained in the act requiring employers to check the immigration status of employees. Despite considerable criticism, Home Secretary, Michael Howard defended the legislation as necessary to maintain the position of Britain's race relations being 'the envy of the Western World'.

Not only those on the left but also employers organisations believe the new measures will lead to an overall drop in the employment of Black people and those from ethnic minorities.

But following Howard's statement, in a hypocritical speech to business leaders, Employment and Education Secretary, Gillian Shephard, claimed that in order for Britain to maintain a competitive advantage in the new millennium, it would be necessary 'to draw from the rich seam of talent and knowledge of Britain's ethnic minorities'.

The day before this Home Office Minister, Ann Widdecombe, stated that the detention of asylum seekers at Rochester was wholly in keeping with Christian doctrine and immediately criminalised one refugee being held there as a child abuser.

Since changes in regulations last year Social security and housing benefit have been denied to 80-90 per cent of asylum seekers. Local authorities, strapped for cash after government cutbacks, are

having (with varied successes) to take the edge of the consequent misery of destitute refugees.

To cap it all, the government has said that from March 1996 it will cut the grants to bodies such as the Refugee Council - a prominent opponent of the benefit cuts - from £3.4 million to £1.5 million per year.

The detention of those whose only 'crime' is to seek a safe haven in this country has reached unprecedented depths. On October 1 1995, 864 people seeking political asylum were being detained in the UK. Of these, 81 were women. This is three times the number being detained in the early 1990s. The average length of detention has also doubled, to nearly three months.

Of the 864 imprisoned refugees, 466 had been detained for over 6 months and 158 for over a year. Of the total, 364 were held in prisons around the country, in breach of a UN Refugee Convention rule that detained Asylum seekers should not be held with people charged with or convicted of crime. (UN High Commission for Refugees guidelines reject such detention in principle, and allow that only in exceptional cases should refugees be detained for a maximum of 48 hours.)

Detention centres

A further 33 Asylum seekers detained in October were held in police cells. The great majority (490) were held at detention centres including Campsfield (up to 200), Harmondsworth and Tinsley House (at Gatwick airport, opened last summer). Where Haslar prison, at Gosport, near Portsmouth - long used to imprison refugees - fits into the governments statistics is not yet clear.

The nationality of detainees reflects the denial of human rights at 'home'. Of 864 people detained in October 510 (sixty per cent) came from ten countries: Nigeria, India, Algeria, Sri Lanka, Ghana, Zaire, China, Turkey and Pakistan - all on the so-called 'white' list of allegedly 'safe' countries, from where those fleeing will be automatically denied asylum. At any one time in 1996, over 100 Nigerian and 100

Indian asylum seekers were detained and over 40 of the other 8 nationalities.

It is no surprise that so many refugees are fleeing from regimes with undemocratic, corrupt military and dictatorial characters. The reason they are on the 'white list' is not on the basis of any human rights criteria but that arms exports and other trading relations with these governments are vital to UK capital.

It is a no-win situation for a refugee arriving in Britain: if you don't apply for asylum at the port of entry then you lose entitlement to benefits. If you do, you may well be jailed for your trouble. 63 per cent of those detained had sought asylum immediately on arrival.

Out of the Campaign in support of the hunger strikes at Rochester it should be possible to strengthen and consolidate an ongoing Campaign there. The existing groups at Campsfield, Haslar and Harmondsworth continue to need support - and additional person power.

A key task must be setting up a closure campaign around the Gatwick detention centre. To be effective, all these campaigns have to work closely with detainees, refugees and other migrant organisations and detainee support groups.

Network

Not everyone can - or wants to - visit detainees - but this is a key element in building the anti-detention movement. Anyone interested in attending a re-launch of the Anti Detentions Network to pursue these aims should ring 01865 558145.

In the past two years three national union conferences, NUJ, TGWU and MSF, have agreed policy calling for an end to immigration detentions. Gaining this level of support was relatively easy and much more could and needs to be done. Even in unions where winning the policy may prove more difficult, raising the demand may be very effective in undermining the bipartisan policy of Labour and the Tories on the question.

The demand has been raised at the past two Labour Party Conferences but more work needs to be done here. With a Labour government likely to be in office it is vital that the issue is once again raised.

90% of those detained are black. The imprisonment of innocent people, especially if they are tightly selected by country of origin and skin colour, is an act of state racism, an incitement to further racist thinking and an attack on the basic democratic rights of all people. There can be no holding back on pointing this out to political 'leaders' and demanding an immediate end to it.

* A widely backed conference on detentions in Europe, called originally by Federation des Associations en Solidarite avec les Travailleurs Immigrants (FASTI) will take place in Lille on April 15-16. (Further information from JP Perrin-Martin, 11 rue Ponson de Terrail, 45000 Orleans, France or call 01865 558145.)

Campaigning Contacts:

Asylum Rights Campaign 0171 820 3000
 Close Campsfield 01865 558145/378734/557282
 Close Harmondsworth Campaign 0181 571 5019
 Stop Haslar Detentions 01705 832260
 Kent Socialist Alliance 01474 566701
 London Detainee Support Group 0171 739 9907
 Medway Detainee Support Group 01634 403001
 National Coalition of Anti Deportation Campaigns 0121 554 6947
 West Midlands Anti Deportation Campaign 0121 507 1618

MURDER AT SEA!

But who cares? It's only illegals

B.Skanthakumar

IT WAS the headline in *The Observer* of January 12 that caught my eye. I've stopped buying a Sunday paper you see. So much bulk and so little substance.

"Massacre at Sea" it read. I half remembered the story from an agency report and feeling guilty as to how easily I'd forgotten it, bought the paper.

280 South Asian migrants died on Christmas Day 1996 off the coast of Greece.

Correction: they had been murdered.

One of the survivors recounted the mind-numbing events. "They forced 318 of us at gunpoint to climb down with ropes from the big ship to the smaller one. The small ship could only take about 100 people. People jumped overboard in rough water."

Ahmad Shahab then described how the larger ship realising that its human cargo was drowning deliberately rammed into the smaller boat wrecking it.

"People were desperately screaming for help. I saw my brother go down. I yelled 'please, please, he can't swim!'. It was to no avail.

These details sounded so familiar to me and then a friend brought it home.

"This is the modern slave trade", she said.

This story broke the same week when there was wall-to-wall media coverage of the rescue of a lone yachtsman and when the self-publicist Richard Branson ballooned his way onto our screens both trying to break records.

But who cares? The migrants were non-white and breaking the law. No one asked them to take the journey after all.

Ordinary

There was an ordinariness about the whole episode. Even its revelation met with disinterest. No one believed the survivors' tales. Most of the press ignored it, even after *The Observer's* coverage.

Those lines come back to me, "About suffering they were never wrong/The Old Masters/How well they understood/ Its human position".

The migrants had paid agents in their own countries anything between US \$5,000 and US \$8,000 for passage into Europe as undocumented illegal workers.

The ship captains and crew fear imprisonment and heavy fines if caught with their merchandise. So sometimes the would-be immigrants will change ships several times to avoid attention. For most of the journey they are kept below deck anyway. Penned in cramped accommodation, eating gruel and scraps, sleeping, defecating, hop-



Stalingrad O'Neill

The British government prides itself on its tough stance in deporting "illegal" immigrants who arrive here

ing and praying. Suffering the indignities and fears together.

The riskiest bits are when they approach the coast of a European country.

Usually the ship keeps a distance to avoid the authorities, then they load people onto life-boats and tell them to make their own way. If they reach the coast without detection, another set of agents will be waiting for them to guide them to their destination.

How do I know this? Well, because two weeks before a cousin had taken the same route as those on that ill-fated journey.

Happily he survived and is now in France.

Once upon a time people from the Third World were encouraged to migrate to the First. That was when they needed cheap, semi-skilled labour. Now the requirements have changed.

"Give us your teachers, doctors, scientists and professionals whose upbringing and education we didn't pay for". Two-thirds of Ghanaian doctors who graduated after 1980 have left that country in the 'brain drain'.

As Western Europe tears down the walls between its countries it erects new ones around it. The bricks in this wall are laws like the Immigration and Asylum Act in Britain which criminalise non-white people and make employers, health workers and school teachers into immigration officials.

Once upon a time, one would take a simple but safe boat journey or fly direct. Today, even an asylum seeker needs a visa and airline companies are fined for carrying passengers without proper entry papers.

That makes it more difficult to enter the West but still not impossible.

There is an elaborate network of airport officials, ship captains, travel agents and racketeers who profit from the desperation of a few to leave their homes and communities. Western governments are also culpable in these murders.

The migrants aren't the poorest of the poor. If they were they couldn't afford the cost of the journey. Many have some assets which they sell or mortgage for cash. Others borrow money from relatives and strangers. This all of has to be repaid with interest.

If they make it to their destina-

tion, they hope to find work. They are as *The Observer* editorial noted, "officially non-existent, but unofficially hired for the jobs no one else will do at wages no one else will take".

There are push and pull factors at work here.

They clean our homes, they guard our work-places, they prepare and serve our food in canteens and restaurants, they are petrol station attendants and fast food workers. But they aren't welcome here.

They work for peanuts and survive on peanuts too. There are

debts to repay, for their fares, for loans taken by the family. Siblings whose marriage expenses have to be found, school fees and medical bills to settle.

Wages in poor countries haven't kept pace with the cost of living. Job security is a thing of the past. Farmers are pushed off the land and into debt through cash crop cultivation and trans-national intrusion.

The new jobs are for women. The factory owners prefer their "nimble fingers" and their socialisation into tiring and repetitive work. They get paid less, but are made to work harder and they aren't allowed to join unions.

They call the migrants 'economic refugees' but as A. Sivanandan remarks, "that is to miss out on a whole series of steps in the process of how economic refugees become political refugees ... your economics is our politics ... refugees are made, not born".

Some flee discrimination and oppression in their own countries only to be confronted by state racism and racist violence in the West. Some will study and train themselves for better jobs but most will remain doing the shit jobs for shit wages. Still it will be bearable.

You know us from news bulletins and travel books and novels. We know you from colonialism and popular music and Hollywood. We are your bastard children born in a loveless trust. Imperialism isn't a swear word for us, nor is it a meta-physical spirit. We know it. We live it.

We just want a better life than the one we left. We want a taste of that fruit you have so jealously guarded. We come to claim our birthright.

"And the [ship] sailed calmly on".

Solidarity with those with no papers

TEN MONTHS ago, three hundred African men and women began their struggle for the right to live and work in France. In August 1996 they were violently removed from a church - St Bernard - which they had occupied.

In response to this, some of these men and women began hunger strikes, in one instance, the hunger strike lasted for more than fifty days.

Every week the Authorities are expelling more people without regard for human rights.

Thousands of 'Sans Papiers' from 40 different countries have joined the struggle since August 1996 and have received help from a coordinating group based in Paris. The 'Sans Papiers' movement became national when local groups, throughout France, decided to unite and combine their actions. They began national campaigns and awareness raising with the aim of enabling the 'Sans Papiers' obtain residency permits for all.

The supporters of the 'Sans Papiers' movement include trade unions, left wing organisations, community groups, people committed to democratic rights and artists. This struggle is becoming a central issue in French politics and life.

The 'Sans Papiers' movement are now in need of international solidarity and contact with other groups and movements around the world.

Immigrants in many European countries including those from the United Kingdom, Spain, Germany and the USA can all benefit from sharing information and support. They also need the active support of organisations, groups and individuals who are willing to show their commitment to freedom.

We urge you to send a letter of protest to the French government and to the president to demand:

- * Resident permits for all of the 'Sans Papiers'
- * The immediate release of

those currently imprisoned

- * To immediately suspend all deportations
- * The return of those who have been deported
- * A repeal of anti-immigrant legislation

Protest

Send your protest urgently to:
M. le Premier Ministre
58, rue de Varenne, 75007 Paris
fax: + + (331) 45 44 15 72
and
M. le President de la Republique
55, rue du fbg. St. Honore,
75008 Paris fax: + + (331) 47 42 24 65

Please send a copy of your letter to us at the address below.

For further information contact: National Coordination of 'Sans--papiers' 22, rue Pajol, 75018 Paris, France
fax (331) 46 07 16 19
http://bok.net/pajol
E--mail : pajol@bok.net

"The story broke the same week as wall-to-wall media coverage of the rescue of a lone yachtsman and the self-publicist Richard Branson ballooned his way onto our screens ..."

Education and social services under the axe as Councils face the crunch

Budget-setting meetings will be taking place throughout February as councils try to balance the books. But the real budget for local government was fixed by Kenneth Clarke last November. The Tories have dumped the bill for their tax cuts onto councils mainly run by Labour and Liberal Democrats. JOHN LISTER looks at the scale of the crisis, and the silence of the unions.

THE SAVAGE cuts in local government spending which are convulsing council chambers across the country, and forcing campaigners and trade unionists back onto the streets in lobbies and protests are the latest of a series of cutbacks tearing the very heart out of council services.

Two years ago, councils faced cuts of £1.5 billion to meet government spending limits. In many areas education bore the brunt of the cuts, and over 4,000 teaching jobs were lost, while angry parents and school governors in the shire counties of "middle England" staged protests which converged in a new campaign, Fight Against Cuts in Education (FACE).

Schools defended

The heat was felt by Tory ministers. They recognised that education cuts were a hot potato, and the cuts in council spending limits for the present 1996-7 financial year were targeted to avoid hitting schools.

The notional spending limits for education were slightly increased, leaving other services to bear the brunt. But in real terms many councils were still looking at cuts, and more teachers were axed, alongside social workers and staff from other services.

FACE and other education campaigners battled on, winning increasing support from the teaching unions, which resulted in the NUT's demonstration last October, and the forthcoming National Education Week, supported by all the main teaching unions and campaigns, on March 10-15.

While schools were to some extent protected, the Tories focused the 1996-7 cuts on social services, giving councils a total increased allocation of less than 1% — well below inflation. 70% of authorities had to make cuts in services, scrap developments and increase charges for social services: many still face a shortfall.

From this April, the squeeze will be even tighter: Kenneth Clarke's budget has given councils only half the 5.1% overall increase they need to maintain existing services.

But extra costs for community care — dumped on to councils by the Tories — will soak up almost all of this extra cash, leaving social services facing a 4% cut.

Community care of the elderly is already so under-funded that three quarters of all health authorities report that front-line hospital beds are being "blocked" by elderly patients who cannot be discharged be-



cause there is no support or suitable accommodation for them in the community.

This log-jam is just part of what has become a huge and growing crisis in social services. After imposing cuts and increased charges totalling £200m in 1996-7, councils say spending for 1997-8 has to go up by £516m to stay level: but after inflation the government is giving only £262m — half what is needed.

As the Association of Metropolitan Authorities warns, many vulnerable people will be excluded: "Failure to provide additional resources will lead to a further and unacceptable tightening of eligibility criteria for people who need community care services".

The frail elderly are caught in a pincer movement. Many have been excluded from NHS care by new, rigorous criteria imposed by health authorities last April: now they could also be denied help from social services, and left to fend for themselves.

It's not just the elderly who depend on social services. 45% of social service spending goes on the elderly, but 28% goes on services for children and young people. Several councils are warning that the new cuts could leave them unable to guarantee statutory levels of care for children.

expenditure at current levels, creating huge problems of backlog maintenance.

In total, councils estimate they need a £1.25 billion increase on a social services budget of £8bn (15%) to cope with the new pressures. This is why a growing list of county and metropolitan councils are contemplating massive cuts.

Bolton is looking at a 5.2% (£2.2m) cut, North Yorkshire £2m-£5m; Tower Hamlets is considering a cut of 30% in community care clients to save £3.3m; cuts in Norfolk could hit £3.7m; Northamptonshire must cut £4.1m, with 100 social service jobs to go; Nottinghamshire is planning to axe two family centres, a children's home and 100 social work jobs to save £4.6m; Hereford and Worcester has warned that it cannot meet statutory responsibilities if it has to cut £4.8m; East Sussex is short by £7.3m, Oxfordshire up to £11m.

Devastating

But Kent tops the league with a massive £23.7m (10.7%) projected cut which will devastate social services, forcing the council to propose the wholesale privatisation of services to save money.

This is no accident. The Tories are cynically applying the squeeze in order to press-gang councils to-

thousands of council workers who have lost their jobs or seen their staffing levels, pay packets and conditions slashed back in school meals, all forms of cleaning services, refuse collection, and a wide swathe of council services, with Labour councils like Lambeth being among the most vicious in applying the Tory tendering policies.

Now Labour-led Kent Council, desperately seeking massive spending cuts, has become the first to privatise its entire home care service for elderly and disabled people. The impact will be felt by care workers whose wages will be slashed and jobs axed, and by clients whose quality of care will come second to the profits of the cheapskate firms which move in.

Social services directors are warning that the new round of cuts could trigger a series of court actions by aggrieved individuals denied their statutory right to care. Last year Gloucestershire County Council fell foul of the courts in a crucial test case, and was told that regardless of its financial plight it had no right to withhold care from those who need it.

Campaigners are already threatening to invoke the 1970 Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act and the Children's Act if councils seek to balance the books by strip-

ping away the safety net of care from those most at risk.

This year the crisis is again hitting the full spectrum of council services. Teachers are back in the firing line: in Bury alone, up to 160 teaching jobs face the axe. 41 local authorities have so far identified education cuts totalling £61m.

Housing

Housing budgets are also being clobbered, and housing departments reduced. In 1995 it was estimated that council estates needed up to £20 billion in repairs. Since then allocations have become even tighter: but still the Tories won't allow councils to spend the £5 billion they received from sales of council housing.

Council Tax will be forced up throughout the country as councils seek to mitigate the impact of the cuts on frontline services and compensate for the cuts in central government funding by foisting the bill onto local people. Millions of Londoners are expected to face council tax rises averaging 7-8%.

But Tory ministers continue to apply ruthless "capping" limits to local spending — restrictions which Labour is now committed to continue, regardless of the outcome of the election.

The more astute councillors warned immediately after last year's budget that Kenneth Clarke's vote-buying 1p cut in the basic rate of income tax would have to be paid for through increases in council tax. Local government spending accounts for a quarter of general government spending.

Now councillors and council bureaucrats are hunched over calculators, working out the precise combination of increases in council tax and cuts in services.

Kirklees council is warning of a 6% increase in council tax, linked to spending cuts of 3%. In Oxfordshire, even the Tory group is advocating the council should set a budget £8m above John Gummer's "cap" of £339m, financed by a hefty increase in council tax. In Scotland, council tax rises of 3% to 35% have been predicted, with West Dumbartonshire warning of an increase as high as 52%.

Missing link

But where are the organisations that ought to be leading the resistance?

As the councils across England unveil the cuts they plan to balance the books, and ad-hoc campaigns of parents, teachers, social service staff, voluntary sector groups and their clients battle to save front-line services, there has been a deafening silence from the public sector unions, as thousands more of their members in vital front-line services face the sack, wage cuts or privatisation.

Since Gordon Brown's bombshell on public spending, the union leaders can't hide any more behind vain hopes of a Labour government riding to the rescue. The current crunch is a dress rehearsal for even bigger conflicts to come if Brown sticks to his threats and upholds Clarke's budget limits on spending for two more grim years.

Instead of buttoning their lips and hoping for the best, it's time national union leaders headed up the fight for council services, with action between now and May including local, regional and national stoppages and demonstrations, pointing the finger of blame at Westminster

The AMA has totted up the size of the bills that councils face for the additional responsibilities imposed upon them for a wide range of vulnerable people: costs of the Carers Act are estimated at £137m; Mental Health Services £82m; the Children Act £184m; Refugees and Asylum Seekers £50m: in total these extra costs add up to £614m next year.

Meanwhile building projects have ground to a halt, with a massive £307m worth of capital schemes deferred for lack of cash in 1995-6. This is equivalent to a year and a half of social services capital

wards even further privatisation of key social services. A new White Paper is due shortly, strongly supported by Stephen Dorrell: it will call for residential homes for children and the elderly, meals on wheels, home visits for the elderly and adoption services to be put up for compulsory competitive tender.

It seems that the policy is about as popular as the new Royal Yacht: an initial opinion poll for *Community Care* magazine found 75% opposed to privatisation of social services, and only 20% in favour.

The brutal impact of privatisation has already been felt by tens of

thousands of council workers who have lost their jobs or seen their staffing levels, pay packets and conditions slashed back in school meals, all forms of cleaning services, refuse collection, and a wide swathe of council services, with Labour councils like Lambeth being among the most vicious in applying the Tory tendering policies.

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Labour set for collision with unions



Testing the ground for a full-scale punch-up with the unions? Blair and Brown

Harry Sloan

A LABOUR government elected in May could be facing major clashes with the public sector unions by next winter, if Gordon Brown sticks to his line of enforcing Kenneth Clarke's brutal stranglehold on public sector spending.

But it could all go pear-shaped much sooner - as early as the autumn - if Labour ministers attempt to carry through their refusal to give 1.3 million teachers, soldiers, nurses and other NHS professional staff the pay increases recommended by review bodies.

Brown's belligerent stance on these issues, coupled with Blair's assurance to business chiefs that Labour would leave the Thatcherite anti-union laws intact, and the public rebuff to union leaders who have suggested a new 'social partnership

forum' involving TUC and labour chiefs, all fuel growing suspicion that Labour's strategy involves provoking a rapid clash with the unions, in which the virility of New Labour as a reliable tool of the bosses could be underlined.

On every front the party is taking its distance from the unions, with its attention focused exclusively on the 150,000 floating voters in the key marginal seats which they want to win. In London, Blairites even stepped in to veto attempts to launch a Trade Unions for Labour campaign.

In announcing his plan to freeze public spending to the existing projected levels for two years, and renouncing any increase in income tax - even on top earners - for the lifetime of the next Parliament (five years) Brown clearly wanted to send clear signals of friendship to the City, and to put the boot in to campaigns that are building against cuts in schools, social services and other

council services.

This warning not to expect any concessions from a Labour government has been reinforced by Frank Dobson's blunt statements to council leaders, who are wrestling with massive shortfalls and looking for relief from central government. Labour will maintain the Tory cap on spending, warns Dobson, so ensuring that thousands of jobs and vital services will get the chop.

Growing gap

But it is certain to get worse: Clarke's limits on spending imply an ever-growing gap in the funding of health and education that would trigger a new round of cuts beginning in the autumn with health authority purchasing plans and running through the winter. Even if Labour could tough it out once, the same problems would come back, even worse, a second time.

If Labour in government is to slug it out with five million public sector

workers, perhaps the best time to stage a showdown is immediately after an election in which the hated Tories have been defeated. Perhaps this is another reason why Brown has chosen to throw down the gauntlet to the union leaders by refusing to underwrite the pay review body proposals rather than focus on the obvious cynicism of the Tories, who know that there is not enough money in Kenneth Clarke's allocations to the NHS, education authorities and armed forces to pay the full increase without triggering another round of cuts in jobs and services.

The proposed increases (3.25-3.4%) are marginally above inflation. For NHS staff there is the added bonus of scrapping the discredited system of local pay bargaining which has deadlocked the 1996-7 pay review in most Trusts, and offered only puny increases in many more.

Even UNISON's Rodney Bickerstaffe - who has kept his head well

below the parapet on earlier Labour pronouncements, and done nothing to campaign against council cuts - and teachers' leader Doug McAvoy have spoken out in opposition to Labour or the Tories phasing the increases.

But they must do more. They must spell out what workers want from a Labour government, why they pay the political levy to Labour, and that if the Blair government will not give workers what they need, there will be a fight. Inside the unions the left must prepare. That's why the link-up of union Broad Lefts (p11) is such an important initiative.

The danger is that Labour's leadership is tooling up for a massive confrontation at the same time as it prepares to gag the NEC - and possibly go for severing the link with the unions at this year's Party conference - the union leaders are keeping their heads so low they cannot see what's happening.

International solidarity boosts dockers' fight

Pete Firmin

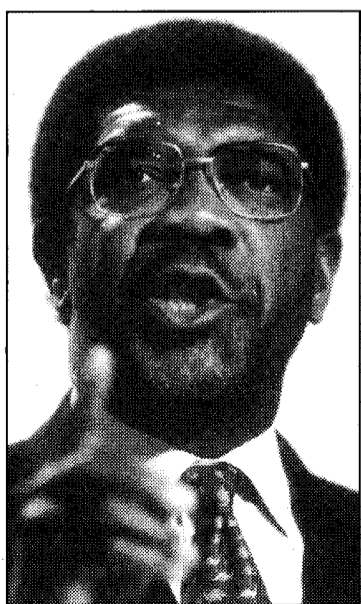
THE LATEST international day of solidarity with the Merseyside Dockworkers - January 21st - got a magnificent response from dockers around the world.

Dockworkers in 27 countries took solidarity action in 105 ports and cities. Highlights included a demonstration in Tokyo and action in all 50 Japanese ports, and total strikes of the West Coast ports of the USA - which got a 15 minute slot on CNN news.

Mexico

Port workers marched to the British Consul in Mexico and unions representing 70,000 port workers in Brazil calling for a boycott of all Liverpool ships. Strikes and boycotts took place around the world, and the dockers received 200 faxed messages of support.

In Montreal the action spread beyond the port workers to seafarers and transport workers and all Montreal ports were occupied for



No help: TGWU leader Bill Morris

24 hours. In Los Angeles all ships stopped for 24 hours with no-one crossing the picket line. In some countries support has extended beyond strike action. In Montreal all

port workers are now contributing \$5 each a week to Liverpool and support groups have been set up in Northern France.

In Liverpool itself the port cranes and gantry were occupied for 8 hours by Reclaim the Streets activists in support of the dockers. They intend to occupy the port for a solid week soon.

All support was reported to a mass meeting of 450 dockers and their supporters and has given the dockers a real boost as they enter another year of struggle.

The further extension of international action comes as a result of the pressure the Liverpool dockers and their supporters around the world have put on the International Transportworkers Federation, which is now calling for a worldwide boycott of Liverpool shipping.

This is in stark contrast to the lack of support the dockers have received from their own union, the TGWU, at home. The TGWU has previously attempted to block the ITF supporting the dockers, but

seems to have given up on that.

However, the TGWU is still pressurising the dockers to accept the Mersey Docks and Harbour Boards offer to buy out their jobs, despite the fact that the dockers have overwhelmingly rejected such offers several times.

The TGWU now wants a postal ballot, not only in complete opposition to the views of the dockers' leaders, but also to the unanimous vote of dockers' mass meetings.

"Enemies"

The TGWU has done next to nothing to publicise the dockers' struggle, and Bill Morris has gone so far as to describe those who have, notably Ken Loach and John Pilger, as 'enemies of the union'.

While vigorously pursuing their own struggle, the dockers have long gone beyond this. They have taken up the issue of state oppression against trades unionists in Turkey, thrown their support behind the European march for jobs and welfare, and are making extensive links

with other struggles in Britain.

They take Magnet strikers along to all meetings they attend and are building links with Ford Halewood workers. Now they are offering to fund the Hillingdon hospital strikers now that UNISON has shamefully withdrawn official support.

Future actions planned by the dockers include another international dockers conference, to be held in Montreal in the next few months.

They will hold a rally together with Fords, Glacier, Hillingdon and Magnet workers in Liverpool on February 8th and a rally in London on April 12th as well as a series of fund-raising benefits around the country.

Support groups here have also begun a campaign to boycott companies which use scab labour, starting with Argos, which ships to its Irish shops through Liverpool. This got off to a good start with pickets of Argos shops in Liverpool, Manchester and Southport on Saturday 25th January.

Why the Euro-March is so important

PETE BURNETT takes up the debate with the TUC unemployed centres combine

THE DECISION by the North West Regional TUC to back Euromarch 97 is a real breakthrough. At a meeting in Manchester on February 1, seventy delegates voted overwhelmingly in favour of supporting the British plans as part of a European-wide mobilisation.

Participating in the key debate, march organiser Glenn Voris said 'trade unionism does not stop for elections.'

The decision in Manchester is very significant. Local TUC support opens the way for a major appeal to unions in the region and will make winning support elsewhere more possible. It gives the lie to those who continue to claim the Euromarch is isolated from the working class movement.

It sharply focuses attention on the politics of a small grouping around the TUC unemployed centres combine who are bitterly opposed to British plans for the Euromarch.

Formed in the late 1980's to fight for a strong campaigning role for the centres, the Combine, led by the Liverpool and Newcastle centres has largely abandoned its earlier militancy. They say that there is no enthusiasm for marches and that there has been such a down-turn they are no longer possible.

More tellingly they argue that the Euromarch is a diversion from the election campaign to get Blair into No 10. They suggest a program of local 'roadshows' to be staged when the election is over.

The combine has held a series of meetings in the Midlands and



Wales to promote the roadshow idea as well as fighting a rearguard campaign to reverse support for the march, using their bureaucratic positions and special relationship with the TUC.

The most detailed defence of the Combine position is contained in an article by Kevin Flynn, Co-ordinator of the Newcastle centre against unemployment and Vice-Chair of the Combine.

Writing in the Newcastle based journal *Trade Union Review*, Flynn starts from the fact that there has been a downturn reflecting "major defeats, 20 years of mass unemployment" to argue a steady reaction in the size of and enthusiasm for marches. From this he draws the conclusion that the Euromarch campaign, at least here in Britain is utopian.

The real heart of the case comes latter. "The election" he writes "will have implications for the labour movement. Everybody in the labour movement wants the Tories out and, in the absence of anything better, Blair's New Labour in. The

trades union movement and the Labour party will put all their energies into that election and will regard anything else at best a diversion and at worst opposition". In other words, don't upset the Blair's election campaign.

However while Flynn is correct to say that there has been a downturn since the early 80s when thousands could be mobilised it certainly doesn't follow that the Euromarch is doomed to failure.

Elections

Elections are times of heightened political awareness. What better time to raise demands for full employment and an end to the social scrap-heap. What better opportunity to take forward the debate on the consequences of European integration than by engaging in a continent-wide campaign involving workers and activists in countries such as France and Greece who have taken inspiring actions over recent months.

Behind the political retreats of the combine lies the anxiety of the

Blairites and their relentless pressure to close down independent activity right across the labour movement. Such pressure must and can be resisted.

Flynn accuses the Euromarch of sectarian hostility towards "others in the movement" attacking "left and right opponents of their march proposals for being either splitters of Blairite traitors"

This is simply not true. Indeed the opposite is the case. The campaign around the marches in Britain has been marked by a continuing struggle to include all forces including the TUC and the Combine itself.

Letters were sent by march organisers to the Combine secretary, Jamshid Ahmadi inviting his organisation to participate in the recent national organising meeting in Sheffield. That meeting kept a vacant seat on the national committee for a nominee of the combine, as the previous meeting in Manchester last year had also done. Attempts to integrate support for the marches with roadshows have been rebuffed

by Combine spokespeople.

Kevin Flynn's argument that Labour Party activists and those in other parties contesting the election would regard the Euromarch as a diversion have been proved wrong by events. Constituency parties such as Leeds Central and Brent East have joined many ward branches in supporting the march.

Some are distributing literature. Many of the trade unionists and other activists who have backed the call in their organisations will be actively fighting for a Labour government.

Both the Socialist Labour Party and the Socialist Party (formerly Militant Labour), which Flynn and the Combine predicted would be hostile to the march have also registered their enthusiasm.

The attitude towards the Combine of unemployed centres remains the same. We call for them to join the Euromarch, to combine support for the march with a series of roadshows and other events instead of counterposing the two. In taking this step they would be returning to their own militant traditions.

Support for the march is building every day. Over thirty trade councils, country associations, the TUC Joint Co-ordinating Committee and twenty Labour members of Parliament in London and Strasbourg are already on board as well as countless union branches.

Deepening and widening that support is the best possible answer to the myths of Flynn's argument and give us the best chance of persuading the Combine to come on board.

Build national education week

Terry Conway

AT LEAST one primary school in seven and one secondary school is five has not enough accommodation.

£3.2 billion must be spent over the next five years just to keep existing buildings open.

Over 600 primary schools still have outside toilets

Well over 25,500 classes are taught in temporary classes every day.

For 765,000 children school is a hut or a mobile classroom.

Germany, Greece Denmark, Norway, Finland, France and Scotland all have maximum class sizes set out in law of between 25-35. England has no maximum class size.

Vouchers

Nursery vouchers will take £ an extra 20 million in administration and inspection costs - approximately 1,000 extra qualified teachers

These are just some of the rea-

sons why the Fight against Cuts in Education (FACE) campaign is organising a national education week from March 10-14.

The purpose of the week, argue Ali Clarke and Paul Graham of the Face National Committee is "to say loud and clear to all leading politicians - whoever forms the next government - that state education needs proper funding. That means more funding than it gets now. Longer or harder homework isn't enough!"

Themes

Each day of the week will have a particular theme: Monday will take up the question of buildings, Tuesday, Nursery Education and Wednesday Class Sizes. Thursday will focus on Special Educational Needs and the week will culminate on Friday with action on the general crisis of education funding.

Local activists will decide on which day(s) they can organise something - focusing on the main

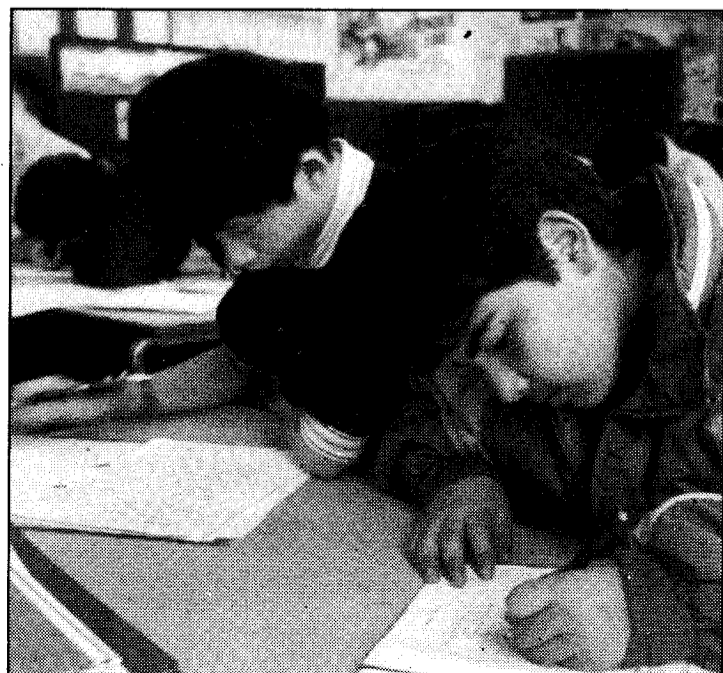
local issues of concern. Face have produced a campaign pack bursting with suggestions to help.

The campaign also hopes to organise a number of imaginative national initiatives to complement what is going on locally.

With the election campaign hotting up and politicians trying to out do each other in arguing how much they see education as a priority, it ought to be relatively easy to get publicity locally and nationally for how different the reality is in our schools.

All those committed to defend and rebuild the welfare state, never a more urgent task after Blair and Brown's latest attacks, should make sure they take part in these activities.

For future information contact Face: c/o St Giles School, Hayes Lane, Exall, Coventry CV7 9NS fax or phone 01203 311 013



Union lefts prepare the fightback

Greg Doherty

Just under 200 trade union activists from 13 different left formations within the unions met on 1 February to discuss co-ordinating a fightback against the government and employers offensive, overcoming union leaders intent on sell-outs and compromises, and building support amongst rank and file members.

Large delegations attended from the NUT, Unison and CPSA in particular. The conference heard reports from the Liverpool dockers, Hillingdon workers and from the Magnet strikers.

Etienne Adam from Tous Ensemble (the left opposition in the French CDGT union) brought greetings from French lorry drivers, and reported on their recent victory.

He explained how reps used mobile phones on the barricades and daily conferences to assist the democratic functioning of the strike, and how they had massive support from the local community, with unemployed people donating food parcels to the strikers.

Too much!

Indeed the strikers faced the problem of having too much food for them to cope with and ended up donating food to charity at the end of the strike.

He explained how their fight for a

shorter hours and retirement at 55 (many drivers are deemed unemployable after that age) not only broke from the argument of market forces but inspired widespread public support in the process.

Tory laws

Delegates attended workshops on the anti-union laws, defending the union-labour link, full employment and the minimum wage, Europe and the employers offensive, building the broad lefts and trade union democracy.

The lefts involved in the conference come from a number of widely different traditions and formations and the fact that the conference took place was in itself of great significance.

The test will come in what action it is possible for the new co-ordination to develop - with the question of the minimum wage being posed as a key priority.



Bitter lessons from long and isolated disputes like the Burnsalls strike must be taken on board

A way forward for militants

Trade Unions in the Nineties: a Strategy for socialists, by Andy Kilminster and Alan Thornett

Published by Socialist Outlook

Reviewed by Keith Sinclair

THIS PAMPHLET is directed at trade union activists. It examines and provides an analysis that explains clearly the current state of the British trade union movement.

However, the pamphlet purpose is not simply to describe. It also aims to help build a fightback against the employers and the government.

The pamphlet starts with a sober analysis of the state of the unions to-day.

The number of trade unionist has declined to 6.9 million and the number of strike days at a hundred year low. In addition, there has been an important change in the make-up of the members of the British trade unions.

Public sector workers are now far more likely to be unionised than those in the private sector. In 1994 only 23 per cent of private sector workers were unionised.

However, the pamphlet is quick to reject the idea that the days of trade unions are definitely over.

The authors explain that there are no easy answers, that those who look to the European Union as our saviour are sadly mistaken and that the ideas of the vast majority of union leaderships and the TUC offer no hope to workers whether organised or not.

The role of the anti-union laws

is outlined and its impact on unions shown clearly. The authors point out that many union leaderships assume that actions are illegal even when it is not necessarily the case. Examples where the law has been successfully defied are highlighted particularly in the Post Office.

New management

The authors point out the structural significance of the various New Management techniques that abound in the private sector and have increasingly crept into the public sector.

The need for a united front ap-

proach is spelt out. The importance of placing demands on union leaders is highlighted as is the need for a consistent fight, at all levels of the unions, against the union bureaucracy.

The struggle within unions is not helped by the poor state of the organised left within individual unions. In some, the organised left consists of a secret caucus, in others competing left formations fight for support.

Only in a handful of unions are there left organisations with a membership in the hundreds let alone the thousands we would want.

The pamphlet concludes by outlining the way forward for socialists in the unions. The need to relate to young workers and to promote the role of women and black workers is explained.

Examples of the type of campaigning which will attract members are explained, such as support for the Euro-March.

The need to build fighting, democratic, internationalist and political trade unionism is the core message of this pamphlet.

It should be essential reading for all trade unionists and socialists.

Building wider links

Socialist Outlook supporters, central to the organising of the trade union Lefts Conference held a fringe meeting with other Fourth International comrades afterwards.

Joel Lejaenic from the Ligue Communiste Revolutionaire in France and a shop steward at Air France talked about the continuing crisis of the French state as it tries to implement the Maastricht convergence criteria.

Hans Jurgen from the German RSB spoke of the growing mobilisations in Germany but argued that the unions remained much more on the defensive and under the control of the bureaucracy than in France.

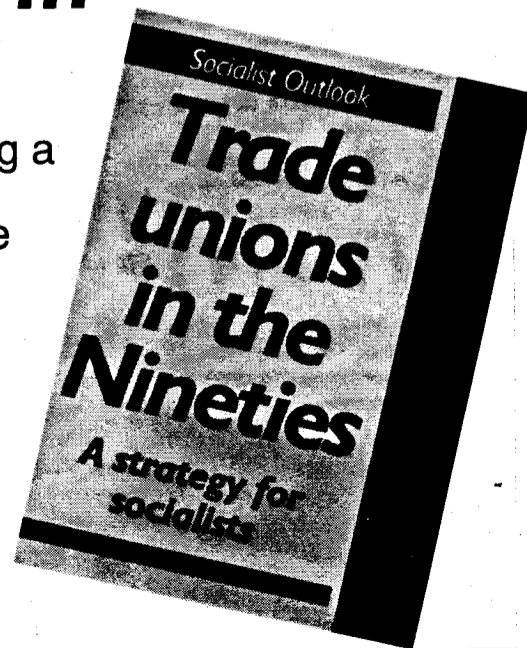
Greg Tucker of the RMT Executive spoke of the difficulties facing the union after privatisation and how railworkers had resisted attacks from their new bosses.

The discussion highlighted the different pace of the class struggle across Europe and growing efforts by the working class to coordinate Europe wide action. Such debates are not only inspiring but essential in the current period.

OUT NOW! Trade Unions in the Nineties

A new 68-page pamphlet giving a comprehensive review of the impact of the Tory years on the trade union movement and a perspective for the left in the 1990s.

£2 including post and packing
From Socialist Outlook, PO Box 1109, London N4 2UU



Teamsters' election: what Carey's victory means

Susan Moore

RON CAREY'S reelection as president of the 1.4 million-member International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT) was an important victory for rank-and-file Teamsters and for the entire American working class.

The narrow 52 to 48 per cent victory by the Carey slate over the old guard, led by James Hoffa Jr, shows that mob-connected business unionists have nevertheless retained a tight grip on a majority of the union apparatus at the local and regional level.

Unusually close attention was paid to the election by the capitalist-controlled mass media. They did their best to portray the Hoffa Jr. gang as the protagonists of tough, militant trade unionism, and the Carey faction as mere fighters against corruption. They gave credence to the Hoffa gang's claim to the militant reputation of the original James Hoffa, the candidate's late father - widely rumoured to have been murdered by the mob.

As important as the fight for union democracy is, it is the Carey side that proved in action that it represents militant trade unionism as well as reform. It is the Hoffa Jr. side that stands for subordinating workers' interests to profits, as well

as for corruption and top-down control over the rank and file.

Carey, early in his first term in office, called a national strike against the United Parcel Service (UPS) in defiance of a federal anti-strike injunction. The bureaucratic officialdom represented by Hoffa Jr. ordered UPS workers to cross their own picket lines!

The *New York Times* was at the forefront of the media campaign against Carey. Labour expert Steven Greenhouse wrote on December 22:

"Many in the teamsters' rank and file ... appreciated Mr. Carey's battle against corruption. But the [Hoffa forces] had a persuasive appeal, saying that membership and power had dwindled under Mr. Carey and contracts he negotiated were deeply flawed..."

The reporter doesn't mention that Carey left nothing on the bargaining table that he was strong enough to take and that the contract was approved overwhelmingly after a 24-day strike - the first national freight strike in 18 years. Neither does he say that most of the weakened contract language had been previously incorporated in contracts by the old guard when they were in charge prior to 1991.

Carey indicated in a recent speech that there has been a sea



change in his thinking about the Teamsters bureaucracy. He intends to open a necessary new stage in the fight to democratise the union.

In November, Carey said, "At the 1992 inauguration I offered an olive branch to the officials. It didn't work. I was wrong and I was naive. At the next inauguration, I'll be carrying a two-by-four".

Politics

Early in Carey's first term it was clear that he didn't want so-called political considerations to disrupt the orderly functioning of America's largest private sector union, now at 1.4 million members.

Then his opponents successfully defeated Carey's proposal to create a large strike fund by raising dues, publicly attacked him during national freight negotiations and scabbed on the UPS strike. Carey

then took a historic step to strip the bureaucracy's leadership of \$15 million in bloated salaries, pensions and perks.

Even so, Carey kept on or appointed many of the old guard's supporters in important positions in the apparatus. Despite this, many of Carey's appointees straddled the fence during the fierce July convention fight, disappeared into the woodwork during the bruising election campaign, or openly attacked him. One Carey appointee even joined the Hoffa slate!

Carey has encouraged the ranks to join in the union's organising drives. But he weakened his own program by leaving much of the campaign to the local union officialdom, who have a vested interest in not mobilising members.

An important next step would be the creation of an internal Team-

sters organisation of activists that can't be stymied by any official opposed to rank-and-file activism. Such an organisation must be democratic and open to all Teamsters.

When the capitalist government intervened in the Teamsters through the Racketeer-Influenced Corrupt Organisations Act, they never expected that someone like Ron Carey could win the resulting elections, overseen by federal agents. They thought a more pliable representative of the old guard would win.

Even then, the powers-that-be were not overly worried. They assumed that the new leadership would play ball with the bosses like other top AFL-CIO officials.

They soon realised they had got more than they had bargained for. Not only did the new Teamster leadership remain determined to clean up corruption in the union, but it stuck to its militant reputation.

RICO and other seemingly benign legislation, and the boss-controlled government behind it, are a real threat that Carey and other progressive forces in the unions must be prepared to confront. There's no way around it short of capitulation.

Ron Carey has shown by his record that he strives to serve his members and understands that bosses give workers only what they're strong enough to take.

He has pledged to find a way to mobilise the ranks in every local union for an effective fight in their class interests and against all opponents, inside and outside the union.

When Trotskyists led Teamster struggles

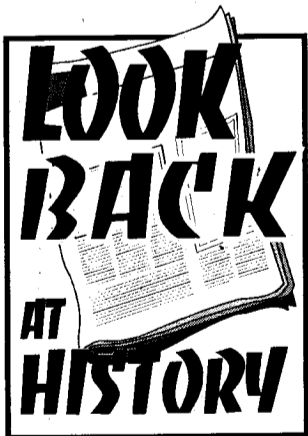
SOME OF the most dramatic and inspiring events in the history of the American trade union movement are contained in the history of the Teamsters' union from the 1930s to the mid 1940s.

Farrell Dobbs, then a member of the Trotskyist Communist League, played a leading role in those battles in 1934 and was elected as secretary-treasurer of Local 534 in 1934 in recognition of his key contribution.

As well as going on to become a leading member of the American Socialist Workers Party, Dobbs made a lasting contribution to labour history not only through his role in the battles themselves but in his graphic descriptions of them in his four powerful books: *Teamster Rebellion*, *Teamster Politics*, *Teamster Power* and *Teamster Bureaucracy*.

Dobbs tells us that the purpose of these books was "to place the reader in the position of the revolutionaries who guided the union ranks - retrospectively looking over their shoulders, so as to speak - as they assessed each successive problem and decided how to deal with it.

"My purpose was to help find clues to ways and means of transforming labor's potential class power into a dynamically active force in the continuing struggle against the capi-



talist exploiters."

In this ambitious and valuable purpose, Dobbs succeeds with his simple but graphic prose.

During the course of the three Minneapolis Teamsters strikes in 1934, martial law was declared and the National Guard sent in.

Two strikers were killed by the local police on July 20 1934, Bloody Friday. Massive protest rallies numbering up to 40,000 were regularly held. The strikers set up their own hospital, produced their own daily newspaper and dispatched flying pickets throughout the city.

Dobbs chronicles the violence of the state and the creativity of the workers. He points out that even a

commission set up by the state governor after Bloody Friday found that "Police took direct action and fired to kill...Physical safety of the police was at no time endangered...No weapons were in the possession of the picket in the trucks".

These strikes resulted in a tremendous victory for the labour movement. Together with the Toledo Auto-Lite and San Francisco Longshore strikes, the Teamsters inspired workers throughout the country.

Dobbs argues that key to what made the strike possible and led to its victory was the presence of a layer of revolutionary socialist cadres who were able to lead the dispute and play a key role in the broader local labour movement. The advantageous position of communists in Minneapolis was however unique, they were not able to repeat these successes elsewhere.

After the 1934 strikes Dobbs went on to lead a major organising campaign - the eleven state over-the-road campaign which transformed the Teamsters into the largest and most powerful union in the country, bringing in tens of thousands of new workers.

The Teamsters had to combat powerful enemies, fighting to defend their democratic rights against frame-ups by the FBI and defeating

an organising drive by the fascist Silver Shirts as well as working for independent political action in the Farmer Labor Party and helping the unemployed movement battle against the repression meted out by Roosevelt as the US prepared to enter the Second World War.

The war was to bring a decline in radicalism as the snug alliance of the union officials with Roosevelt led to support for the war and a no-strike pledge. Revolutionary socialists in the leadership of Local 544 fought to preserve their traditions of militancy and democracy against both the Tobin bureaucracy of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters and the state apparatus lead by the FBI.

The culmination of the confrontation was to come in the infamous sedition trial of 28 socialists and trade union leaders which opened on October 27 1941 and is recounted in detail in *Teamster Bureaucracy*.

At the core of that trial lay the question of the war with the union bureaucracy and the state determined to gag Local 544's opposition to the US's entry to the imperialist conflict.

While the trial was to result in guilty verdicts and prison sentences for the socialists, Dobbs argues that this was only the loss of the immedi-

ate battle.

"Our exemplary fight in Minneapolis contributed to the fundamental education of the workers. Before it was over we had forced the demagogue Roosevelt to openly display his anti-labor visage, thus exposing the capitalist government's true role in the class struggle. Similarly, the clash with Tobin laid bare the treacherous role of union bureaucrats in general since he was a typical example of the breed."

James R Hoffa, father of today's gangster, served as an organiser under Dobbs and went on to become the Teamsters general president. Hoffa said of Dobbs:

"I wouldn't agree with Farrell Dobbs political philosophy or his economic ideology, but that man had a vision that was enormously beneficial to the labour movement. Beyond any doubt, he was the master architect of the Teamsters over-the-road operations."

Today's fighters for militant action and democracy in the Teamsters and across the union movement can learn many lessons and take much inspiration from the stories told by Farrell Dobbs.

Chinese puzzle for Hong Kong workers

On July 1st, the Chinese Army (PLA) will march into Hong Kong, formally ending 156 years of British Imperial rule. MARK THOMPSON reports.

WHILE European and North American tourists are block-booking hotels to watch the spectacle, the vast majority of residents of the territory, when asked said they would not be treating the day as anything special.

While there is no love lost for the British, and a general recognition that Hong Kong is a part of China, the lack of democracy, abuses of human rights and corrupt business practices worry many people.

The Chinese government points out that the British only started experimenting with democracy in the 80's, political parties were banned before that, and Triad gangs are a serious problem in Hong Kong, not China.

Chinese official representatives and "red princes" (offspring of senior CP officials) are already omnipresent in the territory. Hong Kong businessmen know how important clientalism and corruption is in China and are busy ingratiating themselves with key bureaucrats.

For the rich in Hong Kong (with the greatest number of Rolls-Royces per head of population of any country in the world), the transition to "communism" is certainly not a problem. Under the "One Country, Two Systems" policy, the Chinese have promised not to interfere in Hong Kong's economy for 50 years.

Actually they would like the Hong Kong success story to be replicated through the rest of China, but there are some serious obstacles to this, not least that Hong Kong achieved its success by

a) being a safe haven for Chinese capitalists, and several million desperate workers, after the Communist victory in 1949,

b) being the main point of contact between China and the outside world, particularly Taiwan, after 1978.

Until recently one third of China's foreign trade went through Hong Kong.

Instead the ruling elite see China's strong state apparatus and lack of concern for human rights as useful for removing awkward trade unionists, environmental activists, etc. Just in case things don't go well, they all have foreign passports lined up, mostly for the US or Canada but also Panama or the Bahamas.

While theoretically autonomous, the "Special Administrative Region" will have less power than other major Chinese cities like Shanghai or Chengdu, where powerful party cliques are entrenched. Worryingly, Tibet is also a Special Administrative Region, and is treated quite brutally.



The same murderous regime which mounted the 1989 Beijing massacre will soon take over Hong Kong

The Chinese have already named their replacement for governor: C.H. Tung, a previously insignificant millionaire. He was "elected" by the 400 strong Preparatory Committee - all hand-picked by China. This then elected the new legislative council which will make laws, run the economy and appoint judges. It is also packed with time-servers and yes-men - much as the British ran the place.

One of its first decisions has been to reinstate the draconian colonial laws repressing the right of assembly and association that were dropped after the Tiananmen Square massacre.

Many socialists will be wondering what attitude to take to this. Obviously colonial rule cannot be defended, but can rule by the regime responsible for the massacre in Tiananmen Square be considered an improvement?

China's 1949 revolution removed a parasitic landlord class and subsequently expropriated the capitalists they were selling China to, allowing for an enormous improvement in the living standards of ordinary people.

But Mao's Communist Party never allowed the working class or the mass peasantry to feel power in their hands. The regime followed a Stalinist model, establishing a deformed workers' state, not socialism.

Power, both political and economic, was transferred from the men with money and land to those who worked their way up the Communist Party hierarchy. This is still pretty much the situation today, but it is changing rapidly.

In 1978, small-scale capitalist operations were allowed. In 1988, a law was passed ending the limits on the number of employees a capitalist could have. This sector has grown rapidly, mainly composed of foreign companies and party bosses using state capital to launch them-

selves into business.

Some villages and cooperative enterprises have struck rich by building factories and paying poor peasants from the interior to work in them. For this and other reasons, the size of the capitalist sector is difficult to determine.

One thing is sure, though: it is the capitalist sector, however it is defined, which is booming, not the state sector, and power goes to those with the money.

It may be some time before China is able to meet the entry criteria for the WTO because of its state support for industry and protectionist measures (although Japan joined its predecessor, GATT in the 1950's in a similar situation), and any attempt to rush things would result in massive social destabilisation.

But this does not mean it won't happen - the situation is like Russia, where, despite the desire for capitalism by the rulers, it won't happen because there is no capital. Investment capital is pouring into China, mainly from Hong Kong, Taiwan, Korea and Japan.

The domestic stock market is rapidly expanding, and in the Shanghai and Canton areas (100 million people), the old state industries are marginal. It is the old industries in the North which are the obstacle, like Beijing Steel, which employs 100,000 people in a company town, providing schools and health care.

The booming "new" industrial regions of the southern and central coastal areas are holding back their taxes, preventing restructuring or investment in new technology in the north. The government knows it has to stop subsidising loss-making industries, but is unwilling to do it directly.

Many workers are officially "on extended holiday", but spend all day

trying to sell a few shabby consumer goods in the market. Others move to where the work is - it is estimated there are 150 million migrant workers in China.

There was a wave of trade union militancy in the late 1980's, but this was crushed in Tiananmen Square. Now even individual activists who have been silent for years are repeatedly imprisoned. Most are in exile.

While the Stalinist faction in the CP, which opposes the marketisation and privatisation of the economy, could make trouble, they are unlikely to make a bid for power unless the economy stagnates and massive social unrest arises.

The level of investment in China by Hong Kong capitalists has been estimated at US\$80 billion (of which 40% comes from local subsidiaries of foreign multinationals) and it is thought they employ 4 mil-

lion Chinese workers and represent 20% of China's GDP.

In the other direction, Chinese enterprises and state holdings have invested US\$42.5 billion in Hong Kong

In 1999 Macau, a Portuguese enclave across the Pearl River delta, returns to China after 400 years. The Chinese government has made it clear they think the reunification of the Chinese family should be made complete with the return of Taiwan, and they are prepared to invade if necessary.

Leaders of the Democratic Party in Hong Kong (which won over half the directly elected seats) have promised civil disobedience to the new laws. While this party includes some who were content to be appointed legislators under the old system, it also includes some radical activists who have already come into conflict with the ruling elite.

To their left, and cooperating on many issues, are small groups of feminists, environmentalists and supporters of the Fourth International. These people will need our support in the coming years.

To the bureaucrats and new rich in China, everything must appear rosy. But all the contradictions and tensions which produced Tiananmen Square remain, and as class distinctions become more apparent in the big cities, a new militancy is forming, and it will eventually break out in the form of strikes.

Many pundits will say the people of Hong Kong aren't interested in politics, just business, but in and a 1989 one million people demonstrated in support of the students in Tiananmen Square, in a country of just over 5 million.

The workers of Hong Kong have a history of sporadic but often violent strikes, and a well educated, politically aware generation has grown up and expects to keep all its current freedoms. The coming period is likely to be an interesting one.

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Croatia protests rock Tudjman

Geoff Ryan

The western media has focused on demonstrations in Serbia against Milosevic's electoral fraud. Protests in Croatia against the authoritarian regime of Franjo Tudjman have largely been ignored - a good indication of the importance the west attaches to Tudjman to guarantee 'stability' in former Yugoslavia.

The similarity between the issues that have led to protests in Croatia and Serbia is striking. Tudjman too has refused to recognise election results. In 1995 in the local elections opposition parties won in all the major towns and cities of Croatia.

Nominations

For over a year Tudjman has refused to accept any of the opposition's nominations for mayor of Zagreb. In fact he attempted to impose a member of his own HDZ party as mayor but had to back down when she was charged with corruption.

In the past Tudjman has attempted to close down independent radio stations, particularly in the region around Rijeka where the opposition is strong, and has harassed the *Feral Tribune* newspaper.

Faced with growing protests about electoral fraud in November of last year Tudjman again attempted to close radio stations in several cities. The closure of Zagreb's Radio 101 brought 100,000 people out on to the streets. Like Milosevic, Tudjman was forced to back down. And like Milosevic he was also unable to prevent news of protests being broadcast via the Internet.

There is also a similarity in those taking part in the protests. In Croatia, as in Serbia, opposition in the streets has come largely from students and the intelligentsia. The working class has so far remained



Guns and nationalist bigotry are the main props of the Croatian regime

largely on the side-lines. In Croatia, where independent unions are much stronger, the potential for working class action is much greater.

The Croatian opposition does not raise any demands for the right of Serbs expelled from the Krajina to return. Nor are they likely to hand over indicted war criminals who are protected by Tudjman.

By and large they maintain silence over the fate of Croatia's Serbs or the role of Croat forces in Bosnia. The failings of the Croatian opposition to confront the nationalism of their own state mirrors that of their counterparts in Serbia.

Although the problems con-

fronting Tudjman are similar to those facing Milosevic and the methods used to deal with them are virtually identical, there are important differences.

Tudjman, unlike Milosevic, is a convinced nationalist. He interferes in every aspect of Croatian cultural life. Whether it's rewriting history, renaming streets or designing the strip for the Croatian national football team, Tudjman is involved. In particular he has claimed that Croatia is a distinct language and has imposed the use of medieval terms in place of supposedly 'Serb' words.

Despite promises nothing has been done to encourage the return

to Croatia of Serbs who fled when the Croatian army recaptured the Krajina region in the summer of 1995. Tudjman's attempts to create an ethnically and culturally pure Croatian state are hardly likely to persuade Serbs that they can return.

The issue of Bosnia has, however, been used by Tudjman in a totally different way. While Milosevic has abandoned the Bosnian Serbs, Tudjman has strengthened his links with his Bosnian Croat supporters.

He attempted to bolster electoral support by giving Bosnian Croats the right to vote in Croatian elections and making Bosnia a central issue. Milosevic, by contrast, tried

to prevent Bosnia being an election issue and refused to allow Bosnian Serbs a vote in Serbian elections.

Despite the Dayton accords and the Muslim-Croat 'entity' in Bosnia, Tudjman has refused to dismantle the structures of Hercegovina, which continues to operate as an independent 'statelet' within Bosnia.

Reunification

In Mostar Tudjman's supporters refuse to implement the Dayton accords - which require the reunification of the city. HDZ officials in west Mostar continue to expel Muslims in a drive to create an ethnically pure west Mostar. At best Tudjman does nothing to stop this: more likely it is actively encouraged from Zagreb.

Despite these important differences Tudjman has supported Milosevic against protests in Serbia. The official line from Zagreb is that the anti-Milosevic campaign is orchestrated by the west. Once Milosevic goes, the west will turn its attention on destabilising Croatia.

Tudjman knows that to a large extent his regime depends on Milosevic maintaining power in Serbia. Each needs the other as a potential 'bogeyman' that can be used to divert protests at home.

However, the situation in Croatia is complicated by Tudjman's serious illness - he has cancer. The ultra-nationalist Gojko Susak, a former businessman in Canada and the man previously thought most likely to succeed Tudjman has also been seriously ill. Events in Serbia, therefore, are exacerbating an already serious crisis within Croatia's ruling party.

It is highly unlikely Franjo Tudjman will remain in power until 1997. The only question is whether cancer or mass protest finishes him off first.

Bulgarian right takes populist revenge

OPPOSITION demonstrators have forced the ruling Bulgarian Socialist Party to bring forward the next elections. This is however no victory for the working people or for the fight for democracy. DUNCAN CHAPPLE reports

The right-wing Union of Democratic Forces copied the recent tactic of the Serbian opposition's demonstrations outside parliament. But in contrast to the ruling Serbian party's rigging of recent local elections, the coalition led by the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP) was democratically elected.

Despite its "socialist" label the BSP follows IMF plans for capitalist restoration. The UDF, traditionally based on the middle class, places more emphasis on handing land and property back to the descendants of pre-war capitalists and landowners.

It gained a parliamentary majority in 1991 having won the powerful position of president the year before. However its preoccupation with restoring land, homes and factories to the old ruling class meant it was indifferent to the needs of society and the economy. Following a vote of no confidence in 1992, the UDF were replaced by a broadly-supported technocratic "government of experts".

Attempting to press ahead with austerity policies and privatisations, the new government met with strong working class resistance. By 1994 the rate of inflation was 96 per cent and unemployment hit 13 per cent. Over 800,000 took part in four days of general strike action led by the CITUB union federation.

As the crisis developed the UDF started to boycott the parliament, believing it could distance itself from the crisis. The UDF-backed President, Zhelyu Zhelev started to frustrate the government's plans and in September 1994 it resigned.

New elections led to a three-party coalition comprising the Agrarian Party, Ecoglasnost, and the BSP as the senior partner. The new government attempted to pursue the rapid privatisation projects demanded by Bulgaria's western creditors.

Centre for privatisation

Following the visit of a top level US team, headed by President Clinton, early in 1995, the BSP announced the creation of a "socially-oriented market economy". A "Centre for Mass Privatisation" began to organise a Czech-style giveaway of state assets with the government retaining a third of all shares. Simultaneously spending on defence was increased and social spending cut.

The BSP's initial success in developing the capitalist sector was not inconsiderable. During 1995 growth increased by 50 per cent; exports grew by 30 per cent while un-

employment fell by 18 per cent. But pro-US forces were alarmed when the BSP began to move away from the goals of the west and develop stronger links with other Eastern economies. The coalition developed plans for an oil pipeline to the east and for co-ordinated defence production with Russia.

The popularity of these policies was confirmed in 1995 with a resounding victory for the BSP in local mayoral elections. Out of the 255 mayors elected, 195 were BSP. The UDF won only 26 positions but this included the capital, Sofia.

The confidence of the people has not been shared by Western capitalism. Aid has been cut from 55.6 per cent of imports in 1994 to 3.7 per cent this year. Inflation soared in 1996 as the economic crisis deepened. When the IMF refused aid the coalition was forced to increase the pace of unpopular privatisation and closure plans. As a result the BSP's support fell away.

In December last year the UDF retained the presidency with a

new candidate, Peter Stoyanov. In the BSP discontent has come to a head. A triumphant opposition allied to the trade unions is preparing to stand in parliamentary elections scheduled for next year.

The UDF's presidential victory allowed it to build January's demonstrations, calling for the BSP-led coalition to resign. In all likelihood the 60 per cent vote for the UDF in the presidential elections does not indicate popular support for its middle-class base. Faced with the BSP's austerity politics the workers and farmers have turned to the only credible alternative. However a UDF government could only be worse.

Bulgarian trade union opposition needs to stand firmly against the privatisations and prevent workers being ejected from their homes, factories and farms. By leading the struggle against this legal theft and against the pro-capitalist politicians, the new left can win majority support.

Can playing the Kosovo card rescue beleaguered Milosevic?

Geoff Ryan

THE WHEEL has come full circle. In 1985 the Serbian Academy of Art and Sciences published its virulently nationalist Memorandum alleging oppression of Serbs in Kosovo by the Albanian majority.

These fictitious claims were used by Slobodan Milosevic to fight his way to the leadership of the then League of Communists of Serbia on a nationalist programme. The Academy has now become the latest of his erstwhile allies to dump him.

In March 1991 Borisav Jovic, then President of the 8 person Presidency of Yugoslavia, browbeat the other members into sending tanks on to the streets of Belgrade to crush student protests against Milosevic. Today the army refuses to suppress demonstrations.

Denounced

Late in January 1997 Jovic denounced Milosevic's undemocratic methods within the ruling Serbian Socialist Party (SPS) and threatened to form a rival party of 'the left'.

Those who saw the television series 'The Death of Yugoslavia' will remember that Jovic managed to make Milosevic seem a reasonable human being. His 'left' credentials are thoroughly bogus. Workers throughout the former Yugoslavia certainly have nothing to gain from him.

His threat to form a new party is, however, a recognition that Milosevic's time is running out. In new elections Jovic would quite possibly beat the SPS, thereby hastening Milosevic's departure.

Whether or not Jovic could find common cause with Zajedno, the motley coalition of liberals and Serb nationalists leading the current protests, is another matter. Zajedno leader Vuk Draskovic in particular may be less than enthusiastic about welcoming the man who had him severely beaten and then thrown into jail by troops unleashed on the streets of Belgrade in March 1991.

Recognising he is under pressure, Milosevic is returning to the issue that first gained him power - anti-Albanian chauvinism. Albanians have been blamed by state run television for fomenting the current protests. On January 16 a car bomb seriously



injured Radivoje Papovic, Serb chancellor of the university of Pristina in Kosovo. The Serb chauffeur was also injured.

Milosevic and his henchmen in Kosovo have blamed the bombing on Albanians fighting for independence. The sophisticated nature of the remote controlled bomb suggests, however, that it may have been planted by Milosevic supporters in the Kosovo police.

Up until recently most Kosovo Albanians have followed a policy of peaceful resistance to Serb domination. They have organised their own schools, hospitals, welfare services independently of the Serb authorities. They do not challenge Serb rule, they simply ignore it.

More militant

However, more militant currents are emerging in Kosovo, determined to put an end to Serb rule. Support

for them is growing and they are expected to win a majority in the elections for Kosovo Albanians planned for May.

The rise in tension gives Milosevic perhaps his last chance of survival, though it also entails enormous risks. Anti-Albanian sentiment remains strong in Serbia - not least among those protesting against Milosevic. However war weariness is also strong. War in Kosovo would almost certainly lead to new economic sanctions against Serbia, exacerbating already bleak economic problems.

Milosevic has had to down play nationalism and increase 'socialist' rhetoric to retain the passive allegiance of Serbia's working class. His already far from successful efforts at ensuring workers are paid regularly would be undermined by a new war.

On the other hand war in Kosovo could possibly help to isolate Zajedno. The opposition has certainly been imaginative in finding ways to get around Milosevic's ban on demonstrations: convoys of cars, all breaking down at the same time; dog owners all taking their pets for a walk in the same place. A religious procession on the Serbian Orthodox

Christmas Eve attracted over 500,000 people - the biggest protest so far.

Despite determination and imagination Zajedno have still not attracted active support from the working class or peasantry. Protests remain dominated by students and intellectuals.

This lack of working class and peasant support may push Milosevic into a gamble in Kosovo.

War in Kosovo would also help push Vojislav Seselj and Arkan off the fence. In last November's elections Seselj's Serbian Radical Party won 18 percent of the votes. Seselj was elected mayor of the Belgrade suburb of Zemun. Significantly his election result was not challenged.

Both have remained aloof from the protests, as Jean Marie Le Pen discovered on a recent visit to congratulate Seselj on the role he (erroneously) believed his fellow extreme right-winger was playing.

Le Pen's visit was all the more strange since he supported extreme right-wing Croat militias in Croatia while Seselj's (and Arkan's) paramilitaries were conducted a reign of terror against Croats.

Arkan and Seselj are undoubtedly

enjoying Milosevic's predicament - not least since Mirjana Markovic (Milosevic's wife) has been using the privileged position of her tiny United Yugoslav Left (JUL) to grab some of the profits from their trading interests.

They also harbour grudges against Milosevic for being pushed out of coalitions with the SPS when Milosevic decided he no longer needed their support.

A return to anti-Albanian campaigns could see Seselj and Arkan back in favour, with their paramilitary groupings once again engaged in the terrorist activities they 'previously practised in Croatia and Bosnia. It may take the steam out of anti-Milosevic protests.

However this would be a last desperate gamble for Milosevic. War in Kosovo may not attract support. Seselj and Arkan are by no means reliable allies. They may decide to throw in their lot with Zajedno, who are more consistent nationalists.

That is no doubt why Milosevic has already arranged a bolt-hole in Greece and reportedly transferred large amounts of stolen cash out of Serbia.

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Albania regime lashes out at left parties

PRESIDENT Sali Berisha has launched a crackdown on Albania's left opposition parties as his response to the growing protests that have wracked the country.

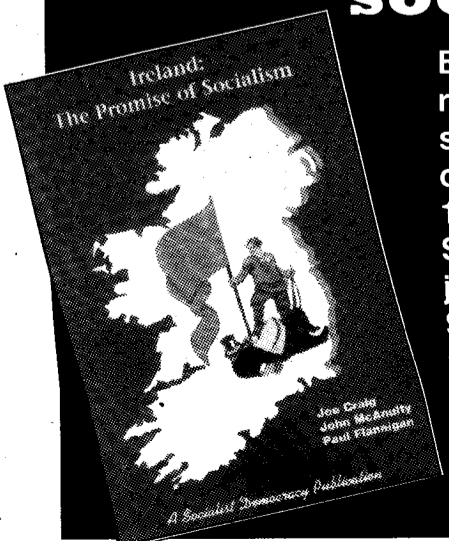
The general secretary of the Socialist Party, the leader of the Social Democrats and a top leader of the Democratic Alliance were all arrested as the government took sweeping powers to use the army to put down demonstrations and attempted to blame "red terror" for fomenting the protests.

As an after-thought, the ruling Democratic Party pushed through legislation banning the pyramid savings schemes whose collapse has triggered the mass protests, with hundreds of thousands facing the loss of

their hard-currency savings.

Two pyramid scheme organisers have been arrested, and future schemes will lay their organisers open to 20 years in jail. But the question on the lips of protestors is how such a massive financial scam, embracing an estimated \$250 million - one eighth of Albania's 1995 GDP - could have flourished without government connivance in one of the most repressive regimes.

So massive is the crisis, with so many individuals demanding compensation, that to return the lost savings could trigger the total collapse of the economy.



At the sharp end

Women are chief victims of assault on Welfare State

**Gill Lee, President
Lewisham NUT
(personal capacity)**

AS THE ELECTION campaign continues, Labour and the Tories try to outdo each other in attacking the welfare state. Each week brings a new announcement of how they will attack welfare in a bid to keep public spending in check.

First we had John Major's January speeches attacking the 'nanny state'. These were quickly followed by Brown's announcement that an incoming Labour government would freeze public spending for at least the first two years of its administration because it has "run out of control". In an echo of Brown's explanation that he would not engage in redistributive taxation of the rich "because of the value I place on work", Blair called four days later for an end to the 'passive' welfare state and unveiled plans to get single mothers off benefit and into work.

The Tories have unleashed such a crisis within the education, health, and social security systems that a radical programme of investment and rebuilding, and a massive change in how welfare is delivered is needed to rescue millions of working class people from misery.

There is nothing to suggest that Labour's pledge on spending will be quickly reversed in office - despite the pressure from public sector workers that will surely emerge.

Labour's policy of entering the European Monetary Union will tie it to the Maastricht convergence criteria that limit the public sector deficit (the excess of public spending over income) to just 3 per cent and accumulated debt to 60 per cent of GDP. Attempts by other European Governments to prepare for EMU have led to huge attacks on the welfare state across Europe (see extensive coverage in last issue of *Socialist Outlook*).

Alliance

Defence of the welfare state must not be left to those who work in it, or to local struggles of those who use its separate services. Only the broadest possible alliances of the working class and the oppressed - welfare state users and welfare state workers, the unions and unorganised workers - will be sufficient to defend the welfare state from the forces united to destroy it.

The increasingly bipartisan development of family policy is tied into the assault on the welfare state. One on the one hand this aims to buttress the institution of the family, while blaming individual families - rather than the way society is organised - for social problems.

The post-war welfare state represented some partial 'socialisation' of the burden of families. A huge burden of care was lifted out of the private sphere of the family and off the shoulders of individual women and shifted into the public arena.

Workers - often women - were then paid to do what had previously



Their jobs and services: her future. The welfare state is vital to all women.

been done for free in the home. Release from the overwhelming responsibility for the private care of the elderly, children, those who were sick or had disabilities, allowed a whole generation of women to get jobs and attain a measure of economic independence.

From the increased confidence and combativity of a generation of women in work and higher education, the women's liberation movement of the 60s and 70s was born. In combination with a labour movement that it had awakened to women's interests, this movement won such victories as the Equal Pay Act, the Sex Discrimination Act, the Abortion Act and a whole raft of

other equal opportunity legislation.

The offensive against the welfare state is in a very direct way an offensive against women. It seeks to push the burden of care back into the private realm of the family, and onto women's shoulders. It also attacks women as a very central part of the workforce of the welfare state.

The offensive against the welfare state has been carried out in a myriad of different ways. The government has imposed massive cuts in public funding and introduced privatisation.

They have changed the way revenue is collected to construct a more direct link between local levels of service and local revenues (e.g. mar-

ketisation in the NHS, Local Management of Schools in the education sector).

New management techniques have been brought into the public sector. The whole idea of public provision has come increasingly under attack and local authorities are increasingly the enabling authorities for private companies to find clients. Many of these changes are carried out in the name of so-called 'client choice'.

Women have been particularly affected by both as workers in the welfare sector and as users of the welfare state.

Cuts in central funding have led to massive job losses and cuts in services in education, health and social services. Labour local authorities that scorned Liverpool and Lambeth Councils for confronting the Tories and preferred the politics of "deficit budgeting", and then "the dented shield" have ended up imposing massive cuts on the Tories' behalf.

Devastating

Kent county's Labour and Liberal Democrat coalition faces a £79 million shortfall in its funds. In January it formulated its solution: raising charges for domiciliary services by up to 400 per cent, closing ten old peoples' homes and cutting eighteen hundred and two thousand jobs. "The impact of the savings which I recommend in this paper will be devastating to the lives of many of the department's service users and their families" said Kent's director of social services.

Kent also is pre-empting the Tories' plans to force councils to contract out most social services on the basis that they can be more cheaply provided for by private companies. Stephen Dorrell, increasingly to the fore as a spokesperson for the Tory party, has made clear that he sees the proper job of local council social services departments as commissioning social care not delivering it. He has said that the government's new White Paper may even propose that all 32,000 field social workers and managers be privatised.

Combined with their recent announcement that they will effectively abolish local education authorities and end local control of schools, the Tories intend for local authorities to be left with little direct role in service delivery and instead be reduced almost solely to a role as commissioners of services provided by private companies.

Low pay

Privatisation is cheap because the service is often poor and the workers, who are often on temporary or part time contracts, are poorly paid. By forcing the burden of care back onto the family, the offensive against the welfare state in itself creates the conditions for workers to be super-exploited in this way.

One third of Europe's part time workers are British and the vast majority of those are women. Women often work part time because it is the only way in which they can meet the demands of the family and child care in particular.

Nursery provision in Britain is among the worst in Europe and is of course itself a target of privatisation through the government's nursery voucher scheme.

Cuts in central funding have been accompanied by increased marketisation and competition within and between services for a slice of an ever diminishing cake. Even once the slices have been allocated, competition continues - between wages and job losses, and between conditions for remaining employees and spending on other resources. In announcing that any increased pay in the public sector would have to be funded through efficiency savings, Labour is set to continue this policy.

Privatisation, fragmentation of services and competition have an impact on the ability of workers to organise, creating smaller and separated workforces.

This has weakened union organisation in many areas, for example the destruction of the Inner London Teachers' Association with the breakup of ILEA, and the widespread contracting out of NHS support services to private companies (such as at Hillingdon Hospital).

Union density (the proportion of a given workforce that is unionised) is lower among private sector workers than among those in the public sector, among part timers rather than full timers, among women rather than men.

Slow unions

Unions have been slow to respond to the changes in the workforce, although some recent studies (eg Labour Research Department June 1996) suggest that union density is falling more quickly in the more traditional areas than in these 'new' areas of unionisation.

Another major area of attack on welfare state workers has been through the extension of new management techniques. A number of Labour councils, including Lewisham, have brought in 'Capability' procedures that allow workers to be sacked after only a few weeks of genuine sickness absence.

Clearly capability procedures hit women, who tend to have higher rates of absence, harder than men. 'Appraisal' and individual pay bargaining may also open women up to sexual harassment or to the perception by fellow workers that sexual favours are the basis for wage increases.

In the name of 'flexibility' workers are required to be available for work at all times, day or night, weekdays or weekends.

'Care in the community' has been overwhelmingly an excuse for a reduction in services to those in need of them and for job cuts. It has also meant the imposition on health care workers, social services personnel and teachers of the need for 'multi-skilling' - often without any extra training.

For example teachers are now meant to meet the educational needs of a much broader range of pupils than would previously have been the case. General assistants have replaced individual support teachers at the same time as the needs of

pupils in main stream schooling are more specialised with the closure of special units in the name of 'integration'. All this adds to the stress experienced by care workers who feel they cannot deliver the service users require.

Increased levels of stress among care workers have been found in poorly publicised TUC surveys. For example among kitchen staff and home helps, predominantly women, one in three reported feeling worn out and harassed and suffering sleep deprivation and were very keen to leave their jobs if alternative employment was available. (Survey conducted for UNISON by Professor Tom Cox, director of the Centre for Organisational Health and Development).

Retirement

Teachers have lobbied and demonstrated in their thousands in defence of their right to early retirement. Education is the second most stressful sector of employment after the voluntary sector, according to a TUC survey, and this has been made hugely worse by the Tories educational reforms and the general levels of deprivation experienced by many pupils as a result of Tory social policies.

In 1978 26 per cent of teachers took early retirement while 73 per cent continued teaching until they were sixty. By 1996 these proportions had almost completely reversed - with 80 per cent of teachers retiring early - 30 per cent on the grounds of ill-health.

The drive for a 'market' oriented service, strict budgets and harsher management regimes hits particularly hard workers, such as teachers, whose training and ethos is based on the quality of the service they offer. Labour's announcement that it will channel money from the assisted places scheme to reduce class sizes for five and six year olds will do nothing to change the overall conditions for education workers.

As the Labour leader of Gloucestershire council said in response to Brown's announcement: "We need millions of pounds just to fix leaky roofs and deficient school buildings". An end to teachers' ability to get early retirement is expected by many to be likely to lead, among other things, to increased numbers being sacked through capability procedures, or dying on the job before they can claim their pension.

Pensions have themselves been the focus of massive cuts, both through the raising of women's pensionable age to 65, and through breaking the link with retail prices. The position of older women will also worsen as the switch in pensioners' income between state and occupational pensions increases, since a smaller percentage of women have occupational pensions, even where they work.

Nearly 90 per cent of all full time male workers are in pension schemes, but only 77 per cent of full time women, who make up just over half of all women workers.

Poverty in old age has been rein-

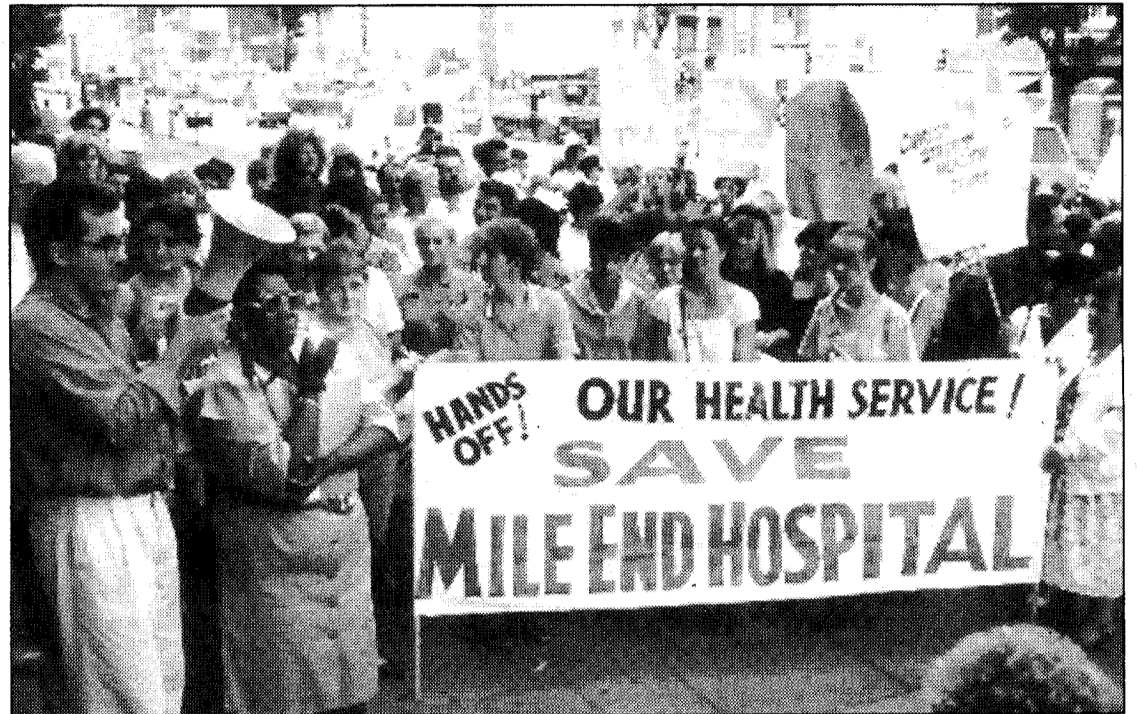
forced by increased means testing in benefits (700,000 pensioners don't claim the means-tested benefits to which they are entitled) and cuts and privatisation in the NHS. Hundreds of thousands of pensioners have been forced to sell their homes to afford private nursing homes while the period spent in an NHS hospital before your pension is reduced has been cut from six weeks to three.

Discharged

"Stabilised" patients are increasingly discharged, to rely on means-tested social services for which fees are charged - like home helps.

The replacement of contribution based benefits by means tested benefits presents a huge potential saving to those who want to impose cuts on the welfare state. The Job Seekers Allowance replaces the second six months of traditional unemployment benefit with a means tested benefit and is therefore expected to 'save' some £400 million in the first two years.

Claimants with partners may lose benefit completely, and it is expected to cut the official unemployment count by tens of thousands in the first year. Women will lose out as their partners are more likely to be in work, and women with children will find it harder to show they have been actively seeking work and



Women have consistently been at the forefront of struggles defending health and welfare services

work, the majority of women now do paid work for a substantial part of their lives, though often in part time or temporary jobs.

Women increasingly work even when they have dependent children rather than just before starting their families or after their children have

Labour has given up any realistic chance of changing this growing social inequality in the next period.

Only a massive scheme of public works which pay people a decent wage for building and running hospitals, schools and homes could offer an alternative means of redis-

Single mothers are blamed as 'feckless', the long term unemployed are 'work shy'. Blair tells us that "there will be no option of a life permanently on full benefit". Those parents unable to cope in a situation of dire social crisis are blamed for being bad parents.

In responding to the offensive against the welfare state and therefore against women, socialists have to defend individual families from being scapegoated for the problems created by the way society is organised.

At the same time we must not forget that the family is the site of women's oppression because it privatises the care of workers and the raising of children and relies on women's unpaid and 'hidden' work to do so. The only alternative for working class people to this traditional form of the family is for society itself to take on the work collectively.

The demands of the Women's Liberation movement around issues such as free 24 hour nurseries, free abortion on demand, equal pay and financial independence remain as relevant today as when they were first raised in the 1960s. We need to fight to rebuild the welfare state and transform it so that it is controlled by all those who work in it and use it.

Europe-wide

The stakes are high in the battle over the welfare state. Across Europe the organised working class has begun to take up the fight through strikes, demonstrations, road blocks, and occupations.

In Britain the legacy of eighteen years of Tory attacks, the



Birmingham's Labour council has been one of the first to bring in a new sickness policy which allows management to sack workers off sick. UNISON members registered their response with strike action.

that they are immediately able to take any offered.

As the welfare state is being dismantled, care is supposedly pushed back into a family which is increasingly unable to play the role both the Tories and Labour think it should. In Britain 6.8 million people are carers for relatives or friends.

Seventeen per cent of women are carers, and the estimated savings to the state of that unpaid caring is £24 billion, all of which represents unpaid wages to the working class. Cuts in health and social service care mean a disproportionate weight being placed on women who are expected to take on, unpaid, the 'caring' role the state is no longer willing to perform.

But the notion of the family that could take on the burden of all this unpaid caring is one that no longer fits reality. Rather than the Tories' ideal in which women stay at home to do the caring while men go out to

left home.

Changing patterns in industry and the changing organisation of employment mean that full time, permanent and male jobs are being replaced by part time, temporary and female jobs. Half of all women now do paid work, 8-per cent more work full time than in 1987, while male full time employment has fallen by 2 per cent.

Unemployed

Young men tend to be unemployed for longer than young women while overall unemployment rates hide huge regional disparities.

For example unemployment is 30 per cent in Newham, but only 3 per cent in Oxfordshire. One in five families have no-one earning - three times as many as in 1975. A growing percentage of families have both parents working, and one fifth of all full time employees work more than 48 hours per week.

While some of the media have reported this as the contrast between the 'time poor' and 'the money poor' many working class families are in fact both. Two million children in Britain are estimated (by *The Observer* January 19) to be malnourished, and as a result underweight and below average height.

Nearly ten million people are on income support while one quarter of the population live on incomes below half the national average. By giving up the redistributive power of changes in direct taxation levels,

tribution.

Family

Women, as those with the main responsibility for taking care of the family and children are those who bear the brunt of coping with the effects of poverty and stress. Cuts in welfare push back onto a fragmented and crisis-ridden family a caring role it is no longer able to perform and threaten women who are already working in poorly paid 'flexible' jobs with an increased burden of care.

When 'the family' is shown to be unable to cope with the pressures of the work its members have to endure and the extra burden arising from cuts in welfare, it is the individual family that is blamed.

Fight back against anti-abortion bigots

As the General Election draws ever nearer with the prospect of a significant number of anti-abortion candidates, the need to support the work of the National Abortion Campaign is extremely urgent.

The new Pro Life Alliance, funded by Harrod's owner Mohamed Al Fayed is threatening to field 50 candidates against pro-choice opponents and show a late term abortion in their party political broadcast.

Join NAC as an individual, and raise affiliation in your Trade Union and Labour Party.

For further information contact: NAC, The Print House, 18 Ashwin Street, London E8 3DL. Tel 0171 923 4976. Fax 0171 923 4979

NHS chiefs cut abortion rights

WOMEN in Enfield & Haringey face new obstacles in obtaining an abortion under the NHS. The Health Authority, facing a growing cash shortfall, has decided to peg the abortion services budget at £600,000, despite growing numbers of women seeking help.

As a result they are restricting services to just 45 terminations a week, and urging GPs to tell patients of private services instead. This rationing of services to desperate women is to be enforced by the application of strict new criteria designed to exclude many from NHS treatment.

In Cambridge & Huntingdon, too, health chiefs are seeking to pressure more women into obtaining abortions privately, to cut NHS spending.



George's fantasy adventure. As Carla and George become more involved following her suicide attempt, George persuades her that the only way she can achieve peace of mind is to return to Nicaragua and find the elusive Antonio, her former lover about whom she has repeated nightmares.

It was in this section of the film that I expected political incisiveness from Loach. Carla's character has already told us of her dedication to the revolution, and certainly as we move to Nicaragua, we see the barbarity of the Contras tearing down the gains the Sandinistas had fought for so courageously.

In one of the strongest scenes, ex-CIA man turned human rights worker, Bradley, explains to George that the devastation he has just witnessed to the Carla's family's village was aided by the CIA. He shows George a satellite picture taken from the pocket of a dead Contra, marking the local schools and health centre - all of which were destroyed in the assault.

While this is powerful - and accurate stuff, the film stops short. It has been criticised elsewhere as overly polemical, but this is to miss the point. As in *Land and Freedom*, Loach is strong in showing how ordinary people can and do organise and sacrifice much to combat oppression.

However, part of the significance of the previous film was to show the political debates and weaknesses amongst those who fought Franco in a graphic and accessible way.

Carla's Song has no answers for those who ask why the Sandinistas are no longer in power other than to point to the undoubtedly important role of American imperialism.

In ducking any analysis of the politics of the revolution, he weakens the film - and ironically leaves it more open to accusations of being overly polemical.

Whatever its failures, *Carla's Song* remains a gripping, moving and fascinating film. It is packed with scenes of great tenderness and sensuality and shots of magnificent scenery which enhance the mood of the action.

While not matching the promise of *Land and Freedom*, it remains one of the most politically powerful films available. The sight of George driving the stolen number 72 bus up winding country lanes to Ben Lomond will stay with me for a very long time, and make me smile.

Terry Conway reviews KEN LOACH's new film Carla's Song

Land and Freedom is a tough act to follow even for as experienced a director and socialist as Ken Loach. His latest offering, *Carla's Song* is certainly worth seeing though it lacks some of the political sharpness of *Land and Freedom*.

The film opens in Glasgow where we meet George, a young, chirpy and impetuous bus driver. When George rants at the authoritarian inspector who tries to have Carla arrested for travelling without a ticket, his stance seems as much for his own satisfaction as in defence of this attractive stranger.

When George is suspended from work for swearing at the inspector, he responds to his bosses query as to whether he wants his job by saying that he needs it. His actions then and later suggest that he has little thought for his own future.

Coincidence is rife in this section of the film. Particularly difficult to swallow is the ease with which, soon after their first meeting, Carla happens to stumble across George mending his bike outside the block of flats where he

The dream of freedom

lives with his family. There is no indication that she had any clues to where he might live. Indeed she does not indicate that she was looking for him, though she then presents him with a neatly wrapped thank-you present.

We are not however surprised when George rapidly falls for Carla and ditches fiancée Maureen. Oyanka Cabezas gives an enthralling performance as Carla, alone in Glasgow and deeply distressed and traumatised by her experiences in war-torn Nicaragua.

Post traumatic stress disorder is usually discussed in relation to male combatants in wars. Loach chooses here to look at the effects

on a woman. Carla is a partisan in the conflict, a strong supporter of the Nicaraguan revolution, who has suffered herself, but perhaps more importantly witnessed hideous acts being carried out on her then partner, Antonio.

Loach has sometimes been criticised for his portrayals of women and certainly despite her centrality to the film, Carla doesn't break the mould. When Carla and George travel to Nicaragua in the second half of the film we are struck by the warmth of her connection with her female family and friends "not least in the wonderfully tangible shots of their first embraces.

While still in Glasgow, we are

treated to one important glimpse of a strong female character. George's younger sister is questioned by him about Nicaragua, so that he can cover his own ignorance in front of Carla.

Fresh from her Modern Studies class - which had me wondering if Scottish education had escaped from Thatcherite reform she explains the basics of the revolution, the civil war launched by the Contras against it and the opposition of America to the Sandinistas.

Robert Carlyle, as George, engages in a glorious piece of dare devil defiance in stealing the bus he is employed to drive and taking Carla up winding muddy lanes to the shores of Loch Lomond.

Complete madness this may well be, particularly when the bus becomes irretrievably stuck in a bog, but we are captivated not only by the breathtaking scenery but by

Fighting spirit on tape

Pete Firmin reviews Port in a Storm (Video News)

'Port in a Storm' is a new video about the Merseyside Docks strike released by Video News. Produced as four separate programmes on one tape, it is designed to be used either as a whole or in parts to help raise support for the dockers.

The film is in parts moving and inspiring, portraying the fighting spirit of the dockers and their supporters. The importance given to Women on the Waterfront is particularly striking, both in the first section, which is specifically about them, but more generally in portraying womens' contribution to the struggle.

We are given a vivid picture of the international support the dockers are receiving, showing international delegates speaking at a rally at the dock gates and at a social in the dockers' club. The effect of this on the dockers and their families is almost tangible as they realise dockworkers throughout the world are prepared to take action in support of them.

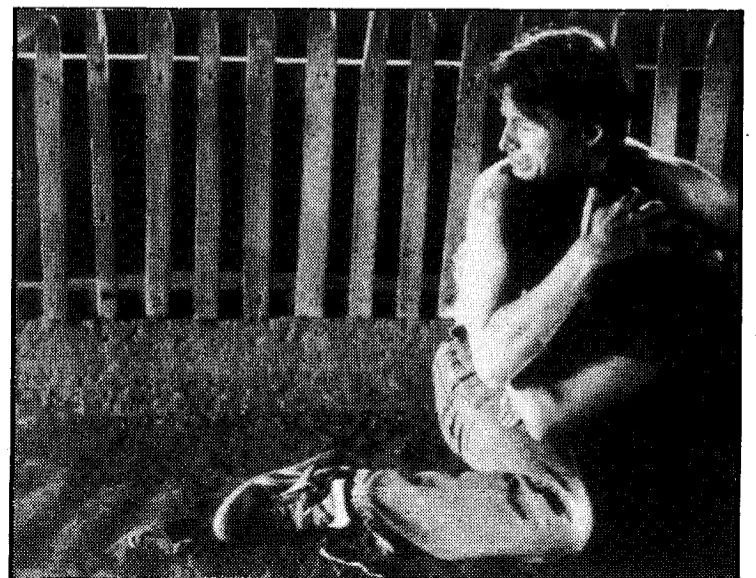
The final programme shows footage of the support given by the 'Reclaim the Streets' activists to the dockers on the first anniversary demonstration, the harassment they received at the hands of the police, and their occupation of MDHC headquarters.

This is a useful video to show to trade union and other meet-

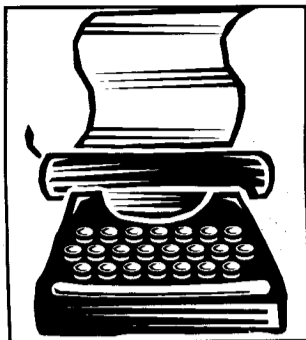
ings. Its main weakness is that it does not explain how the dispute came about. It seems to assume that the audience will be aware of the facts. Despite the length of the dockers struggle, this will not always be true. A restatement would do no harm anyway.

Those using it for meetings where there has not been previous discussion would need to supplement it, best of all by a speaker from the dockers or Women on the Waterfront.

Copies of 'Port in a Storm' cost £10, £20 for organisations, and can be obtained from Video News, PO Box 10395, London N7 9DN, or phone 0171 700 7660.



Above: George (Robert Carlyle) tries to protect Carla (Oyanka Cabezas) during the Contra raid. Top: Bradley (Scott Glenn) says goodbye to Carla



FEEDBACK

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

Solidarity is building between European workers in struggle against Maastricht austerity: but how solid is the agreement between Europe's ruling classes?



Lottery madness

Why are there millions of pounds tied up in lottery funds, yet people are still dying from cancerous diseases, including young children?

This is a shameful criminal act, perpetrated by a totally uncaring government who are still lining their own pockets. Some of the projects into which this cash is injected are ludicrous.

This is an indirect tax, taken from people who can least afford it, brought about for the reasons of a state dangling carrots, making the general populace believe that they become millionaires overnight,

working on the relative blindness of individuals.

Yet again, it is a question of taking money from the poor to give to the rich.

For health managers to make a decision to offer no further treatment to patients while all this money simply floats around is in itself a crime.

Okay, it can be said that their hands were tied, but why should they have been?

I really believe that it is about time that communications were opened up and spread further across the board allow this money to be put to better use!

**Christopher Smith,
Stockport**

Don't overstate European bosses' unity

I CANNOT recall ever having felt impelled to rush to Chris Harman's defence before, but frankly I thought that you distorted his article (Reviews, SO No.1), and I think there is an issue of journalistic standards here.

You argue that: "Harman's view deeply underestimates the multi-lateral relationships that are developing between capitalist classes ... he passes over the way that investment moves increasingly between capitalist classes within these three areas (Japan, North America and Western Europe)."

Yet on page 7-8 of Harman's article this is exactly what he argues:

"The largest multinationals do not invest evenly across the globe. Most trade and investment is between advanced countries...nearly two thirds of the world is virtually written off as far as direct investment is concerned."

Harman then produces figures derived from Hirst and Thompson showing that US and Japanese multinationals are still mainly based on their home markets (US 70 per cent of manufacturing assets, Japan 97 per cent).

While European ones with smaller home markets are more "globalised", British multinationals are the least national with only 39 per cent of manufacturing assets in the UK.

The fact that British and US

capital are so intertwined and that many other UK companies are heavily involved in Europe is behind the present split in the Tory part.

The anti-Europeans are actually not Little Englanders but Atlantacists who want to disrupt the formation of a powerful European economy.

The economic politics of Thatcherism have produced a condition of "weak cohesion" in the British economy. 25 per cent of manufacturing in the UK is foreign owned with an equal split between the US and Europe and a lesser proportion of Japanese capital.

In this sense Harman's comment that "Talk of Europe as an economic power is ... in the realm of fantasy" is correct.

If you had then gone on to complete his quote, you would have shown that it said: "Europe is not one entity, but a squabbling coalition of rival states, whose capitalists confront one another as well as those of the US and Japan."

This is quite true.

In fact I think Alan Thornett's article "From Maastricht to Amsterdam" almost implies that a European superstate is already an agreed policy among the capitalist class. Far from it, as the divisions on this issue amongst the ruling class show.

The acuteness of these divisions

in Britain, and the prospect of a Blair government which does not actually have a clear policy on them, places great responsibility on the forces of the socialist left.

It is important to oppose the effects of Maastricht and the Dublin summit and to campaign against them at a European level. The whole left should be involved in this. However, I think it is equally important to defend the idea that there are solutions prior to a Socialist United States of Europe which the left can propose.

Such solutions include local and industry-wide strikes against cuts, reviving the idea that energy and services and the key sectors of manufacturing should be publicly owned and policies directed, and nationalisation of financial institutions.

Fighting Maastricht with purely democratic demands is not going to work. If we're going to argue at that level then I think that the defenders of the British monarchy might win over those arguing for a European Constituent Assembly.

The point of your review seems to be that the SWP may be dragging its heels over supporting your "Euro March" initiative. Well, perhaps so, but scoring a factional point should never be an excuse for distorting what someone has written, especially when you can so easily be found out by people who bother to read the original article.

John Laurence

Missed opportunity

I was disappointed to see that Socialist Outlook was prepared to drop into the style of reactionary tabloid journalism in discussing Jerry Hayes ("One wheel on his wagon", January issue).

The 'article' reported, without comment, that the Tories refused to support Mr Hayes, "who denied that his relationship with the then 18 year old was anything other than platonic".

Surely socialists should be supportive of anyone's right, even that of a Tory MP, to have a gay relationship? The fact that the article did not make any comment on the treatment of Hayes by the media made the article resemble the same reactionary gossip of the Tory press that it was reporting.

The same piece then commented on Hayes' support for "gay rights" as if this was extra cause for speculation.

Socialist Outlook correctly sup-

ported the attempt to equalise the age of consent, while realising that this is only a small step in the struggle to eliminate the oppression of gay sexuality that is institutionalised under capitalism.

Jerry Hayes' support for this campaign was therefore to be welcomed, despite the incongruity with the rest of his politics, which is actually shared by many politicians, including Chris 'no more money for the health service' Smith.

The people who witchhunt Hayes are the same bigots who fought the attempts for an equal age of consent. They should be condemned by socialists and the article on Hayes missed an important opportunity to do so.

Ricky Paul, West London

EDITOR RESPONDS: it was certainly not our intention to imply that Hayes position on gay rights made him 'suspect', but rather to applaud it. In fact, it is what made it harder for reactionaries to attack him.

WHAT'S ON

FEBRUARY

Sat 8th
Liverpool Dockers' rally

Sat/Sun 22/23
Brussels Euromarch Conference

MARCH

Saturday 1
National Assembly Against Racism One-day conference, 10am-5pm, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, WC1

10-15
National Education Week, organised by FACE (Fight Against Cuts in Education) and supported by teaching unions and education campaigns.

Saturday 15
National Conference against the Job Seekers' Allowance, called by the Welfare State

Network in conjunction with the Unemployment Unit and the Institute of Employment Rights, 11am-5pm, Students' Union, Manchester Metropolitan University, Oxford Road, Manchester

APRIL

Saturday 12
March for Social Justice, Central London, called by Liverpool dockers. Assemble 12 noon, Speakers Corner, Hyde Park.

Tuesday 15
European day of action to mark start of Euromarch

MAY

10-14
June British legs of Euromarch

JUNE

Saturday 14
Amsterdam demonstration to lobby EU summit conference

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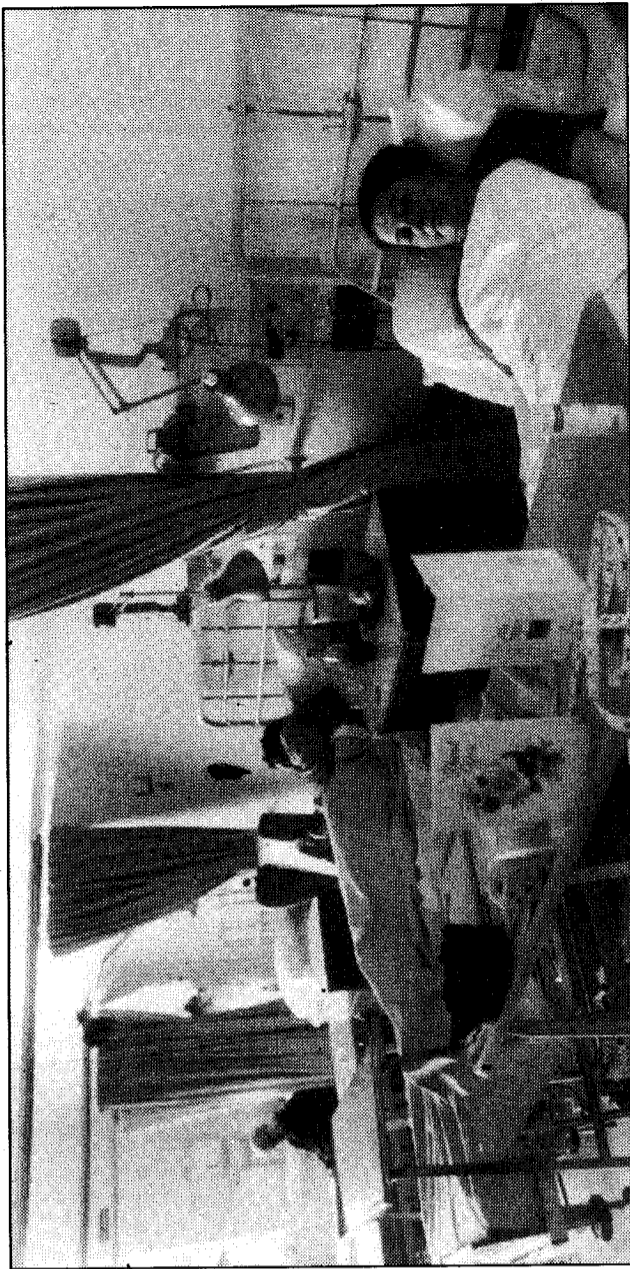
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STOP GORDON BROWN'S WAR ON WELFARE!

* Council Cuts p8 * Women & Welfare State p16-17

Revolt in the belly of a Tiger

B Skanthakumar

ROARS from the belly of the tiger in recent months have inspired workers and activists worldwide. South Koreans will resume their general strike on February 18 unless the government relents on its vicious anti-union laws.

British workers have been told for years now that 'working smarter', non-unionised workplaces, flexibility and so on are the key to economic growth and job security, and that they have to learn from the East Asian example to compete in the new global economy.

South Korea's Kim Young Sam cites "globalisation" (*segyehwa*) as justification for his labour law reforms. Britain's industrial relations legislation is his model. Margaret Thatcher's confrontation with organised labour is his inspiration.

The South Korean National Assembly met in secret session at 6am on December 26 to hastily rubber stamp the passage of two laws - the Labour Law reforms and a draconian National Security Act. Opposition members of the National Assembly (142 out of 299, equalling 47 per cent) were not invited.

The National Security Act gives the state more authority and easier grounds to spy on and imprison dissident and radical social movements.

Business groups, particularly the Korean Employers Federation (KEF), had pressed the regime to deregulate the labour market by

making it easier to hire and fire workers, sanctioning the use of scab labour during disputes, and casualisation.

South Korean workers have the longest hours and the highest rate of industrial accidents in the world. Workers do an average of 48.7 hours a week, usually with up to another ten hours overtime.

The law allows only one union per workplace. The legally recognised *Nochong*, the Federation of Korean Trade Unions (FKTU) is pro-government and is seen as a management puppet. Many companies have collaborated with the FKTU to form an enterprise union to prevent the KCTU doing so.

The illegal *Minjunochong*, the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU), with 500,000 members, campaigned for the overtly pro-employer reforms to be balanced by reforms allowing union pluralism in the workplace and union rights for teachers and civil servants.

The government agreed to union pluralism but only three years from now. Anti-labour provisions come into force immediately. The government's so-called concession might never be implemented.

Prime Minister Yi Su-Song insisted "the new labour laws are not aimed at lowering wages, worsening working conditions or helping to restore the economy by permitting businesses to lay off employees en masse. They are laws legislated out of sincere agony to promote the interests of all - businesses, workers

and the entire people".

No one believes him. Korean workers know that any agony will be theirs, because exports have to be priced 'competitively' in the world market.

In response to the new law the KCTU called an immediate general strike, the first since 1948, demanding its immediate repeal.

Workers in car factories and shipyards took the lead, shutting down the *chaebols* or conglomerates which dominate the economy. Hyundai estimates its losses in production from these strikes at US\$ 473 million. Health workers, transport workers, the un-unionised and students joined in demonstrations and rallies. Over 200,000 workers were on strike and tens of thousands more took unofficial action.

Meanwhile, the FKTU with its official membership of 1.2 million surprised everyone by declaring that it too would go on strike, though at that stage separately from the KCTU. There was pressure from the base to join in the action so they did so to maintain credibility. However, the FKTU leadership soon back-tracked and called for walkouts instead of indefinite strike action.

The first phase of strikes lasted until New Year's Eve.

Disruption

The KCTU needed to cause maximum disruption to the *chaebols* and the government, while maintaining and extending alliances with the people who had taken to

the streets in solidarity. It knew it could not prolong a general strike without losing even core supporters. So it tried to vary the tempo and intensity of action, using strikes, walkouts, in-house meetings, rallies, demonstrations, mass petitions, and at staggered intervals allowing those exhausted or wavering to resume work and be replaced by other groups of workers.

Strikers ensured that emergency hospital services were maintained, and workers on the subway (underground) returned to work at a time when snow made using roads difficult.

President Kim Young Sam's administration used every trick in the book to turn public opinion against the strikers. They suggested that the KCTU were North Korean agents in an unsuccessful attempt to whip up anti-Communist hysteria.

The second phase of the strike began on January 3, with an emphasis on the participation of public sector workers including those from state broadcasting and other white collar unions. Even banking and finance workers were solidly behind the strikes with daily walkouts. In disgust at the FKTU leadership's abstention from strike action, at least 37 enterprise unions have disaffiliated, and most will join the KCTU.

Government threats against the KCTU leadership became more explicit. Arrest warrants were issued against twenty of them, including union president Kwon Yong-Gil. The leaders had already sought

sanctuary in the grounds of the Roman Catholic Myongdong Cathedral, knowing that their headquarters would be raided and they would be imprisoned if found.

The cathedral itself became a focal point for press conferences, rallies and demonstrations in solidarity with those besieged inside.

The strike movement entered a third phase on January 15. The FKTU President visited the KCTU leaders at the Cathedral and issued a joint statement confirming that this was a common struggle in which they shared identical demands. Record numbers were now participating in the strike, over 350,000 members of the KCTU and over 370,000 members of the FKTU according to Labour Ministry figures.

On January 17, the general strike was suspended. Instead, the leadership called one day walkouts every Wednesday, combined with mass rallies and demonstrations every Wednesday and Saturday. The walkouts were called off on January 28, when the KCTU leadership said it was concentrating on preparing for a national general strike.

The KCTU was responding to the fact that union members in heavy industry were returning to work partly in response to pleas from the management. Many see the struggle as one against an unjust law rather than against the *chaebol*-state.

Capitalism's gravedigger isn't dead as some argue. It has only to discover its historic role.