

Socialist COUNTRILOOK

A monthly marxist review * New series No. 21 * January 1999 * 50p

Anger as Blair's team get cosy in millionaire mansions while nurses quit low-pay NHS

The ugly face of New Labour!

PETER MANDELSON and his grubby millionaire chum Geoffrey Robinson may have left Tony Blair's cabinet, but a foul smell still lingers over the government.

Whether or not there are further cash scandals yet to come, the whole affair has lifted the lid on the reactionary politics of New Labour, with its relentless quest for the favours of the rich, right wing and powerful, at the expense of the working people who voted for them hoping for something different.

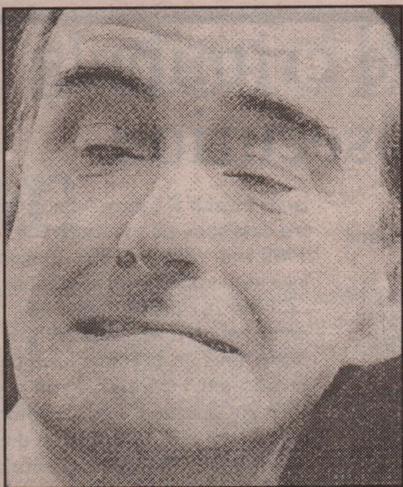
While ministers cavort around with union-busting press barons and tycoons, spend holidays in luxurious villas and jet around the world arguing for an extension of Britain's low-wage, anti-union "flexible labour" policy, millions of workers are struggling to make ends meet on rock-bottom rates of pay, or facing the sack in the latest lurch towards recession.

While Mandelson could go to his wealthy friend and borrow almost ten times his salary for a £400,000 house, ordinary families face growing queues for a dwindling pool of council housing, sky-high prices for private rentals, and the impossibility of paying a mortgage on the government's pitiful proposed minimum wage.

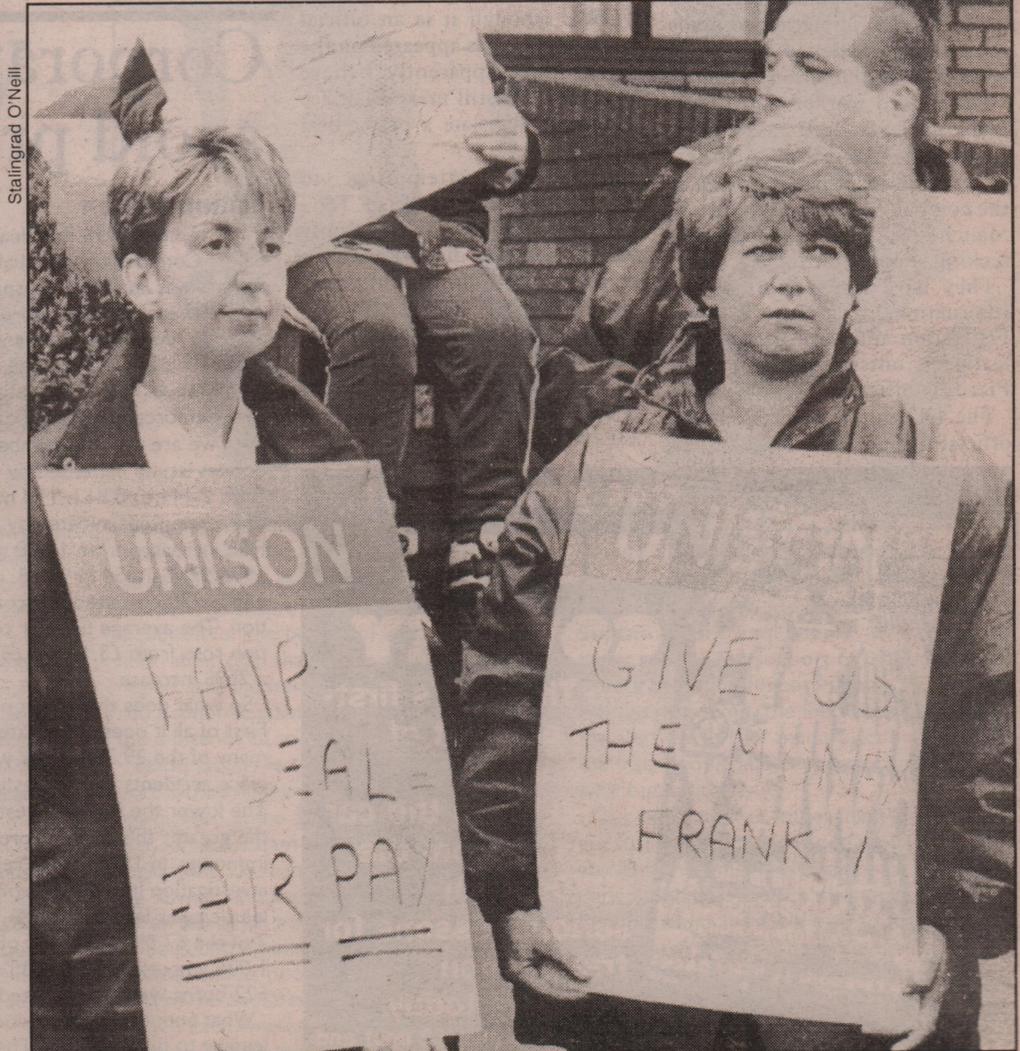
They call it New Labour: of course it is neither new, nor anything to do with the labour movement. Blair's team is just the latest bunch of shiftless individuals to have climbed on the back of the labour movement, only to be intoxicated by the illusions of power while being manipulated by the capitalist class into doing their bidding.

The appalling level of attachment of the current government to so many aspects of Thatcherite policy is a direct result of the deliberate moves, led by Mandelson and other "modernisers" to junk any hint of traditional labour movement politics and principles.

Already the question is how far - if at all - Mandelson has really been removed from Blair's inner circle, and how soon he will be openly welcomed back. But his departure should reopen discussion on what the Labour Party has become, and encourage health workers and others in the public sector and fighting for union rights to get stuck in to a government that will otherwise pay no heed to them, their unions or their demands.



Now how will Mandy pay the mortgage?



Stalingrad O'Neill

Frustrated nurses and NHS staff joined a November lobby of Health Secretary Frank Dobson in Birmingham



Lockout at Heathrow

David Coen

By December 31 300 workers for the airline catering company LSG Lufthansa SkyChefs had been out for 43 days, sacked for daring to strike against new working practices imposed by the German/US owned company.

The workers, all TGWU members (as are the 30,000 or so workers at Heathrow) had two ballots before taking official strike action. On the first day a court injunction prevented them from going ahead.

On the second of four planned one-day strikes 200 were sacked - including those who were on sick leave but who refused to sign new contracts. The workers are demanding re-instatement on their previous pay and conditions. The company has hired agency workers as scabs and is looking to recruit permanent workers to keep going.

The company's video cameras film all that happens at the gate: when strikers photographed scabs the police threatened them with arrest for "imidation".

The sacked workers have been lobbying LSG Lufthansa's main customers (American Airlines, Quantas and Lufthansa as well as the company's plants at Gatwick, Manchester, Paris and Germany seeking support for their action.

They have the support of the International Transport Workers Federation and have handed out leaflets outside Lufthansa's Piccadilly offices.

The lockout of workers on an official dispute in defense of pay

and conditions comes against the background of the departure of Peter Mandelson from the Department of Trade and Industry.

The White Paper on Competitiveness and the misnamed Fairness at Work document both demonstrate Mandelson's pro-employer stance but his going will make no difference to Blair's project even if his public preference for the bosses was a bit embarrassing for Blair.

In the name of competitiveness and with the aid of the Tories anti union laws the Labour leadership seems determined to aid the employers in every possible way, even if it means breaking Labour's connection with the organised labour movement which founded it.

Despite Blair's recent description of himself as a Gladstonian Liberal and publicly distancing himself from the unions, union leaders such as Bill Morris of the TGWU (though it is an official strike and he has appeared on the picket line) apparently believe that they can still make Blair see sense and legislate a better deal for workers.

Instead of attempting to mobilise the thousands of T&G members at Heathrow - the only way to win the dispute with an employer who has carefully prepared for this de-recognition, Morris is concentrating on secret diplomacy, lobbying Ministers and calling for the human rights of the workers to be respected.

It took very determined action,

including the willingness of the Shrewsbury building workers to go to jail for breaching Heath's Industrial Relations Act, before that piece of anti union legislation was defeated.

The stakes in the LSG Lufthansa dispute are high: should these workers be defeated, not just the pay and conditions of all Heathrow workers but also their right to belong to a union will be under grave threat - which is why all the employers including Blair's friend Bob Ayling of British Airways, will support LSG Lufthansa's efforts to break the union.

■ 24 hour Picket: ¼ of a mile down Faggs Lane, off the A30 (near Hatton Cross underground). Wood, snacks and hot drinks would be appreciated.

■ Donations: LSG Lufthansa Sky Chefs Strike Funds a/c no. 00640949, sorting code 20 38 83. C/o TGWU 218 Green Lanes, Finsbury Park, London N4 2HB

MSF witchhunt is hotting up

Pete Firmin

AFTER a protracted period of delay the leadership of MSF has decided to pursue a disciplinary investigation into its London Regional Council.

The issues involved are wholly political: the Regional Council opposed Labour Party policy of a directly-elected mayor for London and asked that candidates for local elections seeking financial support from the Regional Council give an indication of support for union policy.

In neither instance is there a breach of union policy - national MSF had no policy on the question of a directly-elected mayor in advance of Regional Council taking its decision, and there is no policy on the treatment of candidates.

A 'preliminary investigating panel' has been looking at the issues for several months. They demanded the attendance of the Council secretary, Hugh McGrillen, and President, Sue Michie - but refused them the right to hear the complaints against them, to record proceedings or to have a 'friend' present. With the full support of the Regional Council at every stage, they refused to attend under these conditions.

It seems that the complaints stem wholly, or in large part, from the Labour Party, no doubt in cahoots with the union leadership. Terry Ashton, Director of the London Region Board (!) of the Labour Party wrote complaining that the Regional Council was a 'thorn in the side' of the Labour Party.

This seems to relate primarily to

the crime its delegates committed of demanding a vote (!) at the 'consultation conference' the London Labour Party held on the question of London government.

Ashton (and, presumably, MSF General Secretary Roger Lyons) do not see unions as autonomous organisations with the right to decide their own policy and argue for it within the Labour Party.

Ashton did not even bother raising his complaint with the London Region Board of the Labour Party before writing to MSF.

Now a new panel has been set up to attribute individual responsibility, formulate charges and recommend punishment to the MSF NEC. Recommended punishment could be anything from suspension of individuals from office to reconstitution of the Regional Council.

The hearing is likely to take place at the NEC meetings of February 6 or March 13. There will be a demonstration outside MSF Head Office whenever this takes place.

MSF branches and regions elsewhere in the country should pass resolutions demanding an end to a blatant attempt to silence critics of Labour Party policy.

MSF branches and regions elsewhere in the country should pass resolutions demanding an end to a blatant attempt to silence critics of Labour Party policy.

There will be a demonstration outside MSF Head Office whenever the hearing takes place.

300 Club



EVERYONE CAN BE A WINNER!

- The SOCIALIST OUTLOOK 300 Club offers readers and supporters the chance to win a £50 cash prize or alternatives each month - for just a £5 donation.
- We get the cash we need to run campaigns and improve the paper - and you get an excellent chance of a bumper pay-out, or the satisfaction of knowing your donation was well spent!
- To join the 300 Club, send us a Standing Order for £5 per month, or drop us a line at PO Box 1109, London N4 2UU, and we will send you a form.
- This month's lucky winners are (3rd prize) Ann Murray-Hudson (2nd) John Finnegan, and the top prize goes to Greg Tucker.

Corporate criminals avoid prosecution

Shaun Cohen

In November 1998 the Health and Safety Commission's Annual Report was launched. Despite 215 pages, there were no figures provided in relation to companies and directors being prosecuted.

HSE argues that it cannot publish every enforcement statistic. However we are told the number of notices issued increased by 18%, from 7,444 to 8,812. The number of prosecutions initiated by the HSE increased from 1,490 in 1996/97 to 1,654 in 97/98, of which 77% resulted in a conviction. The average fine per conviction rose from £3,113 to £3,886 - a 25% increase.

So what does the report not tell? First of all it doesn't indicate how many of the 29,320 major work place accidents were investigated. The lower the rate of investigation the greater the level of corporate immunity. In 1996/97 the rate of investigation into major workplace injuries was less than 10%. Only 7 of the 67 blindings, 281 of the 206 amputations and 135 of the 622 burns were investigated.

What about the investigations leading to prosecutions? The HSE computer does not have this information. However, the West Mid-

lands Health & Safety Advice Centre data showed that between 1990 and 1992 only 5% of major injuries resulted in prosecutions.

Of the 261 deaths, again no information is available on how many firms or directors have been prosecuted. However, if you ask the right questions and can afford the fee the HSE will provide the information. The most recent data relates to the 679 deaths (including members of the public) that took place between 1996/97.

This shows that only 107 deaths or 15% resulted in prosecutions under health and safety legislation. This prosecution level is despite the fact that the HSE's own reports blame 70% of deaths on management failures.

The unpublished statistics also reveal that of the 1,654 prosecutions initiated by the HSE, only six senior officers were charged. During the same period it prosecuted 24 workers. The number of cases referred to the CPS for consideration of corporate manslaughter has been 1 since 1992.

As the unpublished data shows it has limited the level of criminal accountability of companies and their senior officers. It is time this disgrace was brought to an end.

Get your copy!

INSIDE COWLEY

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

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

Mandelson's departure - a new beginning?

It had to rival the departure of Portillo on election night - the news of Peter Mandelson's resignation for not declaring his loan. Whatever doubts they had about how temporary his departure was, no socialist could help rejoicing at the best Christmas present by far.

Geoffrey Robinson - no less an unsavoury character - didn't rate the same elation. Already semi-detached, and hanging on by his fingertips, he wasn't viewed with the same hatred.

For many, Mandelson represents all that is bad about 'New Labour'. Highly manipulative, pro-business, anti-union, and one of the few with a real vision of where he wanted to take the party - a lash-up with the Liberal democrats with no hang-ups about being a working class or socialist party.

Mandelson's departure was a blow to Blair, of course: he was his closest political ally and in effect his ideological guru. Blair wasted no time in showing that as far as he was concerned, Mandelson's regrettable absence from the Cabinet (for a short a period as is decently possible) wasn't going to change anything.

He declared that he would continue to govern as 'New Labour',

EDITORIAL

confirmed Mandelson as chair of a British-German think tank and invited him round to Chequers just to show he was as much in favour as ever. Mandelson will be there, advising and manipulating, however long it takes him to get back into the Cabinet.

'Old Labourites' have been expressing their hopes that Mandelson's going will provoke a sea-change. Barbara Castle said she was 'relieved' at Mandelson's departure, and felt sure that Blair would return to Old Labour ways, denying that Blair himself shared Mandelson's views.

Prescott, seen by Old Labourites as their champion, issued a New Year message, coded to prevent accusations of disloyalty, but talking of state intervention, Keynesianism and an end to modernisation (interpreted as a rejection of further cooperation with the Liberal

democrats).

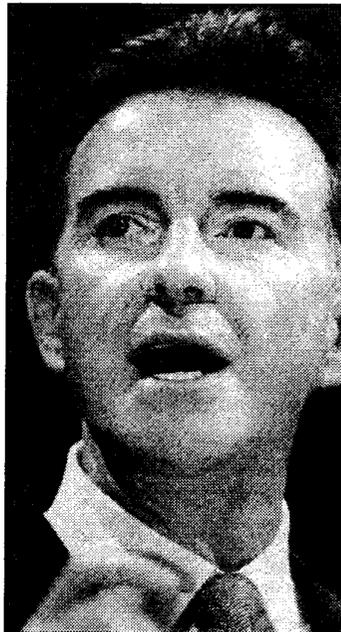
Blair's office immediately repudiated any such possibility. Margaret Beckett however, also seen by many as Old Labour, distanced herself from Prescott.

The press endlessly speculates about who is a 'real' old Labourite in cabinet, trying to discern some political differences at the heart of the personal feuds which repeatedly break out, with rival spin doctors briefing against their masters reputed enemy. Did Charlie Whelan leak the details of the Mandelson/Robinson loan as a service to Gordon Brown? Do we care?

Blair was quick to replace Mandelson and Robinson with loyalists, even if not of the calibre of Mandelson. In fact, Blair is very much in control of government policy. The Cabinet hardly has a role in determining anything anyway. Speculation that Brown is really a closet socialist is so wide of the mark as to be laughable.

While he may not be ecstatic about cooperation with the Liberals and electoral reform, isn't Brown the one that was adamant

Old Labourites have been expressing their hopes that Mandelson's going will provoke a sea-change.



Victim of his own spinning machine? Mandelson could soon be back.

that this would not be a 'tax and spend' government, pledging not to raise income tax and keeping down public spending?

As for Prescott, isn't he the one pushing through the effective privatisation of the London underground?

And, of course, how could anyone place any confidence in people who have been willing partners in all the policies of the government and the carve-up of the labour movement, but who occasionally try to indicate that

they are not real believers by smuggling dark phrases into heavily coded speeches?

The fact is that the policies championed by Mandelson and Blair, if not their ideological underpinning, pervade all departments of government. It will take more than one casualty in Cabinet, albeit such an important one as Mandelson, to change that.

Which isn't to say that we shouldn't take heart from Mandelson's departure and recognise that it wounds Blair to lose such an important ally.

But the only way it can be made into something more long-lasting is if the Left use the opportunity to go on the attack.

First, we have to drive home the message that Mandelson's desire to emulate the high living of his rich friends is a logical outcome of being 'business friendly' and rejecting any idea that there is anything obscene about wealth obtained from the labour of others.

Mandelson far from being the first to fall foul of this, Ramsay MacDonald was pilloried by the left for hob-nobbing with high society when he led the first (1924) Labour government.

We must also demand of the likes of Prescott that if they really favour state intervention, then they could start by halting the privatisation of the tube. If they really reject coalition (formal or informal) with the Liberal democrats then they should speak out in plain language and push for the abolition of the joint cabinet committee.

Until they do, we will continue to treat them as loyal Blairites - and fight them accordingly.

Iraq bombing: Clinton's deadly diversion

THE FOUR-day US bombardment of Iraq was engineered in a criminal and cynical attempt by President Clinton to save himself from impeachment, by intimidating Congress and manipulating patriotic fervour. This is the second time that Clinton has launched a military attack on Iraq to try to save his skin.

He was happy to manipulate Richard Butler, head of UNSCOM into submitting his unconvincing report direct to him, rather than to the UN Security Council. No wonder previous US puppet, UN Secretary-General Kofi Anan, has been so non-plussed.

But this cynical ruse appears to have failed, and may even be strengthening the resolve of some Republicans to remove him.

Those Republicans who stated they could not support his action did so not only because of their deep hatred of the man they believe has usurped their God-given right to the Presidency, but also because their own war aims would be far more through-going than anything envisaged by Desert Fox.

Blair and the Labour government were almost Clinton's sole allies. They offered uncritical support when the rest of the world saw through the US President's ploy. Blair's role as Clinton's lap dog marks a further shift to the right in the politics of New Labour.

Opposition within the Labour Party has

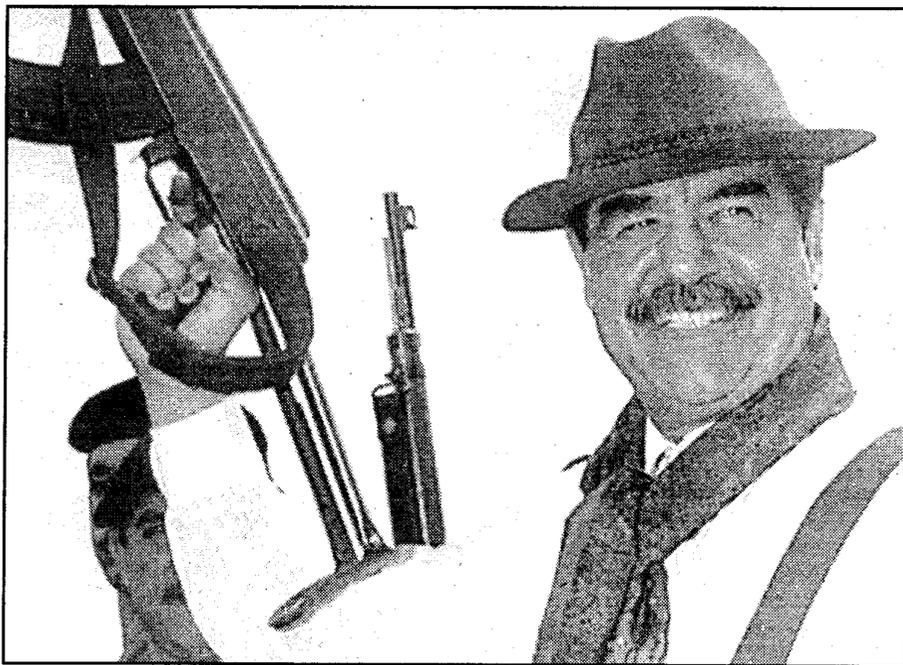
been limited. In an unprecedented move MPs were denied a vote in the House of Commons, though it appears that about 20 would have opposed the attack. Liz Davies and Mark Seddon of the Grass Roots Alliance were active in opposition to this murderous assault and other party members have had critical letters published in the press.

The attack on Iraq is a further blow to this devastated country. More cruise missiles were used than during Desert Storm - though the fire power was considerably lower.

Despite pious statements about military targets, it is clear that civilian sites such as oil refineries and television stations have been deliberately attacked. Although casualty figures are not available, it is clear that these included huge numbers of civilians. Clinton and Blair stated that 10,000 Iraqi deaths would be acceptable.

This is on top of the vicious sanctions, which according to UN figures have led to 1½ million deaths in the past seven years. Having installed, supported and built up Saddam Hussein, western imperialism is now punishing the Iraqi people for failing to remove him.

This onslaught on Iraq is about more than US domestic politics. The underlying causes remain the same as previous imperialist attacks on Iraq: the US drive to retain politi-



Saddam knows that Britain and the US will never back a popular movement to remove him

cal hegemony in the Middle East, the determination to ensure that oil resources are exploited for the benefit of western companies rather than that of the people of the region, and the necessity for the political and economic stability of the US regime of the existence of an external enemy.

These factors led the US to arm and support Saddam in his long and bloody war against Iran in the 1980's. At the end of that war, when Saddam had gained stature in the region, the US manoeuvred him into invading Kuwait, and then used that as a pretext for an attack on Iraq.

The country's infrastructure has been devastated, and its people are starving, but the hold of the brutal regime has not weakened. In fact, each western attack seems to increase, rather than weaken, support for Saddam Hussein among his subjects.

The balance sheet at the end of the four days seemed clear enough.

Saddam's position is more secure than Clinton's. The only forces that can remove Saddam are the Iraqi people - and they will never receive the support of the British or American establishment in doing so.

In the meantime, the left needs to be on the alert for further military action against the Iraqi people and prepared to respond with our solidarity.

Our opposition to impeaching Clinton because of his sex life is not at all based on any illusions in him - but rather in our understanding that such a victory by the Republican party would lead to further dangerous assaults against working people in America, in Iraq and throughout the globe.

At the same time this degenerate and murderous adventure reminds us once again why socialists in the US need so desperately to build their own workers' party, to lead the long-overdue break from the bankrupt Democrats and Republicans.

Livingstone for London Mayor!

Neil Murray

THE LABOUR Party NEC meets on January 26 to decide on the selection procedure for the Party's candidates for London Mayor and Greater London Authority members.

Despite – or maybe because of – the fact that Ken Livingstone had experience of running the Greater London Council Blair and his minions are determined to stop him standing. The polls show Ken as the only Labour candidate likely to beat anyone the Tories put up (or Richard Branson).

The NEC will probably go for the option floated by the Greater London Labour Party Board (executive as was) of setting up a vetting panel. This panel is designed with one main aim in mind – to prevent Livingstone getting on the ballot paper.

This is despite the large number of resolutions submitted by union and Labour Party bodies calling for candidates with nominations from 10 per cent of London CLPs to be automatically on the Labour Party ballot paper. Party members should have the right to choose the candidate for mayor from those with this level of support.

The likely leadership manoeuvre flies in the face of the wishes of the 400-odd delegates at Greater London Labour Party conference last June, who passed a resolution for automatic short-listing with only one vote against.

The fact that Livingstone is extremely popular not only with Party and union activists but also with the London electorate as a whole only makes things worse for the bureaucracy. The best option for them would be to find a candidate who could beat Livingstone in a ballot of Party members and the whole matter would be closed. Unfortunately for them, they can't find anyone who could even run Livingstone close.

Not for want of trying. They have floated several candidates, Glenda Jackson, Tony Banks, and Trevor Macdonald, all of whom have been dropped like a ton of bricks when they realised they couldn't make a dent in Livingstone's popularity.

The latest kite to be flown is Pauline Green, MEP, in the hope that she will have lots of publicity in the run up



Red Ken: bogeyman for the Blair camp

the European elections in June, but she has an awful lot of ground to make up on Livingstone.

While the Party leadership generally succeeded in carving up the selection process for the Scottish Parliament and European elections (although not without protests), the London Mayor selection has created a lot more fuss.

Elsewhere the stitch-ups took place without too much publicity, but having created the post of a high-profile directly-elected mayor against the wishes of the Party membership, with talk of an 'ambassador for London', it is hardly surprising that the selection process has attracted the media's attention. Blair is now stuck with the problem of trying to prevent a popular, high-profile, candidate from standing.

The media have been running planted stories – probably emanating from Millbank – about the terrible record of the GLC. But this hasn't prevented the media also noticing Livingstone's popularity, reporting and running opinion polls showing Londoners' (and Party members) support for his right to stand and editorials in surprising places opposing the carve-up.

The type of candidate Blair would really like was shown when Robert Ayling, chief of British Airways, was floated as a potential candidate. Rather than a hindrance, Ayling's record as a union-basher is obviously an asset as far as Blair is concerned. He may have realised by now that Londoners and London Labour Party

quite the same way.

So why is Livingstone so unacceptable to Blair? He has expressed his willingness to work with a 'Blairite' deputy leader, and toned down his criticism of the policy of directly-elected mayors once he decided he wanted the job. He even claims to have written to Blair making clear that he would not see himself as a focus of opposition to the government.

He has mixed his criticism of the government's economic policy with expressions of loyalty, and now supports

Britain's entry into the single European currency.

He has said that he could not repeat the GLC's 'fares fair' policy (when fares were reduced by about 35%) and would not be able to affect the contracts for the semi-privatisation of London underground. His 'manifesto' is quite moderate (though not for Blair).

His proposals for solving London's transport problems include the pedestrianisation of parts of the centre, the re-introduction of conductors on the buses (cutting delays), the reversal of the trend towards short-distance bus routes, improving the level of frequency on rail routes within the capital, and new taxes on car parking.

While pointing out the high level of poverty in large parts of London, proposals to grapple with this are thin on the ground – an appeal to the government to increase public spending in London and to the City Corporation to back a task force with hard cash and a commitment to "make full use of the government's welfare to work programme to get people into real paid employment".

Other proposals include a Greater London development plan, integrated waste disposal across London, air quality targets, protection of the Green Belt and Sites of Special Scientific Interest, community and voluntary sector

involvement in all London 'partnerships' and tackling energy waste and fuel poverty.

He proposes using the new Police Authority to weed out corrupt and racist police officers, making it a disciplinary offence to refuse to testify against a corrupt or racist colleague in order to do so. He also wants the police to step up the fight against 'petty crime and vandalism'. In the long term he wants to see the GLA become the regional education and health authority and have tax-raising powers.

While all these (and other proposals) would undoubtedly improve life in London (if they got beyond the level of good intentions to concrete reality), this is more an indication of how bad things are than their radical character. They are hardly likely to disturb business in the City overmuch and there is little that challenges the government.

Livingstone rightly criticises the delay between the referendum on London government in May 1998 and the likely first elections for the mayor and Assembly in 2000. The government has been able to introduce short parliamentary bills on issues such as the Irish 'peace agreement', but it seems determined to delay introduction of the Greater London Authority. There is certainly an urgent need for such an authority, but Blair wants to avoid it becoming a pole of attraction for opposition to the government. Maybe he doesn't want an oppositional figure opening the Millennium Dome (or even worse, refusing to do so).

By the middle of 2000 the government popularity may well have fallen, and since the Assembly will be elected by PR there would be unlikely to be an absolute majority of Labour members.

Blair has shown time and again that although the government is committed to devolution of certain powers – some of which Blair would have loved to renege on if they hadn't been such strong commitments from previous Labour leaders – the last thing he wants to do is 'let things get out of control.

So devolve

powers, but move might and main to ensure that such powers are in 'safe' hands. The London mayor should content his/herself with signing annual contracts and attracting tourists and investment.

If an outright Blairite cannot be found who could secure the job (and Mandelson is now said to have declined the kind offer of losing another election) then either a loyalist who will just do as they are told or a 'businessperson' (Ayling, Branson) who would let the government get on with the real job of governing London.

Losing to Jeffrey Archer, who wouldn't upset any appeacarts, would be better in Blair's eyes than allowing Livingstone to stand representing, for all his shortcomings, the opposition to his policies and 'project' within the labour movement.

It is for this reason that socialists should support Livingstone in his fight to become Mayor of London. Not only does *Socialist Outlook* support his right to stand for basic democratic reasons, but we support his candidature. Ken Livingstone's victory would be the biggest blow yet to Blair's attack on the labour movement, inflicting a real defeat with repercussions beyond the limitations of his policies.

Blair will not back down on his opposition to Livingstone, whatever Livingstone says or does in his attempts to ingratiate himself. The way to ensure Livingstone's right to stand is by mobilising the immense support he enjoys among Party and union activists. Resolutions in support of his right to stand should just be the beginning; there should be demonstrations of support at the NEC meeting, at any vetting panel meeting and every other opportunity.

Blair and his supporters are only likely to back down if they are made to realise that the consequences of not doing so are worse.



Linking up the left

The Greater Manchester Socialist Alliance is hosting a conference on February 13th (for details see box) designed to draw together local campaigns from around the country. Socialist Outlook is supporting this initiative. We interviewed John Clegg about the conference and the future of the Socialist Alliances.

SO: Why is the Greater Manchester Socialist Alliance organising the conference?

JC: To create a forum and opportunity, where there are active campaigns, to come together to identify common threads. We are looking for a political identity for these campaigns.

SO: How do you see that going forward?

JC: The existing parties offer no remedy so we have to look for a new alternative.

SO: Do you mean at an electoral level?

JC: Campaigning can change some things, but campaigns can also take the opportunity of using elections.

For example, the Tameside careworkers are thinking of standing because of the way the local Labour Party has let them down.

SO Do you think that Socialist Alliances should stand in elections?

JC: Individual Alliances should stand if they think they have a strong local base and the resources to fight an election.

SO: Will this be a conference for political activists or will its appeal be much wider?

JC: Political activists are welcome but we want to get new people who are involved in community campaigns to come.

There is the beginning of people becoming unhappy with the government; resistance to housing transfers for example; an increasing awareness that when Blair said partnership he meant more privatisation; the aspirations that pensioners or disabled people had are being ignored.

SO: What would you like to see coming out of the conference?

JC: We need to set up a practical support network for new emerging campaigns. Each community campaign seems to start from nothing - they should be able to easily contact others with more experience to help them get going.

SO: From this do you want to build national campaigns?

JC: Yes. We recognise that each local campaign is fighting its own immediate battle - but they all relate to the same national political decisions, for example private finance initiatives (PFI) in hospitals, cuts in council budgets.

There is also the issue of democracy. Quangos - such as unelected health trusts - or, in the future, business consortiums, are keeping their power. Ordinary people are losing even more of their little control over decision making.

SO: The Alliances in England have got a bit tied up with structures recently...

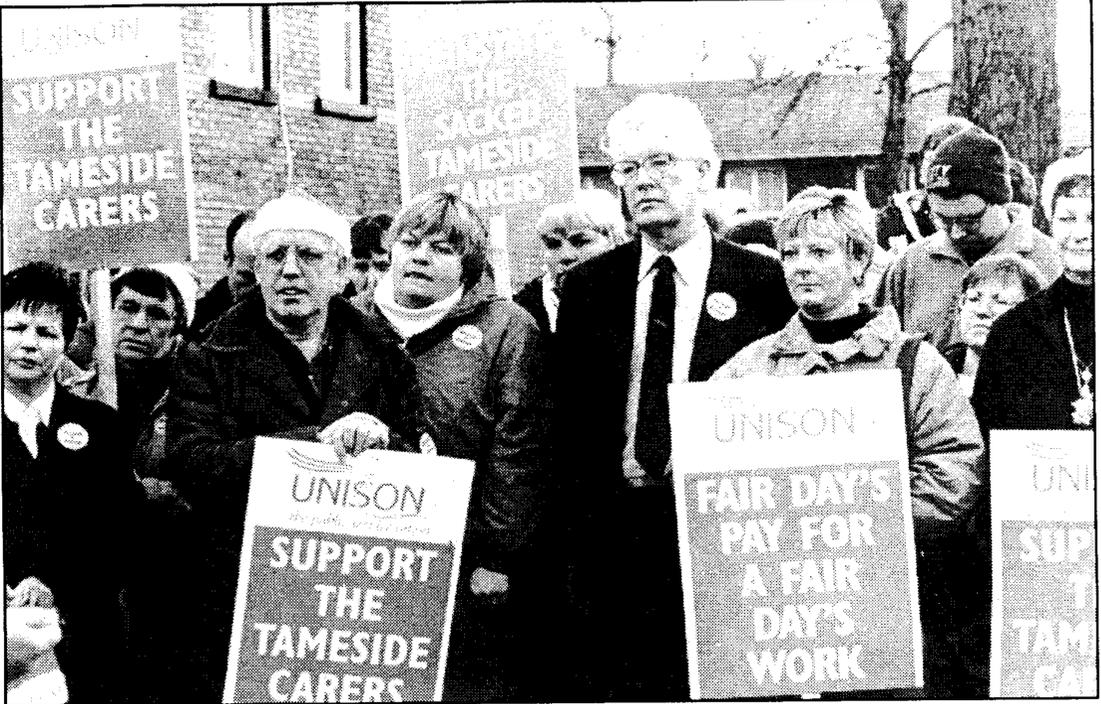
JC: Constitutions are important but are not the centre of the universe. Coventry have been going for six or seven years.

They have been successful because of their activities not their rule book. Eventually a constitution will arrive that we are happy with but we shouldn't spend so much time looking for it at the expense of campaigning.

Nationally we need an issue which all the Alliances can work on in order to draw us together, low pay and the minimum wage has already been suggested.

Maybe the Campaign 99 Conference will identify such a unifying theme.

Stalingrad O'Neill



Tameside strikers: angry at betrayal by Labour at council and government level

Unions and the Labour Party Time for a challenge!

Neil Murray

MANY UNIONS, particularly the larger ones outside of education and the civil service, are affiliated to the Labour Party. The current policies of the Labour government, together with the curtailing of Labour Party democracy, have provoked a debate about what the relationship of the unions to the Labour Party ought to be.

A few on the left have raised the question of disaffiliating from the Labour Party altogether. Outside of a few branches which have affiliated to the Socialist Labour Party, this has not found much support.

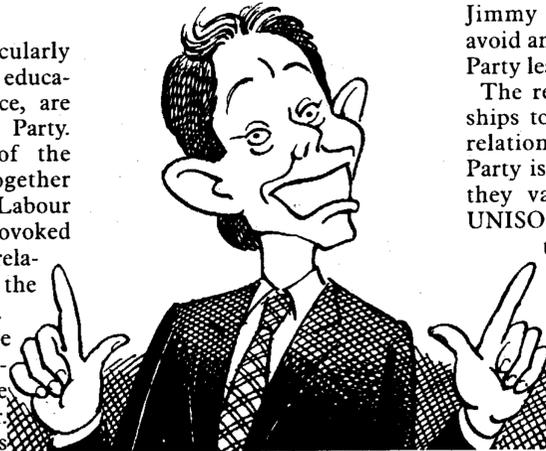
What has found more resonance, with majority support at some union conferences, is to question the sponsorship of MPs who do not take any notice of union policy, and to query whether the unions should continue to put unlimited funds at the disposal of the Labour Party, for elections and in general, when its policies are attacking union members.

While a majority might be found in a particular union branch, or even at an exceptional conference, to disaffiliate from the Labour Party, it is extremely unlikely that this would find the support of a majority of members of any union at the current time.

It would be more likely, if pushed to the wire, to lead to a split in the union, with a radical minority ending up isolated, hardly the best conditions for a fight back.

Currently the left in affiliated unions will get much more support by raising the need for the unions, and their leaderships, to fight for their policies against the Labour leadership.

The record of virtually every national union leader since Labour was elected (and before) has been to refuse to challenge policies which attack their members, but, at most, to make mildly critical, often 'coded' speeches. Their reaction when the union conference or section of the union is more critical is



Jimmy Knapp to continually avoid any confrontation with the Party leadership.

The response of union leaderships to any threat to this cosy relationship with the Labour Party is indicative of how much they value it. London region UNISON convenor Geoff Martin is facing disciplinary charges for daring to say (in line with London UNISON policy) that the union would not support anti-union candidates for London mayor such as Robert Ayling, chief of British Airways.

The leadership of the London Region Council of MSF is under investigation and facing charges for the "crimes" of requiring candidates for local elections who sought union financial support to show some support for union policies, and of opposing the policy of a directly elected mayor for London.

Jimmy Knapp has fought against implementation of RMT conference policy of demanding that sponsored MPs support union policy, particularly over the privatisation of London Underground.

The only national union to seriously question the money it puts into the Labour Party has been the AEEU, but this has been primarily over the employment background of MPs, not their politics, and this at the same time as funding the Blairite slate in Labour's NEC elections.

With union conferences beginning soon, this question will be discussed at many. Rather than disaffiliation, the Left needs to argue for:

- * a fight for union policy at every level of the Party, from local GCs to conference and the NEC, with union representatives accountable to union policy;
- * no sponsorship of MPs who support anti-union policies;
- * no blank cheques for Labour Party funding, instead the money should be used to mobilise the membership for campaigns around union policy.

either to sit on the decisions, or to lash out at those making the criticism.

Thus the union leaders refused to mobilise their members while the government's proposals on union rights were under discussion, instead wasting money on employing a lobbying firm, to no effect. When the awful 'Fairness At Work' proposals were published, the union leaders could do no more than say they were 'disappointed', and do nothing.

The minimum wage, set at a level well below the modest policy of the TUC and nearly every union, brought a similar response. The story can be repeated about public sector pay and many other policies.

No fight

Within Labour Party bodies the picture is the same. Union leaders refuse to advance union policy, whether at conference or on the NEC. A UNISON representative even sat on the commission discussing the level of the minimum wage, and put her name to the final report!

At the 1998 Labour Party conference, union leaders used their block votes to ensure that the only motions discussed and voted on avoided any direct criticism of government policy.

In fact, arguing for disaffiliation at the moment takes the heat off the union leaders, as shown by the fact that some SLP members of the RMT executive refuse to vote on issues regarding the Labour Party, thus allowing

CAMPAIGNS 99 CONFERENCE

Hosted by Greater Manchester Socialist Alliance

Saturday 13th February, 10am- 4pm
Mechanics Institute, Princess Street, Manchester

A conference open to campaigners across all issues - workplace, immigration, deportations, low pay, PFI - as well as socialist, green and trades union organisations.

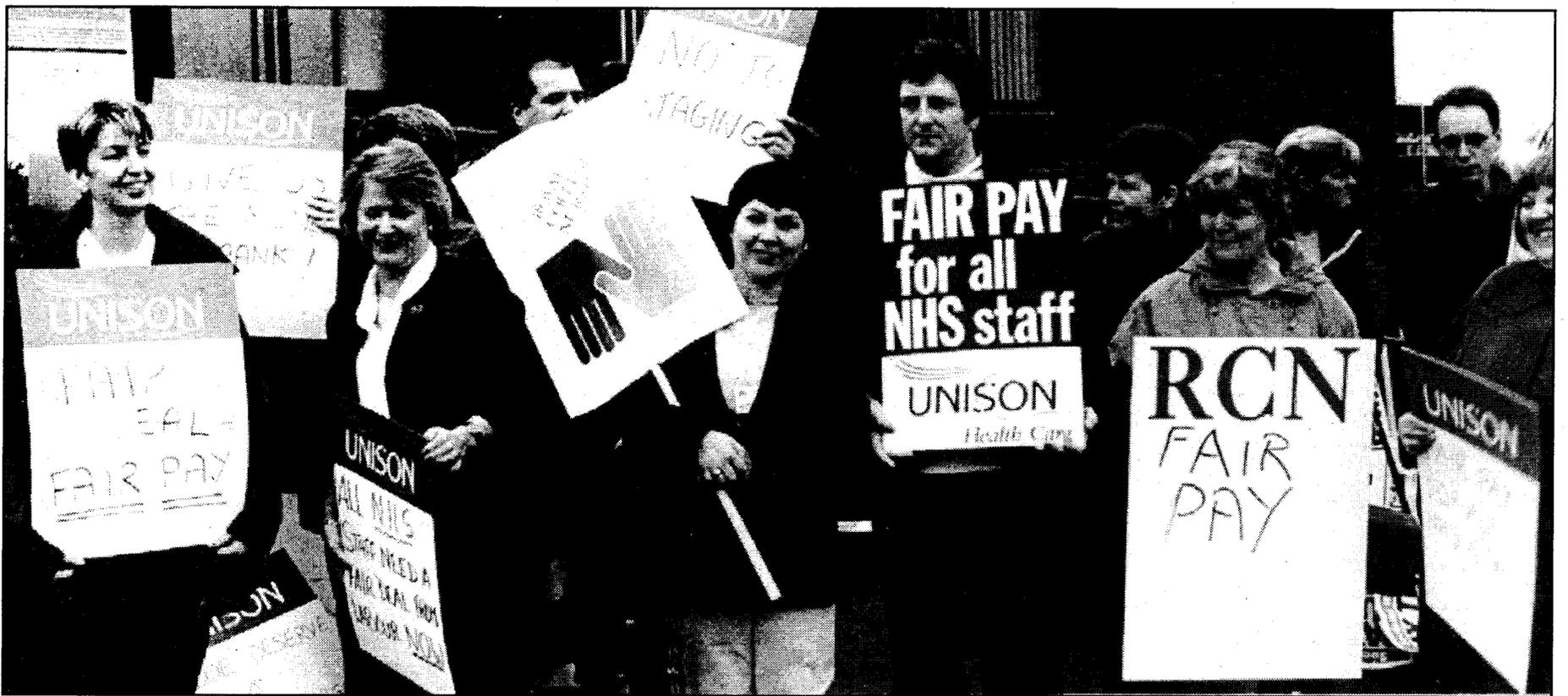
CAMPAIGNS 99 Conference is a contribution to the growing opposition to free market ideology and to the demands placed on people by global capitalism.

Workshops have been arranged under the broad headings: Workplace, Welfare State, Environment, Transport, Refugees, Anti-deportations, Civil Liberties and International.

Opening Speaker: Dave Nellist, Socialist Councillor in Coventry.

Registration: £5 organisations
£1 unfunded campaigns

Sponsors: Kent, Coventry and Liverpool Socialist Alliances, Scottish Socialist Party, Socialist Outlook, Leeds Independent Labour Network, Merseyside Port shop stewards committee, TGWU 6/399 branch, Workers Aid for Bosnia.



Winter causes chaos in NHS hospital services

20 YEARS of Tory policies have reduced the NHS to a near-permanent crisis at times of peak demand – such as the winter months.

Despite glib assurances from Health Secretary Frank Dobson that enough extra “winter pressures” money has been pumped in to enable the hospitals to cope with anything but “exceptional circumstances”, it appears that a relatively small drop in temperature and a ‘flu epidemic are sufficient to trigger chaos in the remaining A&E units.

Not only have emergency patients again been stacked up on trolleys – and even treated in the backs of ambulances in hospital car parks – for lack of sufficient medical beds, but there has been an even sharper crisis in the supply of Intensive Care beds. On December 30, there were only four ICU beds free in the whole country, while the beginning of January has seen patients from London being ferried as far afield as Portsmouth for treatment, with the nearest other bed being Derby!

The pressure of increased demand on the dwindling numbers of front-line hospital beds has been coupled with a growing shortage of qualified nursing staff to keep the available beds running.

In many areas a combination of demoralisation with skid-row levels of NHS pay and the impact of the flu epidemic and winter ailments on nursing staff mean that even hospitals with money to



Dodging reality: Dobson

spend cannot find enough of the right staff to sustain services, and beds have closed.

There are real fears that the rot may have gone so deep that it is almost impossible to retrieve the situation. The worst crisis in nurse staffing levels for 25 years comes alongside huge problems in recruiting new student nurses to

fill the gaps in the profession opened up by increasing numbers of older nurses retiring.

Gordon Brown openly assumed a standstill in NHS pay levels as part of his tight-fisted 3-year settlement of NHS finances, making it hard to see any scope to reverse the downward slide in morale, despite Dobson's promise of a “recruitment campaign” and endless forays by NHS bosses to sign up nurses on short-term contracts from Finland, the Philippines and other countries around the world.

Just like their inglorious Tory predecessors, Dobson and his department appear to be devoting far more time and energy to denying the facts and attempting to gag or mislead journalists and conceal the scale of the crisis than they are to finding ways to put things right. Journalists seeking ministerial comment are now switched through to a computerised “Rebuttal Unit” which at the flick of a switch churns out a stream of pointless facts and figures designed to distract from the story in hand.

A starting point would be to guarantee nurses and other NHS staff a substantial above-inflation pay increase this year and every year for the lifetime of this government, alongside an immediate moratorium on any further bed closures.

Health unions, which have played the pay issue with predictable timidity, must wage a new year offensive on this issue, which is crucial to the future of our NHS.

Health mergers conceal Bristol cuts agenda

Ian McAleer

THE COMING months are witnessing a massive re-organisation of health service provision in the Bristol area and environs.

The background to these changes is the government's policies on health, but also the continue restrictions on public spending.

Single Trust

In spring 1997 Avon Health Authority commissioned a report from the Sainsbury Centre for Mental Health, which recommended a large, single mental health trust.

In February 1998 proposals were put forward to form such a trust from existing mental health services provided, in the main, by general hospital trusts.

This will stretch across the main population centres of Bath, Bristol and Weston-Super-Mare, with an opening remaining to extend it further East towards Swindon.

Presented as an opportunity to provide better services and to ensure that spending on mental health services is defended/ring-fenced, the reality in the run up to April 1999 is somewhat different. Suddenly large deficits in current budgets – amounting to approximately 5 per cent of the total £55 million – were discovered.

In an attempt to balance the budget the favoured approach seems to be widespread job freezes, leading in quite an erratic way to increased pressure on already overstretched staff. Acute beds had already been closed at one Bristol unit in April 1998, elsewhere elderly beds are under threat.

Ironically the Sainsbury Centre has produced a more recent report warning that the rush to form single ‘stand alone’ mental health trusts is often counter-productive, detracting attention from front line services.

In the wake of this a further merger has been proposed between Frenchay and Southmead NHS trusts in Bristol, again for April 1999. Glossy documentation has been published outlining perceived benefits in terms of larger specialist staff groups, reduced management costs and increased ability to reduce junior doctors working hours to 56 per week.

The trusts have stressed that there will be no threat to A&E services on either hospital site; previous threats to this service having been vigorously opposed by local health campaigners.

Cover-up

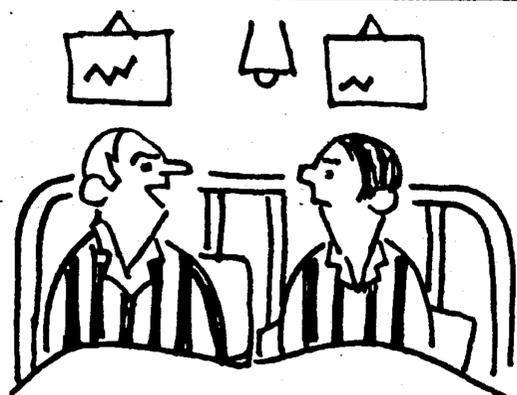
However, in the current economic context, such re-organisation can, as the experience in mental health highlights, be used as a cover for extensive cutbacks.

Already trade unions in the trusts have found their respective managements giving wildly contradictory information about how the merger will effect the support and ancillary services.

Unions have been offered and become involved in extensive negotiations

over personnel policies and staff transfer to the new trusts.

Important though this work is there is a danger of activists becoming exhausted in a myriad of committees with the underlying problems of inadequate resources, workers demoralisation and increasing pressure remaining unaddressed.



YOU THINK THIS IS CRAMPED –
WAIT UNTIL OLD HARRY GETS
BACK FROM X-RAY!
Ted Johns

Suddenly large deficits in current budgets – amounting to approximately 5 per cent of the total £55 million – were discovered

“Our Union needs to change”

Greg Tucker, candidate for General Secretary of the RMT, explained the issues he sees

Censorship at a seat of learning

A member of LMU UNISON

Leeds Metropolitan University has stopped the university's UNISON branch from choosing what notices it puts on its noticeboards. In an attempt to pretend that all is as normal, University authorities have taken down notices they don't like while leaving up others.

This Orwellian farce began with the discovery that on an unknown number of occasions the University had planted secret voice-activated spy cameras in toilets, apparently at both main sites. Particular employees of the University were apparently being targeted, but obviously any member of staff, student or member of the public could be caught, whatever they might be doing.

UNISON branch officers and members were outraged, particularly by the indiscriminate nature of this invasion of privacy. They produced notices to warn about it.

Although the Vice-Chancellor and other officials have admitted that this form of surveillance did take place, they don't want the branch to tell people about it - and demanded the keys to all UNISON's noticeboards.

UNISON members and some of their friends have been conducting a hit-and-run campaign of posting unauthorised notices telling staff and students what they're not allowed to say, and that they're not allowed to say it.

High officials in 'Human Relations' and members of University security have been earning their salaries by going round tearing them down.

Before Christmas NATFHE, the lecturers' union, was writing to the employer to demand an explanation of what was going on. No action has yet been taken by the Students Union, although the 'Leeds Student' newspaper has covered the story.

With the start of the new term UNISON will undoubtedly be continuing its campaign against this attack on the right of the trade union to organise, and the gross invasion of privacy that preceded it.

facing union members at a recent RMT Branch meeting:

“INDUSTRIALLY, we failed to fight when the Tories privatised BR. Despite Union policy, all that Knapp would do was try to convince a handful of Tory MPs to vote against their government. Not surprisingly this strategy failed.

Since then we have been on the defensive. Jobs lost, conditions under constant attack.

If we are to defend our members we have to address the new problems we face.

Not by adapting to our new bosses' agenda - but by pressing forward with our own. That was the meaning of this year's Infrastructure dispute. We have shown that when we organise a campaign on our demands our members are prepared to fight.

For this year we have to make a reality of union policy to fight for a shorter working week and a minimum 10 per cent pay increase. This means more than just waiting in the hope that pressure from members will build up

- but going out and mobilising the membership. Giving them the confidence

that their actions will not be squandered by a leadership looking for an easy life - but taken forward by one willing to organise whatever is necessary to win.

Politically, we are failing to fight as new Labour privatises LUL. Despite Union policy, Knapp will

not even ask our sponsored MPs to speak up to defend our terms and conditions.

The idea that the government might consider re-nationalising the railways has been dropped. Even the cost-less proposal to return rail franchises to public ownership at the end of their term has disappeared from the New Labour agenda.

We need to reassert our own agenda - to fight for re-nationalisation as the only way to defend rail services; to halt the threat of any further privatisation on London Underground; for action to



Andrew Wiaard

RMT has not even called on its sponsored MPs to speak in defence of hard-won LUL agreements

defend our shipping members from the likes of P&O; and defend our bus members from the ravages imposed with deregulation.

As the anti-union laws continue to be used against us, we cannot be satisfied with the pathetic crumbs thrown our way under "Fairness at Work". This is even more the case now that Mandelson has given in even further to the CBI. We have to assert our demands for the total repeal of all the anti-union laws. Together with the rest of the movement we have to build a campaign that forces the government to act to unshackle our trade unions.

Organisationally, we are failing as a Union. Membership is nearly one third what it was when Knapp took office. Finances are stretched to the limit, but other than attacking basic democratic structures little has been done to get to grips with the situation. The financial situation far from being cured has become chronic.

The Union needs to be rebuilt

into an organisation capable of defending the membership. We have to act decisively to direct resources to supporting our grass roots. Our representative and officer structure is arranged as if British Rail was still nationalised. We have to face reality and build an activist system capable of responding to the pressures of the privateer bosses.

We cannot just assume that transport workers will queue up to join the Union. We have to mobilise the membership to actively recruit and organise.

Every member an activist, every activist an organiser.

Our rank and file have struggled to defend themselves - too often with no lead from the top of the Union.

"Wait and see", and hope our troubles go away has been the order of the day. Our Union needs to change - we need to build a fighting democratic union - with all members united in common cause - with officers prepared to give clear and decisive leadership.

Politically, we are failing to fight as new Labour privatises the London Tube

Tube strikes banned by High Court: RMT backs down

By a railworker

IN A LAST minute intervention before planned strikes over the New Year weekend, London Underground workers were banned from taking action when a High Court judge granted LUL management an injunction against the RMT.

The judge ruled that the RMT's successful ballot, held in the summer, had effectively expired because of a several months gap since action was last taken. In effect the ruling penalised the RMT for attempting to further the dispute through negotiation rather than maintaining its strike programme.

Despite an attempt by the left minority on the RMT Executive to call action regardless of the court decision, the RMT agreed to call off the planned strikes and will now re-ballot its LUL members. It is important that the ballot is won and action called rapidly - the first LUL workers are due to be handed over to the private sector in February.

Once again the whole question of the RMT's sponsorship of John Prescott and other MPs has been



In retreat: Jimmy Knapp

thrown into question. Clearly for most LUL workers this is no longer an issue - they cannot understand why sponsorship is continuing. However, the RMT Executive remains equivocal.

Called upon to implement a resolution agreed at the RMT AGM last summer to write to the spon-

sored MPs demanding they support Union policy and oppose the privatisation of London Underground the Executive majority backed down - for fear of breaching parliamentary privilege!

Twenty years ago, the then General Secretary Sid Weighell was called before parliament for daring to demand that NUR sponsored MPs follow union policy under the last Labour government. Such a radical step, it appears, cannot be considered today.

With the three most consistent left members of the Executive finishing their term of office the need to organise rank and file pressure on the Union leadership has become more urgent. That the left, if properly organised, can be effective was shown with the results of the RMT President's election.

The main left candidate, Mick Atherton, came within 45 votes of winning the election. This is clearly the best national election result the left has had, outside of the victory by Bob Crow four years ago, elected as Assistant General Secretary in special cir-

cumstances against a discredited Shipping officer.

Bizarrely, the *Morning Star* managed to claim that Mick lost the election for the left by splitting the vote and thereby stopping the "real" left challenger from being elected. The fact that their candidate trailed in third 2,500 votes behind Mick was neither here nor there.

However, the battle for control is by no means over. Elections for the General Secretary and one of the Assistant General Secretary positions are now underway.

Greg Tucker and Pat Sikorski, left candidates for the two places, have already received significant nominations from Branches across the country wanting to see a real change in the way the Union is organised.

With voting in February and March the task now is to make Knapp and Co. pay the price for their failure to organise real resistance to the attacks being made on RMT members from their privatised bosses and the New Labour government.

The ruling penalised the RMT for attempting to negotiate

Don't drop fight against Section 28

Mark Lewin

TEN YEARS ago, lesbians and gay men protested vigorously against "Section 28", part of a local government act passed in 1988 by the Thatcher government.

It specifically prohibits local authorities from "promoting homosexuality by teaching or publishing material". At the time it was opposed by Labour, and in Labour's 1997 manifesto abolition was an early promise. So it was with shock and surprise that lesbians and gay men learned that repeal was to be dropped from the 1998 Queen's Speech.

It was even hinted that it might not be abolished at all by the present government.

Section 28 is perhaps unique - it has never been enforced by a court or by the police. Legally, it remains a dead letter, since "promoting" anything is rarely an activity of local government. Although it refers to teaching, in fact it imposes no duty on schools.

But the Section has been used many times by local authorities to refuse to fund lesbian and gay orientated things like theatre groups, art centres and so-on. In spite of its non-application to schools, it has been used as an excuse to remove any reference to gay or lesbian sexuality in sex

education.

Repeal therefore has always been a demand of lesbian and gay campaigns.

So why has abolition been dropped? Lack of parliamentary time has been mentioned, but repeal of this legislation would be very straightforward indeed. Possible blockage by the House of Lords has also been suggested after the Age of Consent debacle.

A more likely culprit is the new "family friendly" attitude of the government, coupled with desperate attempts to cover over press exposures of gay ministers.

Another problem is the lack of action on the issue from established campaigns.

Even the activist group Outrage hardly mentions it on its web site, although it does call for repeal.

It is not included in its "Top Three OUTRAGEous Ideas" - evidently the core of Outrage's campaigning demands.

Stonewall has a single paragraph calling for repeal, without any real discussion, on its general



What happened to the anger and activity which animated the campaign against Section 28?

page. As far as action is concerned, the Equality Alliance organised a series of small demonstrations last May, but has no permanent organisation at the minute.

LCLGR has no web page, but integrates repeal with the rest of its legislative proposals. Paradoxically, it is perhaps the least

impressed by the Labour government's efforts. It continues to campaign against Section 28 as part of its general activity.

Overall, it appears that much of the lesbian and gay movement is still in the thrall of the government, unable to believe that Blair and Straw (!) are anything other than "friends". We call for the

immediate repeal of section 28. Lesbian and gay groups need to come together to organise

Web sites referred to:
<http://www.outrage.cygnet.co.uk/eqrighs.htm>
<http://www.stonewall.org.uk/general/front.html>
<http://equality-alliance.diversity.org.uk/pr980430Sec28.html>

Kent asylum seekers under attack

Simon Deville

SINCE the introduction of the Tory Asylum and Immigration Act in 1996, numerous forces have helped to whip up racism against asylum seekers in Kent.

Whilst the National Front have attempted to make whatever gains they can from this, and plan to make Kent one of their key areas for their European election campaign, they have as yet been rather marginal to the rise of racism.

Key to fueling the rise of racism have been government policy, the local and national media, and council officials, both elected and unelected.

The 1996 Act placed the burden for supporting asylum seekers away from central government, as the right to Income Support and Housing benefit was withdrawn for all those who didn't apply for asylum immediately on entering Britain.

A legal ruling meant that local authorities should have a responsibility to provide housing, food and other basic necessities under the National Assistance Act, and the Children's Act meant that much of this financial burden has been placed upon local authorities.

The local media have consistently spewed out rabid, anti-immigrant bile, blaming asylum seekers (and Eastern European Roma specifically) for everything from rises in crime, housing shortages to hospital waiting lists. One paper even carried a story by a local prostitute complaining that her business had suffered as she was being undercut by asylum seekers forced into prostitution.

Kent Today organised a Phone-in

poll to ask 'should the Romanian Gypsies be sent home?' and one newspaper may face prosecution for incitement to racial hatred after printing a letter suggesting that asylum seekers be thrown off the cliffs of Dover.

One of the few voices of dissent came from the Tory Councillor (and deputy leader of KCC) Keith Ferrin

"Sadly there is so much hatred around, it wouldn't be at all difficult to staff a concentration camp for asylum seekers in Kent at the moment. Nurses, doctors, union officials, reporters and scores of

Key to fueling the rise of racism have been government policy, the local and national media, and council officials,

ordinary people have all passed by on the other side, spitting as they went, in the last two weeks.

"If you are one of them I would like you to know that I don't want your vote. I'm proud of the job that we have done in Kent to deal with asylum seekers and if anyone doesn't like that, tough."

While there may be contradictions in his position, this one Tory has done far more than most Labour councillors have been prepared to do in opposing racism.

The National Front have been given a focus to mobilise around, picketing any temporary accom-

modation where asylum seekers have been dumped, and organising two national demonstrations (where they were far outnumbered by anti-fascists on each occasion).

Labour's proposals on immigration and asylum will greatly increase this sort of racism, since all housing benefit and income support will be stopped, placing the entire financial burden on local authorities.

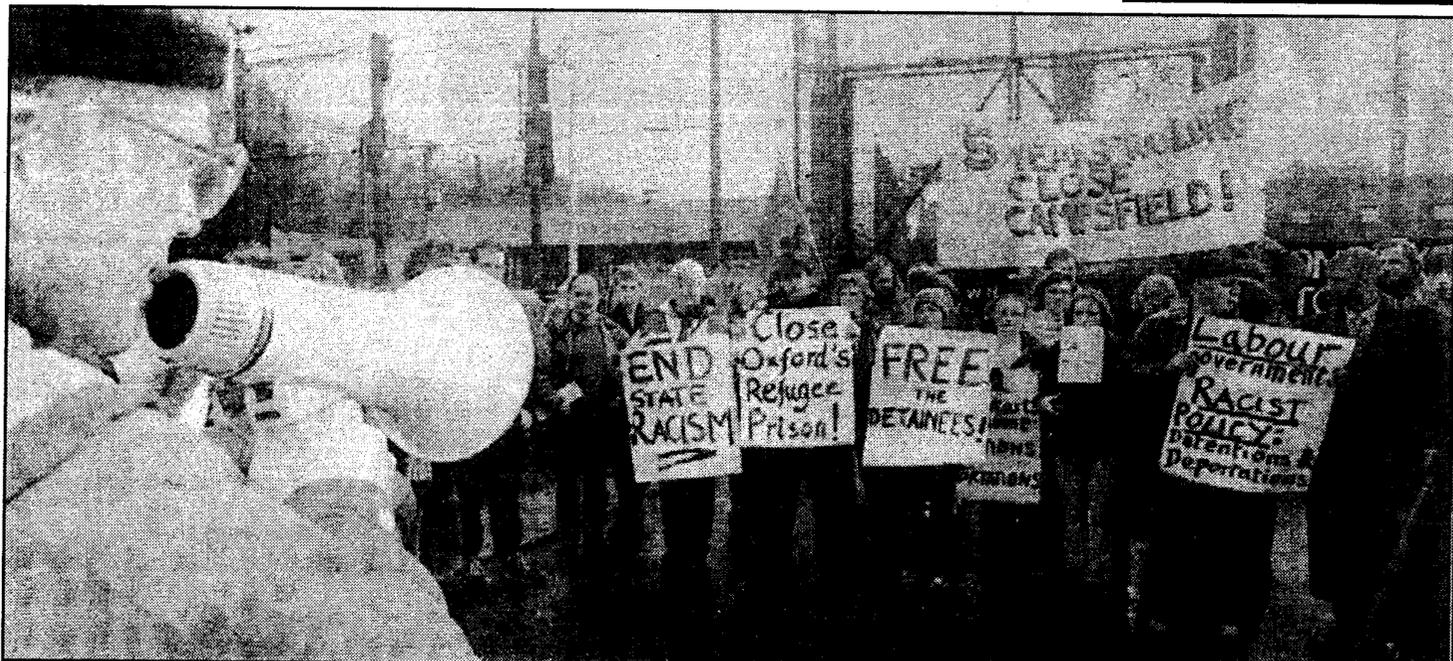
At the same time asylum seekers will be dispersed throughout the country, where support services may be minimal, and they will be far more isolated.

Anti racists should not only oppose Labour's new proposals, but also demanding the abolition of the existing racist laws.

Close Campsfield

Campaigners marked the grim 5th Anniversary of the Immigration Prison at Campsfield, near Oxford with a protest outside the gates (below).

Labour ministers have been at least as keen as their Tory predecessors to continue the practice of incarcerating asylum seekers in the privately-run jail, one of a national network holding thousands of innocent refugees.



Strange bedfellows pushing forward "peace process"

John North reports from Belfast

A DEFINING moment in recent Irish history was the massive vote in favour of the British government's proposals for a political settlement in May.

One of the forces delivering this vote was an "independent" non-party "Yes" campaign. Just before Xmas the campaign published its accounts.

The details said everything about the nature of the Good Friday settlement. Top contributor was billionaire speculator George Soros, followed by Southern capitalist Martin Naughton, who has interests in the North.

The campaign was led by Quintin Oliver - seen as representing the extensive community sector in the North. At the time the campaign claimed to be independent of the British, but it has since emerged that they were provided with extensive research and intelligence data by the British government.

This says all that needs to be said about the Irish Peace process - established and bankrolled by imperialism, supported by Irish capital and fronted by community organisations that have grown up not as a result of struggle but from years of the disbursement of pacification funds by the British and the EU.

The only basis on which this could be seen as progress would be if one were to endorse the idea that imperialism had now become a force for good.

This is exactly what many supporters of the peace process profess to believe, and is at the foundation of current republican analysis.

Stepping stone

In this scenario, the cross-border bodies to be set up following the agreement are a stepping stone to a united Ireland.

In a transitional period the re-established Stormont assembly will be forced to democratise the North.

This will all happen because imperialism, if not defeated, was at least held to a draw by the republican military campaign

- the evidence being that that there is no demand for prior de-commissioning (the formal surrender of arms) written into the agreement.

Unfortunately these are not ideas that would long survive the light of day nor any honest debate, so from all sides comes the blind assertion of reform and progress, punctuated by strange silences when the long periods of



Republican leaders who at first reluctantly endorsed it are now the only eager defenders of the agreement

stasis in the process are broken by movement - a movement which is always below yesterday's bottom line.

And so it was again. The republican leadership, who spent their time in the run-up to the May referendum explaining to their members that the deal was not of their making, and that they were endorsing it with reluctance, spent the rest of the year as the only defenders of the agreement, which froze on all of these issues.

In the run-up to Xmas the proposals for implementation of the agreement were finally announced.

The republican's bridge to a united Ireland - six cross-border bodies - proved only suitable for a horse-laugh: Inland waterways, food safety, trade and business development, special EU programmes, Language [in which the Irish language is equated with an 'ulster-scots' dialect] and Aquaculture and marine matters.

Much stress has been laid on the Trade and business and EU bodies by republicans and nationalist politicians. They argue that these are the foundation of movement to Irish unity.

A glance at the formal agreement shows that these bodies covered only specific issues - for example monitoring the interest rate subsidy - and even then represented only agreement to talk about them.

Another central claim of the reformist programme advanced by Sinn Fein is that the North will be democratised on the road to a united Ireland. The expression of this was to be an equality

body. The new stage of the agreement lists ten departments, to be shared out between the parties with two ministerial seats reserved for Sinn Fein. The equality department is nowhere to be seen. In fact the whole structure of the parliament isn't about equality but about sharing sectarian privilege. In any case the British will hold the levers of power in the state.

A new element has been added to the agreement - the other parties have made it crystal clear that the republicans must surrender weapons - and that they must do so before entering government. This demand has no military meaning but tremendous political significance

In a carefully choreographed bit of playacting this necessity was underlined by the surrender of a few weapons by the LVF, one of the pro-British death squads, immediately following the parties signatures

Many of the details surrounding the agreement give a clear picture of the actual mechanisms at work and the possibility of capitalist stability rising from it.

One issue is the extremely volatile mixture of reaction and sectarianism represented by unionism. Even the ten times diluted agreement, which represents 98% of their own demands, was rejected by the unionist Assembly party and had to be taken back for a further tweak to the right. David Trimble had to be awarded the Nobel prize having conceded nothing and capable only of jibes at the republicans.

The fact that these are the moderate unionists - and the other 50% are even more reactionary - means that there will be a steady rightward drift in the process, one that has operated from the beginning and will continue to

Through Irish Eyes

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

Dublin that vetoed including agriculture in the cross-border bodies - far too important to include in something that is meant to ensure a partitionist capitalist stability based on the status quo.

The Northern SDLP are quite unhappy as their share of the sectarian cake is eaten into, but they will not allow anything to threaten the deal.

Finally there is the stability of the republican base. An IRA convention was held, and refused to agree to the surrender of arms. It appointed a hard-line militarist as chief of staff. The suspicion is however that the Adams leadership has won greater flexibility and that the new leadership stand willing to enforce further concessions by Sinn Fein.

The reality is that the militarists have failed utterly as an opposition, have no alternative programme, have accepted the return of a partitionist assembly and simply represent a sentiment that has to be talked around.

Imperialism won a major victory in May. The fact that the agreement nowhere addressed the causes of conflict means that there are constant shocks and strains that will always be a feature of it.

The demobilisation of the republican base and the co-option of the labour bureaucracy in support of the deal means that regroupment is likely to be a slow and difficult process in the North.

However much of its stability from the nationalist side rests on the authority of the Irish bourgeoisie - an authority recently achieved on the back of perceptions of a "Celtic Tiger" economy, and likely to face sharp challenges from southern workers in the coming period.

Ten departments, are to be shared out between the parties. The equality department is nowhere to be seen.

OUT NOW!

The Real Irish Peace Process

available (£6 plus 70p p&p) from Socialist Outlook, PO Box 1109 London N4 2UU

The birth of the Euro

Bosses tool up against the working class

Alan Thornett

Love it or loathe it, the arrival of the Euro – the single European currency or European Monetary Union (EMU) as it has been known to date – is a gigantic event in European politics. It is equal (at least) to the Marshall Plan in the immediate post war period, or the original launch of the European Economic Community in 1957.

Economically, the sheer size of the zone the new currency represents – France, Luxembourg, Austria, Germany, Belgium, Finland, Holland, Italy, Ireland, and Portugal – instantly makes the Euro a super-currency second only to the dollar, and a major new player in world markets, probably as a reserve currency.

Politically, it represents the biggest single step yet towards a European super-state – the project favoured by the most powerful sections of the European bourgeoisie when faced with increasing competition from Japan and North America. The most important factor at that time was Japan, with the USA relatively in the doldrums.

The Single European Act of 1986 was designed precisely to challenge what was then Japanese pre-eminence in the world economy. It marked the transition from what had been until then a

mainly economic project of a common market or customs union (aimed largely at avoiding further European wars) towards the highly political project of the European Union, and eventually a super-state.

EMU was the core provision contained in the Maastricht Treaty signed in 1992. It would take away the ability of individual nation states to fix interest rates, the most important fiscal lever available to them.

The Maastricht Treaty also contained provisions for a common foreign and defence policy and elements of social policy under the Social Chapter.

Other features of a nation state – such as the European Court of Justice – were already in place, and others such as a common immigration and asylum policy (under the Schengen Agreement) were soon developed after the introduction of the Maastricht Treaty.

1992 was also the year Britain and Italy were blown out of the EMU's predecessor, the European Exchange rate mechanism (ERM). The ERM was a halfway-house between the previous free movement of European currencies and their locking together under EMU.

The demise of the ERM demonstrated just how difficult it would be to maintain the stability of a

single currency which straddled a multiplicity of diverse economies across Europe. And the Euro comes to Europe at a time when there are 20 million unemployed inside the EU and 50 million people living below the poverty line, much of this a direct result of job losses caused by preparation for the Euro.

The Maastricht treaty's answer to the maintenance of stability was the qualification clauses for membership of the single currency, the so-called "convergence criteria". This placed a strict limit (of 3% of Gross Domestic Product) on government borrowing, along with restrictions on balance of trade deficits and inflation levels. It imposed an economic framework which put the Europe of Maastricht firmly within the neoliberal agenda of the USA, the IMF and the World Bank.

Maastricht, therefore, represented not only an attempt by the European bourgeoisie to compete more effectively with rival power blocks in the world (where only the biggest and strongest can survive) but triggered a major attack on the

European working class as austerity measures were introduced to meet the criteria. The various European welfare systems – now regarded by the European bourgeoisie as a luxury which could no longer be afforded – were the main target in these attacks.

The response of the European working class to these attacks was the biggest round of struggles which Europe has seen for a

decades, with general strikes in a series of countries –

Belgium, France,

Spain, Italy and Greece.

At the end of 1996

France saw the biggest

strike wave since 1968, and

the Juppé government fell as a result.

Britain remained the exception in this (with strikes remain at an all-time low after the defeats of the 1980s) but in country after country austerity measures designed to meet the Maastricht criteria were met with strikes and other forms of mass action from blockades by farmers and lorry drivers, to strikes by seafarers and bank workers.

In some cases austerity plans were pushed back.

It was against this background that the European Marches were able to mobilise 50,000 people against the social effects of EMU in Amsterdam in June 1997. It was the first truly international demonstration of its kind – with an internationalised attack being met with an internationalised response.

International solidarity was on the agenda, and Renault workers staged cross border protests and strikes.

The Maastricht treaty and EMU, however, were bruised but not beaten by these actions, and by the middle of 1998 11 of the 15 EU countries had qualified (by a combination of austerity and creative accounting) to join the launch of the single currency on January 1st 1999.

The Euro, in the form of notes and coins, will not, of course, come into use until January 2002. But it will not be a "virtual currency", as some have suggested. From day one all the mechanisms of EMU will operate.

The currencies of the participating states will be permanently locked together, and the collective interest rate set by the unelected members of the new European Central Bank (ECB), set up last year. In reality it will be the 10 currencies destined for absorption which will be the vir-



French unemployed force Jospin into fresh concessions

New Year of struggle for benefits

Christophe Agitou

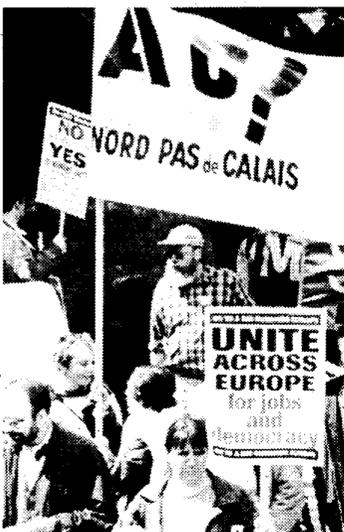
MASSIVE mobilisations of the French unemployment movement were built during the winter of 1997-8. They involved occupations of many administrative offices dealing with unemployed workers.

There was world-wide media coverage, and the campaign dominated the front pages of the newspapers and made prime time news on television throughout France.

The conflict calmed down when Prime Minister Lionel Jospin himself came on television to announce £1bn to be distributed to those in urgent need.

In July, a new law on Social Exclusion was before the National Assembly.

Unemployment associations and social rights organisations watched closely in a tent outside, with television monitors showing the proceedings. The overwhelming feeling was one of utter frustra-



tion, of having suffered a terrible deception, and that nothing had changed.

Winter has come early this year. Already people have died of cold, including a family that died from hypothermia due to inadequate help with food and heating. This year the unemployment associa-

tions and social rights groups have gone beyond the stage of simply demanding a "Christmas bonus". The demand is for a total reform of both the unemployment and benefit system.

The programme includes an extension of benefits to the under 25s – France is one of the few countries not to do this – and a guaranteed legal minimum for all on benefits.

Following the German example of holding a national one-day action every month, the unemployed have been making their presence and demands felt, building their actions up to major demonstrations in December.

Very early on, it was clear that the government refused to allow any occupation to go beyond a couple hours without sending in the riot public. All attempts to occupy as a means of negotiating cases and pressing our demands in job centres, benefit centres

and social affairs offices were met with immediate ejection by the police on the orders of the officials concerned.

However every month since October 1998, throughout France, demonstrations or occupations have taken place with the slogan that 'nothing has changed'. This has helped mobilise all those who find themselves even worse off one year on, and added to the determination that a total reform is necessary.

Key dates have been 3 December and 21 December. The huge mobilisation for a "Christmas bonus of 3000FF" (roughly £320) started in Marseilles and led to actions in 50 towns and cities. Once again Prime Minister Jospin stepped in to announce increases in income support-type benefits, backdated to

January 1998. Jospin has given a little bit more than last year, but it is far from adequate to demobilise the

movement.

December 21 was a national day of action. In Paris actions were aimed at demanding tax reforms that would do more than [meet the cost of the] demands for a financial reform of the unemployment and benefit system. Two occupations took place in Paris. One was in the headquarters of major French insurance company Axa, and the other at the Commission des Operations de Bourse (COB, the Stock Exchange Commission) just opposite the stock exchange.

The first budget of the left government has failed to include measures that would ensure a fairer distribution of the wealth of the country by increasing taxes on the rich and taxing speculative capital. The series of actions ended with a demonstration in front of the finance ministry uniting unemployed and wage-earners.

tual currencies for the next three years, with their values tied unalterably to the Euro.

The Euro will exist from day one as a major trading currency in electronic transactions. It will be an electronic currency for three years but no less powerful for it. And the introduction of the Euro will make financial transactions within the EU cheaper and easier.

This will create big problems for member states not in the first wave – Britain, Denmark, Sweden and Greece. Big sectors of commerce will trade in the Euro irrespective of whether it exists in the physical form of a currency.

Those left outside the Euro-zone will see economic activity gravitate towards what will be the undisputed core sector of the European economy. They will be the worst of all worlds – from a European capitalist point of view – subject to the continuing convergence criteria (continuing for those not yet in), but devoid of influence and the economic advantages of membership.

Membership of the EU is not inevitable, even from a capitalist point of view. But the half in half out situation is a big business nightmare. If the Euro maintains any kind of stability pressure will mount on the remaining four to join – and to do what is necessary to do it.

The big question, of course, is whether the Euro will remain stable, given the recent turbulence of world markets and the continuing severe crisis in key sectors of the world economy. Today the challenge to European capitalism is not so much from Japan, which has lost out to the USA in shaping the world to its model and is now in a deep slump, but to the USA which has regained its dominance.

How the crisis impacts on Europe and the USA over the next year, therefore, will determine how the Euro survives its early stages, and how strong will be the rush of the others to join.

At the same time the arrival of the Euro will accelerate the restructuring of the European economy, which has been under way since the arrival of the Maastricht Treaty, through mergers, takeovers, and the strengthening of the domination of the multinational corporations.

Whilst at the present time most EU countries have some involve-

ment in the production of most goods and services across Europe, there is no reason why this should be the case under EMU. Why should such things be duplicated when the degree of protection given by the existence of individual currencies is gone and the single market complete? The strongest will survive, the weakest will go to the wall. Production and services will be rationalised, and jobs will go.

The current battles for control between European telecommunications companies are a case in point. From the logic of the EU (even more the Euro-zone) a multiplicity of suppliers makes no sense. This may be good news for big corporations who want to maximise their profits, but bad news for the working class in terms of wage levels, job losses, and unemployment.

All these objectives, however, depend on the stability of the Euro in short and medium term in international markets. The plan is that this will be achieved by the Stability Pact (the form the convergence criteria takes once EMU is in) under which government borrowing and inflation levels will hopefully be controlled. But this is easier said than done.

Beyond that the stability of the EU is based on the huge assumption that the institutions of the EU can bring about a harmonisation of the economies of the member states – from the biggest and strongest like Germany and France to the smallest and weakest like Ireland and Greece – to the extent that a single monetary policy can be imposed on them by the European Central Bank.

Yet, even as EMU goes in, pressures are mounting in the world economy which make this objective extremely precarious.

Already the international economic crisis has split the bourgeoisie over how to resolve it. One section, led by in Japan and the Asia Pacific economies (and supported by billionaire speculator George Soros), are pressing for a return to more regulation and for Neo-Keynesian measures to deflate the economies. They argue that the raw unregulated market is a recipe for disaster. The other section, led by the USA, sees more neoliberalism as the answer.

It is an unresolved debate. But it has its reflection in Europe, with the election of social democratic governments in most of the coun-



tries of the EU – in particular the arrival of Schröder in Germany and Jospin in France. They are both pressing for some kind of neo-Keynesian refutation, despite the economic realities of Europe under Maastricht. The brief of the European Central Bank is to ensure low inflation as its number one objective, regardless of the impact this will have on jobs and working class living standards.

As far as Britain is concerned, Tony Blair remains committed to enter the single currency as soon as he can be sure of winning a referendum, despite his continuing attachment to the Atlantic Alliance and his resulting craven support for the Clinton administration demonstrated so clearly recently in the Gulf.

In this he will get the full support of the TUC and most of the

trade union leaders. The TUC has led the pack as an enthusiastic proponent of the whole European project, hoping that a few crumbs from the Euro-table will compensate for their total lack of fight against the government and employers offensive in this country. The AEEU has even announced that workers can now pay their dues in Euros!

Yet the EU is a vicious, anti-working class institution, aimed at increasing the rate of exploitation and destroying welfare provision won by the working class in the post-war period. The responsibility of the left in Britain to fight for clarity on this issue is obvious – particularly in the unions and in the Labour

Party.

Fortunately a lead is being given around which it is possible to organise – that is the international marches and mass demonstration to be held in Cologne in June this year, and called by the European Marches. This will coincide with the German presidency of the EU, and will take place in its most important country.

A big mobilisation from Britain for those events would help to carry the fight into the labour movement, and show the reality of the arrival of the Euro – as another step in the restructuring of Europe against the interests of the working class.



Cologne 99

International demonstration, June 5th

The European Marches (organiser of the mass demonstration in Amsterdam in 97) is calling another major protest (50,000 or more) in Cologne in June to coincide with the Heads of Government Summit of the EU under the German presidency.

Marchers will set out from every region of Germany and from other European cities including Prague, Luxembourg, and Paris, to converge on Cologne for the demo. There will be a (1,000 strong) march from Brussels to Cologne. Across Europe unemployment, job insecurity, social exclusion and poverty are growing. The demands will be:

- * A guaranteed job for all, and a decent standard of living.
- * For an immediate massive reduction of working hours, coordinated on a European level, without loss of wages or purchasing power.
- * Opposition to compulsory part-time work, child labour, and social dumping.
- * Opposition to the enrichment of the minority and the impoverishment of the majority.
- * Yes to the redistribution of wealth.
- * Opposition to all forms of exclusion and discrimination, including those based on gender or race. Yes to the full right of asylum for the persecuted.
- * Defend the welfare state. Yes to social rights in all areas (housing, education, health etc.) with the necessary funding.

The European Marches are appealing to the peoples of Europe, to associations, trade unions and social forces, to make June 5th 1999 a massive day



of mobilisation.

In Britain the European Marches Coordinating Committee is calling for the broadest mobilisation for the marches and the demonstration. Final plans will be made at a conference (open to all) in Cologne on January 23rd and 24th. After that conference the campaign will be launched in Britain.

The (current and tentative) plan is to have a British delegation on one (or more) of the marches in Europe and organise coaches for June 5th. Those (organisations and individuals) wishing to be a part of such a mobilisation, under the name of Cologne 99, should fill in and post the form below.

I/we wish to be a part of the mobilisation for the marches and demonstration in Cologne in June 99 to be launched in February. Please send me/us all information about the campaign as it develops, along with information as to how I/we can be involved. I/we enclose a donation to help start the campaign.

Name
 Organisation
 Phone
 Address

Donation £.....

(Cheques: Cologne 99)

Send to: Andy Robertson, Euromarch Liaison Cttee, 30 Lime St Newcastle upon Tyne, NM 2PQ.

Tel 0191 2220299. Details of the conference on January 23rd and 24th also from this address.



It is five years since the Zapatista uprising burst onto the world stage on January 1 1994 when they occupied the city of San Cristobal de las Casas and six other towns in the state of Chiapas in Mexico. It is a fitting time therefore to look back on what has been achieved by the Zapatistas as well as what solidarity tasks are posed for the left internationally.

Below Terry Conway argues that while the mobilisations led by the Zapatista army (EZLN) and their supporters have not led to the downfall of the PRI government, it has deepened their isolation and led to a crisis of confidence which may in the end be terminal. We also carry a piece from Mexican Labour News and Analysis which marks the first anniversary of the new union Federation, the UNT. The building of a political alternative to the PRI Presidential system must of necessity lead to and need a major rupture in the trade unions. While

Five years after Chiapas rebellion

the promise of the UNT remains unfulfilled, the development is never the less an important one

THE CRISIS of the ruling party, the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) and its state has deepened considerably during the period since the Zapatistas first launched their offensive against the government and its neo-liberal line.

The PRI has continued its hold on power through its tried and tested method of electoral fraud taken to new levels of bathos. It has combined this with a merciless low intensity war against the indigenous communities which has seen the encampment of 75,000 government troops in the state of Chiapas.

The balance sheet of that war combined with the long process of social exclusion imposed on the indigenous people of Chiapas and deepened by the NAFTA agreement is clear from the state's own statistics. Of 42 million poor persons in the country, only 6 per cent receive school breakfasts and only 5 per cent are able to purchase milk at 2 pesos per litre.

UNICEF, who have launched a fund of \$2.5 million dollars to assist the children of Mexico, as well as those of Honduras,

Guatemala, Belize and El Salvador in the wake of Hurricane Mitch, also provide telling statistics. They explain that Chiapas is among the most deficient areas in the whole region with regard to primary education, with a little more than 70 per cent of the population in deplorable and indigent conditions.

Again the government was condemned out of the mouths of its own supporters when 16 PRI senators, the so-called Galileo group, revealed the results of an investigation into living conditions in Chiapas in November 1998. They found that 90 per cent of Chiapans live in poverty and 75 per cent in extreme poverty. They demanded a review of government policy in the state and concluded that even if the Zapatistas were to disappear it would have little effect in the region as "the causes that gave rise to the conflict would remain unresolved."

Such statements are not made out of any concern for the people of Chiapas - but from fear that the current strategy of the PRI will not remain successful in containing the legitimate demands of the people.

Perhaps the high point of the balance of forces between the Zapatistas and their allies and the ruling party was achieved with the signing of the San Andreas accords in January 1996.

The importance of the Accords lies almost as much in the consultative and participatory process in their negotiation and formulation as in their contents. Some 500 representatives of Mexico's 32 indigenous peoples and from 178 indigenous organisations were invited by the EZLN and PRI government negotiators to a National Indigenous Forum in San Cristobal de Las Casas in February 1996.

Regional indigenous forums took place throughout the country simultaneously. The EZLN adopted the demands of these forums as their own, leading to the signing of the accords with the government a month later.

The Accords demand "a new relationship between the State and the indigenous peoples", including the recognition of indigenous rights and autonomy as defined in Convention 169 of the International Labour Organisation.

The Accords necessitate the remunicipalisation of indigenous regions, the free determination of the indigenous peoples, the promotion and protection of indigenous cultures and customs, the promotion of bilingual and culturally aware education, the creation of autonomous indigenous mass media, including radio and TV stations, and the rights of indigenous women to hold positions of

authority and to have equality with men at all levels of government.

Most crucially, they demand the direct control and use of the natural resources on and under indigenous lands. This demand represents a direct threat to neoliberal designs to expropriate and exploit all the natural and human resources of these areas for the interests of the Trans-National Corporations and international investors, a far more radical form of autonomy than that which already exists in some states such as Oaxaca, which would break tip and possibly render impossible the realisation of the planned "corridors of development".

As such the Accords represent an important precedent which other non-indigenous groups and movements might well be inspired to take up in the struggle for their own kinds of autonomy.

While it was clear at the time of the signing of the accords that it was only an unfavourable balance of forces that led the government to make this agreement, this has been underlined starkly by the subsequent repudiation of the accords by President Ernesto Zedillo.

The Accords however, together with demands for an end to the militarisation of Chiapas, have con-

National Union of Workers (UNT) A promise unfulfilled

THE National Union of Workers (UNT), the independent labor federation, celebrated its first regular national convention, and the first anniversary of its founding one year ago on November 27, with a call for demonstrations and work stoppages across the country to oppose the Mexican government's economic program and current budget.

Yet, despite its militant posture, many feel that the new labor federation has yet to realize the expectations and fulfill the promises of its founding convention.

The 2,000 voting and fraternal

delegates gathered in Mexico City for the four-hour meeting declared their opposition to the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) government's neoliberal economic program, to President Zedillo's administration's economic package for the coming year, and to the government's minimum wage proposal.

By a hand vote, the delegates also unanimously reelected the federation's three top leaders and vice-presidents. The union's top officers remain: Francisco Hernández Juárez, head of the Mexican Telephone Workers Union (STRM); Augustin Rodríguez,

leader of the Union of Workers of the National Autonomous University (STUNAM); and Fernando Rocha, chief of the National Union of Workers of Social Security (SNTSS), workers of Mexican Institute of Social Security (IMSS) the public health and retirement system. (Fernando Rocha had already replaced Antonio Rosado, the former head of the SNTSS, as one of the three UNT top leaders.)

The UNT today claims to represent 150 unions with a total of approximately 1.5 million workers, more or less the same unions and members it had a year ago.

The UNT itself recognized that it has so far failed to lead the broad reorganization of the working class which it proposed a year ago to inspire. The UNT Convention's basic document noted, "A year since its birth, the UNT is now an obligatory reference within the national panorama...nevertheless, the federation still needs internal consolidation, momentum in the growth of its membership, material and human resources, as well as a forward motion in its political profile."

Various pundits noted that the UNT has yet to establish a national headquarters, has not yet won inclusion in the government's tripartite boards, and has not succeeded in getting the congress to establish either the new salary board or the national registry of unions and contracts that it has advocated. But those are the least of its problems. Or rather that is the wrong checklist.

Augustin Rodríguez, one of the three top leaders of the UNT, told the press, "With regard to the objectives that we have proposed, we should be self-critical, we have not succeeded in make the UNT into the great fighting front for the most general demands of the

Mexican workers."

That remark comes closer to the heart of the matter. Asked how he would evaluate the UNT, Rodríguez said, "on a scale of 10, I give it an 8." Some would say that is a little high.

The founding of the UNT represented an important and progressive development in Mexico. At its founding, the UNT brought together both formerly "official" or state-controlled unions and independent unions in a new formation that challenged the hegemony of the Congress of Labor (CT) and the whole "corporative" union structure dominated by the Confederation of

Mexican Workers (CTM). Subsequently the UNT organized two massive labor demonstrations, one on March 25 against government cut-backs and privatization, and another on May Day, the international labor day.

But so far, the UNT has failed to take the lead in turning organized labor into the leader of a broad social and political movement to solve Mexico's deep economic and social problems.

The UNT leadership's own economic analysis points to the disastrous economic situation in Mexico. In the last decade the number of Mexicans living in extreme poverty rose from 20 million to 30 million. Unemploy-

'Social Partnership' is an outlook which completely subordinates the unions to the interests of capital.

Support the Maya school at Oventic

The following petition has been launched in support of the first school ever organised which provides schooling in the indigenous languages of Chiapas and which teaches pupils about their own culture.

This initiative deserves support not only from individuals but from trade unions. The Socialist Teachers Alliance took a recent discussion on pushing for backing within the National

Union of Teachers.

Together we say, let the children learn and let the teachers teach in Oventic, Chiapas, Mexico!

We the undersigned, support the peaceful efforts of the indigenous communities Chiapas, Mexico to construct their first junior high school and urge the Mexican government to respect the school at Oventic Aguascalientes !!

Most importantly, we seek firm guarantees for the safety of all the indigenous and non-indigenous teachers, students and families working to open the school this fall.

Finally, we denounce the harsh detention and deportation of San Diego teacher Peter Brown who is permanently expelled from Mexico for the crime of supporting the school at Oventic.

Please send your name, address, post code, phone, e-mail

Return completed sheets to: Chiapas Schools Construction Teams, 3909 Centre Street, San Diego, CA 92103 (619) 232-2841

FAX (619) 232-0500
<mexicopeace@igc.org>
<http://www.igc.org/mexico-peace>



tinually acted as a reference point for the Zapatistas - a rallying cry for their supporters as well as the context for attempted negotiations with the state.

The latest attempt at formal discussions took place at the end of November 1998 - the first meeting since talks were suspended in September 1996 between the Zapatistas and the Cocopa; a congressional commission set up to promote dialogue with the EZLN which is made up of representatives from the five largest parties at the Federal and Chiapas state levels.

The extreme isolation of the Zedillo government was underlined in the run up to the talks by the fact that not only the representatives of the opposition

Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD) in Cocopa, but one of the representatives of the PRI itself refused to attend the meeting. They argued that the federal government had not put in place the necessary conditions for the dialogue to take place.

No one was then surprised when after just 40 minutes of discussions the 29 representatives of the EZLN walked out of the meeting. They pointed out that the legislators of the Cocopa had a "racist" and "humiliating" attitude and explained that the basic material conditions for the meeting had not been provided.

But at the same time the Zapatistas were using the opportunity to

continue the preparation for the National Consultation it is planning for early this year.

The EZLN have always known that in order to force any movement towards implementation of the San Andreas accords they will need to continue and deepen the broadest possible mobilisations across Mexican society.

Therefore they are planning an unofficial national referendum on the accords as a way of stepping up the pressure on the government. Representatives of 2000 popular organisations across Mexico met with them to plan the campaign for the referendum

It will be the success or otherwise of such mobilisations throughout Mexico, together with other developments such as those amongst trade unionists which will in the end determine the fate of the government of Zedillo and PRI rule itself.

After just 40 minutes the 29 representatives of the EZLN walked out of the meeting.

ment has rise to 25 percent of the economically active population (PEA) or 9 million. Wages have lost 76 per cent of their purchasing power since the end of the 1970s. Half of all workers do not participate in the public health system.

These are the conditions that the UNT was supposedly created to address, and which it must address if it is to fulfill the hopes and promises of the unions and members who belong to it.

But the UNT has not yet succeeded in galvanizing new organizing, leading significant strikes, or pushing forward a broad movement of the working class, peasants, and the poor. The UNT has not made itself the spearhead of a movement to organize the fastest growing sector of the economy, the maquiladoras. Nor has it been able to stop the growth of the new company unions with their "protection contracts."

At times the UNT seems to move toward the right, back toward the government-controlled Congress of Labor (CT) and Confederation of Mexican Workers (CTM). For example, it joined with the PRI-government federations in creating a so-called "Workers Bloc" to negotiate changes in the Federal Labor Law (LFT) with the government and the employers.

More recently in the state of San Luis Potosi there have been efforts to form a "Union Bloc" of the CTM, the CROM (Regional



Confederation of Mexican Workers), and the UNT. These bureaucratic alliances so far do little to advance worker self-organization.

What is needed is not bureaucratic blocs, but the transformation of unions into a social movement.

The UNT's call for a broad mobilization against the government's economic package could represent the first step in taking a leading role in building a labor-social movement. The UNT has raised the idea of work stoppages in all of its workplaces. The SNTSS, the largest union of the UNT with some 350,000 members, says that it cannot cut off services to the IMSS cardholders who depend upon it for health care.

But the Mexican Telephone Workers Union (STRM) and the streetcar workers (who operate trolley-buses, light trains and articulated buses) say that they will suspend labor for two hours on as part of a national protest in December. This will be the first serious attempt at national work stoppages since the early 1980s. But it is not yet clear if the UNT's call represents the beginning of building the new labor movement which it promised to create one year ago.

■ *Mexican Labor News and Analysis* is produced in collaboration with the Authentic Labor Front (Frente Autentico del Trabajo - FAT) of Mexico and the USA's United Electrical Workers (UE) and is published the 2nd and 16th of every month.

MLNA can be viewed at the UE's international web site: [HTTP://www.igc.apc.org/united-elect/](http://www.igc.apc.org/united-elect/). For information about direct subscriptions, submission of articles, and all queries contact editor Dan La Botz at 103144.2651@compuserve.com or write to Dan La Botz, Mexican Labor News and Analysis, 3436 Morrison Place, Cincinnati, OH 45220.

The UE Home Page which displays Mexican Labor News and Analysis has an INDEX of back issues and an URGENT ACTION ALERT section.

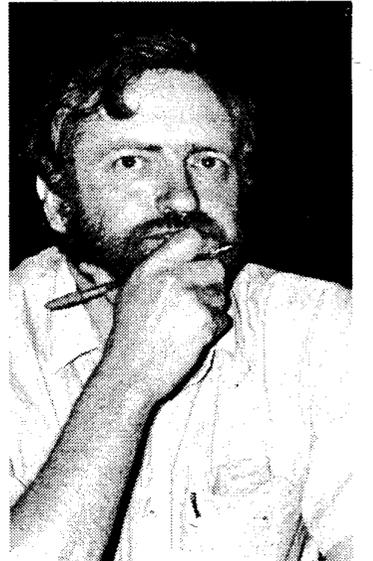
Hit Mexican oppressors where it hurts most!

The Zapatista Action Project and the Mexico Support Group are calling for urgent support for the following Early Day motion as part of the campaign of International solidarity with the Zapatistas. Trade with the European Union is increasingly important to the Mexican state and the pressure to demilitarisation of Chiapas needs to be raised within this context.

MEXICO Early Day motion no.1610 (in Hansard 28 July 1998)

Sponsored by MPs Jeremy Corbyn, Ken Livingstone, Kevin McNamara, Norman Godman, Michael Clapham

This House is deeply concerned about the terror campaign being waged by both paramilitary groups and the Mexican Federal Army against the indigenous Zapatista communities of Chiapas, while human rights observers whose presence had deterred state attacks are being expelled; notes the findings of the recent delegation of MEPs which reported widespread evidence that paramilitary forces in league with security forces are responsible for forced expulsions, death threats, rape, kidnapping and murder (note 1); deplores the Mexican governments abandonment of the 1996 San Andres Accords on Indigenous Rights and Culture, which had guaranteed autonomous self-government and land rights (note 2); and notes that respect for democratic principles and fundamental human rights form an integral part of the EU-Mexico Trade & Co-operation Agreement (note 3); therefore calls upon Her Majesty's Government to demand that the Mexican government fully implements the San Andres Accords, disbands and disarms its paramilitary groups, withdraws the Federal Mexican Army to its pre-1995 presence in Chiapas, and allows foreign visitors to remain as human rights observers; and further advocates that the EU-Mexico Free Trade Agreement be suspended until all these conditions are fulfilled by the Mexican government, and that all arms sales to Mexico



Early day sponsor: Jeremy Corbyn

cease.

Notes

1. The state terror has been well documented by journalists, foreign residents who serve as human rights observers, and visitors such as the independent UK delegation, which included MEP Richard Howitt. In June their findings were published as a booklet, Chiapas: before its too late available from Greenleaf Bookshop, Box 19, 82 Colston St, Bristol BS1 SBB, tel. 0117-942 277L. Since the delegation visited in March, the Mexican Federal Army has attacked several communities, assassinated people, destroyed village amenities, houses and crops, thus turning villagers into refugees.

2. After the Zapatista uprising of January 1994, the Mexican government began negotiations which led to the San Andres Accords, signed by its own representative in February 1996. However, the government never implemented the Accords and has since substituted its own legislative proposal, which ignores the demands of indigenous people

3. In June 1996 the EU Council of Ministers approved an EU-Mexico Trade & Co-operation Agreement, which required 'respect for democratic principles and fundamental human rights' The interim agreement came into effect on 1st July 1998, and further negotiations began in mid-July. According to the Mexican

Trade Minister, the human rights issue has had no repercussions on the agreement, and Mexico needs no 'foreign intervention' (3 July 1998, Reuters).

On the contrary, the tenor campaign is already linked to foreign intervention. The Mexican government seeks to demonstrate that NAFTA can be used by foreign investors to exploit the human and natural resources of Chiapas, e.g. by privatising the land for Agribusiness and mining. This is partly why the government attacks villagers who defend indigenous land rights and who reject dependence upon state aid.

The government obtains military assistance from the USA and arms from Britain. Therefore a different kind of foreign intervention will be needed to stop state terror in Chiapas.

For background information about the conflict in Chiapas, see the Zapatista Challenge website <http://www.acephale.org/encuentro>.

For any queries about promoting the motion itself, you may contact Steve Hogan in the office of Jeremy Corbyn MP. tel. 0171- 219 3545. hogans@parliament.uk

The government obtains military assistance from the USA and arms from Britain.

Justice for Mumia!

Elkie Dee

MUMIA Abu Jamal, a radical Black journalist on Death Row in Pennsylvania whose case Socialist Outlook has previously covered, faces possible execution this year.

His appeal and request for a new trial were unanimously requested by the Pennsylvania Supreme Court on October 29. His lawyer, Leonard Weinglass, estimates that all Mumia's rights of appeal against this could be exhausted by May 1999.

The State Governor, Thomas Ridge had promised to sign and issue a new death warrant on Mumia as soon as his appeal was denied. There's nothing like announcing one's intentions before the outcome of a court case, is there?

If Ridge does not sign, the head of the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections can sign the warrant and issue a date for execution and carry it out within 30 days. Once

the death warrant is signed, Mumia would immediately be moved back into isolation to await the execution or a new stay.

In waging his life or death campaign, Mumia has maintained the principle of not working with scabs. An American TV company, ABC, was making a documentary of his case, and finally sent a team to speak to the man himself. At this time, though, ABC had locked out its production employees, who had been seeking union recognition for 18 months. When a scab film crew arrived at the prison, Abu-Jamal turned them away.

As he is well aware, Mumia Abu-Jamal is a political prisoner. A former Black Panther and MOVE activist, and an outspoken critic of the Philadelphia police department and criminal justice system, he has

spent 17 years on Death Row, since being framed for the murder of a Philadelphia police officer. His execution would be the ultimate punishment for his analysis and criticism of the legal system in his own city and nationally, for being racist and for being financially and politically corrupt.

He has expressed his conviction that the campaign for his freedom and against his execution depends not on the workings of the blatantly racist state and national legal system, but on a political campaign. His supporters need to convince the state that the price of Mumia's execution is too high to pay, and that it would lead in a loss of credibility for the legal system.

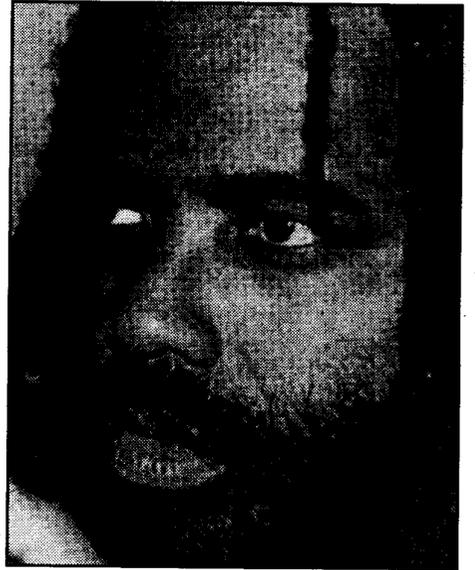
Demonstrations and concerts are being organised in the US. His supporters are seeking to publicise and win people to united action in his defence through labour move-

ment organisations, churches and schools, self-organised black groups, opponents of the death penalty, human rights campaigners and appeals to public opinion.

Activists in other countries are also taking up this issue, for example, by demonstrating outside US embassies.

On December 17 1998, a resolution was passed in the European Parliament calling for the abolition of the death penalty by all the states in the US and around the world, and highlighting the facts of Mumia Abu Jamal's case.

In London, there are open meetings every Wednesday at 56a Crampton Street, London SE17 (Nearest Tube Elephant and Castle), with the intention of pulling together a UK campaign.



There is a public meeting on Thursday 28 January at 7 pm at Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1.

Information about protests and activities can be found on a campaign website at www.mumia.org

Mumia is a political prisoner - a former Black Panther and MOVE activist

Arafat surrender cannot salvage doomed "peace" deal

Roland Rance

THE WYE peace accord between Israel and the Palestine Authority, signed amid much ballyhoo only a few weeks ago, has finally collapsed - and the Israeli government with it.

How much difference will this make to the miserable situation of the Palestinians under Israeli occupation and in the Palestine Authority, and to the prospects for a settlement of the Israel-Palestine conflict?

The Wye Accord was actually little more than a timetable for implementation of commitments which Israel had made long before.

Even so, Israeli PM Netanyahu objected right up to the last minute, and virtually had to be forced by Clinton to sign the document. But Netanyahu's resistance should not be misunderstood; like most of the Israeli cabinet, he now accepts the Oslo agreements, which he opposed when ex-PM Rabin signed them five years ago.

This is not because he has become convinced of the need for Palestinian rights, and even a Palestinian state, but because, as a cynical and realistic politician, he recognises that the Oslo process, and the recruitment of Arafat and his cronies as Israel's agents in the repression of the Palestinians, best guarantees the continuation of the occupation and its benefits for Israel.

This cynicism can also be seen in the recent appointment of Ariel Sharon, the Butcher of Beirut, as Israel's Foreign Minis-

ter, in an attempt to reassure the messianic right that the Greater Israel project is in safe hands. True to form, Sharon's immediate response to the Wye Accord was to call on Israeli settlers to grab every available hilltop, and establish settlements.

In the days following this speech, hundreds of dunums of Palestinian land were seized by settlers. Further roads are being built, linking these settlements and by-passing Palestinian villages and towns. The patchwork of Palestinian bantustans in the West Bank and Gaza Strip is being even further divided and isolated.

According to Tikva Honig-Parnass, of the Alternative Information Centre in Jerusalem, "The Palestinians will certainly be given a state - but they will not have independence".

Among the new elements in the Wye Accord was the establishment of joint US-Israeli-Palestinian arbitration commissions.

Arafat agreed - even demanded - that the US be represented on these commissions by the CIA.

In effect, the PA has conceded that, whenever it disagrees with the Israeli government on the interpretation of the agreement, the CIA should have the final say.

The agreement called on the PA to prevent "incitement". This has been interpreted by Arafat as a green light for censorship. The increasing restrictions on the press have led to a journalists strike and scores of arrests. Sev-

eral television stations were closed down for reporting Palestinian opposition to the US-British air strikes against Iraq.

A further humiliation heaped on Arafat was the demand that the PLO repeal articles of their charter expressing opposition to Zionism. In fact, this was done several years ago, although the validity of the meeting was challenged by the Palestinian left.

This time, Arafat was unable even to convene a quorate meeting. In methods apparently learned from the "New Labour" style of decision-making, the applause for Arafat's speech was declared to constitute approval for the necessary constitutional reform.

Meanwhile, Arafat's opponents gathered in a little-reported meeting in Damascus to reaffirm support for the original PLO charter. This represents probably the final demise of the PLO as a credible organisation, though as yet nothing has been established to replace it.

In one of the few Israeli commitments, Netanyahu promised to begin the release of Palestinian prisoners from Israeli gaols. Arafat did not bother to specify which prisoners; when the Israelis released 250 petty criminals, sex offenders and drug dealers, Arafat's ineffectiveness was once again exposed.

Despite all these clear benefits for Israel, Netanyahu was still unable to convince a majority within his coalition to support the agreement. He has been hanging on to power through the tacit support of the Labour opposition, which fully supports Wye.

Most Labour politicians recog-



exacerbates the country's divisive and sectarian political map.

Although the religious parties are unlikely to put up a candidate for PM, they expect to increase their representation in the Knesset. This would enable them to raise the price for support of any government, both in terms of theocratic legislation and in financial support for their institutions.

Other groups seeking increased representation will be Russian immigrants, who now form about 20 per cent of the Jewish population, and the largely

Middle Eastern slum dwellers, whose champion David Levi resigned as Foreign Minister earlier this year.

Even if the Labour Party were to win the elections, little would change.

With a slight change in style, and less personal antipathy, Barak would be able to hoodwink Arafat and cheat the Palestinians more easily and successfully than Netanyahu. The policy would remain the same, and Palestinians who believe that Barak is the lesser evil will be greatly disappointed.

Meanwhile, Netanyahu (recently described by the Guardian as "The Houdini of Israeli politics") remains in power with plenty of room for manoeuvre.

During the previous elections in 1996, the then Labour Prime Minister Shimon Peres launched a war against Lebanon in an attempt to boost his credentials as a strong leader. In the course of this war, Israeli planes deliberately bombed refugees sheltering at the UN base at Qana, killing more than 100 people. Even this did not gain him a victory at the ballot box.

We can be sure that Netanyahu will make the Palestinians pay whatever price he feels necessary in order to win in May.

We can be sure that Netanyahu will make the Palestinians pay whatever price he feels necessary in order to win in May.

nise this agreement, and the earlier Oslo agreement, as a continuation of Labour's historic policy, first expressed in the 1968 Alon Plan, for maximising territory under Israeli rule, while reducing the number of Palestinian subjects. Among Alon's closest political allies at the time were Rabin and Sharon.

But Netanyahu's balancing act has now come to an end, and he has called fresh elections for May. He will be challenged from the right by Binyamin Begin, son of the former PM, who opposes any concessions to the Palestinians.

Within his Likud party, Jerusalem mayor Ehud Olmert is threatening to challenge Netanyahu. Former Justice Minister Dan Meridor plans to stand as a Likud moderate.

A new centre party is being set up, but is already squabbling over its candidate for Prime Minister. Labour leader (and former Chief-of-Staff) Ehud Barak - who has stated that Israel will remain in the settlements "till the end of time" - could also face a challenge within his own party.

Israel's electoral system, in which the Knesset and the Prime Minister are elected separately,

'Free the workers – jail the Bankers'

Paul Flannigan

More and more potential for explosive class conflict is building up within southern Irish society. Increasing numbers of working class people feel alienated by the gross social inequalities and moral hypocrisies.

Workers are pleased that the economy is booming but also realise that they are not getting a deserved share of the new wealth. By contrast the middle class has never had it so good. It is impossible to avoid noticing their conspicuous consumption of luxuries, the town centres populated with dozens of new boutiques, restaurants and wine bars especially tailored to their tastes.

Since 1987 the percentage of national income going to profits has risen by 10 per cent. More than 50 new luxury hotels have opened in Dublin in the last five years.

Consumer spending has risen from less than £14 billion in 1988 to over £27 billion in 1997. The number of new car registrations has gone up from 68,000 in 1992 to 150,000 this year.

This year's Irish Central Bank economic report is forecasting 9 per cent growth rate for this year and 7 per cent for the year after. Interestingly though, in a generally very optimistic report, one threat to healthy profits is singled out – possible wage inflation.

The report fears that several factors including a falling official unemployment rate now down to 7 per cent, skill shortages in key sectors, increasing unfilled vacancies, the expectation of the introduction of a legal minimum wage, rising rents and the so-called "feel good factor" could combine to raise workers' expectations and spark a wage-push inflation.

The report noted that the 2-3 per cent pay restraint rule agreed between government and the unions under the 'Partnership Two Thousand' arrangement is already being breached, the average pay rise in manufacturing is now running at 6 per cent, and at 14 per cent in the booming building sector.

Increasing militancy

We are beginning to see the first signs of a new wave of working class militancy.

In November train drivers brought the network to a standstill, a threat of strike action by busmen forced the company to concede a £1,350 bonus plus a 7 per cent pay rise.

98 per cent of Dublin's fire fighters voted for strike action if



the Corporation went ahead with a productivity plan. Disputes are daily breaking out in the hospitals, mainly against the vicious programme of cuts.

The leadership of the civil service union (CPSU) has been forced by rank and file pressure to convene a national conference to reconsider the union's commitment to Partnership Two Thousand.

To date the most intense bout of militancy has occurred within the building industry.

Ireland has the fastest growing building sector in the EU: £7 billion invested in 1997. The industry has trebled in size since 1988, it now employs 100,000. Despite this year's pay rises for skilled workers, in reality the terms and conditions faced by the majority of building workers have worsened over the period of the boom.

This year alone, 18 workers have been killed on the sites, and scores more seriously injured. When a worker dies as a result of a safety lapse, the maximum that can be awarded against a contractor is £1,000.

According to a union representative "It's cheaper for a developer not to put up a proper safety structure and just keep paying £500 or a £1,000 every time someone gets killed, and that's what has been happening."

Last year a high court judge called the biggest developer of luxury departments in the country, Zoe Developments, "a disgrace to the construction industry."

usually the worker starts as an employee of a major contractor, but within a few weeks he is told that if he wants to keep working he should re-register with a sub-contractor or even as self-employed.

Union officials estimate that by re-employing workers as individ-

uals the main employers have cut their wage bills by about 12 per cent. They also avoid paying any PRSI (national insurance), contributions to the industry pension scheme, or any holiday or sick pay.

The two bricklayers were imprisoned on October 21 for picketing the site of O'Connor Construction on the site of the old British embassy after the firm had obtained a court injunction.

The men are part of the rank and file group Building Workers

Against the Black Economy, set up in late 1997 to campaign against the employers "re-register or forfeit your chance to work" mentality.

The picketing began in late August after O'Connor's began sub-contracting work to a 'subbie', E. Moran Ltd.

On the day of the men's court appearance, hundreds of building workers downed tools at 25 sites across Dublin and converged on the court waving placards under the slogan 'Free the workers – jail the bankers'.

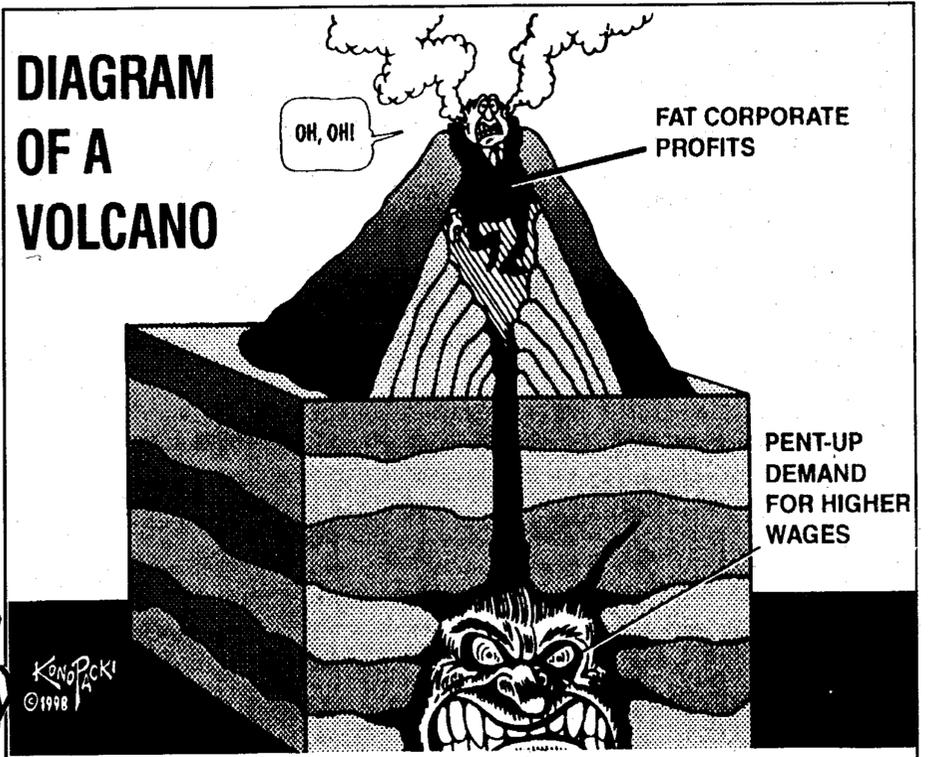
Simultaneous solidarity protests by building workers occurred in Limerick, Waterford, Cork and Kilkenny. All the solidarity action was illegal and went against the advice of the Union leadership, which condemned both the original action and the solidarity activity.

When the men were sent down for contempt of court, hundreds of workers brought traffic on Dublin's O'Connell street to a halt. Later that evening there were clashes with the police outside Mountjoy prison. Although the two men have now purged their contempt of court, the struggle to end the exploitation on the sites is set to become more intense.

Workers in Dublin are currently picketing three Sisk sites against the victimisation of two shop stewards. A small rank and file group is effectively arguing for action beyond the control of the union bureaucracy.

OH, OH!

DIAGRAM OF A VOLCANO



financial surplus, over a billion in the black, at the same time it is cutting back on public spending on health and public services.

A few weeks ago an IMF directors report on Ireland warned the Irish government not to start dipping into its budget surplus, maintaining that the state treasury will need large fiscal reserves to enable it to manoeuvre within the new single currency regime.

Already a major row has broken out at Galway Hospital over the state's refusal to spend any of its surplus to prevent the closure of two vital wards.

Most staff at the hospital attended an angry protest meeting to fight the cuts. Nurses are already on a work to rule and threatening a national stoppage.

We in Socialist Democracy need to start orientating our activities towards developing our programme, strategy and tactics to anticipate a new period of rising class militancy in the south. It would be a mistake to sit around just hoping for a progressive development against the peace process or within Sinn Fein.

In fact in the new period Sinn Fein looks set to become a drag on the development of a socialist class consciousness.

During the same week that workers in Dublin were involved in a stand off with the bosses and their political party Fianna Fail, Sinn Fein was launching its economic plan for West Belfast.

Incredibly Bertie Ahern, the leader of Fianna Fail, was invited up on the Falls Road to co-present the plan alongside Gerry Adams.

Nobody present bothered to point out that the owners of Cromptons and Sisk, two of the worst exploiters of Dublin's building workers, are well known financial and political supporters of Fianna Fail, or ask what Fianna Fail ever did for southern Irish workers.

Sinn Fein's idea for a deepened partnership with Fianna Fail is taking it in exactly the wrong direction – when southern workers will be looking for political as well as industrial solutions for their discontents.

On the day of the men's court appearance, hundreds of building workers downed tools at 25 sites across Dublin and converged on the court

It seems that a new period of deepening class conflict is developing in southern Ireland. A comfy future with the type of social partnership arrangements favoured by the bureaucracy is looking unlikely.

The ideology of the prosperous Celtic Tiger has raised material expectations. Thousands of workers are fed up seeing the bosses getting rich and arrogant on the back of their continual pay restraint and tougher working conditions.

Whilst the state is boasting of its biggest-ever current account



Ahern: his party is friend to strikebreaking contractors – and to Gerry Adams' new economic policy!

On the day of the men's court appearance, hundreds of building workers downed tools at 25 sites across Dublin and converged on the court

Grim lesson of Popular Unity in Chile 1970-73

Workers waited for a lead that never came

AS THE Law Lords ponderously debate once more whether there are grounds for refusing to extradite Chile's former dictator Pinochet to face trial in Spain, there are continued reminders of the scale of his crimes against Chilean, Spanish and other workers during his bloody rule. But the focus on Pinochet should not be allowed to divert socialists from an assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the workers' movement and Popular Unity government he set out to smash. Here we carry extensive extracts from Chile: Lessons of the Coup, an article by Tariq Ali, originally published in a pamphlet of the same name by the International Marxist Group.

ON SEPTEMBER 11 1973 the Chilean army carried out the coup d'etat which it had been planning for the preceding two and a half years.

The Popular Unity government was overthrown and its President, Salvador Allende, was shot dead in his room at the Moneda Palace, a large section of which was destroyed by artillery and aerial bombardment.

The "Chilean road" had come to an end. New names had been added to the scroll of working class martyrs in Latin America.

Reformism of a new type: Allende's experiment

The election of the Popular Unity (UP) was seen as an important step forward by large sections of the working class. The programme of the UP was without doubt confused (particularly on the co-existence of the public and private sector).

Nonetheless it transcended the reformism of (Eduardo Frei's) discredited Christian Democrats. It pledged to create a new Chile, to nationalise all foreign capital and foreign trade, to extend the Agrarian Reform of Frei, and to lay the basis for the creation of a new apparatus under the control of the working class. In brief, the UP saw the electoral victory as the beginning of the process of the transition to socialism.

So was Popular Unity a classical Popular Front as existed in Chile, France and Spain in the 1930's, or was it something different?

A Popular Front embodies the collaboration between a working class party (or parties) and a party or parties of the bourgeoisie, and is a tactic utilised by sections of the bourgeoisie to contain the rise of the mass movement and keep a grip on working class parties. This was how the bourgeoisie conceived of the Chilean Popular Front in the Thirties.

Allende himself told Regis Debray (*Conversations* p118):

"We consciously entered into a coalition in order to be the left wing of the system - the capitalist system, that is. By contrast, today, as our programme shows, we are struggling to change the system ... Our objective is total, scientific, Marxist socialism".

The point made by Allende is essentially correct. Thus the stated aim of the UP was socialism, whereas the Popular Fronts of the Thirties were pledged essentially to combat fascism together with important sections of the bourgeoisie, and remained completely

within the ideological and political framework of bourgeois democracy.

The UP in Chile was thus, if anything, a reformist united front dominated by two large working class parties. Even if there had not been a single grouping of bourgeois or petty-bourgeois origin in the UP there is nothing to indicate that its policies would have been different in any way.

The second important point to grasp about the UP is that the Chilean CP was a *right-wing* force within it, and that the SP was well to the *left* of the CP on virtually every political question. This fact becomes rather decisive in understanding why the UP was not in a position to contain the mass movement by selective repression (as the bourgeoisie would have liked), or even to outlaw the MIR (Movement of the Revolutionary Left).

In the absence of a strong left-wing pole inside the SP it is quite clear that the CP would have irredeemably dragged the UP to the right and ultimately brought the Christian Democrats into the coalition, which would have made it a classical popular front of the type in which the Stalinist movement specialised in the Thirties.

The Chilean Socialist Party was founded in 1933 by Salvador Allende, amongst others. It was from the beginning a party which stated in its programme its commitment to Marxism: "The Party adheres to Marxism as the method for interpreting reality and recognises the class struggle as the motive force of history." The SP was founded because its founders felt that the Chilean CP (which was then going through an ultraleft phase in accordance with the turn initiated by the Stalinist bureaucracy in Moscow) was incapable of responding to the needs of the Chilean proletariat.

The SP represented an attempt to build a working-class party based on Marxism, but not under the domination of the Stalinised Third International.

The SP, as a result, was different from traditional social-democratic parties, and Allende specifically stated in 1970 that the SP had nothing to do with "certain self-styled socialist parties in Europe". Thus the SP never aligned itself with the Second International (it was the Radical Party which was the Chilean section of the Second International). Its internal life was much more open, and many SP militants in the Thirties (including Allende himself) used to study Trotsky as well as Lenin.

Although programmatically committed to Marxism, the SP had no real strategy for the seizure of power, and it was involved in a whole number of class-collaborationist electoral alliances, including the Popular Front of 1938, which was dominated by the Radical Party and its leader Cerda. It was, and remained, a centrist political formation, constantly vacillating under the pressure of different class forces in Chile.



Pinochet's troops burying victims of their brutal crackdown on Chilean left

tionist electoral alliances, including the Popular Front of 1938, which was dominated by the Radical Party and its leader Cerda. It was, and remained, a centrist political formation, constantly vacillating under the pressure of different class forces in Chile.

It was the peculiar nature of the Socialist Party, together with the conditions which had brought the UP to power and the continuing mass mobilisations, which made the position of the Chilean CP somewhat awkward. The CP had been since the late Thirties a party of class collaboration.

After its ignominious role in the Cerda Popular Front of 1938, a Front which did not carry out one significant reform in favour of the urban or rural proletariat, the Chilean CP continued its electoralist orientation. In 1944 it participated in the government of right-wing Radical Party leader Gonzales Videla, who used the CP support to contain the rising working-class upsurge (there were three CP leaders in Videla's cabinet) - and when this task had been accomplished he banned the CP, unleashed a ferocious repression against the workers, arrested 1000 CP militants, and sent 500 of them to a desert concentration camp in the North.

It was not until 1958 that the ban on the CP was lifted. Then it embarked again on its old policies. No lessons were learnt. No questions were asked. The Cuban Revolution left no mark on the CP, and the parliamentary, non-violent road to socialism was pursued with a vengeance once again.

The First Year of Popular Unity
Allende was elected President on the basis of a minority vote, and the UP was dependent on Christian Democrat

support in parliament. He assumed power in November 1970.

The first year of the UP saw the Allende administration carrying out a number of important reforms as had been promised in the UP programme. Certainly there can be no doubt that many of these measures were immensely popular with the oppressed strata of Chilean society and had a big impact.

Beginning with the free distribution of half a litre of milk for all children, a number of new laws were passed to increase and develop the existing social services; a ceiling was placed on all governmental salaries. 45 political prisoners were released, and the special mobile group of riot police was disbanded.

There was a 60% increase in wages, and most prices were fixed. The first six months of 1971 saw inflation reduced to 7.5% compared to the first half of 1970 when it had risen to 22%. Major nationalisations were also begun, and within the first nine months a large proportion of the textile, iron, automobile and copper industries had been nationalised. In addition, 60% of the country's banks were also taken into public ownership.

The nationalisation of the three largest copper mines (all owned by American capital) - Cerro, Annaconda and Kennecott - was a measure of some importance, particularly since no compensation was paid. The UP argued that the profits which the companies had extracted over the years was ample compensation.

There were cases of factories being nationalised after being occupied by workers protesting against redundancies. This happened in May 1971 in the case of the Ford plant, and in November 1970 with the Northern Indiana Brass Company's local subsidiary.

More significant was the seizure by the workers of 14 textile mills in May 1971, which compelled the UP to take them under state control

immediately to maintain production. In addition five other textile plants were also taken over to provide a base for the new state-owned industry. By the end of the year 263 factories had been occupied and taken under state control.

It was these measures in particular which convinced the bourgeoisie that the UP was not going to restrict its take-overs to obvious anachronisms such as the copper mines, but was challenging the manufacturing sector of the bourgeoisie as well.

Imperialism is prepared to tolerate a certain measure of nationalisation provided that compensation is guaranteed, but in return it wants the prestige gained by the government carrying out the nationalisations to be used to contain, or if necessary repress, the mass movement.

But the UP government was unable to satisfy imperialism by containing the mass movement. Its dilemma lay in the fact that by its very nature it was also unable to satisfy the hopes and aspirations which its victory had aroused in the broad working class and peasant masses. Its vacillations were utilised by the bourgeoisie, as the latter together with the multinational corporations of Wall Street prepared to bring about its downfall.

What, then, were the real problems confronted by the UP government? Fidel Castro expressed them rather succinctly in his important speech on Chile in Havana on September 28, 1973:

"In the first place there was an intact state apparatus. There were armed forces that called themselves apolitical, institutional, that is apparently neutral in the revolutionary process. There was the bourgeois parliament where a majority of members jumped to the tune of the ruling classes. There was a judicial system which was completely subservient to the reactionaries ..."

Their key problem was therefore how to smash the state apparatus of the bourgeoisie. This problem was at best understood by the major components of the UP in a gradualist, parliamentarist way. There was a complete failure to understand the nature of the Chilean army and its functions. There was a failure to see that the creation of an alternative apparatus based on the workers and peasants was vital if the bourgeoisie was going to be defeated.

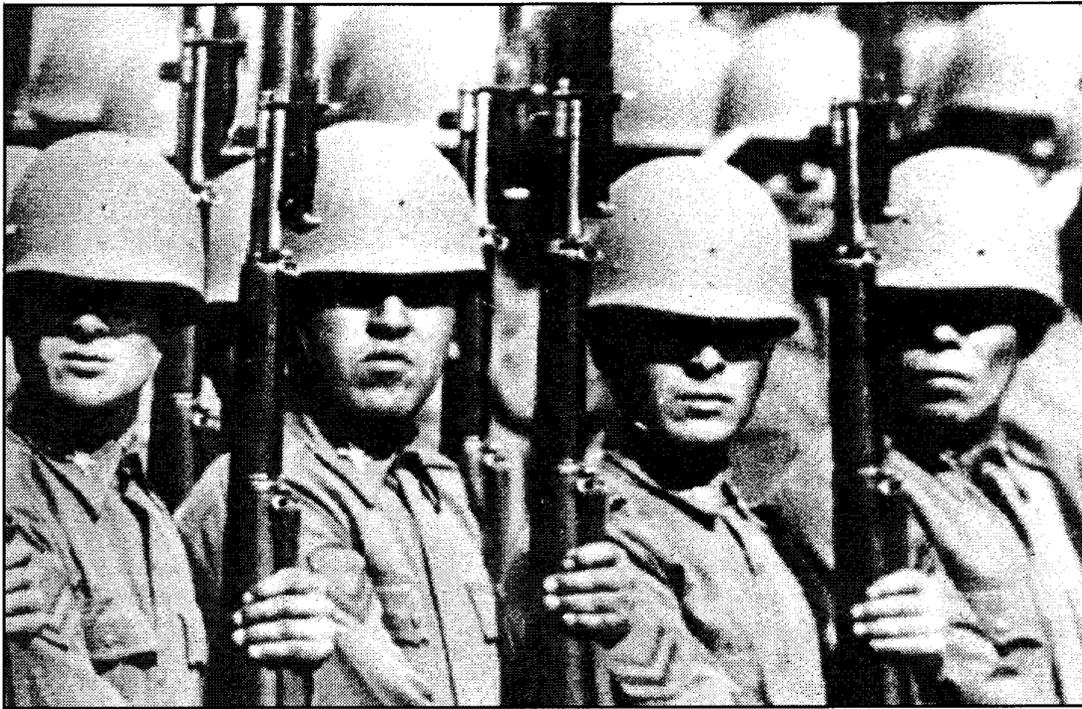
Imperialism and the bourgeoisie prepare their offensive

At first US imperialism adopted a "wait and see" attitude to the UP government. However as soon as the nationalisations began in earnest, the US declared economic war on Chile.

All economic aid and credits were suspended, and a de facto boycott of Chile by American capital began. Internally, the more vigorous implementation of Frei's Agrarian Reforms saw the agrarian bourgeoisie embarking on a course of sabotaging agricultural production. The urban bourgeoisie, in total control of distribution, began to hoard and create a black market on a vast scale in Chile.

During this whole period the USA did not for one moment cut off military aid to the Chilean armed forces. Having put the economic screws on Allende, they continued to strengthen the state apparatus of the Chilean bourgeoisie, which they knew full well would at a later date be required to throttle the UP.

Given the preparations which the Americans and their friends in Chile were making, the UP leaders



Chilean troops were not "apolitical" professionals, but the ruthless stormtroopers of Pinochet's 1973 coup

showed little understanding of what was involved.

The Communist Party did have a line: they would have made virtually every concession possible to the bourgeois parties. However this would have resulted in the disintegration of the UP because of the opposition it would have encountered from within the SP and the MAPU.

The only other alternative was for the UP to go on the offensive, mobilise the workers, expropriate large chunks of the private sector, and take distribution into its own hands. If this had been done in the early part of 1972 it would have disrupted the plans of the bourgeoisie, put the latter on the defensive, and improved the relationship of class forces in Chile in favour of the working masses.

But to do that would have required a break with the addiction to bourgeois legality and its rigid constitutionalism which would prove to be the rock on which the UP floundered and was crushed.

By the autumn of 1972 the bourgeoisie had mounted its offensive. It went on strike against the Popular Unity government. Within a week roads were blocked, production centres abandoned, transport withdrawn.

Faced with the life and death question of the organisation of production and distribution, the working class developed those organs by which it could organise those activities itself - the *cordones industriales*, the JAPs, and the co-ordinating committees.

These institutions of the workers had existed prior to October, grouping together factories in the same geographical area so as to give unified leadership in economic demands.

The owners' strike saw their development as an apparatus existing alongside the state, and capable of taking on more and more of the functions of the state and the ruling class.

Factories abandoned by their owners were requisitioned, production was organised by the workers, commercial secrecy abolished by opening the books. The executive of each *cordón* was elected by mass assemblies and delegated to perform specific tasks.

Coordinating committees provided the central nerve of the workers' organisation, linking the *cordones* to one another. Goods travelled straight from factory to consumer. Shops joining the bosses' strike were forcibly re-opened. Lorries standing idle were requisitioned. Local militias watched and guarded these activities.

The reaction of Popular Unity was very different. At first they

appealed to the patriotic spirit of the owners. Where *cordones* arose, they made every effort to restrain them, calling them illegal. Then a state of emergency was declared, and the military called in to break the strike. The Allende government was relying on the very forces which were later to depose it, while rejecting the forces that were the key to the Chilean revolution.

An increasing polarisation was taking place, and more and more workers were beginning to understand the need to fight the bourgeoisie. But the right wing within the UP (the CP and the SP right) wanted to return to the bourgeoisie the factories taken over by the workers.

Faced with growing inflation, the public sector workers staged a strike for higher wages. The government branded them as "agents of the right", like those who took part in the illegal occupations of factories and of land. It was these attacks made by the UP and the CP in particular which drove sections, and important sections, of the working class into the arms of the right.

Instead the UP took a step somewhat unique in the history of the international workers' movement (though it must be said not at all unique to the Stalinist segment of it): the leading naval and military chiefs were brought in to the cabinet, in an attempt to create "stability", and no doubt "unify the nation".

The military chiefs accepted cabinet posts (General Prats became Minister of the Interior), but all of them left soon after the elections of March 1973. The withdrawal of the "uniforms" from the cabinet was merely the beginning of the process which culminated in the September 11 coup.

On June 29, the Second Armoured Regiment made an attempt at a coup, and led an assault on the Moneda Palace. The reaction of the working class was immediate, with factory occupations and a strengthening of the workers' action committees.

Nearly a million workers marched in the evening of the 29th to demand that Allende dissolve parliament and execute the plotters of the abortive coup.

This was an important test for the UP. If the working class movement, its trade unions and its political parties (inside and outside the UP) had been united to defend the UP against the threat of military dicta-

torship, the picture would have been significantly different. If a revolutionary party had existed in Chile at the time, its intervention could have been decisive, but the revolutionary groups did not constitute such a party, and the UP was totally engrossed in the logic of its own "experiment."

The UP's failure to mobilise and arm the masses was fatal in every sense of the word. A renewed bourgeois offensive began on July 25 with a strike by truck owners. Then came a right wing purge of the army and navy, while Popular Unity remained silent.

Allende told workers to stand by and allow the military to break the owners' strike. Instead the army collaborated with the bourgeoisie to spread the strike and break the workers' militias.

Despite the mounting evidence, Communist Party leader Luis Corvalan continued to reassure the military chiefs that no lessons had been learned, in a speech reported in Chile Hoy on July 31:

"They [the reactionaries] are claiming that we have an orientation of replacing the professional army. No sir, we continue and will continue to support keeping our armed institutions strictly professional".

This attitude of the UP leaders convinced the armed forces that there would be no serious organised resistance to a coup d'etat.

They began to plan the last stages of the coup together with representatives of US imperialism and the Brazilian military junta.

On 4 September up to 800,000 supporters of the UP marched past the Moneda Palace to commemorate the third anniversary of the Chile experiment.

Little did they know it, but in exactly a week the UP would cease to exist.

The workers chanted "Allende, the people are defending you: hit the reactionaries hard." The mood of the masses was militant. They were waiting for a lead that never came.

On September 11 the Chilean military, with the backing of all ruling class parties and the fascists, launched a coup d'etat.

At the Moneda Palace Salvador Allende decided not to surrender but to go down fighting back, with a gun in his hand.

Could it be that in his final hours Allende decided symbolically to illustrate the futility of the "peaceful road", and point the way to the future?

The UP's failure to mobilise and arm the masses was fatal in every sense of the word.

ANC weighed down by apartheid debts

Charlie van Gelderen

AS SOUTH Africa prepares for the second Post-apartheid General election, it is still grappling with problems left by the previous regime. In its desperate efforts to perpetuate white rule, the apartheid regime destroyed massive resources both human and natural.

The country is still burdened with the foreign debt accumulated by the apartheid government mainly for the purchase of armaments. It used these weapons of destruction both to suppress internal opposition and for a series of foreign wars against Mozambique and Angola.

The foreign debt was about \$20 billion in 1993. But because of the Rand's devaluation against the dollar and the dollar's decline against hard currencies such as the Deutschmark, the Swiss frank and the Yen, the debt has greatly increased in size and is currently just short of R90 billion. (There are 9.45 Rands to £1 sterling).

To appreciate what this means to the many millions still deprived of the basic necessities of life — work, land, homes, clean water, electricity, transport and health care, one has to look at the relation of the debt to the national budget. The total national budget for 1997/8 was R186.7 billion.

In short, the R90 billion debt represents about half of what the government would be spending in the ensuing year. The interest on the total government debts mostly incurred under apartheid is R38.5 billion, the second largest expenditure under the budget.

Another burden inherited by the ANC headed government, is the swollen size of the civil service. Part of the so-called "sunshine clauses" drawn up by the Communist Party leader, Joe Slovo, to ensure a peaceful transition to 'democratic' rule, was that there would be no dismissals of public servants — mainly, of course, whites.

But places had also to be found for thousands of black supporters of the new regime.

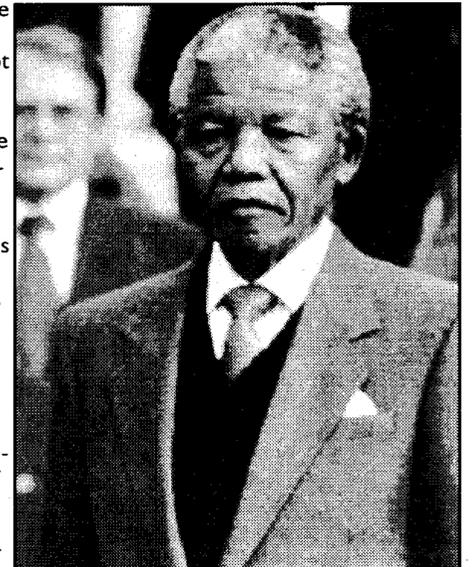
The result, inevitably, was a bloated civil service, estimated at

1.1 million, imposing a heavy cost on public expenditure. Of these, some 55,000 were regarded as unskilled or semi-skilled, thanks largely to the rudimentary schooling they received under Verwoerd's notorious Santa Education Act - 'Education for Barbarism' as Tabatha called it.

President Nelson Mandela, Public Service Minister, Zola Skweyiya, and Deputy President Thabo Mbeki, all threatened to sack thousands of public servants, but this met with strong resistance and often with strike action from the Public Servants' Association (PSA, the Civil Service trade union).

Many of the workers threatened with job losses were based in the former so-called homelands, where work is scarce.

The government fears that to



Mandela's ANC government has wound up paying off the debts of their apartheid oppressors

throw these thousands of surplus employees on to a labour market which could not find them jobs would lead to increased unrest. Such a development would not be desirable in an election year.

The government is already concerned about the marked apathy about the forthcoming elections. This is likely to stand in stark contrast to the overwhelming enthusiasm in the first post-apartheid election which swept the ANC and its allies into power.

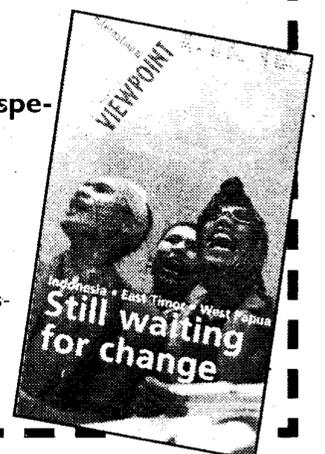
As a consequence an agreement has been made with the PSA that there would be re-deployment within the public sector, and training schemes to develop the skills of the workers.

You've seen some articles: now buy the magazine!

International Viewpoint offers special low rates (for new subscribers only!)

■ Britain £20: cheques to Outlook International, PO Box 1109, London N4 2UU

(Also available in USA \$35: Canada \$40: Australia \$35: New Zealand \$35: South Africa R80: Sweden 330 SEK: Denmark 300 DKK: Hong Kong \$120 (These and other agent addresses available on request).



Food matters!

By ????

MORE PEOPLE are eating well in the world than ever before. In these circumstances it is perhaps not surprising that in Britain and many other countries, food is a political topic of limited importance.

For example, much of the controversy about the Common Agricultural Policy has been about subsidies and tariffs, and not particularly about food as such.

Some of the scares about food safety in Britain have been so intense that eating has seemed more dangerous than ever before. Yet there are more choices about how, what and where to eat, and an industry of 'food pornography' to stimulate the jaded palate and get the goodies whizzing out of the shop and onto your shelves.

There is a well-established view in the British left that an interest in issues of food is a self-indulgent one. This was most notoriously stated by George Orwell in *The Road to Wigan Pier*: "One sometimes gets the impression that the mere words 'Socialism' and 'Communism' draw towards them with magnetic force every fruit-juice drinker, nudist, sandal-wearer, sex-maniac, Quaker, 'Nature Cure' quack, pacifist and feminist in England."

Orwell's view was not without truth. It could still be said today that there are 'cranky' vegetarians with a disapproving attitude to what other people eat. It is also true that there are animal lovers who will deploy the most militant tactics against experimental laboratories or the shipping of live cattle but who show little interest in the struggles of other human beings against oppression.

Despite all the reasons for not having been interested in food, there are powerful reasons to expect food issues to become more important. They are already a matter of 'life and death' for hundreds of millions of people, especially in Africa.

Although more people are eating well than ever before, there are also more people one bad harvest away from starvation than at any time in history.

Between 1959 and 1990, the world's population increased from 2.5 billion to over 5 billion people. By 2025, United Nations projections suggest it could be 8.5 billion. Much of the expected growth will take place in those areas which already have the most difficulty with food supply, such as Africa.

'Respectable' commentators say that there is enough food in the world now to feed everyone, and that starvation is a distribution problem. Some of the most optimistic say that the growth in productivity in agriculture can be maintained over the next 25 years so that a population of 8.5 billion can be fed.

There are a number of problems with this view. One is that it

rests on assurances that new technical solutions can be found to allow the output of food to grow faster than ever before. Enormous growth in the past falsified the expectations of the Malthusians in the 19th century or the Club of Rome of the early 1970s. However confidence by itself will not feed 2.5 billion people.

In some areas, agriculture will be affected by population pressures, limited water, and pollution. For example, Egypt draws a considerable amount of water from the Nile, and is threatened by the wish of neighbours upstream to do the same. Shell is unpopular with the Ogonis in Nigeria partly because of the leaking and discharge of oil ruining ground and water.

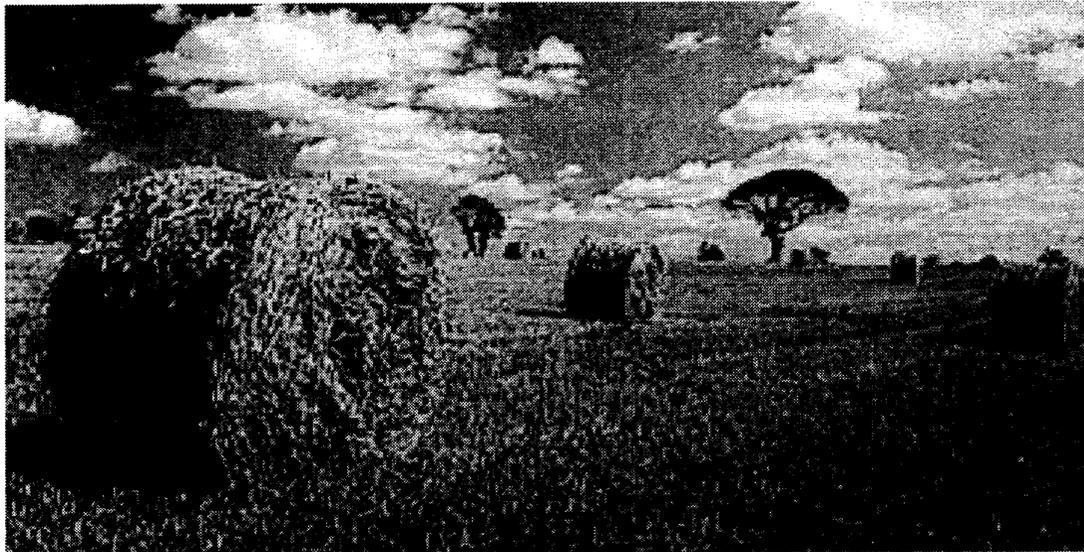
If global warming and significant climate change are taking place as a result of reckless development and use of resources, there could be severe consequences for food production.

At least, if the atmosphere is heating up, the weather can be expected to get more violently unpredictable. Events such as the extremely destructive tropical storm in Nicaragua and Honduras and the floods in China this year are likely to be repeated more often.

Some, such as apologists for major oil companies and a few self-styled 'living Marxists', maintain that answers can easily be found to these problems, if they exist. If their complacency is unjustified, there are billions more people than before to suffer the consequences.

Many 'greens' would agree with the above theses. However Marxists have something distinctive to add - there is a central problem with the ownership of the means of production, not to mention distribution and exchange. The capitalist market is anarchic, because each firm is more interested in its own profit than the productivity and organisation of the whole system.

Ownership has become more and more concentrated. This can be seen in the spread of brands and 'supermarketisation' - it really does make a difference that people want Weetabix and baked beans in Mirpur or to eat Big Macs in Moscow. It makes it harder for local and unbranded



Cornflakes in the raw. It all looks idyllic: but how many nasty chemicals and modified genes lurk beneath the surface?



TWO-THIRDS of the world's banana trade is controlled by the "Wild Bunch" - three giant multinational companies, Del Monte, Chiquita and Dole, whose profits are built on the exploitation of Third World workers.

metal tool replaces its laboriously made wooden predecessor.

The tractor enables work to be done with a fraction of the time and effort. However they demand respectively a small surplus and a large surplus followed by a flow to market sufficient to replace the tool or service the machine.

Such changes therefore increase the pressure to produce for wider markets rather than for local ones or for subsistence. Capitalist food producers are not ultimately interested in feeding people. The scandal of the campaign to get mothers in poor semi-colonial countries to use formula baby milk, regardless of suitability or affordability, is an extreme case of this.

Farmers switching to cash crops may start growing green beans to ship halfway round the world to sell in your supermarket the next day, or cut flowers or tobacco if those are more viable. If former agricultural labourers in nearby villages or the slums of growing cities cannot afford to buy food at prices to compete with production for Europe or North America, that's too bad.

Generally the major food com-

panies are reckless about environmental costs, except so far as they cause bad publicity. The sustainability of particular methods is a secondary issue.

Although it is likely that some of the opposition to genetically-modified food is exaggerated, the concern that the companies using it are careless of some of the consequences is justified.

One striking example of the character of the changes which confront us is the so-called 'Terminator' gene, currently in development. Improved varieties of plant (with higher yields or other characteristics) will grow normally, but produce seed which will not germinate. Farmers will have to buy new seed every year rather than collecting their own.

Some genetic manipulation may lead to unforeseen side-effects. These might include transfer to other strains and species, destruction or proliferation of particular feeders in the field, and effects on people who eat them.

More certainly, the genetic diversity of varieties will be reduced even further, and the production of seed for commercial use will be in the hands of a few multinational companies. Clearly the aim of companies like Monsanto is also to tie seed more closely to other products, like herbicides and pesticides.

The challenge to socialists is to find ways of addressing this issue which don't simply moralistically tell working-class people that they should be prepared to spend more on good quality food. There are genuine issues about choice, and the control ordinary people have over what they eat. There are democratic questions about how monopolistic food companies buy the ear of government - or even have representatives inside it, like David Sainsbury. Issues of safety affect not only the quality of food but also the conditions of those who work in the industries.

Capitalism's reckless anarchy threatens the continuity of supply. The use of new techniques may pose new hazards to the environment. Billions of workers in the debt-ridden countries of the so-called 'Third World' may have to handle some of the dangers that have been exported. They face an uncertain livelihood, and may lack both income and land for decent food for themselves.

The merits of a planned economy rather than hoping for the market to sort things out are not so hard to see when the issues about staples of life are so big.

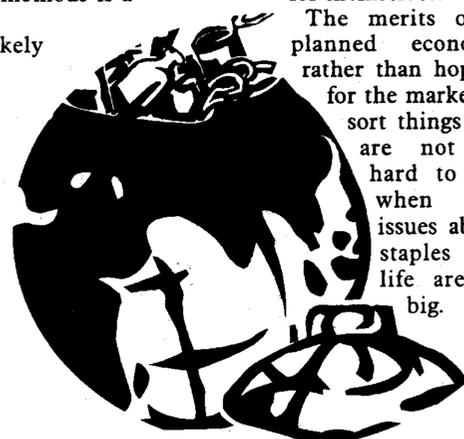


Some, such as apologists for major oil companies and a few self-styled 'living Marxists', maintain that answers can easily be found

products to compete.

The companies promoting brands want the customer to be able to find the same product wherever they are, so this implies increasing standardisation of production.

The past century has seen a major shift on a world scale from subsistence farming and peasant production to cash crops and capitalist agriculture. Vast numbers remain dependent on subsistence agriculture and surrounding quasi-feudal social relations. On the other hand there is an inexorable momentum to the spread of capitalist relations. The cheap



SOCIALIST OUTLOOK

Where we stand

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Confused on Israel

YOUR ARTICLE on Israel is a prime example of the confusion the left has about Israel - and the lies it tells itself. You state "The Zionist state since 1948 has continued to defend and uphold the imperialist position" - fine rhetoric, but what about the facts?

It is a lie to portray Zionism as a monolithic bloc. For example debates in the early years of Israel's establishment in Mapai were around whether to have a neutral policy vis a vis the West and the Eastern Bloc, or a policy more sympathetic to the Soviet Union. The Mapam group itself was more pro-Soviet Union and because of this its two 'factions' Hashomer and Ahdut Ha'avoda won half the votes in the Histadrut convention elections in 1946. There was an undeniable threat of civil war should the Histadrut be split on these lines.

Why did pro-sovietism become less attractive? Was it because Israel was an imperialist creation? Or as the wave of anti-Semitism that swept through Eastern Europe from 1946 and then again with explicit pro-Soviet backing the Prague and then Czech show trials in the early fifties?

On the issue of Czechoslovakia it is a well known fact that this notorious 'imperialist' power gave Israel vital military aid in the 1948 war of survival. These arms transactions continued to 1951 - again is this the behaviour of a USA

'imperialist' entity?

As late as 1955 even when the soviets backed the Arab bloc, Israel considered submitting a formal request for Soviet weapons. Which country supplied Israel with over 30% of her oil consumption 1953-56? the USSR. Even in late 1955 when the Egyptian Czech arms deal had taken place, Israel declined to publicly align itself militarily with anti-Soviet defence arrangements - again no doubt you see this as a clear manoeuvre on the part of an imperialist puppet!

The gradual abandonment of non-alignment in the 1950s was due to several elements. Soviet backing of the Arab cause, decline of Mapam and partly as a result of the Arab nation's boycott of Israel, growing economic dependence on the west. The idea that Israel was a creation of imperialism is just not true!

Your insinuation that the 1948 war was a war of aggression on Israel's part is again pure fabrication! The reality is much more complex. What do you think Israel should have done in the face of the Egyptian/Iraqi/Jordanian/Syrian/Arab League armies?

What was the situation in 1945-48? do you think the mood in Israel was for more conflict? Strangely you are silent on the attitude of the British towards Jews who tried in the 1939-45 period to flee Nazi terror, or does

Letters



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

this not fit your thesis of Israel being an 'imperialist' creation? Perhaps you would let your readers know that Britain's involvement against Israel did not end in 1948 e.g. John Bagot Glubb was the Arab League's commander from 1939 to 1956. and the League generally was under the control of British Officers until the mid 1950s.

Steve Collins,
Wolverhampton

PFI is a threat to support staff

Although both articles on the use of PFI in schools in the December issue contained useful information, they missed the point that the main threat to jobs as a result of PFI is to support staff working in schools - not teachers.

Teachers are not the majority of the workforce in schools. It is the mainly part-time female workforce that work as nursery nurses, librarians, cleaners, lunchtime assistants, school meals workers and special needs assistants that represent the majority.

It is this workforce that will be transferred to a private company as a result of PFI - not teachers, who remain formally employed by the Education authority.

In Southampton, the Labour controlled council is proposing to transfer three secondary schools to the private sector as part of a PFI bid to provide more school places.

Over a hundred jobs are at risk, including those of support workers directly employed by the schools and grounds maintenance,

building and other maintenance workers employed by the council's Direct Service Organisation.

To date, only UNISON is opposing this privatisation. Any campaign against PFI must involve parents, school governors and teachers. But it must start from the point that the main threat to jobs is directed at support workers, not teachers.

Best wishes, Mike Tucker,
Secretary Southampton
District Branch Unison

WHAT'S ON

January

Sat 23/Sun 24

Euromarch assizes, Cologne.

Saturday 30

Bloody Sunday March for Justice, Time for Truth. Assemble 12 noon Victoria Embankment (opposite Temple tube station), London.

February

Tuesday 2

London Reclaim Our Rights Rally, Grand Committee Room, House of Commons, 7p.m. Speakers include Tony Benn and Arthur Scargill.

Saturday 13

Campaigns 99 National Conference, Time for United Action. Hosted by Greater Manchester Socialist Alliance. 10a.m.-4p.m., Mechanics Institute, Princess St, Manchester.

Saturday 27

National Demonstration to defend asylum and immigration rights. Assemble 12 noon, Embankment, London SW1.

April

Saturday 10

UNISON National demonstration for "a living minimum wage", Newcastle.

Saturday 24

Blair Peach memorial demonstration

May

Saturday 1

Union Rights day march, assemble 12 noon, Clerkenwell Green, London.

June

Saturday 5

Cologne demonstration at European summit.

NEWCASTLE,
April 10,
UNISON's national demonstration for a living minimum wage of at least £4.61 per hour

Feb 13, Manchester Campaigns 99 National Conference

You get a better view with

Socialist OUTLOOK

Don't miss an issue: **SUBSCRIBE now!** 20 pages of internationalist news, views and marxist analysis each month. 12 issues delivered for just £10. OVERSEAS subscribers 12 issues for just £20.

SPECIAL OFFER (UK only): One year of **Socialist Outlook**, PLUS one year of *International Viewpoint* (Fourth International magazine) for only £30.

PLEASE send me 12 issues of **Socialist Outlook**

12 issues of **Socialist Outlook** plus *International Viewpoint*. I enclose £...

Name _____

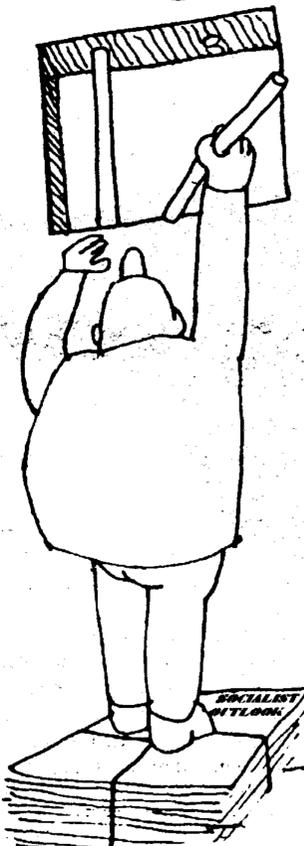
Address _____

Post Code _____

Phone _____

Age _____

SEND TO: Socialist Outlook, PO Box 1109, London N4 2UU



Socialist Outlook

You are about to be Euro'd!

THE MEDIA hype over the City slickers having to work over the New Year bank holidays to set up the systems for the launch of the Euro in world markets from January 4 should have given us all a clue.

Whether the new currency rises from its initial 70p valuation, or falls, the City of London, the banks and the big employers stand to make a packet buying, selling and speculating with a new global currency.

But while the bankers will pocket any profits, the costs of the exercise will fall fair and square on the working class in the EU countries – beginning with the eleven nations which have joined the Euro, handing over key economic decisions to an unelected board of bankers.

Regardless of the impact on jobs, living standards and welfare services, the priority of the new European Central Bank is to guarantee the value of the currency and control inflation. The result is likely to be a continued squeeze on welfare and public spending, while European bosses celebrate their new freedoms by indulging in a new round of rationalisation.

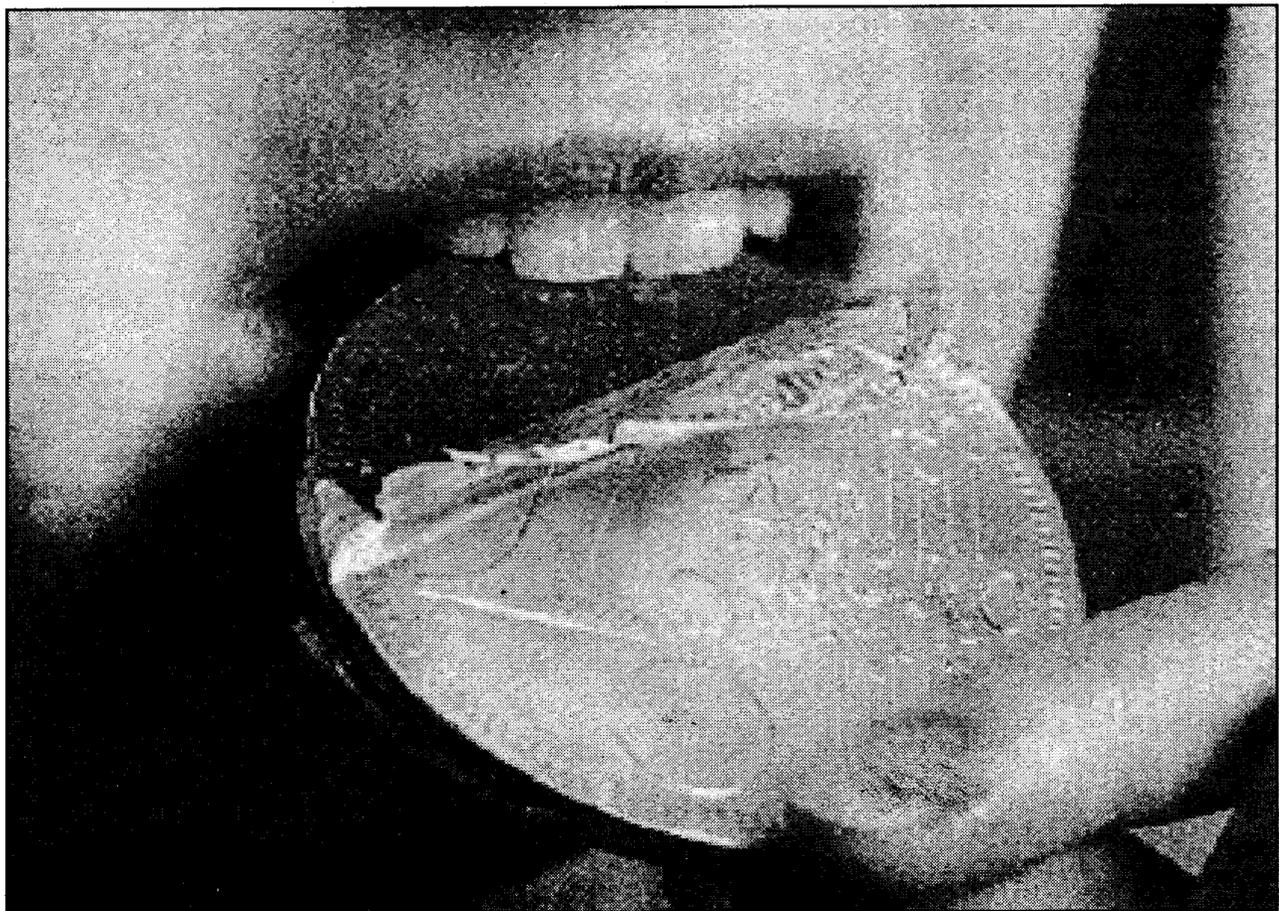
But the effects do not stop there. Britain's New Labour government has barely concealed its eagerness to join the new currency, and is softening up public opinion in readiness.

To some extent our economy has already been "Euro'd", as two Gordon Brown budgets have rigidly enforced the Maastricht criteria, squeezing public spending and promoting the ruinously expensive Private Finance Initiative in the NHS, education and other public services.

For Tony Blair's team, there is an extra attraction in moving swiftly towards monetary union. Not only could they link up British and European capital, and please many of their existing business backers, but they could steal a march on William Hague's befuddled Tory Party, which has now painted itself firmly into a corner by rejecting EMU for the indefinite future.

As growing sections of British business make clear their ambition to join the Euro, this could mean that Blair could establish new Labour as the political wing of a sizeable section of previous Tory sponsors – and as a result cut himself even further adrift from Labour's trade union roots.

Whichever way you look, the Euro brings serious new threats to the working class movement throughout the continent. The need for an internationalist, socialist fightback has never been greater.



The Euro coins will not be available until 2002 – assuming they have not all been eaten beforehand.!

Hard currency means hard labour for EU workers!