

Socialist OUTLOOK

Support the dockers

Rally on March 23
Starts Myrtle Parade, Liverpool.
Speakers include: Arthur
Scargill, MPs, FBU and dockers
Organised by dockers strike
committee

THE Liverpool docks dispute started in September 1995 after the Torside shipping company attempted to casualise its workforce through flexible working, short-term contracts and no trade union rights. Eighty Torside workers went on strike.

The Mersey Docks and Harbour Company then sacked 350 dockers who refused to cross the Torside picket. Workers at Nelson Freight were sent down the road for the same reason.

Much of the port's trade has been stopped.

However the government is the largest share-holder in the company. It is certainly involved in the dispute.

The strike is still unofficial because the dockers did not have a ballot for strike action, although they recently held ballots which overwhelmingly rejected a pay-off deal in favour of continuing the struggle.

The strike is solid.

They will stay on strike until every worker is reinstated with full trade union recognition and the casualisation of the workforce is ended.

It is imperative that the TGWU leadership officially recognises this dispute. All TGWU members should pressure the leadership.

Union activists should get involved in the many dockers support groups that have been set up, or tour striking dockers round workplaces and branches. This is the best



Swedish workers join Liverpool dockers on 21 February demo and picket line

Photo: Dave Sinclair

way to regenerate the trade union movement.

The Liverpool dockers themselves have a long history of solidarity. In 1971 they supported the Pilkington Glass dispute.

In 1981 they supported the British Steel workers. They refused to load any coal during the 1984-85 Miners Strike. They have also refused to handle goods bound for South Africa, or to load any nuclear waste.

In 1989 Liverpool was the last port to return to work following the Government's abolition of the Dock Labour Scheme. The removal of the scheme has paved the way for the process of casualisation.

Once again Liverpool is fighting on. Dockers around the world have been able to give support through boycotts, go-slows and strikes.

They can see what will happen to them unless they fight. Much support has come

from Australia where a similar Dock Labour Scheme is under threat.

The Liverpool dockers organised an international conference to discuss an international solidarity organisation.

This is the way forward for the workers.

The dockers have struck a blow for collective organisation and solidarity. The battle against casualisation must be won.

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Fight to end all casual labour

Women of the Waterfront

ONE OF the most important aspects of the Liverpool docks strike has been the formation of Women of the Waterfront.

After the dockers' defeat in 1989 conditions got worse. The problems caused by new contracts affected the women as much as the men.

These women have had enough of the constant stress caused to everyone in the community by new working conditions.

Many women had had enough. They got involved in the dispute, whether the men wanted it or not.

There was no way that they would accept the £25,000 pay-off. Instead the women set up their own picket line.



Women of the Waterfront picketing the freeport entrance at Seaforth, Liverpool — with an unexpected cardboard guest

Photo: Dave Sinclair

Leading docks stewards speak out

THE LIVERPOOL docks dispute has been going on for six months. It is one of the key industrial disputes of the moment. The dockers have shown remarkable resilience and determination.

GLENN VORIS speaks to three leading shop stewards from the dispute, JIMMY NOLAN (Chair of the Mersey Docks Shop Stewards), TONY NELSON (Shop Steward in charge of picketing), and TERRY TEAGUE (Shop Steward in charge of international relations).

GV: The dockers have been in dispute for a long time. What is the strength of feeling?

JN: The general feeling is that we won't go back to work until every worker is reinstated with full trade union recognition and the proposed introduction of casual labour is scrapped. In a recent ballot result, 85

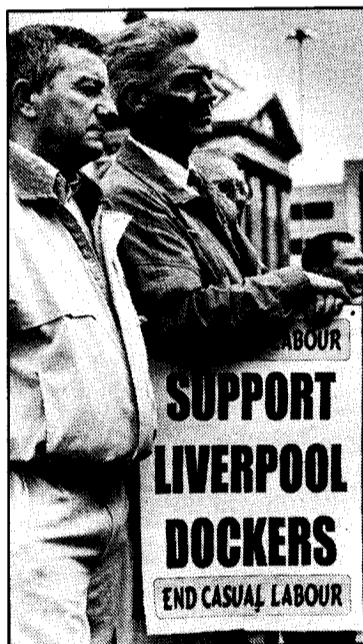
per cent of the sacked workforce rejected a pay off deal.

TN: We have pickets at different times of the day for one and a half to two hours. This has so far caught the police on the hop and completely stops the port. Around 150 of us picket every day and the spirits are very high.

JN: Every shop steward (12 in total) and a further 40 dockers regularly speak to meetings up and down the country. So far we've spoken to 2,100 meetings.

GV: What level of support have you received from the TGWU leadership?

JN: Because of the Tory anti-trade union laws the TGWU haven't supported us officially. They seem too worried about the union funds being sequestered. They have organised a hardship fund which has helped but it isn't regular. Our demands on the leadership have been for them to campaign up and down the country with John Monks to vigorously resist all the anti-union laws. But this seems to fall on deaf ears. The TGWU leadership urged us to have a ballot to see what the strikers thought of the management's offer. We had the ballot to



show the TGWU leadership and management that our support is solid. We were proved right!

GV: The biggest obstacle for the dockers has been the Tory anti-trade union laws. How do you think the trade unions can defeat the laws?

JN: They were introduced to strangle the unions and stop workers taking solidarity action. If Tony Blair gets elected I cannot see him scrapping them. The only way they can be defeated is by the working class itself smashing them. Workers will oppose the strength of the bosses when there is no other way out. Workers must combat the laws through building a mass grass roots movement based on a national shop stewards organisation whilst trying to force the trade union leadership to break them.

GV: Internationally the Liverpool dockers have gained tremendous support. What has happened?

TT: We first of all visited the dockers in Bilbao, Spain as many of the con-

tainers from Liverpool go there. They agreed to send regular donations and organise go-slows at the port when unloading containers from Liverpool.

Our next visit was to Stockholm. The union leadership organised various well attended meetings with the rank and file. They agreed to send regular donations and not to handle any Liverpool containers. We came away with very high spirits.

Two delegates visited Montreal and a further two went to Sydney. They again received tremendous support. In both countries the dockers unions agreed to send regular financial support and organise overtime bans, go-slows and 24 hour strikes when any Liverpool ship comes or goes. Already this has caused major problems.

The Longshoremen Union of America picked up our dispute on the internet and sent messages of support and \$5,000 donation before we even visited them. Four of us went to New York. The union agreed to block any ship loading or unloading in all the major ports in the USA both on the Atlantic and Pacific side.

This forced the Atlantic Containers, the largest company using Liverpool docks, to engage in discussions with us and forced the Mersey Dock and Harbour Company to the negotiating table for the first time resulting in the ballot. We shall be going back to New York to make sure Atlantic Containers honour their words and not use the port.

Delegates have also been to Italy, Greece, Israel, France and New Zealand. The dockers in all these countries have sent regular donations and organised go-slows and overtime bans. We look back at the beginning of the dispute and realise that we should have concentrated on gaining international support first.

Because of this support we decided to hold an International Dockers Conference in Liverpool. The majority of these countries have similar problems to us, fighting casualisation and privatisation. We are

building up an international dockworkers solidarity group.

GV: What kind of support and solidarity have you received nationally?

JN: We've received financial and moral support but not action due to the anti-trade union laws and economic fears. We are going to organise a national conference to bring together all the dockers support groups, trade unions, community organisations, the unemployed etc.

We are jointly organising with the Merseyside County Association of Trade Union Councils. The bureaucrats won't like it but workers need to come together to start building a real grass roots movement. Employers can hire and fire at will, shut factories, intimidate workers—this must be stopped!

Isle of strife

300 members of the RMT union have voted overwhelmingly for strike action against the Wightlink ferry company which operates out of Portsmouth and Lymington.

Wightlink run 75 per cent of ferry services to the island and would be seriously hit by such action. Post office workers and other lorry drivers who use the service have threatened to boycott Wightlink. TSSA staff are also balloting for action.

This comes after moves to bring in personal contracts and de-recognise collective arrangements. Casualisation is taking place with holidays and lunch breaks cut and pensions threatened. Wightlink already pays considerably less than other companies. New staffing proposals have also raised serious concerns over safety.

Jonathan Joseph

Welfare State Network Conference Action, Solidarity and Rights! 23 March

Mechanics Institute, 103 Princess Street, Manchester
Speakers include: Jeremy Corbyn MP, Audrey Wise MP, Neil Gerrard MP, Ken Coates MEP, Doreen Cameron, John Sheldon, John Lister, Dave Anderson, Kenny Ball

Workshops on housing, education, JSA, youth rights and benefits, public sector, health, disabilities and Europe.

To register please send cheque/postal order payable to "Welfare State Network" for £5 waged £2 unwaged

Name

Address

Organisation

Return coupon to: WSN conference, c/o Southwark Trade Union Support Unit, 42 Braganza Street, London, SE17. Phone 0171 639 5068

Blair at the sharp end of capitalism

BLAIR HAS offered the labour movement a short course in the pre-emptive sell out.

In his short tenure Blair has delivered blow after blow against the political body of traditional labourism. In the last month alone the party leadership has made further moves to break the union link and has begun to tout its solution for youth unemployment: workfare in all but name.

To cap it all, Blunkett attacks comprehensive education for failing the young, capitulating completely to the Tory agenda.

What does Labour now offer youth? Forced labour and bigger prisons.

What does Labour offer trades unionists? Subordination to management in the "competitive global economy". Not much use if you are a Liverpool dockworker.

EDITORIAL

And to those who have defended the comprehensive education system? A lecture about failure.

Blair knows that to implement European austerity he must eradicate some of the most favoured nostrums of labourism.

This is not because labourism ever sought to radically transform the world—it never had any socialist content—but because the basic demands of labourism can no longer be met by the British economy.

Modern capitalism is destroying its basis—the promises of free welfare, free education and full employment.

The 1945 settlement has melted away.

What should Labour Party socialists—many of whom support the Socialist Campaigning Group—do in response to its crisis?

Trying to resuscitate the political body is pointless.

Four things are necessary.

The first is to create a left alternative to Blairism in the run up to the election. This is the purpose of the Socialist Campaign for a Labour Victory initiative.

To be successful the SCLV must reach out to new forces that exist beyond the already organised layers of the left. It must also draw in those who are to the right of the Socialist Campaign Group supporters network in the trades unions and the constituency parties.

For such a campaign to have purpose it must avoid the recitation of the litany of labourism and look at socialist answers to Britain in crisis—it can begin this by focussing on half a dozen key issues central to the interests of the working class.

Second, The Socialist Campaigning Group must both nationally and locally turn outwards to those who are at the

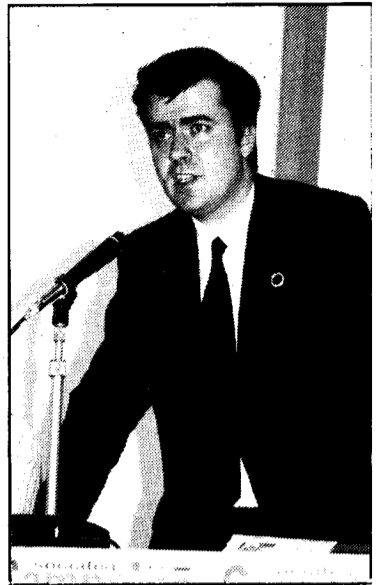
sharp end of capitalism. It is pointless drawing up a socialist platform if it is not imbued with the experiences of those in struggle.

It is out of such struggles that substance of an alternative can be developed.

Third the SCG must organise the broadest possible alliance in defence of the material gains most associated with labourism, including the welfare state, free education and the union link.

A working, if partial, alliance with Tribune newspaper is also on the cards—the paper that supports the minimum wage and full employment. The purpose of such alliances should be both to further the interest of the working class and to recompose the left in the Labour Party and trade unions around class struggle politics.

Lastly, the Socialist Campaigning Group must build on its recent successful growth by developing its campaigning initiatives, strengthening the links



Tribune's Mark Seddon

between the national committee and the local groups and forging a national profile for itself.

It also needs to harden up its organisation—an expanded network bulletin drawing on the campaigning activities of local groups would be a start. The offer of Socialist Group News to give more space to SCG network activities must be welcomed and built upon.

It is important that socialists in the Labour Party and trades unions combine their support for those in struggle with the creation of an organised left.

Put anti-racists on firm foundations

Simon Deville

THIS IS A crucial period for the anti-racist movement. Black communities face increased police harassment, the Asylum and Immigration Bill will intensify state racism, and the government is cutting Social Security benefit to asylum seekers.

As a general election looms ever nearer, the Tories are more tempted to play the race card, and it seems likely that fascist organisations may well stand in a number of seats.

The widescale opposition to the Asylum and Immigration Bill must be built upon both to defeat the bill and to continue the struggle against all forms of racism. Anti-racists must mobilise for the ARA demo on March 23 and the Campaign Against the Asylum and Immigration Bill demo on April 20.

These can help to develop a movement that can either force a complete retreat by the Tories, or a complete repeal of these racist laws by the next Labour government.

Such an important victory for anti-racists could lay the basis for a movement that challenges all forms of racism.

The National Assembly Against Racism (NAAR) has affiliations from a wide range of anti-racist and labour movement organisations, and has been central to a number of national mobilisations. It could play a key role in uniting the movement.

It held its second "conference" in Bethnal Green on Saturday March 9 attended by around 200 people—making it a somewhat smaller affair than last year.

The long list of speakers advertised in the literature may have convinced many others not to waste their time in an event that allowed no deci-

sion making process and very little discussion.

While it is extremely important that MPs, trade union leaders and various leaders of refugee groups are prepared to support anti-racist initiatives, it is insufficient if not combined with a struggle to build unity in action.

The vast majority of those who attended were already involved in one or other campaign or organisation.

They were there because they had already been convinced of the need to fight racism.

Sitting listening to hours of speakers from the platform added little to our understanding.

More positively, there were workshops in which activists were able to exchange ideas and experiences, and which many may have found useful.

These were immediately followed

by another list of speakers from the platform, with no opportunity of the discussions in the workshops feeding back into the plenary.

The divisions within the anti-racist movement have left many disillusioned and have convinced many activists that there is no possibility of building a united, authoritative movement that can take on state racism and win.

The vast majority of anti-racists be-

long to no organisation, and generally confine themselves to local work. Crucial though this is, it has its limitations when the greatest perpetrator of racism is the national state.

The National Assembly could have a lot to contribute in overcoming this weakness. But an effective national anti-racist movement must be built on the solid foundations of mass action.

Defend Raghbir Singh

Mark Jasen

IT HAS BEEN a year since Raghbir Singh was put in prison. Raghbir is a member of the NUJ and editor of the Sikh Punjabi newspaper Awaze Qaum. He faces the threat of deportation.

Raghbir is not an "illegal immigrant", until his imprisonment he lived in the Midlands with his wife and two children, all of whom are British citizens. Nor has he committed any crime. After a year in jail Raghbir still has not been charged with anything. Yet the Home Secretary intends to deport him as a "threat to national security". The Home Secretary has not only refused him the right to request bail or the right to appeal, he has even been allowed to know the specific "charges against him."

Awaze Qaum has been critical of the Indian government and has expressed strong views on the political situation in India. Many MPs and human rights activists fear this is an attempt to silence him through deportation. Amnesty International are considering taking up



Vigil outside Winson Green Prison, Birmingham

his case as their first ever case of a "prisoner of conscience" in Britain.

The National Union of Journalists has called a demonstration and rally on Saturday March 30, assembling

11.30am at Black Patch Recreation Ground, Foundry Lane, Smethwick, West Midlands. The march will go past Winson Green prison, where Raghbir is locked up, before the rally.

• The Raghbir Singh Defence Campaign can be contacted at 723 Pershore Road, Birmingham, B29 7NY, tel 0121 486 1809, fax 0121 643 4424.

Photo: Tim Blier

Criminal Justice



A copper being DNA tested by a colleague and an undercover political activist posing as Inspector CJ Adams.

Photo: John Lister

Terry Conway

TWENTY years ago it was quite common for activists to get the message of their campaign across to a wider audience through exciting political theatre.

When well made it can also act as a

battery recharger for those involved.

So it is refreshing to see Birmingham's Banner Theatre's latest offering Criminal Justice performing both these tasks.

The new play by Stuart Brown and Dave Rogers reminds us of the pernicious nature of the Criminal Justice Bill by telling the stories of people whose

rights and lives have been destroyed by it.

The almost accidental infiltration of the highest echelons of the police force by an anti-CJA campaigner gives the script both a humorous and sinister twist.

A highlight of the performance was the section dealing with the Prevention

of Terrorism Act and particularly the haunting song, powerfully delivered by Paula Boulton, about the experiences of Annette McNulty in police custody.

Most thought provoking the parts dealing with the attacks on the gypsy community. The act demands that travelling people give up their centuries old

way of life and integrate into settled 'communities'—described here as ethnic cleansing.

The campaign against the M11, of the Exodus Rave Collective in Luton, of Disability rights campaigners fighting for accessible public transport, of women peace campaigners were all brought to life by slides and tapes of the actual events in the voices of those involved.

This performance was a benefit for Satpal Ram, imprisoned in 1986 on a murder charge after defending himself against a vicious racist attack. Satpal was placed in segregation in Long Lartin prison for refusing to comply with procedures that amount to strip searching.

This was conveyed to the audience by leading activists from the Free Satpal Campaign—further reinforcing the vital need for solidarity on many fronts.

Banner Theatre

BANNER THEATRE can be contacted at The Friends Institute, 220 Moseley Rd, Highgate, Birmingham B12 0DG or on 0121 440 0460.

Music tapes of the show are also available.

Criminal Justice is now booking at the reduced price of £300.

Free Satpal Ram

FREE SATPAL Ram Campaign can be contacted c/o 101 Villa Rd, Handsworth, Birmingham.

Information about Satpal's current situation can be obtained from the campaign or from *Socialist Outlook*.

Libelled Liz fights on

ISLINGTON Labour councillor Liz Davies is continuing with her libel action against two other Islington councillors and one former councillor. She believes that defamatory remarks made publicly by the trio were instrumental in Labour's NEC removing her as parliamentary candidate for Leeds North East.

All three claimed that she had been involved in physically disrupting an education committee meeting which took place in November 1994. A number of newspapers reported that she was accused of "inciting violence".

She did not decide to go to court until after two letters had been sent to each of the councillors asking them to set the record straight. She feels that she has to do this not only to clear her name but also to protect her professional reputation as a lawyer.

Liz and her supporters say that it appears that the three councillors are receiving support from "people with extensive financial resources". She herself has no such resources and a defence fund has been established.

Contributions can be made to: Liz Davies Libel Fund, P O Box CR54, Leeds, LS7 3XW.

Labour councillors dance to Tory tune

AS LOCAL authorities set their budgets for what could be the last time before the general election Labour councillors are again dancing to the Tory's tune and slashing jobs and services.

Council workers in Liverpool are being told either to take a five per cent cut in pay or face 863 compulsory redundancies.

In Birmingham, education and social services will be badly hit and 727 jobs may have to go as the result of the council forging ahead with a £50 million cuts package. Union leaders in both cities have threatened to ballot on strike action if job cuts are forced through.

Cuts are also being made in most London Boroughs. On Wednesday of last week UNISON members in Hackney walked out over a £15 million cuts package and the threat of compulsory redundancies. Many schools were closed when teachers refused to cross picket lines.

In neighbouring Islington the Coun-

cil is rejecting claims that its decision not to set the highest council tax in the country is anything to do with the fact that Tony Blair lives there.

A £4 million cuts package in education could mean one teacher being sacked in every school.

Labour councillors in all of these authorities say that they cannot operate outside of government caps on spending and raising of revenue. At the same time many service users and trade unionists are sick to the back teeth of Labour councils making cuts, year-in and year-out.

Doug Thorpe, secretary of Islington UNISON A Branch said that if necessary, councils should refuse to set legal budgets and make it clear to both the Tories and Tony Blair that any more cuts were unacceptable.

In Scotland where there are no Tory councils, public outrage, mainly over education cuts, has forced Scottish Secretary, Michael Forsyth to find another £96 million. Just over two weeks ago 40,000 parents, pupils and teachers

marched through Edinburgh to protest against the cuts.

Other protests are continuing and in some cases schools are being occupied.

From Birmingham, Bob Whitehead adds:

ALTHOUGH the council claim that the main schools budget is being protected, central education spending is being cut by 15 per cent and this has led to the loss of thirty specialist teaching posts.

Social services face drastic cuts and the council wants to crack down on sick pay.

The Birmingham Community Conference and UNISON have been organising opposition. Strong links have been built with left councillors—five voted against the budget. Another two Labour councillors abstained.

A spokesperson for the Community Conference said that although there was a long way to go they were determined to give a voice to all those attempting to fight back.

Lambeth Labour councillors—the keenest cutters

LAMBETH Council's new get-tough chief executive, Heather Rabbatts—salary, £115,000 a year—has told her workforce that she has to get rid of 1,200 of them before March.

In addition to the usual redundancy terms, staff are being offered sweeteners.

The hung council is also axing its five remaining homes for the elderly and is closing Clapham Rehabilitation Day Centre for adults with physical disabilities. Users there responded by chaining their wheelchairs across Clapham Road and causing a massive tailback to the Elephant and Castle.

Union members have been threatened with disciplinary action if they organise joint protests with users. They say that when it comes to making the cuts, the Labour councillors are the keenest.

Stage set for postal battle

AN ATTEMPT by Royal Mail management to force through a wholesale change in working practices has been rejected by the CWU Postal Executive.

The proposed "employee agenda" seeks to introduce teamwork, abolish allowances in favour of a "simplified" single payment which would cut shift earnings, establish a productivity bonus and introduce personal development assessments.

In delivery offices the team leaders will be the managers.

In an unprecedented campaign of opposition, activists from 40 CWU postal branches attended an open conference to discuss the employee agenda in the week running up to the executive meeting.

This was due to the annoyance of Alan Johnson the Gen-

eral Secretary. He had urged CWU members not to attend the meeting, then issued threats against executive council members involved in the conference.

It is no wonder that Johnson is upset. The CWU has now thrown down the gauntlet to Royal Mail management, rejecting their agenda and pushing forward with the union's claim for a shorter working week.

The union leadership has been trying to avoid such a confrontation in the run up to the General Election.

As a report prepared for the activists conference showed, postal workers are already owed a shorter working week of over four hours as a result of the introduction of new technology.

Pressure must be maintained to push forward the union's claim of a phased introduction

of a 35 hour working week.

The opposition to the employee agenda represents a real breakthrough for left organisation in the CWU.

Yet despite the high degree of militancy the left is organisationally weak. This has enabled Alan Johnson to duck a national confrontation with Royal Mail despite the huge attack on jobs in all parts of the country.

It is quite likely that Royal Mail will now try and provoke a national dispute.

The last year has seen a growing use of confrontational tactics by management on the issue of job cuts.

The employee agenda was seen as a way of tying the workforce to increased productivity and undermining the union's strength through teamworking.

A national confrontation with the union will be the only way



Blair: a Labour government will try to introduce "partnership" into Royal Mail

management can push forward their job cutting agenda.

A national dispute will force the issue of privatisation back into the centre of political debate.

It will also place Tony Blair in a dilemma. How will a Labour government introduce "partnership" into Royal Mail when it has provoked a national fightback?

The employee agenda is in many ways a blueprint for a publicly owned company under Labour's new Clause Four.

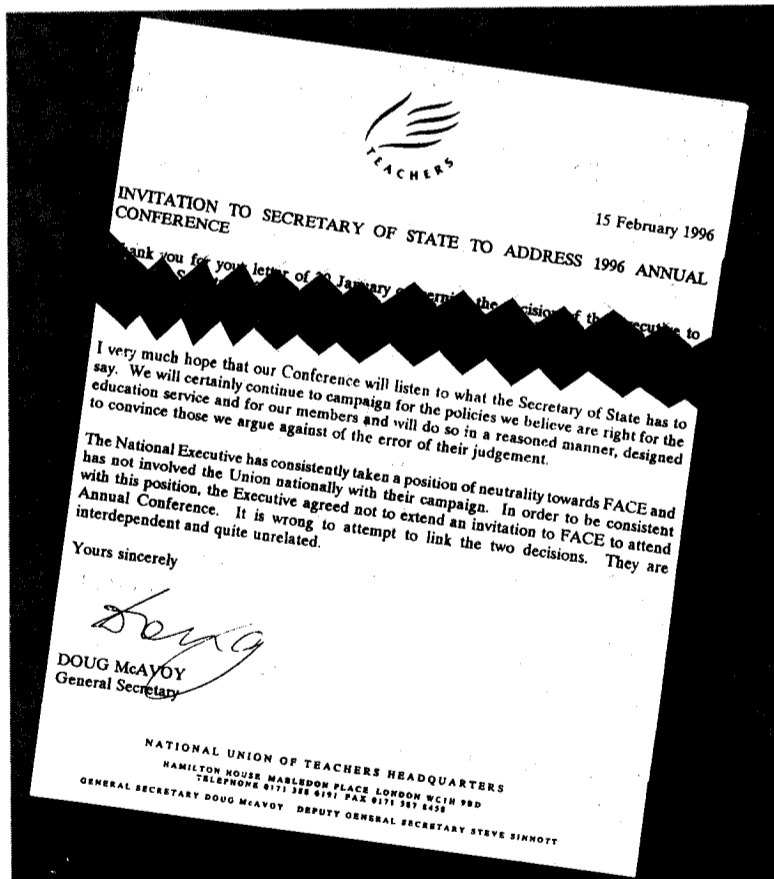
The CWU postal branches the battle ahead, organising among the membership to explain why the Employee Agenda was rejected.

All attempts to introduce teamwork must be resisted.

The open conference needs to reconvene to co-ordinate its activity. This will then open a new agenda set by the workforce of job security and a shorter working week.

Alan McBowes

Hot Easter in Cardiff



McAvoy's letter

Roy Leach NUT national executive personal capacity

DAVID Blunkett has declared open season on comprehensive education. In a highly publicised speech he accused progressive teachers who refuse to divide pupils by ability for the failures of comprehensives.

The outpourings of Labour's education spokespersons go even further than the Tories. It is an historic break from

Labour's previous stance.

The Conservatives have used league tables, opting out and OFSTED inspections to encourage selection between schools.

Labour wants bigger and better league tables, an extension of specialisation (with inevitable selection), more rigorous inspections and an imposed end to mixed ability teaching.

The title of the latest policy statement *excellence for everyone* disguises the fact that equal funding for schools

reinforces inequality.

Schools need equitable funding, with more resources allocated to those in greatest need.

Labour must target the chronic underfunding of state education. The refusal to enter into spending commitments—and the necessary tax increases for the rich—coupled with Blair's obsessive courting of the middle classes inexorably drives Labour down the same road as the Tories.

McAvoy is the only union leader to back the proposals. Both Blunkett and Shephard are to be given a platform at the Easter NUT conference in Cardiff. FACE is not even invited to send an observer.

Despite thousands of redundancies and an insulting pay award the leadership have made "extending democracy" the key debate of conference. McAvoy and the Broad Left leadership are trying to force through rule changes which will centralise power in their hands.

But they are not certain of victory, despite engineering a mandate through a slanted ballot.

Opposition goes beyond the left in the Socialist Teachers Alliance and the CDFU to a broad layer of activist and local lay officers. A tabloid *Campaign Teacher* has been launched.

McAvoy has responded by writing to every delegate claiming the STA and CDFU are trying to "dissuade, through distortion and dishonesty, conference delegates from agreeing reforms".

With the right wing majority on the executive looking increasingly shaky and unable to answer the challenges of the left he realises that his time may be running out.

The gloves are off. It looks set to be a hot Easter in Cardiff.

Schools vicious voucher venture

Imbar Tamarl

THE TORIES new wonder scheme of nursery vouchers will do nothing for quality education. The vouchers will not increase provisions, training or parental choice.

In fact the vouchers are the first step in the privatisation of education. It is the thin end of a thick wedge.

They are only for four year olds and for a part time place. Existing places for three year olds will be put in danger. The money for the vouchers will be taken from the local authority budget, and will not cover the cost of a part time place in a state nursery.

Many authorities are opposing the scheme, and Iain Mills, a Tory rebel plans to table an amendment which would allow local authorities to withdraw from it.

Only Westminster, Kensington and Chelsea Wandsworth and Norfolk have agreed to the scheme.

Nurseries are only the beginning. If the Tories consider them successful they will be used in other parts of the education system such as further education.

The Campaign Against Vouchers in Education (CAVE) has been established by teachers and parents.

* Demonstrate against vouchers, Saturday, March 16, 12.00 Battersea Park, March to Central Hall, Westminster.



Three year olds will be put in danger

Photo: George Tomlins

War on welfare

The Tory offensive against the welfare state is not just an abstract whim which can be dropped at will: it is driven by three intersecting pressures which also affect Labour's response, reports HARRY SLOAN.

Is the cupboard really bare?

THE BRITISH government, like that of Juppé in France, is driven to hack back welfare spending not simply to open the space to cut taxes for the ruling rich and private industry, but also in part because of the financial restraints imposed by the Maastricht Treaty and its criteria for further economic integration of the EU.

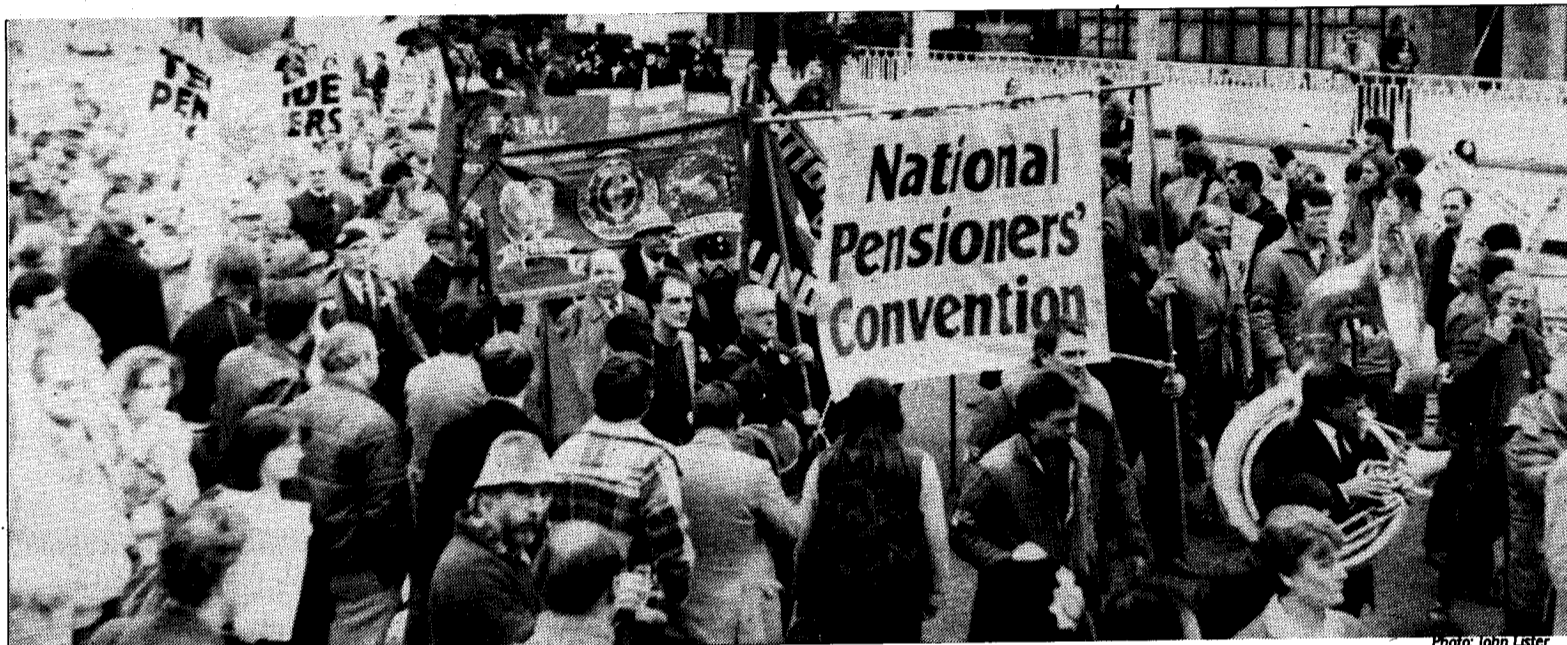
Maastricht sets an upper limit to each government's deficit of three per cent of GDP: Britain's deficit is currently running at 4.2 per cent.

The fight for welfare rights is therefore not restricted to Britain—it is an EU-wide battle.

But as the capitalist world market cuts up rough, with competing countries and trade blocks seeking competitive advantage, it is also a world-wide fight.

In the USA, workers are battling against bipartisan attempts by Republicans and Democrats to slash the minimal state funding of health care and other welfare services. In Eastern Europe the drive to privatisation and restoration is being accompanied by a frontal attack on welfare rights.

In the Third World and dependent economies the brutal policies of the IMF and the World Bank, acting on behalf of imperialist finance houses, are demanding cuts in services and the imposition of brutal new charges for health and education, bringing the collapse of



An advanced economy can quite reasonably sustain a larger than previous number of pensioners

Photo: John Lister

fledgling services.

The situation facing the Tory government continues to deteriorate. Contrary to the optimistic assumptions behind Kenneth Clarke's relatively muted but still savage package of cuts, the public sector borrowing requirement is as bad this year as it was last, implying a gap of up to £7 billion between Clarke's estimates and the real deficit.

Of course this deficit has been manufactured by 17 years of Tory policies, systematically cutting progressive taxation to hand big rewards to the wealthy. But it has created a situation from which the Tories cannot easily escape. The possibility of a swingeing, vote-buy-

ing tax-cutting budget in November is already restricted. That is why every avenue for cutting public spending is being so relentlessly explored.

From the point of view of welfare spending even the much-vaunted drop in unemployment and creation of 'new jobs' is bad news: closer examination shows that all of the new jobs created in the final few months of last year were part-time jobs, whose low rates of take-home pay offer a minimal contribution in taxes, while part time staff often pay little or no National Insurance. In fact numbers of full-time jobs fell by 9,000 in November, while 50,000 'new' part time jobs were created.

NHS goes to the market

THE TORY onslaught on the welfare state is also fuelled by the very ideological notions which drove on the original Thatcher project.

Major's team is equally wedded to the concept of the free market as the solution to every problem—whether it be highly profitable telephones and water supplies, or the more problematic railways, hospitals—and now even nurseries.

The icon of privatisation as a supposedly superior method of delivering each and every conceivable service has been stretched beyond previous imaginable limits: we now have private prisons, private mental hospitals, and plans for private companies to own and manage NHS hospitals.

The Tories have won the last four elections above all by promising (though of course not delivering to most people) low taxes—by which they mean low direct taxes, supplemented by larger indirect taxes, charges and payments by the individual.

One factor crippling Blair's response is that he, too, has stolen the low tax slogan, preventing the party from offering any radical alternative or any reversal of the Tory cuts.

Even the most daring Labour response to the education cuts has been to demand a big increase in council tax, daringly busting the government cap, only to foist the bill on individual householders.

While this is preferable to axing teachers' jobs and increasing class sizes, the key issue is the fight for adequate central government funding, derived from direct income taxes.

So far has Labour lurched down the road of Tory tax philosophy that a battle must now be waged in the labour movement to uphold the principle of a steeply progressive income tax, which is a key step to making the rich pay for the restoration of services decimated by a decade of Tory tax handouts.

Also lurking in the Tory ideological arsenal are the reactionary weapons of racism and sexism. The racism is given fullest vent in the attacks on the welfare and other rights of asylum seekers and immigrants, reinforced by Michael Howard's 'Snoopers' Charter', which aims to force public service workers—in the NHS, schools, colleges and social security—to denounce black people they suspect of being illegal immigrants.

The sexism emerges in the unstated assumption that the larger number of frail elderly, people with mental illness and those with learning disabilities will be offered no formal welfare state assistance, but cared for without obvious cost to the taxpayer—by (largely female) relatives at home.

This colossal hidden privatisation dominates the lives of six million carers saving the state an estimated £27-£30 billion a year.

Baby Boom bursts

THE TORIES, arguing that their allegedly booming 1990s Britain can no longer afford the welfare provision established during the austerity and rationing of the post-war period, point to demographic changes. The proportion of elderly in the population is certainly on the increase: the lack of a major world war for 50 years has helped create this new phenomenon.

More pensioners, and an increased life expectancy for each elderly person, not only serve to push up the pension bill, but also bring additional pressures—on health care and social services. The average cost of NHS care for the growing number of over 85s is ten times higher than the average for peo-

ple of working age.

Of course the problem has again been worsened by years of systematic under-investment in the kind of services required by the frail elderly, and by Tory cuts in the value of pensions which have in turn undermined the health of many pensioners: the generation who fought at Dunkirk and paid all their lives into National Insurance for the welfare state now make up the bulk of those living in poverty in Major's Britain.

But those pundits and analysts who cite the "grey timebomb" as the reason for scrapping key elements of the welfare state seem to forget that the last 50 years have also seen huge advances in the productivity of labour.

New technology means that fewer

workers today could, in an advanced economy, quite reasonably sustain a larger than previous number of pensioners and other dependents: the problem is that they also have to sustain a parasitic capitalist class creaming off the lion's share of wealth as private profit, and—perhaps even more important—shackling the productive forces to their own narrow requirements.

We should not forget the other demographic pressure, which is now making itself felt in our schools. After several years of declining birth rate in the 1970s and 1980s, a new generation of baby boomers are arriving and need primary schools. Soon these increased numbers will need secondary schools and colleges, too.

Limp Labour tied to Maastricht

TIED AS they are to the same Maastricht criteria, and the same reactionary low-tax slogans as the Tories, Tony Blair's Labour has little alternative it can offer to the Tory war on the welfare state.

Indeed Labour's own Borrie Commission proposals floated the notions of a graduate tax and compulsory second pension payments, while right wingers led by Frank Field have been challenging some of the most basic elements of welfare state provision.

Blair & co's total capitulation to Tory free market ideology leaves them unable coherently to confront the market-style reforms in the NHS and education, with successive policy pronouncements on such issues as opt-out schools, selection in education, NHS trusts, fundholding GPs and other topics leaving campaigners confused.

The party not only has no socialist policy, but on many issues it appears to have no policy at all.

The timidity of Labour's programme, coupled with the scale on which the Tories have embarked on privatisation and dismantling of services, makes it even less likely that a Labour government would even attempt to restore many of the services lost or hived off in the past 17 years.

Activists fighting inside the labour movement for defence of the welfare state in any or all of its aspects must not state in grasp of the scale of the Tory attack, but also the scale of the policy battle to be waged if Labour is not to continue along the same lines as Major.

Campaigning on a number of fronts has demonstrated clear evidence of the continuing public support for the con-



Socialists reach out to the best campaign and trade union activists and develop the fight

Photo: Linn Fjort

cept and practice of welfare state provision.

Though conceded by the ruling class as a means to pacify working class resistance in the post-war period, it represents an important, if limited step towards social provision for those in most need, linked to the concept of

collectively funding key services free of charge at point of use, through progressive taxation.

These principles are now being eroded to be replaced by the naked logic of the market—driving the more prosperous layers of the middle classes to contemplate costly private provision

for pensions, health care, and even education.

The reality is that with ever fewer people employed in permanent full time jobs, and the decline in living standards now taking its toll of employed workers as well as the poorest families on state benefits, only a small

minority could afford to pay privately for the services traditionally identified with the welfare state: even those with private medical insurance require NHS A&E cover.

Socialists must raise these issues more openly and forcefully inside the unions and the Labour Party, raising again the demand for steeply progressive income tax and the renationalisation of key privatised services, industries and utilities to guarantee defence and improvement of the welfare state.

The fight for democratisation of the quangos which run the NHS, and democratic control of occupational and private pension funds must be raised, along with the scrapping of ludicrously wasteful and bureaucratic market systems in the NHS, voucher schemes for nurseries, etc.

The fight back for the welfare state must start now, to prepare the ground for the battles to come under a Blair government. We must not allow defeatism to set back the struggle.

Even the apparently invincible Tories have been beaten back on some of their proposals, especially the demise of the profoundly regressive Poll Tax, and the notable victory notched up by pensioners fighting VAT on fuel.

Workers who see the Tories ousted and Blair elected will expect some of their long-standing demands to be met; and when they are not, they will be more determined to fight for their rights.

Socialists reach out to the best campaign and trade union activists and develop the fight as a root and branch challenge to Blair's corporatist charlatany about stakeholding.

Tories scramble to cut welfare

Education

AS WELL as ongoing cuts in schools budgets, Universities face a £550 million (12 per cent) cut in revenue funding over three years, with additional cuts in funding for research and equipment.

Further Education colleges face a real terms cut of 30 per cent by 1999. Funds for equipment and capital projects are to be slashed by a third next year, rising to two thirds in 1998/9.

Students are in the firing line with

grants cut another 9% next year, and all parties moving towards a 'graduate tax', effectively ending any notion of free higher education.

University Vice Chancellors and Principals have threatened an emergency cash levy of 300 per new student next year, underlining the desperation of the colleges, and the danger that they will turn to attack the 'soft' target of the students rather than confront the government.

Benefits

Social security and other bene-

fits have been slashed in value since 1979 and are again under attack:

* Sickness and invalidity benefits were replaced by scrapped the more restrictive Incapacity Allowance, cut benefits from tens of thousands of people.

* Housing benefit for the under-25s has been brutally cut from January 1.

* Single parent benefits are also to be cut.

* From April 1, unemployment benefit will be restricted to 6 months duration, and in October it will be scrapped, to be replaced by the

meaner Job Seekers Allowance, designed to save £2.2 billion by cutting off benefits to 90,000 people and forcing 150,000 onto lower, means-tested benefits.

Benefits will be more difficult to obtain as a result of Lilley's draconian plans to slash £1 billion (25%) from the running costs of the DSS in just three years, implying large-scale privatisation, thousands of jobs to be axed, and even less flexibility to respond to the needs of individual claimants. Claimants may be refused help unless they can produce 'proof' that they are eligible.

Pensions

Attacks on pensions have been key to mobilisations across Europe, notably in France and Italy. In Britain, other than campaigning by pensioners themselves, it remains a sorely neglected subject.

Thatcher axed the link between pensions and average earnings: with pensions linked only to prices there is no possible increase in the real values. Levels have fallen from 20 per cent to 15 per cent of average male earnings. By 2030 it is estimated it will have declined to just 9 per cent.

The Tory scheme was to persuade

ever larger numbers to take out additional, private pensions - funnelling billions into the coffers of insurance companies and finance houses: but the high cost of doing so means that millions of workers are seriously under-insured for their old age.

Now it appears that the Tories and Labour leaders are moving towards a 'consensus' that a decent state pension cannot be afforded, and that pension levels can only be topped up through an additional, compulsory 'second tier pension'.

Housing

Tory attacks on council house-building have followed on the massive forced sale of council houses at giveaway prices under Thatcher. House building of all kinds has been reduced to an all-time low, with council programmes in many areas at a complete standstill, despite billions in unspent balances from house sales in the 1980s.

A new Tory bill now aims to strip the homeless of their priority on council housing lists, and speed up evictions of private sector tenants, would also extend the devastating 'right to buy' policy to houses run by Housing Associations.

Socialist Outlook Books

Defend Our Welfare Rights

"The studies in this pamphlet, edited by Duncan Chapple from Socialist Outlook's editorial board, explain the ideological offensive and economic crisis behind the welfare state — and outline how to win the fight to defend our rights"

Contributors include Richard Hatcher, Gill Lee, John Lister, Helen Shaw and Alan Thornett. Send 50 pence, plus 25 pence postage, to 'Socialist Outlook Fund', PO Box 1109, London N4 2UU.

In search of leadership

Roland Rance

THE SUICIDE bombings in Jerusalem and Tel-Aviv by supporters of the Islamic movement Hamas have left the policies of Shimon Peres, Yasser Arafat and Bill Clinton in disarray.

Arafat has won his election as President of the Palestinian Authority, but the latest attacks threaten Peres' lead in the forthcoming Israeli elections, and weaken Clinton's image as a world peacemaker.

Once again scores of Israelis are dying in random attacks in population centres. Once again millions of Palestinians are besieged in their homes as Israeli army patrols return to the streets.

Yet another emergency conference to save the so called peace process will be held in the Red Sea resort of Taba—John Major has promised to attend, in order to share Britain's experience of dealing with terrorism.

No-one should be surprised by these developments.

Socialist Outlook has consistently

argued that the Oslo Accords were inherently unstable and could only be implemented by ever-increasing military coercion.

They legitimised the existing social and demographic situation and recruited the PLO to police the Palestinian people on Israel's behalf, while offering less than nothing to the impoverished Palestinian masses.

The failure of the secular Palestinian left to pose an effective challenge to Arafat's increasingly autocratic rule has left the way open for Hamas to establish itself as the genuine voice of Palestinian resistance—much in the same way that the PLO established itself in the 1960s and 1970s against the pro-Jordanian and tribal traditionalists.

For almost twenty years the debate on Palestinian strategy polarised around so-called military and political options. In reality the main proponents of both of these options offered an elitist approach.

The 'military' supporters focussing on spectacular terror attacks and the attempt to develop a standing army capable of confronting the might of the

IDF, while the eventually triumphant 'political' called for diplomatic negotiations with Israel under the auspices of the UN.

Neither camp proposed a strategy capable of mobilising the Palestinian masses in an integrated political-military struggle for liberation.

The Palestinian Intifada which erupted in December 1987 was as much a challenge to this failure of the national leadership as a revolt against continued Israeli military repression.

Particularly in its early stages, the Intifada brought tens of thousands of Palestinians onto the streets in a concerted challenge to Israel's military and political control, while at the same time establishing popular committees across the Occupied Territories.

This struggle and these committees provided an inspiration for popular risings and insurrections throughout the Arab world.

In many cases these risings took on an Islamic colouration. Religious language, ritual and structures could provide a cover for political activity in societies where any open political ac-

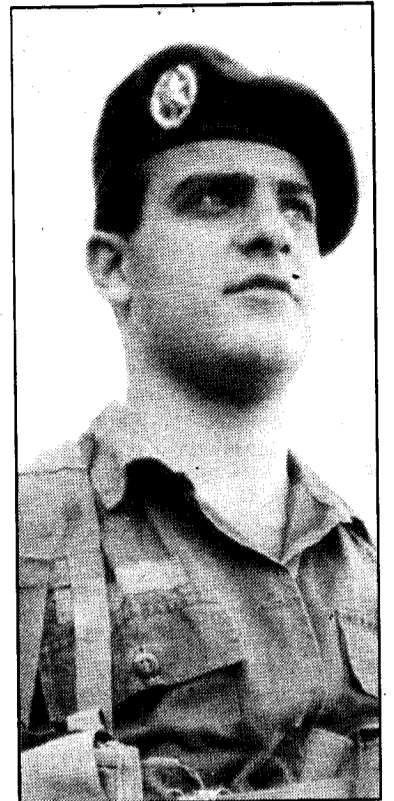
tivity was brutally repressed.

And Islamic movements were seen as a credible—and less corrupt—alternative to nationalist regimes which had failed to fulfil the promises and expectations raised in the struggle for national independence.

Ironically, for a long time the Israeli authorities tolerated, and even fostered, Islamic fundamentalism in an attempt to weaken the hegemony of the PLO in the Occupied Territories. Although the PLO and its affiliated organisations had always been banned under Israeli rule, Hamas was not banned until September 1989—by which time it had managed to establish a real presence and an effective cell structure.

There is growing evidence of a split in the Hamas ranks. Some "pragmatists" seem tempted to enter the process in the expectation of gaining power from a discredited PLO in the near future. More ideological elements reject any possibility of a compromise with Zionism or Palestinian secular nationalism.

With no serious attempt to alleviate the miserable conditions of the improv-



Israeli repression has intensified

erished Palestinian masses the secular left has failed to provide a credible political alternative.

The Islamic movement will seize this opportunity to fill the vacuum.

US attack on Cuba

Adam Hartman

TWO PLANES flown by Brothers to the Rescue, a rightist US based Cuban exile group, were shot down recently by the Cuban air force.

The Cuban and US governments dispute the details, but at least one plane clearly invaded Cuban airspace in a deliberate provocation. The Cuban government claims "irrefutable proof"—including personal items of the four crew members killed—that both planes fell in Cuban water.

The invasion follows eight violations of Cuban airspace since May 1994. On July 13 1995 and twice in January 1996 Brothers to the Rescue flew over Havana, dropping leaflets. The July incursion was backed by eleven boats in Cuban waters.

This incident has given Washington a pretext to tighten the screws on Cuba. Clinton immediately reinforced the travel bars.

He wants Congress to authorise raids on Cuban assets, frozen since 1960 in US accounts, to pay the families of the four dead crew and other agents.

The Libertad or Helms-Burton Bill strengthens the embargo against Cuba, making companies in any country which does business with Cuba liable to legal action by Cuban Americans who claim land rights in Cuba.

Washington has also gone on the offensive in the United Nations, calling on the Security Council to condemn the Cuban government's "unlawful use of force". All fifteen members agreed to a statement "strongly deploring" the incident and calling for an investiga-



Cuban soldiers wave hello: defence of the 1959 Cuban revolution is a pressing task for internationalists worldwide

tion.

The threat of military intervention has risen.

On February 25 F-15 fighter planes accompanied a US flotilla searching for the downed planes. US manoeuvres off

Cuban waters have been stepped up. Reserve pilots have been called up to bases in Florida.

Socialists must stand full square behind Cuba's struggle to defend its national sovereignty and revolution.

• For details of forthcoming actions contact Cuba Solidarity Campaign, c/o Red Rose Club, 129 Seven Sisters Road, London N7 7QG. Telephone 0171 263 6452, fax 0171 561 0191.

International Viewpoint

International Viewpoint is the hard-hitting monthly published by the Fourth International. The March *International Viewpoint* has a special dossier on women in political organisations worldwide, including Britain's Labour Party. Additional features include Turkey, Germany and Mexico. Annual subscriptions in Britain and Ireland cost £22. Send to Outlook International, PO Box 1109, London, N4 2UU. Make cheques & POs payable to Outlook International.

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Social Democrats slash Swedish welfare

TONY BLAIR is to be the main international guest speaker at the Swedish Social Democrat's party congress on March 16.

They have been leading the austerity drive since coming to office. Cutbacks increased when Sweden joined the EU in January 1995.

In December 1993 the previous government reduced sickness and unemployment benefits by ten per cent. At that time the Social Democrats and the LO (the main trade union federation) organised 30,000 protesters. Now they play a different role.

During the last election in 1994 three Trotskyist women in Nacka, home town of deputy Prime Minister Mona

Sahlins, dominated the media debate. The women organised a protest against proposed cuts in childcare.

Mona Sahlin hotly defended the cuts, but the proposal was withdrawn due to mass protests. Sahlin was later forced to resign from the government.

Sweden is feeling the results of Maastricht. The new EU-rules for refugees make it harder to be granted asylum. Cuts in social welfare also hit refugees and single mothers very hard.

Cuts in education have led to school books being sponsored by private companies. More children are being forced to pay for school meals.

Unemployment benefits now only pay for two 300 day periods—forcing

more of the unemployed to live on welfare. Part time workers no longer receive unemployment payments for the time they are not working.

This decision will mostly affect women. Pensions have also been cut.

So the Swedish welfare system is deteriorating. The cuts have been much harder than any proposed in the French Juppe plan. Yet resistance is nowhere near the level in France.

The Social Democratic congress will be met by a demonstration supported by more than 60 local unions including miners from the north, and various women's organisations.

Peter Lindgren

What future for Irish republicanism?



Has the distance between Mary Robinson and Gerry Adams grown or lessened?

David Coen

HAVING promised talks within three months of a cease-fire, the Tories continually moved the goalposts just when talks seemed to be about to start. Canary Wharf was the result.

But ending the cease-fire has left Republicans in a politically weaker position. The "pan-nationalist alliance" embracing the Social Democratic and Labour Party, the Dublin parties and Irish America, on which they relied so much is now pressuring them to make even more concessions.

The bombs put the Dublin Government in an even stronger position.

Commenting on the end of the IRA cease-fire, a senior member of the Dublin establishment is recently reported as saying "the cancer of republicanism should be permanently removed from the island of Ireland".

Other than provoking the gung ho elements in the British ruling class and in Dublin, the Canary Wharf bomb has changed nothing.

But Republicans now appear as the main problem—just when it was becoming clear that the British are the main obstacle to peace in Ireland.

During the whole 18 months of the

cease-fire the Republicans made some effort to get movement on prisoners, the unblocking of border roads and the dismantling of fortifications. Their main demand was for negotiations backed up by the threat of a renewed military campaign.

But they did not organise any serious campaign around the demand for negotiations—not merely because of their reflex militarism but even more importantly, because mass demonstrations against the British would be opposed by their new friends in Dublin.

If there is a new settlement it will be brokered by Dublin on its terms.

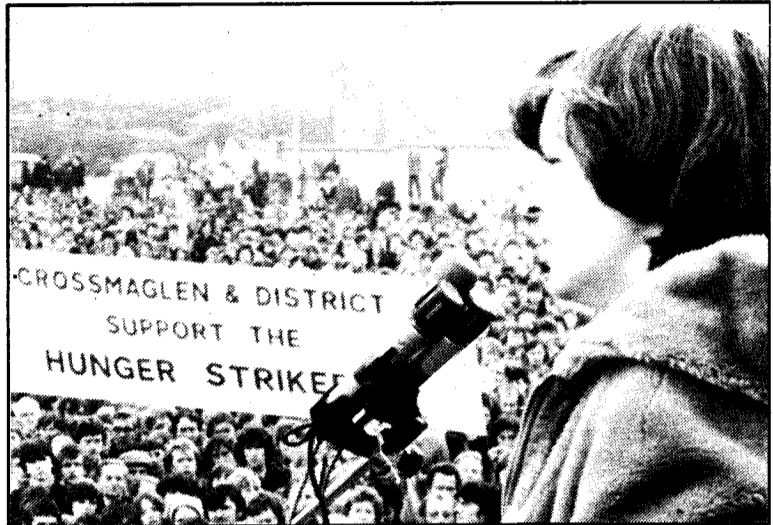
The Dublin bourgeoisie got a bad fright in the early 1980s and has no desire to see the fusion of militant republicanism again with the economic crisis in the south. They are opposed to Irish unity, but want enough from the new settlement to sell the constitutional changes which they want to defeat the republicans.

Other elements take a more relaxed view of the end of the cease-fire than the British. They know that they are the only card the Republicans hold.

They may be more worried about an IRA split than the British: it would be destabilising making the outcome more uncertain.

Most Republicans accept that the war was a stalemate. A large section go one step further to draw the wrong conclusion that if force could not drive the British out, nothing else can.

It is this which has led a section of the leadership to the contortions over self determination. They and John Hume of the SDLP are groping to find



Bernadette Devlin McAliskey addresses 1981 H-Block demonstration

a form of words which manages to reconcile the apparently irreconcilable—Irish self determination and the Unionist veto.

This identifies the Unionists rather than the British as the main obstacle to Irish unity and concedes their right of veto in a completely convoluted way.

It is worth going through the arguments step by step to show how mistaken they are.

The Irish people as a whole have the right of self determination but also the right to decide how that right should be exercised. They can decide that self determination can be decided separately by the two parts of Ireland.

Basically, the Irish people can concede self determination to the Unionists. Irish self determination - the right of the whole people of Ireland to deter-

mine their own future - becomes, in this topsy turvy world, its opposite.

The Unionist minority on the island in effect determine the future of Ireland. The majority find that the exercise of the right of self determination is not the exercise of self determination at all.

It is still not too late to withdraw from this farce.

Bernadette McAliskey's call for a Republican Congress open to all, and for a renewal of the cease-fire until after it has met, could begin to lay the basis for building the kind of mass movement needed to get the British out of Ireland.

The choices are stark. Another 25 years of military stalemate or participation in a process whose outcome is the copperfastening of partition.

Spanish Tories beat Gonzalez's PSOE

Simon Day

ONE OF Tony Blair's favourite Europeans was put out on his ear last week. Spanish Prime Minister Felipe Gonzalez's PSOE got its comeuppance after thirteen years in office.

In 1982 the party was elected on a wave of working class enthusiasm. A modern Spain was promised, of de-

mocracy and extended welfare provision.

At first there were reforms to education, national rights within the Spanish state, and some changes for the better in abortion rights. But the PSOE has become increasingly caught in the contradiction of Euro-austerity. In order to achieve the targets of Maastricht public spending has had to be slashed.

The PSOE's so-called labour reforms have stripped workers of rights

and made it easier for bosses to make sackings.

A third of Spanish workers are now on temporary contracts. When Gonzalez was first elected the figure was four per cent.

Attacks on working class living standards have been accompanied by revelations and allegations of gross corruption and brutality.

Four former interior ministry officials have been arrested on charges of organising death squads.

Gonzalez has been conducting a dirty war against the leadership of the Basque separatist movement.

It is widely alleged in the Spanish press that the person behind the paramilitary gangs that murdered over 20 separatists in France in the 1980s was the PSOE interior minister Jose Barionuevo—or even Gonzalez himself.

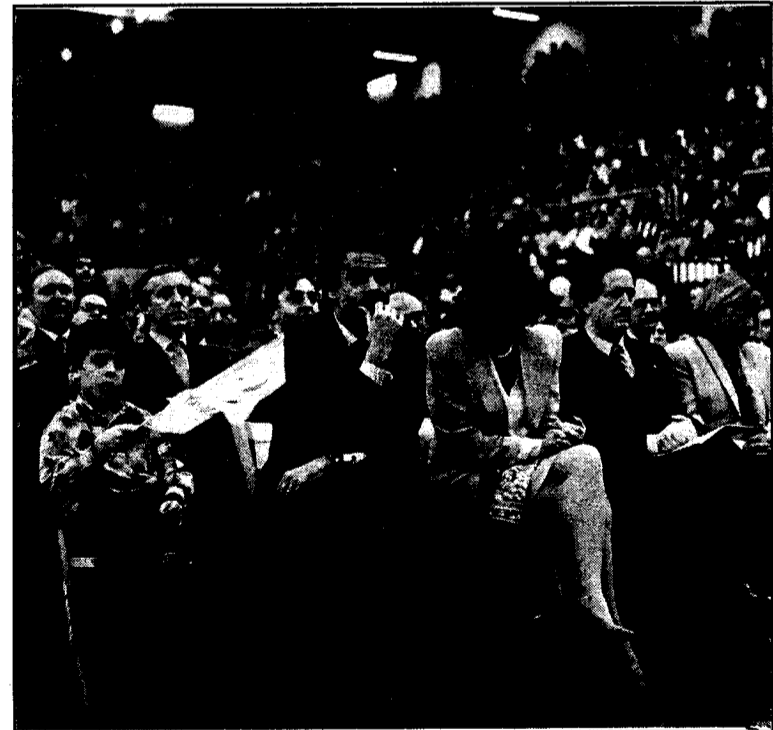
The People's Party may now put together a governmental coalition, with its 38.9 per cent of the poll augmented by Catalan, Basque, Canary Islands and Valencia right wing nationalists.

It has until the end of the month—with the investiture vote for leader José Maria Aznar expected at the beginning of April.

But the PSOE did remarkably well despite their record in government. They got 37.5 per cent of the vote.

Gonzalez benefited in particular from the fears of right wing authoritarianism—the PP has its roots in Franco's regime.

There is also widespread opposition to cuts in welfare—especially from the old and rural poor. PP leaders were



PP leader José Maria Aznar, flanked by his son and wife, at a PP election rally

forced to deny that they are going to press ahead with a programme of privatisation and cuts.

It is still possible for Gonzalez to make an alliance with the United Left, which won 10.6 per cent.

The United Left has grown rapidly over the last few years since the Spanish Communist Party joined forces with a number of far left groups.

But it remains a fragile alliance, with a number of stresses and strains—particularly over the role of the ex-Com-

munist Party. It has a red-green manifesto and is committed to defending welfare against the attacks of the right. It has therefore spent a great deal of time in the last few years attacking the PSOE for implementing neo-liberal economics.

Now that the PP looks like stepping into the PSOE's shoes it has to find new tactics for the new situation. The choices it makes will be decisive for the future of the Spanish workers' movement.



Gonzalez: fell after implication in assassination of Basque independence fighters

Memories of Mihalis Raptis

Obituary: Mihalis Raptis (Pablo)

Michel Pablo (1911-1996) died on February 17 in Athens. He was one of the founders of the Fourth International and one of its key thinkers. He is particularly associated with the analysis of the Eastern European overturns of capitalism that followed the Second World War.

His theorisation of the period has been one of the most hotly contended positions in the Trotskyist movement.

We print here an article adapted from obituaries by Gilbert Marquis and Tassos Anastasiadis in *Rouge*, weekly paper of the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire (French section of the Fourth International), and a contribution by John Lister looking at the consequences of Pablo's positions for our understanding of Stalinism, nationalism and the nature of the revolutionary process.

HIS PERSONAL qualities, his organisational abilities, the freshness he brought to analysis and his role in maintaining Trotskyism in Europe under Nazi occupation made Michel Pablo (Mihalis Raptis) one of the central leaders of the Fourth International.

These qualities were well known throughout the socialist movement. That is why every left wing political organisation and trade union in Greece expressed their condolences.

Despite his age Pablo participated in a wide range of demonstrations: in solidarity with Turkish families threatened

with expulsion, in support of workers' struggles, against repression of homosexual prostitutes. He persuaded Greek television to invite old Russian Trotskyists, bringing their memories of the deportation camps and the Left Opposition.

Pablo strongly supported a workers' united front that took up all issues: social, political and cultural. He opposed a purely workerist approach to building a revolutionary movement.

Michel Pablo and the Fourth International took up the defence of Tito's Yugoslavia against Stalinist slanders. More than 2,500 young people partici-

pated in work brigades in solidarity with the Yugoslav revolution.

In 1954, with the launching of the Algerian insurrection, the Fourth International enormously increased the scale of its work in solidarity with colonial revolutions. Pablo was in the fore-front.

The Hungarian uprising in 1956, with its workers' councils, confirmed Pablo's conceptions of socialism. He insisted that democracy, including multi-party pluralism, was essential. He argued this point with the Yugoslavs, even though he felt their policies, especially 'self-management' were far more progressive than the Stalinists.

The Fourth International condemned the invasion by Russian troops and defended the Hungarian workers' councils against accusations of wanting to restore capitalism. However, the International argued that the working class, not the party, must decide whether or not capitalism is restored.

In Algeria Pablo opposed repression of the Communist Party, despite massive disagreements with it, and argued for workers' self-management against the bureaucratic institutions set up by the F.L.N.

Pablo persuaded the Algerian government of Ben Bella to provide arms and money to Che Guevara, despite



1995: 'Pablo' paid his respects at the funeral of FI leader Ernest Mandel

arguing that socialism needed more than Guevara's conception of purely moral stimulants. If workers in the towns and on the land did not receive regular increases in their standard of living then the revolution would be lost.

Pablo was not solely concerned with national liberation movements.

In November 1995 he telephoned an old friend in Paris to express his joy at the developing strike movement. "Kohl himself is worried" he claimed.

Pablo spent much of his life in exile from his native Greece. He was only able to return after the overthrow of the military regime.

His long absence perhaps explains why he failed to understand the growth of Greek nationalism. This failure led

to other wrong positions, including support for Serbia's war against Bosnia.

Pablo's wrong views on these issues made collaboration with the Greek Trotskyists increasingly impossible.

Pablo's funeral was paid for by the Greek government. The Ministers who shed tears on his grave are now trying to transform this great revolutionary into a nationalist.

It is certainly regrettable that Pablo never foresaw this possibility but we shouldn't forget that there are plenty of similar examples in history.

For our part we should retain the best memories of this revolutionary, this theoretician of action, this seeker for social emancipation.

Michel Pablo: Key figure in Trotskyist split

John Lister

MOST TROTSKYISTS recognised that the regimes taking shape across most of Eastern Europe were the offspring of the Stalinist bureaucracy in the Kremlin, hostile to the working class, and in a visible sense counter-revolutionary even while they nationalised property, industry and banks.

But many, like Pablo, believed that Tito's Yugoslavia was an exceptional case.

The problem was compounded when Pablo from the International Sec-

retariat (IS) began to set out the view that Communist Parties could be pressurised by a mass movement into revolutionary action:

"Certain CPs in favourable conjuncture, when they are linked to the real, revolutionary movement of the masses, can detach themselves from the yoke of the Kremlin and begin to act on their own."

Of course history has consistently shown precisely the opposite: that Stalinist parties are at their most counter-revolutionary when the possibility of revolution is at its height. This is one of the bitter lessons of Spain and Germany in the 1930s, of France, Italy and

Vietnam after the war, of Indonesia in the 1960s and Chile in the 1970s.

But Pablo went further: he developed the view that the Third World War was imminent, and that this would be a war between two 'camps' - imperialism on the one side and the Soviet Union on the other.

This, argued Pablo, was a global 'exceptional circumstance', which could force Stalinist parties to drop their counter-revolutionary role everywhere. It would be a 'war-revolution', in which:

"It is not excluded that certain Communist Parties with the bulk of their forces can be pushed out of the strict orbit of the Soviet bureaucracy and can project a revolutionary orientation. The developments in Yugoslavia and China are only a pre-figuration of the events to come."

With all this excitement on offer, it made no sense for Trotskyists to be building small parties on their own programme and politics: they should be getting into the bigger, Stalinist parties - especially in France and Italy - and 'remain there, in order to take advantage of the revolutionary possibilities which will develop.'

Trotsky's call for political revolution to overthrow the Stalinist bureaucracy in the USSR and Eastern Europe was also lost in the wash.

At first, Pablo's highly factional organisational methods, which included expelling the majority of the French section for refusing to enter the French Communist Party, did more to stir re-

sistance than his politics. But matters came to a head in 1953, when a succession of events served to discredit his line on Stalinism.

In September 1953, on the eve of the Fourth FI Congress, the British, American and expelled French sections, citing Pablo's politics and methods, together signed an Open Letter which effectively split the International.

Pablo never dropped his campist line on Stalinism: nor indeed did the residual IS call, as Trotsky had done so clearly on the USSR, for the building

later, the 1969 World Congress was to make a major self-criticism, belatedly recognising that by refusing to build a Trotskyist party in Algeria the FI's efforts had delivered absolutely nothing.

Pablo's departure from the FI in 1965 came in the same year that another populist leader, Boumediene, ended the FLN's honeymoon period and began the crackdown on Algerian leftists and CP members.

It was errors like these which made Pablo's name almost a byword for political opportunism among supporters of other currents in the Trotskyist movement.

In the hands of sectarians like Britain's Gerry Healy and France's Pierre Lambert, the term "Pabloism" became

a little more than buzz-word to justify the permanent split in the FI, while they in turn implemented policies towards social democracy and bourgeois nationalism which were equally - if not more - crass and opportunistic than Pablo himself.

In practice Pablo gave political expression to the opportunist pressures which constantly bear down on the Trotskyist movement - pressures to downplay the programme and politics of the FI in the hopes of making a quick breakthrough into growing mass movements.

He may have gone but the hostile pressures have not. The fight to develop and strengthen the marxist programme in the tough conditions of the 1990s also involves resisting 'Pablo-style' opportunism.

He argued that mass movements could press Communist Parties into revolutionary action: history has shown precisely the opposite

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OUTLOOK

Stop Tory
Asylum and
Immigration
Bill



Mobilise for March 23 ARA demo

Socialist Outlook 99 • March 16, 1996.

FEEDBACK

Socialist Outlook welcomes readers' letters. Post them to 'Feedback', PO Box 1109, London, N4 2UU. Letters over 300 words are edited for brevity and concision.



"Peace off? The unionists want a deal whereby the nationalists admit defeat"

No justice & no peace in Ireland

THE REASON that the British government finally abandoned the peace process seems clear. Neither Britain nor especially the unionists are willing to sign up to a deal that does not involve the acknowledged defeat of militant nationalism in the north of Ireland.

For British imperialism there are obvious political and economic advantages of a settlement of the 'Irish problem'. As the editorial in your last issue made clear, Sinn Fein was prepared to offer big concessions so a deal between all parties should have been on the cards. But Major kept insisting that the IRA had to give up its arms. Why? Because they had to be seen to be beaten. Because at the end of the day unless the most class conscious and militant communities in the British state are not demoralised and broken they are still a threat to the ruling class and a challenge to unionist reactionaries.

Solidarity with these communities and the republican struggle is therefore important for the British working class. The bombings obviously don't help us to develop that solidarity but it is very much in our own interest.

Ivor Gill, West London

Militant Swedes

READERS of *Militant* (issue 1263, February 16) were no doubt very pleased to read that in Sweden, "3,000 to 4,000 people took part in a demonstration organised by the Workers League Offensive (AFO) against the tightening up of the asylum laws" and "Per-Ake Westerlund spoke as AFO chairperson along with speakers for the Left Party and Liberals"

Readers may however wonder how it came to pass that the Liberal party chairperson was invited to speak at a AFO demonstration. After all, this party was, between 1991 and 1994, part of a bourgeois government which did some really nasty things to refugees.

The answer lies in the fact that the event was not organised by the AFO but by a coalition of more than twenty groups. The AFO did a good job before it happened but then so did everyone else.

It was not a demonstration either but an outdoor meeting. The attendance was not more than 500.

In Sweden we have a saying — "Lies have short legs".

Peter Lindgren,
Socialist Party, Sweden

CPRF "is openly capitalist"

ANTHONY BRAIN (SO 98) is wrong to advocate even "critical support" for the Communist Party of the Russian Federation.

The CPRF is not Stalinist or even really socialist. It is openly capitalist. Gennady Zyuganov has often repudiated claims that he would restore the Soviet Union if he became President.

The CPRF merely wishes to slow the Yeltsin reforms, not to stop or reverse them. What's more, the experience of so-called "reformed Communist" parties in Eastern Europe shows that they have wholeheartedly embraced the West's free-market agenda.

Many leading figures within such parties have expressed admiration for Margaret Thatcher.

Brain's claim that Russia isn't capitalist because "there is going to be a 20 per cent increase in investment on education...miners are getting the back pay owed to them...[and] 4.5 billion roubles is being invested in the mining industry" is ridiculous.

In Lyndon Johnson's USA, there was an increase in educational investment, all the miners got paid and there were subsidised industries.

Does that mean that the USA was not capitalist in the mid to late 1960s? Of course not!

As for the CIS along with China "reasserting themselves against imperialism"...how?

Hollow anti-western ranting from Yeltsin and Li Peng aside, both countries can be seen to be embracing the West. The encroachment into Russia and China of Western capital, firms and Western-style organised crime, surely shows this.

Alan Thomas, Southampton

What's Happening

March

Saturday 16, CAVE demo, assemble 12, Battersea Park.

Saturday 16, memorial meeting for Sam Levy, 3.30, Fenner Brockway Hall, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London

Saturday 18 Socialists in or out of the Labour Party? Debate between Socialist Campaign Group, Militant and SLP, 7.30, Adelphi pub, Leeds.

Saturday 23 Dockers demonstration, assemble 12, Myrtle Parade, Liverpool

Saturday 23 ARA demo, London. Assemble 12.30 Embankment.

Saturday 23 Welfare State Network conference. Mechanics Institute, Manchester.

Saturday 23 North West Peoples March against Job Seekers Allowance. Assemble 10 Cavendish Street, Manchester. Will march to WSN conference.

Monday 25 Defend working class militants, defend Horatio Penario, Picket of Argentine Embassy, 53 Hans Place, London SW1.

Called by Campaign Against Repression in Argentina

Saturday 30 Socialist Campaign Group Supporters' Network, Leeds Town Hall. 11.30 debate with SLP, steering committee, 1pm

Saturday 30, March for Justice, Raghbir Singh demo, assemble 11.30, Black Patch Recreation Ground, Foundry Lane, Smethwick, West Midlands

April

Saturday 13 Stop Workfare demonstration, Hull, phone 01482 215 059

Thursday 18 lobby of parliament against JSA, called by Unemployed Workers Centres

Saturday 20 CAIAB demo. Assemble 11 am, Embankment, London

May

Friday 10 - Sunday 12 National Conference of Trades Councils, Kettering.

Saturday 11 Conference against the Asylum and Immigration Bill, 11 am-4pm, Natfhe Conference Centre, Britannia Street, London, near King's Cross. Organised by Campaign for a Fighting Democratic UNISON.

Saturday 25 National Dockers Conference, 11am, Transport House, Islington, Liverpool.

WHAT WE'RE FIGHTING FOR

UP AGAINST mass unemployment, rampant employers with savage anti-union laws, and a war on hard-won public services, the working class in Britain faces a real crisis — an avoidable crisis created by the historic failure of its official leadership.

Socialist Outlook exists to build a new type of working class leadership, based on class struggle and revolutionary socialism.

The capitalist class, driven by its own crisis, and politically united by its need to maximise profits at the expense of the workers, has had determined, vanguard leadership by a brutal Tory high command.

The Tory strategy has been to shackle the unions, and to fragment and weaken the resistance, allowing them to pick off isolated sections one at a time.

In response, most TUC and Labour leaders have embraced the defeatist politics of 'new realism', effectively total surrender, while ditching any pretence of being a socialist alternative. Every retreat encouraged the offensive against jobs, wages, conditions and union rights.

New realism is the latest form of reformism, seeking only improved conditions within capitalism.

We reject reformism, not because we are against reforms, but because we know that full employment, decent living standards, a clean environment, peace and democracy, can never be achieved under capitalism.

Nor, as we argued long before the collapse of Stalinism, could these demands ever be achieved under the bureaucratically deformed workers states and degenerated USSR, whose regimes survived only by repressing the working class.

We are a marxist current, based not on the brutish totalitarian parodies of state marxism, nor on the tame, toothless version of 'marxism' beloved by armchair academics, but the revolutionary tradition of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky.

Our socialist alternative is not based on parliamentary elections or illusions of peaceful legislative change.

We fight to mobilise and unleash the power of the working class to topple the corrupt and reactionary rule of capital and establish its own class rule.

We struggle against fragmentation by building solidarity, to unite the various struggles of workers, the unemployed, of women, of pensioners, of the black communities, of lesbians and gay men, of students, of youth — and of those fighting imperialism in Ireland and worldwide.

Socialist Outlook is above all an internationalist current, in solidarity with the Trotskyist Fourth International, which organises in over 40 countries.

Unlike some other groups on the British left, we do not believe a mass revolutionary party can be built simply by proclaiming ourselves to be one. This degenerates into sectarian posturing and abstention from struggles in the labour movement, playing into right wing hands.

Nor do we believe that the demands of women, black people, lesbians and gays or the national demands of people in Scotland, Ireland and Wales should be left to await revolution. The oppressed must organise themselves and fight now for their demands, which are a part of the struggle for socialism.

But propaganda alone, however good, will not bring socialism. The fight for policies which can mobilise and politically educate workers in struggle, must be taken into the unions, the Labour Party and every campaign and struggle in which workers and the oppressed fight for their rights.

To strengthen this fight we press for united front campaigns on key issues such as racism and fascism — in which various left currents can work together for common objectives while remaining free to debate differences.

If you agree with what you see in *Socialist Outlook*, and want to join with us in the struggle for socialism, readers' groups meet in cities across the country.

Get organised! Contact us now!

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Socialist OUTLOOK

State attacks Newbury protestors

Bring the Tories down to Earth!



Photo: Andrew Ward

Upside-down world - profit rules whilst environmental resources are squandered

THE THIRD round of the battle to prevent the building of the Newbury by-pass is on.

The campaign has united young environmentalists and members of the local community. It has forced politicians to focus on environmental policy.

More than twenty camps line the by-pass route. Protesters maintain constant vigils, determined to put themselves between the diggers and the trees.

The campaign has worked for so long because of the protesters' emphasis on organisation and collective decision making.

They have effectively put their case to the media and gained local support. They

successfully organised a demonstration which brought together other ecology groups.

Importantly, it has also linked the campaign to the labour movement. Trade union banners were in evidence on the march.

The labour movement has been forced to take seriously the arguments raised against car dependence and in favour of an ecologically sustainable transport policy.

Labour's environmental spokesperson, Chris Smith, has been forced to say that switching investment from roads to rail is economically sound. What Labour will do with the privatised rail network is another question.

It is now up to all of us, inside and outside the labour movement, to make sure these issues remain in the policy makers' minds.

Despite the protests being peaceful, both the police and security guards have tried to break them up. The recent High Court decision that the protests are illegal has provoked the recent scenes of protesters being plucked from the trees.

The repressive legislation contained within the Criminal Justice Act has been used to charge protesters with offenses under the Aggravated Trespass section.

This legislation is being employed in a deeply political way. The protesters find themselves battling not only against the

contractors and police, but against the whole Tory project to stamp out resistance.

It is essential that these protesters do not remain the only champions of ecological debate in Britain, or that they fight alone against repressive legislation that affects us all.

These issues need to be linked to a broader project of social change. An effective struggle to defend the environment implies a broader fight against capitalism's abuse of resources.

The special issue 100 will be out on April 4, 1996.