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Socialist **OUTLOOK**

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**With Europe's
workers --
against
Euro-bosses!**

**Make 1997
a year of
international
solidarity**

INSIDE this 20-page issue: 4-page pull-out on Euro-March campaign



Unworthy of a civilised society: Cardinal Hume

Abortion rights under fresh attack

Marian Brain

THE NEW Pro-Life Alliance has stated its intention to stand 50 candidates at the forthcoming general election. With the financial backing of Mohammed Al-Fayed, they announced in early January that they had 20 candidates already in place.

If they are able to achieve the target of 50, this would entitle them to a party political broadcast. They are likely to use this to screen a film of a late abortion, a new version of the infamous 'Silent Scream'.

This campaign is being assisted by the increasing intervention into political life by the Catholic Church, which for 2000 years has stood in the way of women's equality.

Over recent weeks, Cardinal Basil Hume used a television appearance to call abortion 'a great evil' 'unworthy of a civilised society'.

His Scottish counterpart, Cardinal Winning, who had attacked Blair's supposed hypocrisy on abortion last autumn, was given a platform by Radio 4's Today programme to continue to attack. Winning claimed that Labour was forcing those MPs who were opposed to abortion to keep their views quiet.

Such reactionary broadsides have been given a good deal of follow-up coverage in the press, ensuring they reach a wide audience.

The Tories have been quick to jump on the bandwagon. Robert Spink MP, a junior government minister, has urged voters not to cast their votes for pro-choice candidates. Conservative Central Office has highlighted the fact that 'Emily's List' which exists to promote women MPs only sponsors those with a pro-choice position.

Loser

Clare Short, talking to *The Guardian's* Maureen Freely on January 2, argues that the greatest loser in this game is the Catholic Church itself which has alienated an entire generation of catholic women with its antiquated views on sex and women's rights. Short, who was brought up a Catholic, has however been the only Labour politician to put her head at all above the parapet and denounce this reactionary crusade.

She has further argued that there was no pressure on Labour MPs to vote against 'their consciences' and defended this policy which pro-choice activists have long fought

against. Her partial defence of women's rights remains however in contrast with the Blair clique who have attempted to damp down the whole row.

This is scarcely surprising when Blair has moved increasingly to claim religious, moral justifications as the basis to differentiate him from the Tories. When their economic and social policies have moved so close together, this has been a useful, and safe basis to emphasise a supposed difference.

Pro-choice activists need to gear up for the months to come. In October 1996 a Mori poll for the National Abortion campaign found that 81 per cent of people in this country supported a women's right to choose.

That situation has been achieved through long years of battling by the pro-choice movement and does not give us the basis for complacency in the face of this new threat.

The National Abortion Campaign is organising a series of speakers training days for pro-choice activists around the country. They will take place in Liverpool and Birmingham on January 18.

For further details contact NAC on 0171 923 4976

Release Roisin McAliskey!

ROISIN McAliskey, daughter of Bernadette McAliskey has been held in custody since November 20 1996 on suspicion of involvement in the Osnabruck barrack bombings. On January 3, 1997 she was again remanded in custody.

Roisin is five months pregnant and is suffering from a chronic asthmatic condition as well as serious complications of a digestive and muscular nature related to the pregnancy. Her health has deteriorated rapidly while in detention because of her treatment by the British authorities. Both police and prison doctors have confirmed that her pregnancy is at risk.

During Roisin's imprisonment she has been treated in ways that would create hardship to anyone let alone a woman with a difficult pregnancy.

Notorious

Following her arrest she was taken to the notorious Castlereagh Interrogation Centre and subjected to intense questioning for 15 hours per day. She suffered from sleep deprivation and her family doctor and relatives were denied access. After six days of interrogation by the Royal Ulster Constabulary no charges were brought.

On November 25 the German authorities issued an extradition warrant. The RUC denied the existence of this warrant for more than 24 hours and continued to question Roisin illegally. On November 26 she was transferred to London and her solicitor and family were only notified afterwards.

A prison doctor examined Ms McAliskey at Charing Cross police station and advised she should be transferred to an obstetric facility. Instead she was taken to Bow Street Magistrates' Court and then remanded to Holloway women's prison. She was placed in solitary confinement.

A pre-arranged family visit at the police station had been cancelled and no provision was made for a visit at the court. Her father and sister were allowed a visit on November 28 - her first for over a week. Her partner Sean, however, was denied access on the basis that he was not a family member.

On November 30 immediately after a visit from her partner, Roisin

was transferred without warning to Belmarsh prison - an all-male prison with no facilities for women prisoners. She remained in solitary confinement in a filthy cell with no heat. Her family and solicitor were not informed of the transfer for two days.

On December 2 she was again seen by a prison doctor who was seriously concerned by her condition. He stated that she had no nutritional reserves to sustain the pregnancy. She required full-time medical supervision.

The following day Ms McAliskey was violently ill while being taken to court in a prison van. Despite this an application for bail on medical and humanitarian grounds was refused and she was returned to Belmarsh.

She had been given nothing to eat all that day and had no food or drink until 6.30am the following morning. During the early hours of the morning she had severe stomach cramps and activated the panic button in her cell which met with no response for over an hour.

On December 5 Eamon O Cuiv, member of the Irish parliament, was denied access to Roisin for a pre-arranged visit. Her mother and partner were also denied access. Later that day she was taken to a hospital where her pregnancy was confirmed and then transferred back to Holloway. Officials there were not expecting her and her possessions were still at Belmarsh.

Doctor

A family visit was eventually permitted on December 6 and an independent doctor examined her and recommended a proper hospital examination. Despite this, she remained at Holloway where she is subject to regular strip searches.

She was again refused bail on December 13, despite a doctor's report submitted to the court saying she was in an advanced state of starvation and sureties of £200,000. At court appearances on December 20 and January 3 she was again remanded. Roisin remains in custody more than six weeks after her arrest. Loud protests are needed.

Contact: Roisin McAliskey Justice Group, Conway Mill, 5-7 Conway street, Belfast, BT13 2DE Tel/Fax 01232 238524

Newham anti-racists under attack

Simon Deville

Over recent weeks, there has been a concerted local campaign against Newham Monitoring Project, calling on the local council to withdraw funding. For the 16 years of NMP's existence it has continued its 24-hour emergency service, case-work and its campaigning in the community against police harassment, racist attacks, and fascism.

Some of those involved in the campaign pose no surprises - the Tory candidate in a recent by-election and the local paper the *Newham Recorder*. The Recorder has always claimed that NMP was 'stirring up racial tension and took particular offence at any campaigns against police racism. The local Tories have previously stood as 'Conservatives Against Labour's Unfair

Ethnic Policies

What gave this campaign new impetus is the involvement of a small but vocal right wing split from NMP itself. Half a dozen people led by Unmesh Desai, one of NMP's founding members, declared the launch of 2 new organisations: the NMP Reform Group, and the Katherine Road Traders and Residents Association. These two front organisations fused to form a third group calling itself, ironically, Newham Unity.

This group is now organising to get council funding instead of NMP. They would clearly be very different from NMP - far less involved in campaigning. They criticised NMP involvement in a picket of Forest Gate police after the death of Ibrahim Sey in custody.

Leading anti-racist A. Sivanandan charged how, in the early 1980s, the growing militancy amongst black youth was headed off by the creation of a 'race relations industry.' Learning from the experience of the

States, a layer of middle class professionals were created with the task of teaching the white power structures to accept black people - and teaching black people to accept the white power structures.

Newham Monitoring Project has been one of the few organisations to successfully resist this trend. Despite being primarily funded by Newham council, NMP has always maintained its political independence.

Blairites

At the root of the right wing split are two central issues - the political ambitions of some within Blair's New Labour and the business interests of a local property-letting agent.

A few years ago it might still have been possible to build a political career inside the Labour Party on the basis of consistent anti-racist activity, today such a background would be a liability.

At the Annual General Meeting of

NMP, the right proposed two council race officers for the management committee. NMP had previously been clear about conflict of interests between a role as a 'race professional' for the council and involvement with NMP. Having failed to gain any support for this move, Unmesh and his grouping then left NMP.

The Traders and Residents Association includes one of the councils race officers, Sultan Mohammed and some of his business partners. Mohammed has investments in a local property letting agents. NMP has always opposed the rehousing victims of racial attacks in privately-rented accommodation, which amounts to profiteering from racism. Mohammed has unsuccessfully pushed for the council to oppose NMP's position.

Since the split from NMP, however, a victim of racist attacks has alleged that Mohammed whilst acting as a council officer, privately offered

to rehouse them in a property with his company, Shore Properties. Mohammed is currently under investigation by the council.

Despite the corruption allegations surrounding the 'Newham Unity' group, and despite the fact that there are no specific charges made against NMP, the council has ordered an investigation into Newham Monitoring Project.

This is clearly an attempt to find a justification for withdrawing support or trying to impose tighter strings. The Labour group would much prefer to see resources going to their political allies and avoid the embarrassing exposures of police racism that NMP has so consistently produced over the years.

NMP has launched a campaign to defend its political independence and to resist any further funding cuts.

To contact the Defence Campaign: phone 0181-555-8151.

A new year of struggle

1997 looks set to be a crucial year in politics - here in Britain, across Europe and on a world-wide level.

The world economy goes into the new year in a fragile state despite the many measures by governments and bosses to drive down living standards and increase productivity across the globe. A new recession in the United States - which is not beyond the bounds of possibility - would send the whole situation into a tail spin.

1997 will see the continuation of the crisis in the Russia which at the close of the previous year has led to the miners taking strike action and to an unstable political situation despite the fact that Yeltsin remains formally in control. Lebed's dismissal from power certainly doesn't seem to have done him any harm and he is clearly gearing up for the succession battle.

The disastrous situation in the Central Lake region of Africa continues to demonstrate the barbarous legacy of imperialism and the failure of the neo-colonialists to bring peace or dignity to the peoples of the area.

The so called 'peace process' in the Middle East will continue to fail the Palestinian people with Netanyahu pledging to increase Jewish settlement in the occupied territories and the PLO doing little to oppose this.

The election of a Blair government is unlikely to make much difference to the situation in Ireland as New Labour will continue a bi-partisan approach and accommodate to the unionists. The struggle for self-determination for the Irish people has not been aided by the approach



They will just keep on battling: public sector workers will press demands on Labour on pay and the welfare state

the Sinn Fein leadership, fighting for a seat at talks which will enshrine partition.

Dramatic struggles will break out across the globe like the huge strikes against the regime in South Korea or the combative protests against budget cuts in Australia. The task will be to build lasting organisation from these flash points that it able to carry on the battle against international capital more consistently.

Socialist Outlook will be covering these and other processes that are of interest to our readers, bringing you information about the ruling class offensive and the resistances to it, ideas on how the struggle can be developed and lessons from other activists.

The European March for Jobs can begin to link together militants across Europe in the run up to the

Inter-governmental Conference to agree the Maastricht Treaty in June 1997.

The recent victory of the French lorry drivers and the blockade of Greek farmers demonstrate yet again that the governments of Europe are not having an easy time in imposing the massive cuts they need to meet the convergence criteria.

Europe-wide

The campaign will also give to opportunity to cement continental-wide links between other groups such as unemployed organisations, who have been inspired by the recent French events or those fighting racist laws.

Socialist Outlook through its involvement with the Fourth International can bring detailed news and

analysis of the resistance across the continent and bring the lessons from those campaigns to our readers here.

In Britain the General Election will most likely see the election of a Labour government after the long winter of Tory rule. But Blair's New Labour is not promising an end to the unrelenting attacks the working class and its allies have suffered under the Tories.

Far from it! Attacks on the Welfare state, already cut to the bone, will continue. Anti-trade union laws will remain in place to shackle our ability to fight back against the bosses.

And not content with his victories over Clause 4 and the manifesto Blair will set out to destroy the historic link between the party and the unions, giving himself a freer rein for more reactionary attacks.

Despite the fact that Blair will continue these and other attacks on working people, *Socialist Outlook* will campaign for a vote for Labour. We believe that the election of a labour government is in the interests of workers not because of what

it will do but because it will raise people's expectations and begin to rebuild a confidence which has been lacking since the defeat of the miners strike. We will seek to organise where ever we can to place demands on Labour both in the run up to the election and after Blair is in government.

We are committed to preparing the best possible conditions for the fight back. The Broad Lefts conference in early February can be an important step in better equipping the left in the unions to work together.

The campaign to build the European March for jobs in Britain can bring together young unemployed activists fighting the vicious JSA with those fighting to defend the welfare state and those fighting for rights at work.

While we will continue to work in the Socialist Campaign Group Network and the Keep the Link campaign to strengthen the left in the Labour Party, we are pledged to work with activists working in the anti-racist movement, in defence of women's rights, the environmental movement and in other campaigns committed to forging a better society.

We think that we will be able to meet all these goals more effectively by changing our schedule of publication.

Through producing a monthly paper rather than a fortnightly we are able to reduce a whole number of overheads and so increase our coverage by over 25%. This we believe will allow us to produce a paper which is more useful to our readers.

A monthly gives us the flexibility we believe we need at this crucial time to deal with complex issues in more depth than has been possible in recent months.

We hope you agree and will continue to give us your support in the battle for socialism and internationalism.

One wheel on his wagon ...

JOHN MAJOR'S rickety government is suffering blows by the minute and may not stay the course through until May.

No sooner had the world begun to gear up after the Christmas break than the *News of the World* was making allegations that Jerry Hayes, MP for Harlow has been involved in an illegal gay relationship.

Though Conservative Central Office refused to support Mr Hayes, who denied that his relationship with the then 18 year-old was anything other than platonic, this will be the source of irritation rather than nightmares for the Tory leadership.

Hayes has been open about his support for gay rights - voting for the gay male age of consent to be reduced to 16 and acting as vice-chair of the cross parliamentary group on AIDS.

A rather more serious headache has been triggered by senior Tory MP Hugh Dykes announcement that he is to join Labour and Liberal Democrat talks on constitutional reform, at the same as the Prime Minister was denouncing them as 'profoundly dangerous'.

Major, launching what looks set to be another expensive, gruesome, and ineffective poster campaign has really been upstaged by his rivals.

The package of constitutional reform package being trailed in the press is much more newsworthy than another tired out PR campaign from the past-sell-by date Prime Minister.

More importantly the proposals could allow Blair a radical face while carrying through reactionary policies in the economic sphere.

Scrap Lords

Of course, abolition of voting for hereditary peers is completely inadequate - the whole rotten second chamber should be scrapped at once. But this, together with a Freedom of Information Act, and the introduction of a Bill of Rights are important moves.

The decision to hold two referenda in Scotland is a complete outrage - but there can be little doubt that during the first term of a Labour government a Scottish Assembly with tax raising powers will be in place.

A huge majority of the

Scottish population are already in favour and this percentage is likely to grow rather than fall under Labour. This alone would be the most significant change to the British constitution for centuries and one which we whole heartedly support.

Socialist Outlook agrees with Labour's call for an immediate election - it is clear that the Tories have no legitimate mandate. We doubt that when Blair's office say they will do everything in their power to get an election called they had anything more daring in mind than breaking with the ludicrous practice of pairing.

Certainly we have heard no calls for anyone outside Parliament to do anything - other than stop Major winning the Personality of the Year poll! No demonstrations, no lobbies, certainly no strikes.

Our readers and supporters will be greeting the New Year and trying to force and election in different style - involved in promoting struggle where ever we can. 1997 will certainly be a year of change - let's make an extra effort to make sure that as much as possible is in our favour.

Socialist OUTLOOK

Emergency Appeal

The severe winter weather has taken a heavy toll on the *Socialist Outlook* office. As many of us celebrated the New Year, the water tank on our top floor sprang a leak, bringing a serious flood on the floors below. Files, records, flooring and equipment have all been severely damaged, including new computer equipment and software for work on this newspaper.

We have only managed to produce this issue under makeshift arrangements, and will need to raise substantial additional cash for immediate repairs and replacements of items damaged beyond repair, while we negotiate with our insurers.

This is a vital time for the work of *Socialist Outlook*, and we urge readers and supporters to assist us in restoring our office to proper fighting trim.

Please rush any donations, large or small (though preferably large!) payable to *Socialist Outlook*, to us at PO Box 1109, London N4 2UU

How *not* to fight the Job Seekers Allowance

or Three Strikes that shouldn't be supported

By Keith Sinclair

THE INTRODUCTION of the Job Seekers Allowance (JSA) has led to a number of campaigns being set up to oppose the JSA and the workfare scheme Project Work. Groups have been set up in a number of areas.

All these groups share a common opposition to both the JSA and to Project Work. However there has been an important debate amongst members of the various anti-JSA groups.

The debate centres around the idea of "Three Strikes and You're Out", which has been advocated by some unemployed activists. The policy has tended to be associated with the organisation 'Groundswell', although it is no longer the national policy of that group.

What does "Three Strikes" involve?

A leaflet from Counter-Information explains that Job Centre Staff found guilty of harassing claimants or cutting their benefits will receive a warning letter - as does their manager - that is STRIKE 1.

A repeat offence brings final written warnings - STRIKE 2.

A third anti-claimant crime by the same individual means photos of them and their manager will be

fly-posted. And a claimant's demo will confront the culprits in their offices: this is STRIKE 3.

The policy is posed in slightly different ways by different groups, but the common thread is clear: Job Centre workers are seen as part of the *problem* rather than potential allies in the fight against the JSA.

For example, a leaflet from the Tameside Unemployed Group refers to 'dole officials', never once calling job centre employees workers, far less mentioning that the vast majority of job centre workers *oppose* the JSA.

The main union involved, the CPSA, has a policy of opposition to the imposition of the JSA.

What sort of campaign is needed?

Anti-JSA campaigns need to involve the employed and the unemployed. As part of this, there is a need to involve job centre workers in publicly opposing the JSA. An example of the sort of unity that can be built is shown by the Hull Trades Council campaign against Project Work.

The campaign was initiated by the Trades Council following a motion being sent in by the CPSA Employment Service branch.

There has been no question of seeing CPSA members as being 'the problem': rather the aim has been to build a united front which demonstrates the sort of alliance we want to build.

The 'Three Strikes' policy cuts across attempts to win over job centre workers to actively oppose the JSA. Left activists in the CPSA are put on the defensive, as management and right-wing union officials combine to suggest that all anti-JSA



Claimants and civil service workers demand "Jobs Not JSA"

activities are targeted at CPSA members.

'Three strikes' makes it more difficult to win over job centre workers and is, in reality, a gift to management and the right-wing leadership of the CPSA. Management have been keen to attempt to link CPSA left activists with 'Three Strikes', as they know the policy makes it more difficult to win Employment Service workers to active opposition to JSA.

Job centre workers and the unemployed have the same fundamental interests. Therefore, an alliance needs to be built. This will not be easy. The good formal anti-JSA policy doesn't mean that all job centre workers (or all CPSA leaders) fully support that policy.

The activity of unemployed groups needs to be built up.

There is a need for sustained work around the job centres, aimed at building active opposition to JSA by claimants. This should involve leafleting, petitioning, occupations etc., which are co-ordinated with the job centre unions. The tactic of

peaceful occupation is useful, as it enables both claimants and job cen-

Support for 'Three Strikes' is often linked with a refusal to fight to put pressure on the Labour Party and union leaderships to fight the JSA and Project Work.

tre workers to hear the arguments against JSA.

One of the noticeable trends is that support for 'Three Strikes' is low in areas where CPSA activists are involved in broad-based campaigns against the JSA or Project Work. Often the links have been built over a period of years, particularly through Trades Councils like Hull and Nottingham, where CPSA activists are centrally involved.

Three strikes and Project Work

If 'Three Strikes' is not helpful in fighting the JSA then it is totally irrelevant to any real fight against the workfare scheme 'Project Work', which has been piloted in Hull and Medway.

'Three Strikes' focuses on the relation between the individual job centre worker and the individual unemployed person.

But any fight against Project Work has to operate on a far wider terrain. In particular, there is a need for campaigners to target any organisation which is likely become a provider of placements for Project Work. This particularly involves a fight to get Labour councils to refuse to become Project Work

providers or to offer placements.

But it also involves a fight to win over charity workers and trade unionists in colleges - Project Work cannot be fought solely at job centres, nor can it be successfully fought solely by unemployed workers.

What's behind Three Strikes?

It's clear that the main advocates of 'Three Strikes' tend to be from an anarchist background. However anarchists and syndicalists who operate within the existing trade unions and Trades Councils are often opposed to 'Three Strikes'. Support for 'Three Strikes' is often linked with a refusal to fight to put pressure on the Labour Party and union leaderships to fight the JSA and Project Work.

In a similar vein, it is often assumed that the Labour and Conservative Parties have the same position on these issues. But it is not as simple as that. Labour is opposed to Project Work, so it is essential that campaigners use that formal opposition to help win over local councils to refuse to be involved. In the same way, many local Labour activists wish to see the repeal of the JSA.

John Prescott's constituency Labour Party is for the abolition of the JSA. The point here is not to sow illusions in Labour; rather it is to recognise that there are going to be big battles with a Blair government on the issues of benefits and workfare programmes.

Any policy that cuts across building the maximum possible unity in action against the Tories is a wrong policy. Supporters of 'Three Strikes' should think again, and help build a united struggle against JSA and workfare.

Tories fiddle jobless figures

THE TORIES were jubilantly claiming just before Christmas that the unemployment figures were now below 2 million for the first time in six years. Indeed the November drop of 95,000 is the biggest single fall in the monthly official figures for more than 25 years.

There has been no celebrating amongst the unemployed as it is clear that the new figures do not represent an increase in people with jobs. There are in fact 800,000 fewer people at work than in 1980.

The Tories fiddling of the figures is well known with more than 30 changes to the way 'unemployment' is calculated since Thatcher took office in 1979.

Labour's deputy leader John Prescott, respond-

ing to the Government's announcement, pointed out that 'Much of the drop in figures can only be explained by people being driven off the benefit register and off the records all together'.

This is indeed the case with more and more people being denied any means of support at all. Incapacity Benefit, the Asylum Bill, Project Work and the Job Seekers Allowance are combining to create a layer of non-people with no official existence - and no money!

The situation will get worse as the JSA in particular progresses and more fall foul at new stages.

It is a crime that Prescott and the Labour Front bench are happy to denounce the Tories but will not commit themselves to scrap this vicious legislation.

Union Broad Lefts seek new ways to work together

Fred Leplat, Campaign for a Fighting and Democratic UNISON
AN UNPRECEDENTED co-ordination between 12 trade union left organisations is being established. These union left caucuses come from a variety of industries and services as well as different political traditions. A conference to strengthen this co-ordination will take place on the 1 February 1997.

This initiative should be supported by every socialist who

wants to see our unions being campaigning organisations. At the moment, too many decisions of our national leaderships are the subject of scrutiny by lawyers and campaigning too often reduced to promoting Unity credit cards.

For far too long each union left has been through necessity concerned with the affairs of their own respective union, yet we face common problems across the unions.

The lack of co-ordinated response by the left in the union has allowed the 'new realist' leadership of the TUC to drag the whole movement to the right.

Over the last 17 years, unemployment, privatisation, cuts in services and the anti-union laws have bat-

tered the unions.

Activists at rank and file level have had to face the full onslaught while the 'new realist' leaders failed to organise any concerted fightback and increasingly adapted to this situation.

Organising a union left wing across the whole of the movement is not a new idea.

But in the recent past such organisations have been more the property of a particular political organisation rather than a genuine attempt to bring together in one room militants with different traditions. This may be one reason that such efforts have rapidly floundered in the past.

However the decision of 12 genu-

ine union lefts such as the Socialist Teachers Alliance, the Print & Media Broad Left, the Communications Workers Broad Left, or the Equity Left Alliance have been meeting together and have decided to hold a conference on February 1 1997 is a major step forward.

In the context of the likely election of a Blair led Labour Government, the left in the unions needs to discuss common problems and seek through this to develop a coherent militant response across the trade union movement.

The most immediate aspirations of union members, as embodied by their conference policies, can only be met if a majority Labour government is elected and if such a gov-

ernment is then forced carry out these policies.

For UNISON members, this would be an ending to all forms of privatisation, a minimum wage at £4.26p, adequate funding for the welfare state and the repeal of anti-union laws and the Asylum & Immigration law.

Campaigning for these policies during and after the election would eventually have to be backed industrial action.

The task of this conference is to start planning a strategy for the unions to fightback against the old free-market Tories and the New Labour freemarketeers and which would have at its heart the interests of workers and union members.

Will new realists lose their grip?

Neil Murray

OVER THE LAST few years the level of strikes has been the lowest for a century. While the figures picked up slightly in 1996, this was not a qualitative shift and a long way short of the levels of the 1970s.

Unlike bourgeois and social-democratic commentators who see a high level of strikes as a thing of the past, Marxists recognise that the contradiction inherent to capitalism between the interests of the employers and their state and the working class means that class struggle is inevitable.

The question is not if, but when, around what issues and in what form this will take place. While Marxists do not claim to be able to predict the exact development of events, they can point to general tendencies.

The reasons for the downturn are not hard to discover. The defeats inflicted on key sectors of the class by the Tories with the connivance of the bureaucracy allowed them to make changes which consolidated these gains.

The anti-union laws have made it harder to take action, while job losses and the use of short-term and temporary contracts have led to an insecurity which undermines the confidence to fight.

The trade union leaderships refusal to challenge any of this; their shift to the right and their stressing of the 'need' for restraint to ensure the election of a Labour government has been a major contribution.

Those struggles which have broken out in recent years, tenacious and inspiring as they have often been, have highlighted the problems that exist.

While the anti-union laws have made it difficult to take legal, official strike action, they have also served as a screen for union bureaucrats.

Thus, while the Liverpool dockworkers have fought heroically for over a year against their sacking and

the casualisation of port labour, and have received enormous levels of support internationally, they have been isolated by the fact that every other port in Britain has already been casualised.

The TGWU has hidden behind the anti-union laws in refusing to make the dispute official but has also refused to even do what it could within the law. It has pressurised the dockers into accepting sell-out deals. Similarly, UNISON has done little to support the Hillingdon hospital workers, also out for over a year.

Postal and rail workers accounted for a high proportion of the strike figures over recent years, both official and unofficial. Rail workers had a series of successful disputes in 1996, but the break up of the rail network into separate companies means they now have to fight company by company for separate agreements, with the anti-union laws restricting who can give support.

Frustration

Postal workers frustration at continued management attacks have led to repeated local walk-outs, leading up to the national strikes over plans to introduce team working.

They had to contend with a union leadership hell-bent on fostering a 'good relationship' with management. Unofficial strikes have been repeatedly denounced, ostensibly to protect the unions funds, and joint General Secretary Alan Johnson did his utmost first to prevent the national strike happening at all, and then to end it.

While Johnson was not completely successful, facing the occasional revolt from the CWU executive, he did finally manage to sell a deal which at best postpones the dispute until such time as the union-management 'working party' on team working reports, leaving branches to fight victimisations on their own.

The recent further education strike was an important develop-

ment, bringing together all the unions involved in a one-day strike, and further action may ensue, but it is not enough in itself.

Years of defeat and retreat cannot be simply reversed overnight, they have brought about changes which are not just superficial. The level of unionisation fallen considerably and organisation within unionised workplaces has also suffered. The number of shop stewards has fallen drastically, workplace organisation is weak and many union branches have difficulty functioning.

So what is set to change? The general election will probably see a Labour government come to power, but Blair will not only keep the Tories' anti-union laws intact, but may add new ones.

There will be no loosening of pay restrictions, no assault on unemployment and the continued destruction of the welfare state. If a minimum wage ever emerges from joint commissions with the bosses, it will be set at a level more to do with inter-capitalist rivalry than providing a living income.

Nevertheless, there are factors which counterbalance this if Labour is elected. Despite Blair's attempts to make the opposite clear, the working class will expect some reversal of the damage done by the Tories over 18 years. Frustration could explode in a variety of ways.

Despite - and, in part, because of - their subservience to Blair's moves closer to Tory leaders, the Trade Union leaders expect some pay back. They need something to show the members who they told the election of a Labour government is their only hope.

The bureaucrats will not be willing to lead a fight against a Labour government, but if Blair fails to deliver they will find it difficult to hold back their members.

Blair will undoubtedly enjoy a 'honeymoon' period, during which he will attempt to undermine the party-union link. How long this honeymoon will be is a matter of conjecture.

If pay restrictions remain, the



Andrew Ward

Postal workers on the march: frustration eventually led to walk-outs

low pay commission drags out, welfare provision continues to deteriorate, or a major section comes into conflict with the anti-union laws, this situation could rapidly change.

Conflict

Given Blair's programme, the areas of potential conflict are clear - not least to Blair himself who has been busy making plans to attempt to ensure he can carry out his programme unhindered. Blair's priority is the same as the Tories, even if it differs in some of the details, improving the profitability and therefore competitiveness of British capitalism.

To do so he has to continue their attacks. Socialists do not, however, sit back and wait for the good times to come or simply assume that an

upsurge will automatically lead to a long-term growth in the strength of the Left. There are too many examples in history which show otherwise. But it does create the conditions in which this is possible, given the correct intervention by socialists.

Socialists have to lend material and political support to those disputes which do break out, arguing how to take them forward and what the lessons of them are for workers in general. While calling for a Labour vote, we need to explain what its programme will mean and build support for key demands, such as repeal of the anti-union laws.

We have to rebuild the structures of the unions and argue for policies which can provide a real lead in a fightback.

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Houdini Dorrell leaves Labour floundering

New Labour heads for a new health - fiasco

Harry Sloan

HEALTH Secretary Stephen Dorrell is on the edge of a historic exercise in escapology.

With the aid of Labour's Chris Smith and his dim-witted Blairite advisors he seems set not only to neutralise the NHS as an electoral issue, but even to turn the tables and put Labour under pressure.

More remarkably still, Dorrell has achieved this result without relenting in the Tory "scorched earth" strategy which is preparing a major NHS cash crunch for an in-

coming Labour government.

This is the reality behind the Budget settlement, which appears to pump additional cash into health services while in reality pushing health authorities and Trusts towards new cutbacks.

Dorrell has cynically turned the tables on Labour, challenging Smith to promise more money for the NHS, safe in the knowledge that no such pledge will be forthcoming from a party terrified of appearing to embrace any policy of increased public spending.

In fact £1 billion of the £1.6 bil-

lion "extra" money for the NHS unveiled last November will be gobbled up at once by rising prices: Kenneth Clarke's claim of a much bigger real-terms increase rested on the vain assumption that inflation will run at just 2%.

Another £200m has been cut from the NHS capital programme, worsening the £2.4 billion backlog in maintenance and the total standstill on hospital building. And over £300m extra will be required simply to keep pace with growing numbers of elderly patients and the advances in new technology.

From Clarke's trumpeted £1.6 billion, therefore, just under £100m amounts to "new money" — and this falls far short of the deficits already predicted for health authorities this year.

Uneven

To make matters worse, the money is being distributed unevenly across the country, according to a fiddled formula which somehow gives the biggest percentage allocation to the health authority covering Tories' darling borough of Westminster, while leaving more deprived districts in London and across the country starved of cash.

Dorrell has even produced an extra hand-out of £6 million to delay high-profile hospital cuts and closures in Merton Sutton and Wandsworth, where Tory marginal seats are at stake. Elsewhere, health authorities are being urged behind the scenes to borrow money against next year's allocations to defer high-profile cuts until after the general election.

But as more Trusts resort to banning non-emergency admissions and search for other cost reductions to balance their books, and yet another winter cold snap and flu epidemic expose the pitiful inadequacy of hospital bed provision and staffing levels, there are harder times ahead.

Unless Labour wins the election and pumps in extra money, NHS spending is set to fall in real terms in 1998/9 and stand still the year after.

Chris Smith's eloquent silence on these vital issues has been coupled with his ideological capitulation to the Tory market reforms.

After collapsing on earlier proposals to sweep away the internal market, abandoning suggestions of scrapping Trust boards, and embracing the disastrous Tory Private Finance Initiative as a means to build new (privately-owned) NHS hospitals, Labour has now come full circle and embraced the basic principle of GP fundholding, although this would be carried out through 'commissioning groups' of GPs rather than individual practices.

The half-baked Labour proposals represent the worst of all options. They will antagonise the most self-interested and determined advocates of GP Fundholding — the GPs who revel in the inequalities of the two-tier system — while ignoring professional and other support staff working in primary care, and press-gang other un-

willing GPs into commissioning groups.

And by accepting the framework of the market system with its "purchaser-provider split", Labour would create an additional network of purchasing bodies, and increase the administrative costs and bureaucracy of the front-line Trusts.

This is an even greater nonsense when we remember that Labour's sole pledge of extra cash for NHS services hinged on cutting bureaucracy.

"I reject utterly Stephen Dorrell's attempts to pretend there are no real disagreements between us and the Tories on health policy, and that in some mysterious way he can gain credibility by claiming to be like Labour". (Labour's Chris Smith, December 1996)

Labour's capitulation to the notion of the market comes as its contradictions and inequalities are increasingly discredited.

The last few months have seen health authorities grappling with the wasteful charade of services fragmented between competing cash-strapped Trusts, and increasing pressure to merge Trusts into larger units.

In South West London, South Derbyshire and Lincolnshire, health unions have expressly called for the merger of Trusts to cut bureaucracy and avert cuts in patient care: in Oxfordshire, health bosses facing a £7m shortfall have taken the initiative and proposed a sweeping package of mergers to halve the number of Trusts.

With rare exceptions, therefore, despite Smith's spluttering, incoherent attempts to deny it, Labour policy has become a pale echo of existing Tory government policy.

Unless a further rapid U-turn is executed, we seem set for an even more embarrassing repetition of the 1992 'Jennifer's Ear' fiasco, leading to a second successive election in which the NHS is ignored as an electoral asset by a clueless Labour leadership.



Taking the message to the politicians: nurses from South West London staged an impromptu 'operation' in Parliament square to highlight the dire shortage of beds and cash as a result of Tory cuts.

Nightmare on Downing Street: housing cash cut to the bone

Veronica Fagan

FOR THOSE concerned with homelessness and poor housing last year's Budget meant their worst nightmares coming true.

Chancellor, Kenneth Clarke, announced new Housing Benefit Regulations designed to cut £130 million from the overall bill. From October 1997 all single people under 60 will only be entitled to benefit for the assessed cost of shared accommodation. Under a separate regulation rent officers will also have increasing powers to cut back rents.

One immediate consequence has been private landlords organisations already issuing advice to members not to let to people claiming housing benefit.

Not only could this mean more jobless people becoming homeless but also increasing numbers of low-paid workers as well. Those that have the option will be thrown back on the family.

A new report by the homeless organisation, 'Crisis' shows a dramatic fall in the average life expectancy of those sleeping rough. Between 1991 and 1995 it fell by five years from 47 to 42. The average in the population as a whole is 76.

As if all this were not enough grants for building new properties have been severely slashed. The cut in government grant to the Housing Corporation saw a gigantic fall from £1.06 billion this year to £650 million for 1997/8.

This means a reduction in the approved development programme for housing associations of 38.9% — the biggest percentage cut to date and far worse than was expected. The Housing Corporation staffing budget was also cut even though before the announcement staff were already working massive amounts of overtime to keep pace with work levels.

Credit approvals — the amounts which local authorities may borrow to finance new housing — fell by £253m to £499m.

Only £70 million has been committed to the Estates' Renewal Challenge fund over the next three years. Just before Christmas the government announced the levels of Housing Investment Programme (HIP) allocated to different councils. Investment across London was cut by 35% and five London councils lost more than 50%. The North East of England saw a reduction of 30%.

While Labour's spokesperson

Nick Raynsford has been scathing in his attacks on the Housing Minister, David Curry, for his failure to defend housing against the Chancellor, the New Labour programme promises very little.

'Labour will increase investment in social housing,' Raynsford pledges. 'We will do so both by the phased release of capital receipts and by increasing private investment through partnership'.

But in housing as in other areas of social need Labour pledges no new resources.

Such lack of commitment exposes both Raynsford's attacks on the changes in Housing Benefit and Blair's condemnation of the Tory changes in homeless legislation as empty rhetoric.

As John Perry, Policy Director of the Chartered Institute of Housing, explains "Ironically the 1 billion cut (in the Housing Investment programme) is equal to the likely amount Labour would spend on housing in any one year through releasing capital receipts from the sales of council houses.

"If Gordon Brown will not take action on the cuts then his party's cherished capital receipts policy will only take us back to square one".

Labour spurns offer of Social Contract II

Terry Conway

JOHN Edmonds, leader of the GMB, has been slapped down by the Labour leadership for claiming that a new understanding might be possible between Labour and the trade unions.

They have rejected outright the suggestion for a national 'social partnership' forum involving employers and the TUC.

One of Labour's employment spokespeople, Stephen 'Fish shop' Byers brushed aside Edmonds' proposal - which involves a new tri-partite structure to discuss jobs, training, low pay and the European Social Chapter - saying it would mean 'turning the clock back'.

The Labour leadership are more interested in discussing constitutional change with the Liberal Democrats, and are determined to prove that the unions should not expect anything from them when they come to office.

The TUC had commissioned a special text from Lord Mc Carthy, another one of Labour's army of employment spokespeople, on its approach to a new Labour government. Mc Carthy points out that public sector pay is likely to be a real hot potato for Blair after a four year pay freeze under the Tories.

The public sector pay review bodies are due to report in February and settlements are due in April. But the whole process is routinely de-

layed: many NHS Trusts still have not settled last year's pay review. The issue will be up and running as a flashpoint during and after the election.

Despite Labour's best efforts, trade unionists do still hope that things will be different with a new government.

Open door

McCarthy made it clear that there would be no movement at the level of pay, but seemed to leave the door open for the type of proposals made by Edmonds.

Now these too have been rejected as Labour steals the Tory ideology of anti-unionism as well as their economic policy.

Peter Hain, Shadow Employ-

ment Minister, has been ploughing a slightly different furrow. He has pointed out that few workers have any confidences in the Tories fiddled unemployment figures and warns that job insecurity is an increasing concern for many.

The massive rise in short term contracts in all sectors of the workforce, combined with the increasingly authoritarian management style which is part of 'new management techniques' mean that fear of the sack is an increasing feature of peoples' lives at work.

Based on this, Hain goes on to argue for locally agreed deals between unions and management in which promises of job security would be exchanged for low pay claims.

Such as strategy, an incomes pol-

icy at local level, has the advantage of not directly involving Labour in its dirty work.

This way, the union leaders themselves would be encouraged to play on the lack of confidence of their members, to ensure they avoid conflict with the bosses and avert industrial action which would embarrass the new government.

However while such deals have already been embraced by the trade union tops, precisely because they are localised they cannot ensure the industrial peace that Blair so desperately wants.

Especially where national pay bargaining exists, the possibility that conflict will occur remains strong. Socialists will do everything to ensure that this occurs.

As Blair seeks to sever Labour's union roots

Fight to keep the link!

Pete Firmin

Blair has made it clear for some time that the trade unions can expect 'no favours' from a Labour government. Now a serious attack on the unions' involvement in Party policy-making is planned.

Looking back at the defeat of the 1979 Labour government, their concern is not the pay restraints and cuts, but that the Party, and in particular the unions, revolted against these policies. Their priority is to remove this ability.

Measures taken up until now have merely laid the basis for this major assault. The ditching of Clause IV was partly to prepare the ideological ground.

The extension of 'One Member One Vote' ballots to policy issues like the draft manifesto encourages party members to see themselves as individuals, not part of a collectivity. Conference has been downgraded, with more time for presentations from the Shadow Cabinet members and less to discussion of motions.

Regional and women's conference have been sidelined, and the toothless policy forum has been lauded as the real place where discussion takes place.

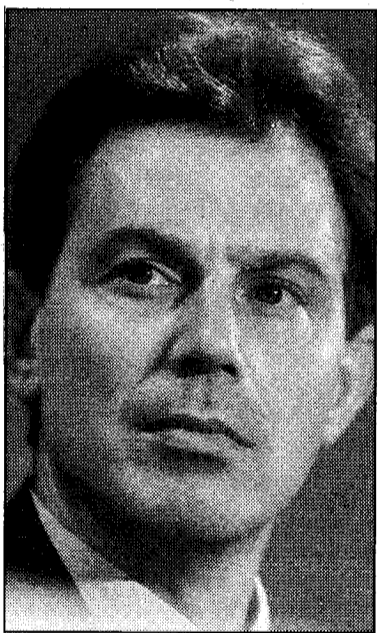
But this is tinkering around the problem. Blair wants to see the end of the ability of the unions (and constituency members) to affect party policy. To do this there has to be fundamental and, if possible, irreversible, change.

Simple

A straightforward proposal to scrap the Party-union link, while having the merit of simplicity, would be problematic. While union leaders are reluctant (to say the least) to fight with Blair, a proposal remove any input into the Party whatsoever would probably provoke resistance.

This constitutional change would need to be ratified by conference. The unions still have 50% of the votes - it would only need a small proportion of constituencies to join virtually the all unions to ensure an embarrassing defeat.

State funding of political parties would circumvent the current financial reliance of the Party on the



Andrew Ward

Still 'modernising' away: Blair

unions (which still provide 50% of funding, despite the large donations from some businessmen), but there is no certainty that such a proposal would get passed.

Crucially it is in Blair's interest to keep the unions attached to the party, even with no say in policy, in order to attempt to maintain the loyalty of the union leaders.

An alternative line of attack has developed, now said to have the support of Blair and his clique. The Labour Co-ordinating Committee has often been influential in the 'reform' of Party procedures. Their proposals amount to keeping the link but gutting it of any real content.

Conference would be made up of a mixture of Plenary sessions and seminar groups. The plenary sessions would allow the top table to present their policy themes and shape the news for that day. General Committees would be abolished and replaced by a small steering committee to co-ordinate the running of the constituency party.

The local branch would become the primary means of organisation - running elections, socials, fund raising and recruitment. The National Executive would not be a policy-making body, "policy would be the preserve of individual members [via OMOV] and Labour's Parliamentary Committee [the Cabinet or

Shadow cabinet]". The NEC's role would be a purely organisational one.

No one other than the leadership would have any input in policy making - beyond purely passive 'take-it-or-leave-it' participation in OMOV ballots.

The unions would remain attached to the party - positions on the NEC for instance - but there would be no votes on policy for them to affect. Affiliation to local parties would be meaningless and conference sidelined.

'Modernising'

These proposals will be 'sold' as modernising the Party, giving the membership greater rights as against the trade union 'barons' and avoiding confrontation at conference in front of the media.

They need to be recognised for what they are - a destruction of democracy in any meaningful sense and in particular of any union input. Far from increasing anyone's participation in policy making other than the front bench, they make party members into rubber stamps and election canvassers.

Does it matter? Hasn't Blair removed any semblance of socialist policy and reduced party democracy to a sham anyway? These proposals are qualitatively different.

While the current structures exist it would be possible to reverse some of the changes which have taken place over party functioning. These proposals would destroy that ability.

They would mark an important change in the nature of the Labour Party. The Party has never been a socialist party since its formation, but rather a social democratic one.

Voice

The particular nature of its structures however has allowed the working class to raise its voice - and sometimes even be heard.

Such new structures would turn the Labour Party into something like the European continental model of a social democratic party, where, although the unions are linked to the party, there is no mechanism for them to influence policy.

They are primarily treated as a

transmission belt for the Party's policy into the working class, while the link is used as an excuse by union bureaucrats to demand the loyalty of their members to 'their' party.

Blair will probably attempt to introduce these proposals - or some variant of them - later this year while still basking in the glory of an election victory and before any serious conflict develops with the unions. That is why socialists are organising now against these plans.

While most union leaders have declared that they are opposed to a dilution of the union-Party link and will fight any proposals to scrap it, they cannot be relied on.

At last year's Labour Party conference none of them were prepared to have a confrontation with Blair on the issue, despite the furore over Stephen Byers' comments at the TUC. These proposals could also give them the excuse to argue that they are not about the link but about the rights of individual party mem-

bers.

The 'Keep The Link' campaign has been collecting signatures in defence of the link and trying to get the issue on the agenda of every affiliated union Conferences. Local campaigns have been set up in some areas and a broadsheet is being produced demolishing the LCC's proposals.

This is a vital issue for all trades unionists as well as Labour Party members. Resolutions should be put wherever possible opposing these plans and winning affiliation to the campaign. Delegates to conferences must be mandated to support retention of the link in its current form.

■ The Keep The Link campaign can be contacted at 138 Crampton St London SE17 3AE for copies of the broadsheet and affiliation. The next open meeting of the campaign is on Sunday, 2nd February 11a.m.-1p.m. at the Lucas Arms, Grays Inn Rd (Near Kings Cross).

A Socialist Outlook pamphlet Trade Unions in the 1990s A strategy for socialists

A comprehensive review of the impact of the Tory years on the trade union movement and a perspective for the left in the 1990s

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Jitters as capitalism walks the tightrope

ANDY KILMISTER looks at the prospects for the world economy in 1997, and the economic situation in Britain.

THE LEADERS of the main capitalist economies are united in predicting steady growth and low inflation over the next year.

The rich nations' club, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), backed up this view in its latest report in December. But there are increasing signs of a more turbulent prospect ahead than such forecasts admit.

On December 6 world stock markets suffered what the *Financial Times* referred to as a 'frantic Friday'. Remarks by US central banker Alan Greenspan were taken to imply possible interest rate rises.

Markets

There were dramatic falls in European stock markets and on the Tokyo and Hong Kong exchanges. Three weeks later Japanese markets fell sharply again in response to a tough government budget.

These developments are not accidental. They are a reflection of the fact that the coming year will see some difficult economic choices for the ruling classes in the industrialised countries. The relative economic stability of the last few years will become harder and harder to maintain.

There are two main reasons for this. Firstly, in the USA and Japan the immediate past has been dominated by the impact of the recession of the early 1990s.

This recession was seen as necessary by the governments in these countries because of the unstable growth, fuelled by debt, in the preceding decade. Continuing speculative investment and borrowing was likely to threaten the stability of the financial system. The impact of the slump was to squeeze much of the debt out of the economy and to leave many productive resources standing idle.

This spare capacity has allowed the US to lower interest rates substantially and Japan to raise government spending and cut taxes, without causing a rise in inflation.

The nervous feelings in the mar-



a minority of EU members they could afford to stand aloof.

But now that it seems possible that Italy, Spain and maybe even Portugal might meet revised criteria for joining up it is much more difficult for Britain to stand outside.

The result of all this is a very difficult set of economic choices for the Tories. The Bank of England and the markets expect higher interest rates, so much so that the pound has risen in value considerably due to speculation. Even revised Maastricht criteria will mean cuts in government spending or higher taxes. But an election is less than six months away.

Clarke's response to this in his November budget was a blatant fudge. Central government taxes were cut slightly, but local council taxes are set to rise even more.

There was a very small amount of extra money for public spending this year, but projected cuts in the following two years are savage. The figures presented are based on very optimistic assumptions about both growth and inflation.

With investment still very weak and exports insufficient to maintain growth Clarke has clearly decided to risk a mini consumer boom in the run up to the election, in the hope that no-one will notice what is in store for them afterwards.

Labour weakness

It does not seem likely that this will convince many people; however, no distinctive economic policy is on offer from Labour, and this remains the Tories' biggest advantage.

Whatever the outcome of the election though, the economic problems of British capitalism remain acute. In addition the world economy is heading for increased uncertainty in the next few years.

What has been portrayed by the OECD and their fellow-thinkers as steady growth has always been much more erratic. It is more like a tightrope walk, with the constant danger of slipping either into recession on one side, or speculation and instability on the other.

However, the prospects now are for even more frequent shifts in policy in response to one or other of these dangers, and for narrower options and sharper conflicts in the coming year than we have seen since the early 1990s.



kets result from the fact that this phase is now coming to an end. The expectation is that to carry on expanding the economy will start to push up inflation and debt levels. So the US central bank (the Federal Reserve) is set to raise interest rates and the Japanese government plans to cut spending and raise taxes.

Dilemma

But they also face the dilemma that, despite the policies of the last few years, the "recovery" in both countries is still weak and patchy. Any attempt to slow down this weak growth risks provoking another slump.

The second major development this year concerns Europe. European governments have pinned their economic hopes on the Maastricht Treaty and the single currency.

Up until now this has provided a rationale for attacking public spending and wage demands. But this year also involves deciding on the implementation of the project. This is certain to be immensely difficult.

The key economic problem is that no country is likely to meet all the criteria laid down in the treaty for joining the single currency. Given this, the criteria are likely to be relaxed to allow the project to

proceed at all.

But this has already sparked off a fierce debate about what the new rules of the game should be, and who should be allowed to join. In particular, the Bundesbank is terrified at the prospect of giving up the German mark for a common currency which includes countries like Italy and Spain.

The first impact of these developments was the row at the Dublin Summit of the European Union. This put considerable strain on the alliance between Germany and France which has up until now been the basis of the Maastricht process.

Germany appears largely to have won the argument, and to have imposed automatic strict penalties on "excessive" government budget deficits after monetary union. But this is only the first stage of an argument which will get much more intense over the coming year.

EMU crisis

An indication of the kinds of divisions within the capitalist class over these issues is the leading article in *The Economist* of December 14 1996. This argues strongly against the German position at Dublin, and predicts that if implemented in full it could provoke a political crisis over EMU in which "the entire structure could fold".

The British government cannot avoid either of these two issues. As in Japan and the USA, such growth as John Major and Kenneth Clarke have been able to claim credit for is essentially as result of conditions after the recession which Major also helped to create.

But as in the larger economies, this economic phase is now ending and interest rates are set to rise in Britain as well.

Major and Clarke cannot avoid being involved in the debates over monetary union either. When this project looked likely to involve only

Socialist OUTLOOK

Euro Special Pull-out

INSIDE

- From Maastricht to Amsterdam
- Liverpool dockers pledge support to Euro-March
- French jobless fight for benefits

1996 saw the biggest wave of struggles across Europe for more than 20 years. Strikes, demonstrations and occupations took place against the convergence criteria of the Maastricht Treaty and the cuts and austerity programmes they have generated.

It is far from the first time that the convergence criteria have been challenged in this way. There were strikes and demonstrations against cuts in welfare and government austerity measures in Italy and Greece soon after the Treaty was signed. In the Autumn of 1994 there were mass strikes in Italy followed by demonstrations in France against cuts in education.

December 1995 saw the huge confrontation in France which shook the Government to its foundations. Millions of workers struck and millions demonstrated across the country against the Juppe plan and in defence of the welfare state. It was by far biggest challenge mounted by the French working class since 1968.

The political climate in which it took place was of course very different and the movement of the 90's lacked the vision of 1968, some of the mobilisations were even bigger.

1996 saw major strikes in a number of European countries as the governments continued their negotiations and monetary union crept closer.

Mass strikes

There were mass strikes in Italy, Portugal, Belgium, Greece and Spain while France maintained the highest level of class struggle in Europe. In Germany the biggest workers' demonstration since the second world war forced the Kohl government to withdraw proposed cuts in welfare.

Recent months have seen the biggest European-wide waves of struggles for decades.

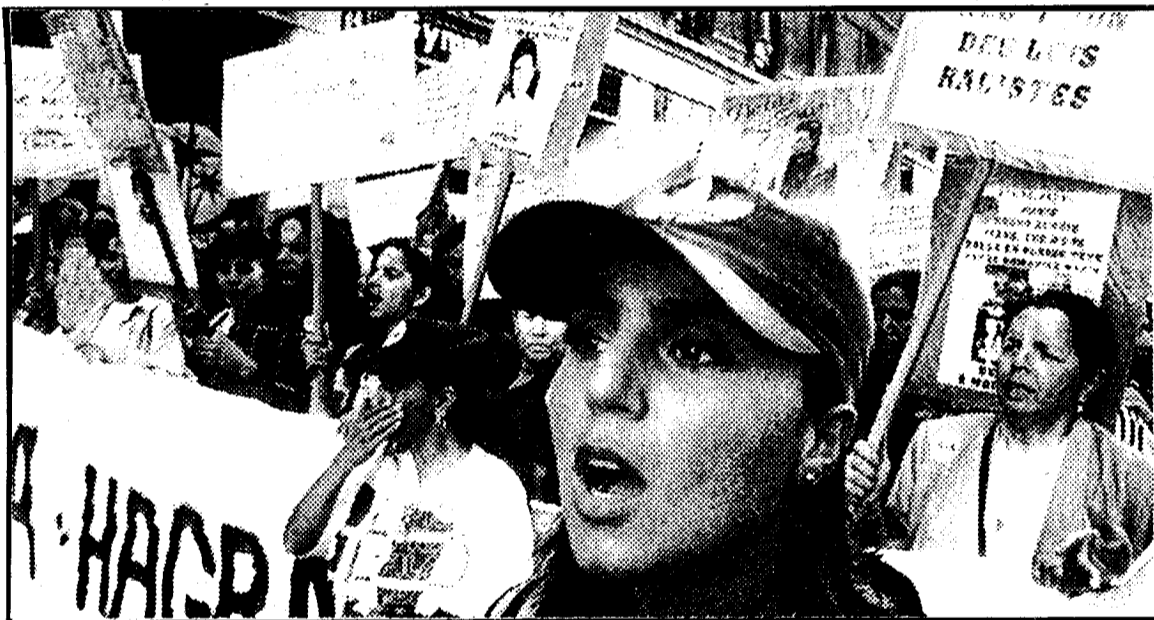
In October, 150,000 metal workers participated in strikes in Germany. At the end of November 3 million Greek workers took part in a one day general strike involving both public and private sector workers.

80,000 French lorry drivers paralysed France with road blocks demanding more pay, early retirement and tax concessions. It was the most powerful strike action by an individual section of workers in France for years, and at the heart of the private sector. It showed, if any further illustration was needed, the massive potential of the working class in Europe.

Fearing a more generalised social explosion, the French ruling class had to concede the drivers main demands. They won a massive victory.

Their struggle inspired truck

Maastricht: the working class resistance grows



All over Europe working people are fighting back against Maastricht austerity and racist laws

drivers in Finland to mount blockades on the border with Russia and blockades were set up by Danish and Portuguese bus workers.

On December 11, two million workers struck in Spain against austerity programmes. There were demonstrations of 210,000 in Madrid and 100,000 in Catalonia.

Inspired by the tactics of the French lorry drivers, 80,000 Greek small farmers declared "holy war" against Prime Minister, Costas Simitis and his PASOK government's austerity policy.

They cut Greece in half by blocking the roads with their tractors, demanding increased subsidies and tax concessions. The government replied saying that there would have to be further cuts in government spending if Greece was to have any chance of meeting the Maastricht convergence criteria, and that this was their priority.

Not since austerity measures were first introduced in the mid-1980's has the government of the

EU's poorest member faced such opposition. The revolt of the farmers was all the more painful in that it came from a sector that has traditionally supported PASOK.

On Wednesday December 17 most of Italy came to a halt when

1996 was a year of struggle across Europe. Let's make 1997 a year of International Solidarity

millions struck in support of engineering workers demanding higher wages. At the same time there were more strikes in France involving transport workers, communication workers, energy supply and theatre workers. There were further strikes and demonstrations in Spain

against cuts in public spending.

On December 18 Greek seafarers began a two day strike and tens of thousands of demonstrators marched through Athens as part of a public sector strike involving teachers, local government workers, and health workers.

It was the second mass strike within weeks, and with much of the country still paralysed by the farmers' blockades, plunged Greece into further crisis.

Unemployed

The following day, December 19, a campaign by unemployed workers in France demanding increased unemployment benefit led by the two main unemployed organisations and major sponsors of the Euro marches - Agir Ensemble Contre le Chomage (AC) and the Association de Defense et d'Entraide des Chomeurs (AD EC) - won an 11% increase in unemployment benefit from the government.

This came after a month of direct

action by unemployed workers. They had occupied unemployment benefit offices and offices of employers' organisations, and fought repeated battles with the police who tried to evict them.

These struggles have not yet been replicated in Britain. The working class and the trade unions here have suffered more defeats over the last 17 years than anywhere else in Europe. During the French strikes at the end of 1985 the British media pointed out that such action would be impossible in Britain because of the anti-union laws.

Isolation

This is of course a simplification as action can be taken outside the law - but there is no doubt that the law together with the 'New realist' policies of the trade union leaders have worked together in isolating Britain from this European-wide tide of struggle.

If the pace of struggle continues to develop as it has done in recent months across the continent, it could well derail attempts to secure European monetary union.

Maximising the likely success and impact of these campaigns raises the need for more co-ordination and united action by the workers' movement European wide. Most struggles will take place on a national level and put forward demands aimed at national governments.

The attacks against the working class however are being organised at a European level and a Europe-wide response is needed.

The only initiative concretely addressing this need at the present time is the European march for jobs. It is this which makes the European marches, and the important message they project, so completely appropriate the present political situation.

Support the European March for Jobs, converging on Amsterdam June 1997

From Maastricht to Amsterdam -- towards a European Super-State

IT IS AS CERTAIN as anything can be that we will have a Labour government by May. The new government will quickly be forced to confront the issue Blair has ducked in advance of the election - whether to sign up for the single European currency, for European Monetary Union (EMU).

The consequences of this decision are likely to shape the first period of Labour in office. There is little doubt that Blair will opt for EMU and take Britain in either the first or second stages - if stages are created.

The new government will need to make more and deeper cuts in the already battered Welfare State as they seek to reduce government borrowing to 3% of GDP in line with the convergence criteria of the Maastricht Treaty.

There is no middle way. A Labour government must either attack the welfare state or reject Maastricht and undermine Britain's position inside the EU. **ALAN THORNETT** looks at the big issues that will confront the labour movement.

EUROPE is not the only reason for an assault on welfare. The economic and fiscal policies with which Blair is going into the Election are in essence a collapse into Tory economic policy; but they also imply further reduction in public spending.

These two factors create a double-barrelled attack on welfare to be carried out by Labour.

Despite the struggles going on across Europe against the implications of the convergence criteria, the debate in the workers' movement lags behind the material process taking place.

This is particularly the case in Britain. Here the anti-Maastricht debate is dominated by the Tory right, with Labour and TUC leaderships lined up behind European integration. The left, despite important efforts by sections of it to address the issue, remains marginalised.

There are apparently as many as 50 opponents of Maastricht in the Parliamentary Labour Party, mostly, but not all, on the left. It is positive that some on the left are lending support to the project of the Euromarches, particularly Alan Simpson of the People's Europe campaign.

However none of these MPs seem likely to be willing to challenge Blair in a clear way on this issue in the immediate post-election period.

Yet European integration is directed primarily against the working class, with the aim of more effectively exploiting its labour power and maximising profit.

The left in Britain has a responsibility to challenge this logic develop the working class dimension of the debate, and start to turn the tide. Persuading left MP's or senior trade unionists to speak out clearly could be crucial in gaining a wider audience for these ideas.

The TUC and the Social Chapter

The 'New Realist' politics of the 1980s brought with it a sea-change in the TUC on the question of European integration. 10 years previously they had opposed the EEC. Today the overwhelming majority of union leaders support the EU.

While they are not prepared to do anything themselves to challenge the Tory government, the bosses or the market system, they argue that the EC will extend workers' democratic and social rights. They look towards a 'social Europe' and the

Social Chapter. They hanker after the institutionalisation of the unions in Europe which has been excluded in Britain under Thatcherism, and is not about to be embraced by Blair.

Politically they have pinned their hopes on the illusion that the new bosses' Europe can be reformed.

This year's TUC conference strengthened the stance still further, voting for more integration and specifically for EMU. In this they are more radical, at least in their public stance, than the Labour leadership.

Only a minority of unions have even discussed this issue, and although UNISON's conference has adopted a policy of opposition to Maastricht, no union has been prepared to stand out against the TUC line.

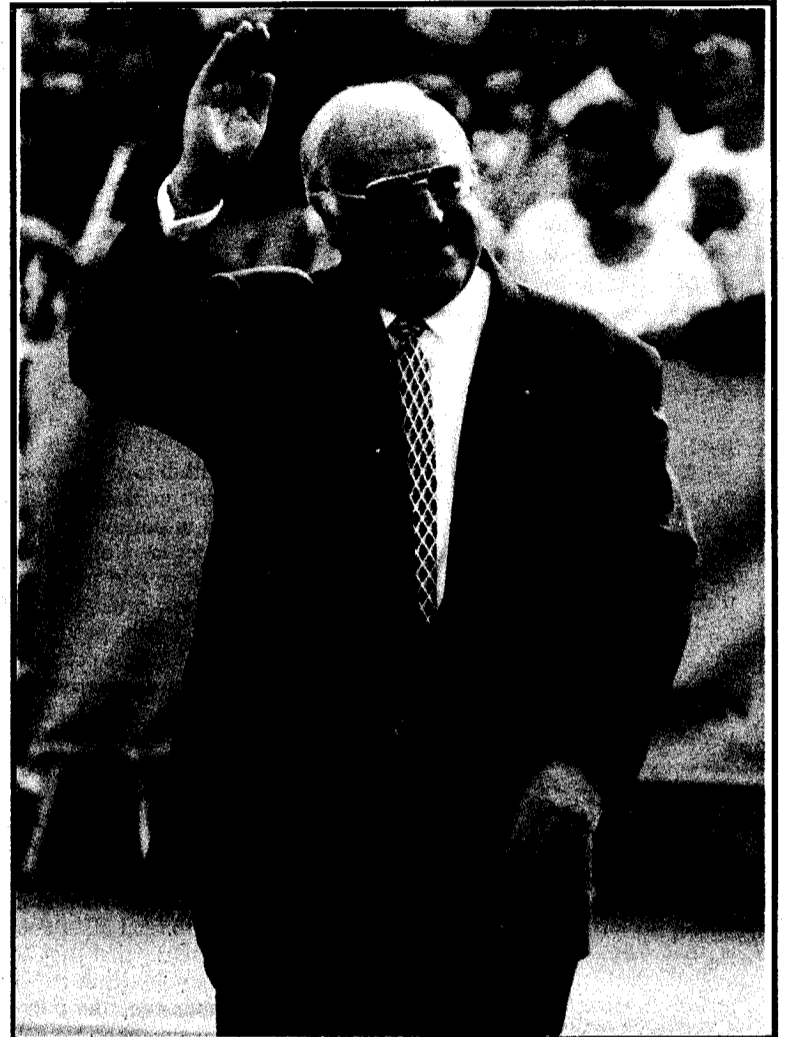
But the so-called Social Europe is not about the generosity of Europe's bosses. It is designed as a palliative to persuade the working class and the labour bureaucracy to accept European integration.

The Social Chapter is in any case a classic example of a paper tiger. It

The so-called Social Europe is not about the generosity of Europe's bosses. It is designed as a palliative to persuade the working class and the labour bureaucracy to accept European integration.

includes the right to strike, but this is subject to 'national obligations', and in Britain is over-ruled by the Tory anti-union laws. Its provisions, even if implemented, are marginal to the problems facing the working class.

In any case the so-called 'social Europe' also includes the notorious 1985 Schengen agreement. Whilst citizens have rights to move their place of residence within the Community, the Schengen deal erects a wall against immigrants and asylum seekers from outside. Anyone barred from one EU country is barred from them all. In Britain this racist structure has been complemented by the Immigration and Asylum Act and similarly draconian legislation has been implemented in most other EC countries.



Old King Kohl hopes German capital would dominate a European state

The tragic consequences of such racist laws were graphically illustrated in the death of 280 clandestine immigrants in the Mediterranean on Christmas Day.

The Dublin Summit

The Maastricht Treaty provided for a full constitutional review of its workings which is now taking place. This process should be concluded at the Amsterdam Inter-Governmental Conference (IGC) in June this year. The recent Dublin summit of EU heads of government was a part of this.

The Dublin meeting discussed a new draft treaty - "Maastricht 2" - which will become the Treaty of Amsterdam if agreed in June. This will set the scene for a whole new stage of European political integration.

Not all the objectives of Dublin were achieved. John Major and the British Tories vigorously opposed proposals to drop passport controls and move to a common immigration policy. These issues were laid to one side but will come up again in Amsterdam.

The crucial step which was taken by the Dublin summit was the agreement on the so-called 'Growth and Stability Pact'. This is a legal framework for the Euro and establishes the rules by which the new currency will function. The Stability Pact is highly significant and will hand over far-reaching powers

to the Council of Ministers to determine the fate of countries who take part in the single currency.

Effectively, under the Pact, the convergence criteria will continue in force after the introduction of the single currency in January 1999, in the form of 'stability criteria'. Government spending will remain fixed at a maximum 3% of GDP - and a breach of the criteria will result in a huge fines being levied on the countries involved, forcing them to cut spending to get back into line. These fines can amount to many billions of pounds - up to 0.5% of GDP.

From the point of view of the European project, the Stability Criteria are crucial. The single currency is as precarious as previous attempts to regulate the currencies of the EU. The European Exchange Rate Mechanism went into crisis under the impact of recession and the pound was spat out of it on Black Wednesday, after the Bank of England had spent £18 billion trying to maintain its value.

EMU will not just regulate exchange rates, but lock these permanently together. After that, if the Euro is to remain stable against the dollar and the yen, economic fluctuations between the different member states must be reflected directly in rising unemployment and cuts in government spending rather than in changes in the relative value of currencies.

This is why there has to be a genuine economic convergence if there is to be a chance of stability. There can be fudging at the mar-

"In England they are killing cows: in Germany they are killing the welfare state"



gins, but serious fudging would threaten the whole set-up. A new development in the world political situation, such as a recession in the USA, could threaten the whole structure.

British Capital and EMU

Both the Tory and Labour Parties posture over entry into EMU and argue that all the options are open. But it is not so simple. The majority of big capital want integration.

Other sectors, whose operations are focused elsewhere, are more divided; while many smaller, uncompetitive companies are opposed to Maastricht and its consequences. But the most significant want the EU and if the full benefits of Europe are to be realised, these companies need not only markets but monetary and political union.

This issue has created the beginnings of civil war in the Tory party which may well destroy it in its present form.

Germany, France and others are prepared for a two-tier Europe if some other countries are unable or unwilling to join by the target date of January 1999.

Prime Minister Blair will not be happy if he is unable to join the first wave. Waiting for stage 2 is not an easy option. There could be a lot to lose for British capital if they are forced to remain outside the currency for a few more years and things shape up without them. This can happen both in terms of the financial institutions and the rationalisation of capital. However, it is not clear that it will be possible for Labour to move quickly enough to avoid this.

Ultimately integration will be on the terms of the most powerful state in the EU - Germany. Britain is developing into a low-pay, under-skilled economy, over reliant on financial services in the City of London. EMU will accelerate this trend, and exact a heavy price from the working class. Banks will have a free hand to impose monetarist, deflationary, economic restructuring, to force through massive public spending cuts, creating a more mobile, cheaper labour force, through

the discipline of mass unemployment.

When the treaty is put together with the racist Schengen agreement the shape of 'Fortress Europe' emerges.

What Kind of Super State?

The European Union is fundamentally an attempt by the most powerful sectors of the European bourgeoisie to shift the balance of power towards itself and away from the working class. They need to restructure European capitalism in the most effective way to increase the rate of exploitation and maximise profit.

Their ultimate aim is some sort of European super state, since a single state form can most effectively (though not exclusively) achieve this objective. What they have in mind is not just a duplication of the existing nation states but on a larger scale.

The new structure is however intended to perform all the essential functions that nation states have traditionally carried out. This is a difficult project, but one in which a considerable amount of political will has been, and is, invested.

The Maastricht Treaty went further than any previous treaty towards the creation of this kind of state form. It set out timetables for a single currency as part of an economic and monetary union which implies a common foreign, security and defence policy. Politically and economically both the Treaty, and the objectives it promotes, challenge the sovereignty of national parliaments and establish institutions which are outside of any democratic control.

The Tory right make some correct points about this, although their critique is from a reactionary ultra-nationalist perspective. This issue has split the bourgeoisie in Britain and created the beginnings of civil war in the Tory party which may well destroy it in its present form.

Under Maastricht, economic power will be shifted from both the national governments and national banks to an independent and even more unaccountable European Central Bank (ECB), modelled on the Bundesbank which would control the interest rates of all the countries within EMU.

These powerful members of the European Bank will be appointed

for eight years, and cannot be removed by popular vote. The European Monetary Institution, the forerunner of the ECB, will be established in early 1998 in preparation for the launch of the ECB a year later.

A single European currency and bank are essential not only for economic integration but the establishment of a monetarist structure across Europe that can break up the main elements of the welfare state and the post war settlement.

The Emergence of the EU as a Global Superpower

The strategic aim of a reorganised European capitalism is more adequately to meet the economic challenge of the power blocks - of Japan and the 'Tiger' economies of the Pacific rim, and the North American block around the United States.

This strategic aim has evolved out of the post-war European project. The post-war settlement was forged after the USA's emergence as the main victor of the second world

Europe's big companies need mergers and rationalisation if they are to compete with the generally larger American and Japanese giants. This is why the EU-based multinationals are overwhelmingly in favour of the EU and further integration.

war and the overwhelmingly dominant capitalist power. The original European project of the Iron and Steel Community and then the Common Market was a creation of the Cold War and NATO.

Historically British capitalism has been the most globalised. A high proportion of its assets lay outside Britain, hence the special role of the City of London as a centre of international finance. With the decline of the British Empire, however, British capital made a

compromise and became second string to the USA under the 'special relationship'. British overseas markets, assets and financial operations, became more and more dependent on US economic and military power.

France reacted against US dominance in Europe, and refused to become a full member of NATO. This, along with the emergence of Germany as the most powerful capitalist state in Europe began to erode US influence, and shape a more independent European project.

The relative economic decline of the USA during the 1970s and the shaping up of new power blocks stimulated a new drive towards European integration during the 1980s.

These developments created an increasing contradiction for the British ruling class between its membership of the EC and its special relationship with the USA. The special relationship had remained the main pillar of British strategy under successive governments until the post-war boom ran out of steam.

France had opposed Britain's late application to the EEC for that reason. Britain's successful application to join the EEC created profound contradictions between the British market for goods and its international financial operations, which during the 1980s brought a massive outflow of capital, primarily to the USA.

Europe versus American and Japanese power blocks is now the crux of the European Union. In this global struggle, the relatively small European imperialist states require bigger and more secure markets and a greater freedom for the movement and rationalisation of capital on a European basis if they are to compete.

Europe's big companies need mergers and rationalisation if they are to compete with the generally larger American and Japanese giants. This is why the EU-based multinationals are overwhelmingly in favour of the EU and further integration. In fact a group of multi-nationals representing multi-billion pound businesses meet regularly to pressurise for integration.

For a Socialist Alternative

Socialist Outlook is in favour of British withdrawal from the EU. This view is based on a concrete

Those who take action against the effects of Maastricht will come to realise that the whole project of European integration needs to be challenged.

assessment that such a step, because it is against the interests of national capital, would give a boost to the class struggle here in Britain. At the same time this might well create a crisis within the EU itself which would positively affect the relationship of forces in other countries.

Our aim of course is not capitalist Britain outside of the EU. We want a socialist Britain in a socialist Europe. At every stage, socialists have to propose a Europe-wide alternative to the bosses project.

We do not defend the national state. We stand for a United Socialist States of Europe, east and west. We are internationalists. The Europe we want is one which prioritises the needs of the working class against profit, promotes equality for women, fights racism and defends the environment. We want a real 'social Europe' - and that can only be a socialist Europe.

We support the idea of a genuine Constituent Assembly of all the peoples of Europe to determine the future of Europe. We are for workers' solidarity against the capitalist trusts and multinationals. We are for building direct links and joint struggles between workers across Europe.

At the same time we cannot simply abstain on Maastricht, Maastricht 2 or EMU on the grounds that if they fall the bosses will impose another form of capitalism. These Treaties represent a direct attack on the working class and their interests. In particular they represent a coordinated attempt to smash up the welfare state

Attacks

Today it easier for working people to see that EMU and the Maastricht treaty will lead to further attacks on their jobs and services, even if they retain illusions that the EC itself is a positive thing. That is why we have participated in many campaigns and debates against EMU.

That is why we seek to broaden the debate in the labour movement, working so that those who today will take action against the effects of Maastricht will through action come to realise that the whole project of European intergration needs to be challenged.

From this point of view the recent announcement that Labour will hold a referendum on the question of European Monetary Union is a welcome one. A referendum will stimulate broader political debate and allow us a broader audience for our ideas.

Obviously we would have preferred a referendum on the question of European Union itself. ut if EMU, a crucial stage of European integration, is to be put to a referendum then we will campaign for a no vote. We will do so whilst rejecting the right-wing nationalist arguments.

Only the independent mass action of the working class, as has been taking place across Europe, can confront and defeat the power of international capital and its state forms. A crucial part of this perspective is defeating the current plans of the employers for a reorganised Europe to coincide with their own interests.

Come to Brussels!

ON FEBRUARY 22-23 in Brussels there will be a major conference designed to launch the Euro-Marches on a continental level.

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

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

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

For details and tickets contact (North) Glen Norris 01744-755889 or (South) Pete Cooper 0171-738-3362.

Euro-March campaign: No time - to lose!

THE CAMPAIGN to organise a three-leg march across Britain against unemployment and social exclusion received an important boost just before Christmas when the Liverpool Dockers, one of the first signatories of appeal for the marches issued a press release which we are reprinting here.

With the dockers' own struggle getting a much deserved increase in attention following the showing of Ken Loach's documentary, this call for support across the movement will held our voices be heard more widely.

When the project to organise these marches in Britain was first launched in autumn 1996, June 1997 in Amsterdam seemed an awfully long way away.

Now there is an urgent need to get things moving again quickly after the Christmas break.

The next month will see the setting up of regional committees in those areas where this wasn't possible before Christmas, as well as the continuing drive for further sponsorship and financial donations.

The most important date in all supporters calendars should be the next national meeting in

Sheffield on January 18.

The meeting will discuss the plans for mobilisation across Europe as well as more details of what needs to be done here in Britain.

French jobless fight for increased benefits

Robert Cremieux

THE MONTH from November 19 to the December 19 saw a first in France: the organisations of the unemployed demonstrated, petitioned, and occupied public buildings.

The autonomous movement of the unemployed has actually only existed for a few years. The trade union federations have failed, or haven't bothered, to organise the unemployed in a country where the official rate of unemployment is 12.7%!

This mobilisation of the jobless had been galvanised by a huge scandal. In 1996 the unemployment benefit system, UNEDIC, reported a surplus of 13 billion francs (£1.7bn). This massive fund is the result of the use of selective criteria which deny any benefit to more than half of all unemployed people.

The official figures omit all those who no longer sign on, or who depend on help from charitable or other institutions, and who are not counted as seeking work.

UNEDIC without the unemployed

From 19 November to 19 December the policy-making Council of UNEDIC, the organisation which runs the unemployment insurance system, met to decide on what to do with the 13 billion franc surplus of employees' and employers' contributions over the total benefits paid out.

The unemployed, understandably, called for an increase in benefit rates, the payment of allowances to all the unemployed, and an end to the system of periodic benefit reductions.

This last measure is particularly cynical, since the benefit has been cut by 17% while rates of long term unemployment are increasing.

The paradox is that the unem-

Liverpool dockers pledge support to Euro-march

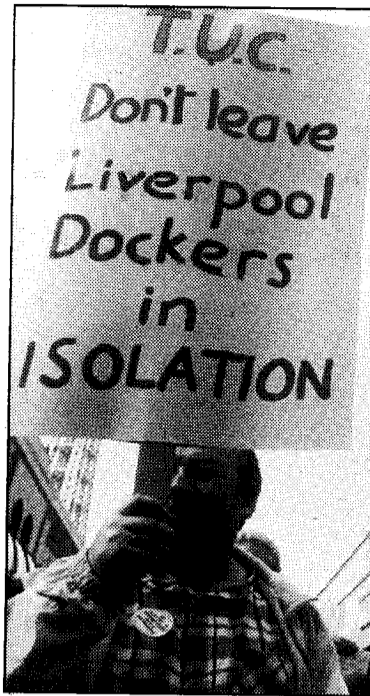
The Liverpool Port Shop Stewards Committee - as solid as ever now after 16 months in dispute against wholesale sacking - fully supports the European Marches against unemployment, job insecurity and social exclusion.

These Euro-wide marches signal the beginning of a concerted and serious fightback by workers against the concerted assault of bosses on workers jobs and the welfare state.

If the proposed single currency comes into effect a minimum of a further 10 million workers will be thrown onto the already twenty-million strong scrapheap of Euro-unemployment.

No less across-the-board poverty, homelessness and social marginalisation will hit levels not witnessed since the 1930s.

The impending social cost - including its human despair and degradation - is utterly unacceptable, which if not successfully resisted will give a free hand to the bosses and their governments to drive home still further reactionary policies and to pour petrol on their racist flames.



On the March: Liverpool dockers

The Liverpool dockers recognise the three-leg British component of the Euro-march as a powerful means of galvanising and empowering the strong but disparate opposi-

tion within the working class against the bosses many-pronged assault.

In solidarity and in active support, we will be further boosting this urgently needed campaign by sending several of our members to join the march, trooping the whole distance to Amsterdam, shoulder to shoulder with our unemployed brothers and sisters.

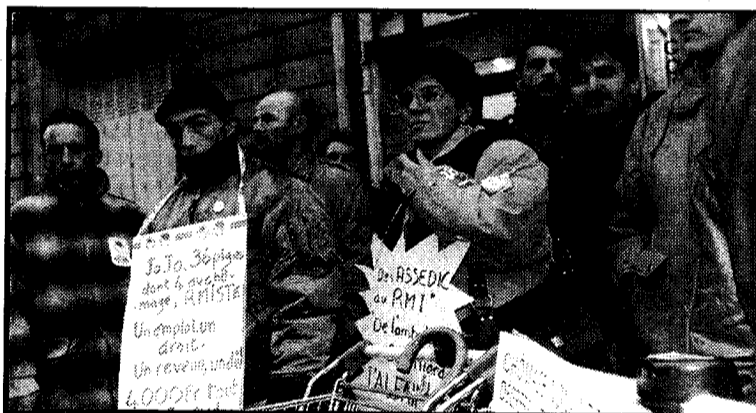
Alongside, we urge and send out a call to the entire labour movement - not least to its leadership - to unite behind the marches and to fight fullsquare against the barbarism of unemployment and anti-working class criminality of the European Commission and European bosses.

NO to national austerity attacks!

NO to their international orchestration!

NO! NO! AND NO AGAIN! SIDE BY SIDE, STRIDE BY STRIDE, MARCH AND UNITE! BUILD INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY

**Jimmy Davies
Liverpool Port
Stewards Committee.**



Start of the protests: the November 19 demonstration

ployed are not represented on the Council. UNEDIC which decides on their fate is a organisation jointly managed by the employers' organisations and the five trade union federations (CGT (Pro Communist Party), CFDT (pro Socialist Party), CFTC (Christian), FO (non-affiliated), and CGC (management)).

The unemployed movement has demanded, with varying emphases according to the organisation, to participate in the decision-making process of UNEDIC as well as in the management of ANPE (the national employment agency), the public organisation which manages the job centres.

The emergence of an unemployment movement

Organisations of the unemployed independent of the unions are nothing new. The oldest has existed for ten years. But they had a low profile in society. At the end of 1996, the mass media finally discovered their existence under headline 'UNEDIC negotiations under pressure from the unemployed.'

The three main organisations of the unemployed engaged in united activity for the whole of last year.

'Agir ensemble contre le chômage' (AC!) (Act together against un-

employment) organises wage earners belonging to various trade unions and the unemployed, whether members or not of unemployed organisations. AC! defines itself as a crossroads of struggles against unemployment, and plays a significant unifying role.

APEIS (*Association pour L'entraide, l'Information, et la Solidarité*, Association for Self Help, Information and Solidarity) is an organisation of the unemployed close to the Communist Party. APEIS is mainly active in Communist-controlled municipalities, and in the Paris region.

Le Mouvement National des Chômeurs et Précaires (MNCP) (National Movement of the Unemployed and Insecurely employed) is the federation of unemployed centres. The MNCP is engaged in both militant activity and everyday advice for the unemployed.

To this picture should be added the link up made in 1996 with movements against social exclusion. Various organisations such as Droit au Logement (DAL) (Right to Housing), Comités Des Sans-Logis (CDSL) (Committees of the Homeless), or Droits devant!! (Rights to the fore), participated in the mobilisation, feeling themselves rightly concerned with the

struggle of the unemployed.

Unions, outside the main trade union federations equally demonstrated their presence at their side, including the FSU (teachers), SUD (Post and Telecoms), the group of 10 (autonomous sectoral unions), and some CFDT sectors.

One more effort

The results of the UNEDIC negotiations indicate a new relationship of forces. It is not enough for the essential demands of the unemployed just to be taken into account. But dozens of UNEDIC offices were occupied, and the occupations cleared out by the police.

A local office of the CNPF (the main bosses' organisation), was also occupied in Paris by a hundred unemployed people, on the initiative of AC! and the MNCP.

All these actions had a certain resonance.

For the first time for several years, the UNEDIC negotiations did not conclude by worsening of the position of the unemployed. Some small steps forward were even registered. Some hundreds of additional francs from the 13 billion kitty were granted to the unemployed. Benefit reductions for the long term unemployed were eased (they will only take place every six months instead of four).

However, the essential demands remain: the right to work or a decent income for all, and the representation of the organisations of the unemployed in the bodies whose policies affect them.

These objectives will be central to the concerns of the joint committees which are being set up to participate in next spring's European marches against unemployment, job insecurity, and social exclusion. Thus 1997 promises to be a good year for the development of the struggles of the unemployed in France.

SHEFFIELD

Open Meeting of all sponsors and supporters of the European March against Unemployment and Exclusion

**JANUARY 18
12 noon - 4pm
Student Union
building
Sheffield
Hallam University**

**Opposite
Sheffield BR
station**

Speakers include:
**Christophe Agitoun from
Agir Chomage! in France
and a speaker from
Liverpool Dockers.**

Will it be a happy New Year in Serbia?

1997 may well see the fall of the Milosevic regime in Serbia. Every tactic has tried has failed to crush the developing opposition movement. Milosevic is reaping the reward for tactics that have previously kept him in power.

Demonstrations have taken place every day, mainly in Belgrade but also in several other places, since Milosevic overturned the results of local elections held on November 17.

GEOFF RYAN reports.

THE OPPOSITION Zajedno (Together) coalition won majorities in 13 out of 18 of Serbia's largest cities including Belgrade.

An investigation by the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, headed by former Spanish Prime Minister Felipe Gonzalez, upheld the opposition's claims.

The regime has now, belatedly, been forced to accept some of the allegations of fraud. Milosevic's attempts to push the blame onto officials of his ruling Serbian Socialist Party (SPS) have fooled no-one.

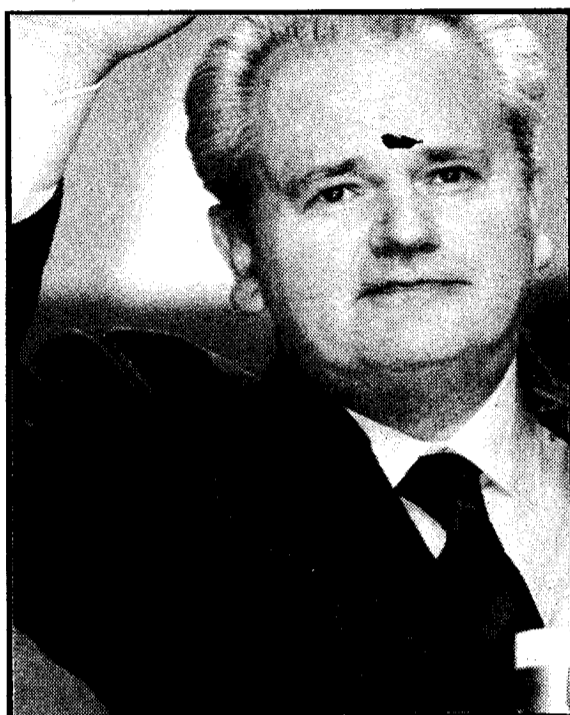
The scale of the protests has been enormous, with over two hundred and fifty thousand taking part in the biggest demonstration. An attempted counter-demonstration by Milosevic supporters could muster only thirty thousand. Milosevic has called in riot police to break up or prevent marches. Neither repression nor appalling weather has been able to stop the protests.

The state-controlled media have largely ignored the protests, though on occasions Zajedno leaders have been denounced as Nazis. It has been impossible, however, to prevent news of demonstrations becoming known. Milosevic was forced to allow the independent radio station B-92 back on the air after a clumsy attempt at silencing it. The regime is incapable of controlling access to the Internet, which has been widely used by Zajedno supporters.

Splits in support

The protests have also led to the splits among some of his former supporters. The army is reported to be divided, unwilling to intervene to save the regime. Discontent over pay (or its absence) is rife. There is considerable resentment among soldiers at the privileged position of the Security Police. Sections of the officer corps still harbour grudges against Milosevic for his failure to support military intervention in Slovenia in 1991.

Splits are appearing within the SPS where there is much resentment at the dominant role of the United Yugoslav Left (JL). Former Milosevic ideologues like Boris Jovic and Mihailo Markovic have



Not waving, but drowning: Milosevic

complained bitterly about this. The tiny JUL, a coalition partner of the SPS, is largely run by Mirjana Markovic, married to Slobodan Milosevic.

The Milosevic family influence is not confined to politics. Like the former Stalinist regimes of Eastern Europe, political power has gone hand in hand with enormous personal enrichment. At a time when most Serbian workers are still living on or below the poverty line this has become a great cause of resentment.

Church

Milosevic has now lost the last of his important allies in Serbia, the Orthodox Church. After years of backing his wars for a Greater Serbia, and its support for Milosevic against the Albanian population of Kosovo, the Church now supports

Milosevic's return to vaguely Marxist rhetoric has made it easier to portray him as the last remaining 'Communist' leader in Eastern Europe. Can those carrying placards in English proclaiming 'Better Dead than Red' explain donations totalling nearly £100,000 to the British Conservative party from the 'communist' Serbian regime?

the opposition.

Behind the protests lies Milosevic's wars against Croatia and Bosnia, but the demonstrations are not primarily anti-war. Some leaders of Zajedno are even more virulent Serb nationalists than Milosevic.

Opposition to Milosevic has been fuelled by his willingness to abandon the Bosnian Serb leadership and even to denounce Radovan Karadzic as a war criminal. This turn was not simply a public gesture designed to hide continued covert support. It was undoubtedly real.

Milosevic, after all, is not a convinced nationalist. He is a Stalinist bureaucrat. Like all Stalinists he

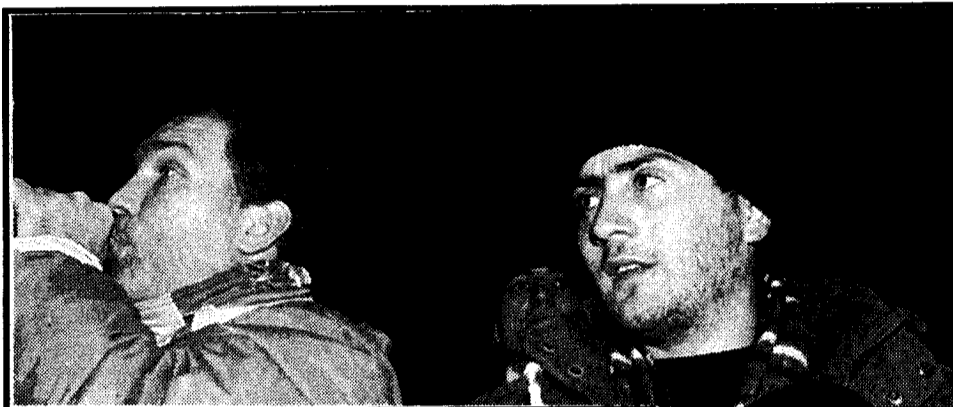
will use nationalism when it suits him and abandon it when it doesn't. Dumping Karadzic and Mladic was a small price to pay for getting sanctions lifted. The Dayton 'peace' accords gave

Milosevic an important role in assuring 'stability' in the region. He had previously been prepared to remove leaders of the Krajina Serbs in Croatia, who he had helped to power, when they became too independent. They were left to defend themselves against the Croatian army. A deal with Croatian president Tudjman became more important.

Milosevic had previously relied on and whipped up nationalism in his fight during the 1980s for the leadership of Serbian Stalinism and in his wars in Bosnia and Croatia. His denunciations of the Bosnian Serb leadership may have placated the west - but they were bound to anger many in Serbia who had suffered economic hardship and the death of loved ones as a result of Milosevic's wars.

Milosevic's subsequent abandonment of nationalism was accompanied by a return to vaguely Marxist sounding rhetoric on economic matters. The JUL replaced the fascistic Serbian Radical Party as his coalition partners. Since the JUL was trying to portray itself as a party of peace (it replaced the Red Star with a dove as its emblem) such an alliance required an abandonment of war.

The JUL was not more 'progressive' than Milosevic. They simply followed a different variant of Stalinism. They believed that the best way for the bureaucracy to cling on to power was to concentrate on economic rather than military is-



Sounding the knell of Stalinist rule? Belgrade protesters stand firm against police violence

sues.

Two of the main leaders of Zajedno have ultra-nationalist credentials. Vuk Draskovic has made rabidly xenophobic speeches in the past and organised a paramilitary group, the Serbian Guard, which fought in Croatia, before deciding he was a pacifist.

Barbecue

Despite his pacifism he calls for the rehabilitation of the former *Cetnik* leader Draza Mihailovic, who collaborated with the Nazi occupiers during the Second World War. Zoran Djindjic attended a barbecue with Radovan Karadzic. Both leaders, while vehement in their denunciations of Milosevic, have refused to denounce the crimes of the Bosnian Serb leadership.

What is more important is that they key into and mobilise an important sentiment of residual Serb nationalism. The relative isolation of the Civic Alliance led by the third Zajedno leader Vesna Pesic, the only one to refrain from nationalist rhetoric, is negative testimony to that.

Milosevic's return to vaguely Marxist rhetoric has made it easier to portray him as the last remaining 'Communist' leader in Eastern Europe. Can those carrying placards in English proclaiming 'Better Dead than Red' explain donations totalling nearly £100,000 to the British Conservative party from the 'communist' Serbian regime?

Can they explain why it has been mainly Tory MPs who have defended Milosevic? Foremost among the apologists for the regime has been Harold Elletson, MP for Blackpool, who is also an agent for MI6.

Zajedno is united solely on the basis of opposition to Milosevic. It mobilises on the twin bases of Serb nationalism and anti-communism. If Milosevic were to fall it would rapidly split apart. It is a movement based primarily on intellectuals and the petit bourgeoisie.

Despite appeals for strikes, they have so far failed to mobilise the working class. The independent union *Nezavisnost* remains very weak and politically extremely heterogeneous, ranging from monarchism to (very weak) revolutionary Marxism.

Most workers are alienated from the regime, not least because they are paid so irregularly. However they have little confidence in Za-

jedno - though they voted for it in large numbers.

To conclude that socialists should defend Milosevic would be totally wrong. Milosevic remains in power today through police repression and electoral fraud. The democratic demands of the opposition movement should be supported. The overthrow of Milosevic would open up the possibility of developing an alternative to the Serbian nationalism that has been at the centre of the break up of Yugoslavia. A serious alternative to the nationalism of many of today's demonstrations would be more likely to develop in these circumstances.

Supporting the legitimate complaints of Zajedno is not the same as supporting its policies or its leaders. Socialists in Serbia need their own voice and their own candidates in elections against both Zajedno and Milosevic.

Neither the pro-capitalist policies of Milosevic nor of Zajedno can solve the problems of workers in Serbia. Serbian nationalism must be challenged, arguing for the need to link up with workers throughout the former Yugoslavia.

A refusal to give any political support to Zajedno does not, however, mean that socialists should not be part of common actions against Milosevic's fraud and repression.

Despite the seriously wrong political ideas of Zajedno, the overthrow of Milosevic will have important repercussions. On December 13 tens of thousands of protesters in Belgrade held a minute's silence for an Albanian teacher killed in Kosovo by the police. Such an event would have been impossible when Milosevic ruled unchallenged.

Distance

There are already signs in Montenegro that the normally servile party leadership is taking its distance from Milosevic. Without Milosevic it is difficult to see how Tudjman can survive in Croatia. Despite the pro-capitalist policies of protesters in Belgrade and Zagreb neither Washington nor London would look too kindly on the removal of those they believe can best guarantee stability in the Balkans.

■ In the next issue we will look at the crisis of the Tudjman regime in Croatia, a crisis that in many ways mirrors that in Serbia.

Gate-crashing guerrillas sour the cocktails in Lima

Audacity is the watchword of a revolutionary movement, Che Guevara once remarked, and unquestionably the guerrillas of the Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement (MRTA) have been supremely audacious.

It is uncertain for how much longer the MRTA commandos in the Japanese ambassador's residence in Lima can hold out and whether the Peruvian Government of Alberto Fujimori can be trusted not to kill them even if they do release all their remaining hostages and lay down their arms as he demands.

B. Skanthakumar reports.

THE MRTA usually operate hundreds of kilometres from the capital, in the forested regions of Chanchamayo province. Their occasional forays into Lima and other cities have been for high profile actions like kidnappings and bank robberies.

Within Peru they are less well known than the larger and more feared Sendero Luminoso or Shining Path movement whose ruthless and nihilistic methods propelled it into international fame in the 1980s.

Sendero Luminoso's base are the poor indigenous peasantry of the rural provinces but its leadership have drawn on students and intellectuals recruited by the movement's leader Abimael Guzman, a former university professor. His unique ideology claimed to be based on Marxism-Leninism of the Maoist variety but included heavy doses of his own 'thought'.

The Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement on the other hand is recognisably closer to the classic guerrilla movements in Latin America of the 1960s and 1970s, drawing inspiration from the Cuban revolution and with an internationalist character.

It would seem that many years after Regis Debray abandoned fo-cism (and in his case socialism), the MRTA has pursued its lonely course of struggle even after the end of direct military rule and the introduction of elections in 1980.

However its actions on this occasion reflect a revised strategy, of focusing on a specific and narrow demand, the freedom of 400 MRTA members held in Peruvian jails in return for the freedom of the 47 hostages left of the 500 it had initially captured. (Figures are current as we go to press).

While the international media called them "terrorists", fuming

mere half hour every day and are deprived of telephone contact or even regular visitors. Mrs. Polay is only permitted to visit Victor once a month and that too for half an hour.

These outrageous and unbearable conditions violate international human rights standards and reflect the hypocrisy of western governments which turn a blind eye to the human rights records and outright democratic abuses of pro-capitalist regimes like that of Fujimori.

In an unconfirmed report by the MRTA's spokesperson in Europe, Isaac Velazco claimed that MRTA prisoners in Peruvian jails have been on hunger strike since December 16, and have been joined by other prisoners in their protest against prison conditions.

This has not been investigated by the international press. Neither has it been widely reported that it is the Peruvian government that poses the

even if the odds are stacked against them achieving their ends. For a start choosing the Japanese diplomat's home made the point well that it is the Peruvian President, who is of Japanese descent, above all whom they blame for the situation, and their target for occupation was second best to the Presidential palace itself.

Fujimori has traded on his Japanese immigrant roots using it within Peru to portray himself as an outsider in politics and not beholden to the traditional political system and the rich white elite it has served so well.

Outside the country he has used his ethnic roots both to attract Japanese inward investment to Peru on regular visits to Japan and also as 'proof' that he has the cultural attributes and work ethic to transform the country into a Latin American tiger economy like Chile.

A related message he has also

elected to the Presidency, popularly perceived as the social candidate against his rival the novelist and candidate of the right, Mario Vargas Llosa.

IMF medicine

However Fujimori embraced his rival's economic programme of liberalisation and privatisation, and made Peruvians swallow the bitter medicine of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank in return for resuming loans and credit to Peru and sanctioning foreign investment in that country.

In 1992, in a one-man coup, he dissolved Congress, dismissed the judiciary, and appropriated greater powers for the Presidency. So much for the often asserted claim that free markets are associated with freedom and democracy.

"Fujishock" — as this policy was dubbed — tested out the claims of the neo-liberal right, and was found wanting not only on social criteria but even on crude economic indicators.

The government removed basic labour standards, and introduced large scale redundancies by halving the public sector payroll. It has privatised most of the state owned assets and reduced tariffs for imports and removed foreign exchange restrictions.

Foreign debt

The proportion of annual income spent on debt servicing has been increasing, without any overall decrease in the size of the foreign debt. The resources for this drain come from reduced health and education budgets as the poor are forced to pay user fees to have access to these services and as private insurance, loans and self-help schemes are touted as alternatives to state funding.

Consequently 14 out of 22 million Peruvians live below the poverty line, a factor singled out by Nestor Cerpa, "The MRTA entered this country's political life to fight a system that deprives the majority of

The MRTA's spokesperson in Europe, Isaac Velazco claimed that MRTA prisoners in Peruvian jails have been on hunger strike since December 16, and have been joined by other prisoners in their protest against prison conditions. This has not been investigated by the international press.

over their invasion of diplomatic property and making protestations over the safety and health of the hostages, Nestor Cerpa of the MRTA drew parallels between the fears and trauma of the families of the hostages and that of families of political prisoners languishing in Peruvian jails.

He contrasted the fact that they have treated their hostages more humanely than the prison authorities do MRTA militants. In fact Mrs. Otilia Polay, mother of jailed MRTA leader Victor Polay, described her son's cell as "more like a tomb".

The cell is only 6 feet by 6 feet in dimension with a small hole in the ground for a toilet. The prisoners are only allowed out of the cell for a

greatest threat to the lives of the hostages.

The authorities have cut electricity and water supplies to the residence compound and even cut telephone links which permitted the hostages to communicate with the outside world. Even the supply of food is irregular and in inadequate quantities. Without fresh water, toilets were unavailable for use until the Red Cross brought into portable toilets.

Without electricity the hostages, now mainly business people, politicians and military figures associated with the administration and more accustomed to easy living and sleeping, must be in discomfort.

The MRTA has planned and executed this operation brilliantly,

peddled within the country comes in his admonishments to the poor to work harder, be more self-reliant, save more, develop entrepreneurial skills, and rely less on the state while making the free market their friend in this enterprise.

This message is music to the ears of the new right ideologues. In 1989 Peruvian businessman Hernando de Soto published his influential neo-liberal tract *The Other Path* in which he characterised the 20th century Peruvian (indeed Latin American) economy as 'mercantilist', and gushed with enthusiasm for the virtues of a true market economy liberated from the fetters of legal regulation and state intervention.

In 1991 Alberto Fujimori was

Indonesian Show Trials: Act now

B. Skanthakumar
INDONESIAN political activists and worker leaders detained over the last few months have been on trial since December 12 1996 in Jakarta and Surabaya.

The charges they face range from creating public disorder to sowing subversion. The maximum penalty for the latter is death.

The verdict will be delivered within the next few months and probably before General Elections scheduled for May 1997 - so as not to upstage that charade.

In any event the final judgement is not in doubt. The defendants will be found guilty and sentenced to the severest punishment under law - unless other circumstances intervene.

The accused include members of the opposition Partai Demokrasi Indonesia or Indonesian Democracy Party (PDI). However the main tar-

gets are leaders of the left wing Partai Rakyat Demokratik or Peoples Democratic Party (PRD) including its Chairperson Budiman Sudjatmiko, 26, trade unionist Dita Indah Sari, 24, peasant leader Coen Hussein Pontoh and student activist M. Sholeh.

The other principal accused is the independent trade union leader Muchtar Pakpahan, 43, who had already spent a year in jail for his organising efforts.

Riots

They were arrested following the anti-government riots that swept Jakarta after the Government organised the storming of the PDI headquarters on July 27th, to prevent it being used as a meeting place for democracy activists and as a forum for anti-government speeches and rallies.

The 'New Order' regime of President Suharto has prided itself on its

authoritarian grip over the country, advertising Indonesia as an investment safe and profitable site for foreign trans-nationals. These companies choose Indonesia because of its abysmally low wages and (until recently) docile working class.

The labour force has been managed until a few years ago by a combination of 'yellow' or company unionism directed by the sole legal union federation - the All Indonesia Workers Union (SPSI) and the direct intervention of the military in factory disputes.

However in the last few years independent trade unions have emerged and become implanted in the new industrial working class. Associated with them are new political formations including parties based upon and oriented to the working masses and popular sectors.

In the 1980s in Indonesia a new civil society gained expression in

non-governmental organisations involved in environmental campaigns, legal aid and human rights. On its own criteria and to maintain its survival this important movement was strictly non-political and respectful of constitutional norms and state policy.

Voices

However the 1990s has witnessed the appearance of previously unorganised constituencies and unarticulated voices and concerns. The existence in spite of severe repression of alternative labour unions particularly the SBSI (Indonesian Labour Welfare Union) with its 48,000 members and the very foundation of the PRD are grounds for the real optimism that enthuse the progressive movement even in this time of despair for the lives of those fighters.

The PRD has a sophisticated and refined analysis of the nature and tasks of democratic reform and so-

cial change as well as a principled approach to the question of the occupation of East Timor and the genocide of its people.

This small party with barely a few hundred militants has managed in a short time to organise tens of thousands in related front organisations of students, peasants, workers and cultural activists.

In an orchestrated campaign of rising hysteria, the regime and army plainly astonished by the strength and courage of its opponents, has lost interest in the larger legal opposition party, the PDI and has instead concentrated on manufacturing mis-truths and falsehoods about the banned PRD. These include honouring them as "masterminding" the July protests and wrongly labelling them as 'Communists'.

The latter charge must be viewed in the context and aftermath of the 1965 massacre of the Indonesian Left and the organisational ex-



MRTA leader Nestor Cerpa holds a press conference after interrupting the ambassador's cocktail party

Peruvians of their most vital needs. The situation has not changed at any time under Alberto Fujimori's administration. In fact it has worsened, with a dramatic rise in the number of poor in Peru."

The opening of the internal market to trans-nationals has driven many Peruvian companies out of business. The Peruvian sol is trading at artificially high levels which is good for importers but bad for exporters.

Banks have pegged interest rates high attracting foreign capital but making it expensive for local capitalists to borrow for investment.

The alternative for Peruvian capital is to play second fiddle to

foreign trans-nationals by entering into joint venture schemes as junior partners, and this is precisely what is happening.

The Peruvian economy has been growing in the 1990s — not because of Fujishock, which with its deflationary mechanisms threatens a recession any day — but because it has been a desirable destination for portfolio investment capital drawn by the high interest rate and the fortune it makes on the stock market through the purchase of grossly under-valued public assets.

Wealth is concentrated in fewer (and mainly foreign) hands and Fujimori while denouncing the hostage taking by the MRTA is holding

the entire country hostage to the whims of finance capital which is notoriously nervous and fickle.

The lessons of the Mexican debacle, where the peso went into free fall and had to be bailed out by the US government, have not been fully absorbed in Latin American capitals. The bulwarks of the Fujimori administration are therefore the international financial institutions, and also the military.

Hand-picked

He has his hand-picked loyalists in the armed forces hierarchy who are intensely and personally loyal to him in return for his giving them carte blanche to pursue a counter

The Fujimori government removed basic labour standards, and introduced large scale redundancies by halving the public sector payroll. It has privatised most of the state owned assets and reduced tariffs for imports and removed foreign exchange restrictions.

insurgency campaign against anti-state forces without fear of punishment for abuses and excesses.

Under an amnesty decree of June 1995, no military personnel can be tried for offences relating to human rights violations or drug trafficking from 1980 onwards, the beginning of the Sendero Luminoso insurgency.

Marginalised

The terror of the state continues in the rural communities and in the working class and poor neighbourhoods. The roots of Sendero Luminoso is in the real immiseration of the poor; the marginalisation of the indigenous campesinos who face land hunger and starvation; and the exclusion of the majority from a political and economic system in which they simply do not exist.

However the tactics of Sendero which operated on the basis that "if you are not for us, you are against us" backfired against them. They murdered many progressive activists, from feminist leaders to militants of the Fourth International. They would not tolerate any opposition or debate as to their ideas and strategies.

The capture of their leader, Guzman, in 1992 has weakened and split them, but they have not gone away.

Their struggle and the military campaign against them consumed the lives of 35,000 people. The revulsion at this waste and disdain for armed struggle increased popular support for Fujimori's authoritarian efforts to curb Sendero, and was a major factor in his re-election victory of 1995.

Another reason being his reining

in of hyper-inflation from a high of 7,659 per cent in 1990 to 139 per cent in 1991 and a new low of 10 per cent in 1995.

Here the Peruvian electorate are representative of the continental trend, in that even with deeply unpopular austerity measures, they prefer the reality of economic stability associated with low inflation to vague promises from the Left.

In Brazil too, this was one obvious lesson of the defeat of the Workers Party (PT) by Collor de Mello and Fernando Henrique Cardoso.

Unfortunately for the MRTA, even in the popular imagination of the barrios of Lima they are seen as little better than Sendero Luminoso. There is little popular support and sympathy for them in a country weary of violence and which longs to believe in the Fujimori promise of prosperity for all.

The MRTA as a legal party may have better prospects but that path is fraught with dangers too. It could for example go the way of the Colombian M-19, originally a left wing guerrilla movement but later co-opted into supporting the neo-liberal economic programme.

Another example is that of the URNG in Guatemala, which has now signed a peace accord with the government which includes granting army personnel immunity from prosecution for tens of thousands of 'disappearances' there and the genocide of entire indigenous village communities.

Peru's traditional 'left', the populist APRA and the United Left (IU) fared badly in the 1995 elections, and are seen as part of the discredited political establishment.

Opportunity

They have the opportunity to rebuild their support in the months ahead by leading the anti-privatisation campaign which the left wing daily *La Republica* is spearheading, and by combining that with assaults against the authoritarianism and corruption of the present government.

The events of the last few weeks may be the stimulus to a reawakening of the interventions of the radical left.

The MRTA members are prepared to be martyrs in their struggle, ready to die for the brief spotlight on their imprisoned comrades.

We must hope that they will live to participate in the reconstruction of the Peruvian Left and in re-kindling interest in alternatives to neo-liberal ruin.

to free the detainees!

tion of the Indonesian Communist Party, which had three million members and many millions more in its mass organisations.

Contain communism

All of these acts were perpetrated by the present ruling clique of Suharto and the military, and with the direct support of western powers in their bid to 'contain' Communism in south-east Asia.

The torture, imprisonment and killings which followed; the battery of repressive laws; the growth of the military apparatus and its reach into everyday life; the policing of dissent and the revising of the historical past; the egos and fortunes of the Suharto clan, the crony capitalists and their army buddies are by-products of this period.

Ironically the regime was initially preoccupied by the rise in public support for the state created Partai Demokrasi Indonesia led by

Megawati Sukarnoputri. She is a daughter of the nationalist leader Sukarno and was tipped to do the unthinkable, challenge Suharto in Presidential elections and possibly win.

Suharto's original plan was to prevent her from challenging him and to weaken her support base in her party and in the country. That accounted for the ham-handed assault on the PDI office where her supporters were barricaded.

Congress

It also explains the swift convening of a PDI congress by the military, which Megawati and her supporters were barred from attending, and which replaced her with a Suharto stooge who will play his scripted part in Indonesia's 'Guided Democracy'.

In other words the PDI was restored as a 'kept' opposition party, giving the political system the facade

of multi-partyism but which never seriously challenges the ruling Golkar party or the social and economic system.

Megawati herself will be handled with caution by the Government. Her profile and the prestige of her father give her some protection in that regard.

Meanwhile she has become identified as the public face of the yearning for an end to the Suharto presidency and for greater openness and accountability from the state.

It is tempting and instructive not only to draw the obvious parallel between Megawati and Burmese oppositionist Aung San Suu Kyi but perhaps from further afield Benazir Bhutto, the former Pakistani Prime Minister.

Bhutto drew on the populist legacy of her father and his party. She symbolised the struggle against dictatorship. But her record in office and attitude towards former allies under-

scores the inherent limitations of these charismatic individuals and their ideologies.

The pro-democracy movement has to unite its forces in the struggle against the dictatorship and to recognise that the PDI of Megawati will for the foreseeable future be its largest component. This will define the movement's strategies and its demands.

Megawati's immediate priority has been to preserve her own political future by re-organising her supporters and trying to secure legal legitimacy for her party.

Optimism

A spokesperson for the PRD interviewed by *Green Left Weekly* was optimistic about the future. He observed that his party (courtesy of the regime it vows to overthrow) has been catapulted from obscurity into national prominence. It is gaining a new audience for its ideas.

"Some pro-democracy groups believe the movement has receded, but we feel the opposite. The opportunities ... are far greater today. So our perspective is to raise the level of struggle and give it a political focus".

In Australia members of the Maritime Union have been mounting slowdowns on cargo bound for Indonesia, and in one case are refusing to unload a ship.

Elsewhere there must be similar protests targeting Indonesian business interests, embarrassing its government by pickets, lobbies and the like, campaigning to free all detainees, repeal repressive laws and end arms sales.

The regime has left no doubt that it will not hesitate to take the lives of political prisoners.

We must leave it in doubt that there is nothing that we won't do to save their lives.

Central Africa in new turmoil

By a special correspondent

THE THREAT of foreign military intervention in Zaïre (Congo-Kinshasha) has receded. The dismantling of the refugee camps and the flight of their occupants has removed the stated goal of this "humanitarian operation".

The western powers were more concerned over the success of anti-Mobutu forces and the stability of their client regime in Zaïre than the lives of the refugees. The aid agencies were amongst the most vocal advocates for a military operation.

These NGOs are indeed Africa's new missionaries. The old missionaries brought religion and demanded colonial government to "civilise the natives". The new missionaries bring food parcels and demand "humanitarian intervention".

They want to ensure permanent dependency on them and the legitimisation of their work in the grand project to recolonise Sub-Saharan Africa. With a few honourable exceptions such as Oxfam they invented the 'fact' that one million people would die in the absence of western troops in the region securing the distribution of food and medical supplies.

Rebellion

The goal of western military intervention would have been to defeat the rebellion against the Zaïreois dictator Mobutu Sese Seko. Instead of disarming the militias which had run the refugee camps, would have supported them in the consolidation of a Hutu supremacist outpost in eastern Zaïre.

The camps near the Zaïreois towns of Goma and Bukavu had become havens for the leaders of the Interahamwe Hutu militia – the instigators of the 1994 genocide of the Batutsi minority in Rwanda.

Some of the civilians in these camps participated in that genocide and fear returning to Rwanda because they will be identified by their former neighbours. They were stock-piling arms and ammunition purchased from the west including at least one British company.

Preparations have been underfoot ever since the flight from Rwanda for a military campaign against the new government there. This would have plunged the region into years of low intensity war.

Many refugees however have remained in those camps over the last two years against their will. They were used as human shields to protect the real scoundrels and to justify the existence of these camps as a Hutu homeland in exile.

Even at the height of the fighting around the camps people were forcibly prevented from returning to Rwanda by militia leaders. The Rwandan government had been trying for months to reach agreement with the Zaïreois central government on the repatriation of the refugees.

They wanted to prevent the camps being used as a base against them and to prove that their govern-

ment would not victimise Bahutus as the previous Hutu government victimised Batutsis. In August, Zaïreois Prime Minister and Presidential aspirant, Leon Kengo Wa Dondo was in the Rwandan capital Kigali to initial an agreement on this.

He has different interests in this issue. It was rumoured that in the 1997 Presidential elections in Zaïre, Mobutu's party would give the Bahutus voting rights converting them into voting fodder for their party.

Thus Kengo Wa Dondo wanted them out as soon as possible.

II

The Hutu militias in collaboration with the Zaïreois army had been engaged in attacks during 1996 on the Banyamulenge community in eastern Zaïre. This people have many connections with the present Rwandan government and some had been involved in the resistance war against the Hutu supremacist government of Juvenal Habyarimana in Rwanda before 1994.

Many have lived in Uganda where Yoweri Museveni's government has been sympathetic. So it wasn't surprising that the Rwandan and Ugandan governments gave them material support in their campaign against the Zaïreois army and its Hutu allies.

The immediate trigger to the fighting from October was an order of expulsion on the Banyamulenge people in eastern Zaïre by regional deputy governor, Lwasi Ngabo Lwabanji, who gave them a week to leave.

He threatened those who tried to remain saying that, "they will be treated as rebels and like rebels ... will be exterminated and expelled". With their very survival at stake, the Banyamulenge took a stand and fought back.

They had little choice. One of the rebels insisted, "the government tried to take our land and they told us we had to leave the country and go back to Rwanda."

But we don't come from Rwanda and they cannot force us to go because we know how to fight and the army does not." The Banyamulenge people are often referred to as 'Tutsi' by commentators who insist on viewing African politics through a "tribal" prism.

However we have argued previously in *Socialist Outlook*, these ethnic identities are constructs of the 20th century and while useful to understand some of the political dynamics in central Africa, do not help explain them.

The Banyamulenge community currently numbers around 400,000 people who have been settled in eastern Zaïre for at least two centuries. They originally settled near the Mulenge hills from which they took their name.

This community had been swelled and differentiated in this century by different migrations from Rwanda and by a specialisa-



Protected by western imperialism: Zaïre's dictator Mobutu

tion in their occupations. Thus they were often pastoralists in Masisi and cultivators in Runduru.

Many came to Zaïre or the Belgian-Congo as it then was to escape German and Belgian colonial oppression in Rwanda-Burundi. Zaïre is such a vast country that they knew they could live relatively free of the colonial administration in Leopoldville (present day Kinshasha).

Tensions

However there have always been tensions between the Banyamulenge and other communities in the region.

As the Banyamulenge became wealthier using their trading connections in Rwanda resentment grew. The Mobutu regime has survived for the last thirty years by fostering and using ethnic tensions across the country.

In 1981 it stripped the Banyamulenge of Zaïreois citizenship and one of the main demands of the current rebellion is for the restoration of that right and an end to discrimination against them.

III

The Banyamulenge had been allies of Mobutu in the early days. They participated in the crushing of the radical nationalist movement led by Pierre Mulele between 1964 and 1968. This movement for the Second Independence of Congo-Kinshasha was a continuation of the struggle against western imperial-

ism's stooge governments.

It was destroyed with the direct involvement of western troops. Now the Banyamulenge have united in a broad coalition against Mobutu with Mulele's comrades notably Laurent Kabila.

Kabila is political co-ordinator of the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaïre (AFDL), an alliance of four disparate parties, which he said was formed with the intention to, "overthrow the irresponsible clique of people in power and to put in place a transitional government which would eventually organise democratic elections".

Kabila is leader of the Peoples Revolutionary Party which has a Marxist-Nationalist past and has been active since the military defeats of the late 1960s in propaganda work and consolidation of its influence in liberated zones it controls.

Minerals

The strategy of the Alliance appears to be to gain control over the mineral rich provinces where they can rely on the disaffection of the local communities angry that nothing of this wealth finds its way back to them disappearing instead into the pockets of the Mobutu regime.

Their forces have so far captured Sominki gold concession in southern Kivu and was making progress towards the gold mines in upper Zaïre. Mobutu's personal gold mining concession area has recently fallen to them.

The western companies which exploit these mines have withdrawn

and Zaïreois troops in retreat have looted and destroyed much of the property. Kabila issued an invitation to the companies to return and threatened to revoke their licenses and sell it to their competitors if they don't.

IV

On the whole western businesses are fairly sanguine about the recent developments. They have got used to the weak control the central government has over the provinces and are accustomed to bribing the regional government and paying the army battalion salaries in return for protection. A further fragmentation of Zaïre and even instability in the central government won't affect their profits.

Fortunes to be made

They are far too important to all sides for that. There is no threat of nationalisation and there are still huge fortunes to be made from gold, diamonds, cobalt, copper and cadmium deposits. In return for their generous contributions to the military budget and the personal bank accounts of the elite, these companies are on the fast track to make even more money from the privatisation of state firms in the near future.

Mobutu's political response following his return in December from convalescence in the French Riviera following a prostate cancer operation in Switzerland was to consolidate his authority within the government.

The parliamentary opposition is spineless and weak – the main concern of its leaders is to ensure representation in a post Mobutu Zaïre. The outcome of the turmoil in the region is unclear.

There are many divisions within the military. Soldiers are irregularly paid and their ill discipline is notorious. They survive by extorting the rich and poor alike and pillage and rape at will. Mobutu himself only relies on the absolute loyalty of his Presidential Guard.

There is always the possibility of a coup and politicians in Kinshasha are ingratiating themselves with military figures in preparation for such an outcome. The military defeats in the east could backfire on Mobutu as demands for a stronger, healthier leader become more pronounced.

The Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaïre (AFDC) cannot with its small forces and narrow base expect at present to be more than one factor in this equation. What may make the difference is urban protest channelled against the central government.

Protests and strikes by workers, public sector employees, the urban poor and students would rock the government and could make a difference. In and of itself it still wouldn't change the nature of the Zaïreois state but it would be a beginning.

Keep the censor out of my bed!



Westminster's prudish Tory censors appeared to have no problems with soft-porn Hollywood-style - in 'Showgirls'

IN NOVEMBER 1996 Westminster Council banned David Cronenberg's film 'Crash', apparently because it deals with the eroticism of car crashes as well as the awkward idea that disability itself might be sexy.

While the rest of Europe can watch 'Crash' uncut, it looks as if the more susceptible British will have to be protected from such undesirable notions!

While important in itself, this event is just a symptom of a wider and more dangerous attack on our right to see and read what we like. In the name of protecting the young, violence and sex on TV and video, word and image on the Internet are under sustained surveillance.

The call to protect children is of course a clever way of approaching the question. No-one likes our apparently increasingly violent society, everyone wants to protect the young and vulnerable from attack, sexual or otherwise - so, stop images of violence on TV and video and CD, ban sexual images from the Internet, and all will be solved.

In today's Britain, with widespread poverty, increasing if uncoordinated unrest over a series of issues, environmental as well as economic, the question of censorship is again firmly on the agenda. Through the last 17 years the state has been eroding democratic and

As John Major again nails his colours to the mast of 'Back to Basics' and 'family values', JANE KELLY probes the ulterior motives which are driving the moral panic

social rights.

A series of anti-trade union laws have reversed long-held workers' rights against employers, whilst the Criminal Justice Act criminalised a whole range of legitimate activities, as well as attacking the right to silence. At the same time it is also preparing to control what we read and see. But this cannot be carried out directly: popular issues are utilised as a smokescreen, issues such as sex and violence on TV and child pornography on the Internet which give censorship a legitimacy.

It is especially what we look at that is under attack. In the 1950s, and from the standpoint of a liberalisation of sexual and moral issues, it was mainly the written word which came under the scrutiny of the censors - *Lady Chatterley's Lover* and *Last Exit to Brooklyn* for example. Today the image is a much

more potent form of communication, and it is film, TV and the Internet which now face the censor's eagle eye.

Even if it were true that there is more violence today, which is a debatable point, there is no serious evidence that images or words are the cause.

Rather, increasingly violent film, TV and computer imagery is a symptom of the social and moral decay of late capitalist society, the effects of poverty, cuts in welfare, so-called 'community care' for the mentally ill, and the atomisation of society resulting from seventeen years of Tory rule.

Barbarism

Images are not to blame and banning them will increase rather than undermine violence. In previous centuries violent and barbaric attacks were carried out without the aid of such images; today in some semi-developed countries where pornography and erotic images are banned for religious reasons, rape and sexual abuse and murder still exist.

Like rape in marriage and child abuse here ten years ago, they go unrecognised. But in countries with less harsh censorship laws there tends to be less sexual and violent crime.

In the face of increasing authoritarianism socialists should oppose censorship. The cutting of violence from films or of erotic images from the Internet will have no impact on real violence and real sexual attack, nor will it solve the social problems suffered by many today.

Quite the reverse, it will be used to further undermine our rights and liberties.

Once accepted, censorship will be used to increasingly curtail the rights of the oppressed - women, lesbians and gay men, black people, the disabled - and against the left and anyone who wants to change the status quo. Real violence and sexual abuse against women and children will be again swept under the carpet of moral hypocrisy.

In the United States the reversal of affirmative action for blacks and women as well as attacks on a

woman's right to choose have gone alongside increasing censorship of the arts - museums have been threatened with withdrawal of federal funding for showing exhibitions of the photographs of Robert Mapplethorpe or critical works on the history of native americans.

Abortion

These events have their echoes here: the Labour Party leadership is just about holding the line against demands from the Catholic Church to change policy on abortion rights, but with Blair moving right on more or less every policy area, there is no guarantee that this demand will not be successful. And sections of the Catholic church are calling for a ban of some pop records on the grounds of satanism!

Once accepted, censorship will spread from sexual and/or violent images to political expression. Already TV films or documentary programmes on Ireland are subject to extra scrutiny. Jordan's film 'Michael Collins' was attacked for being 'pro-IRA', just as Oliver Stone's work ('Born on the Fourth of July', 'JFK') has been slated for its exposure of American injustice.

Real violence and sexual abuse against women and children will be again swept under the carpet of moral hypocrisy.

This Christmas Channel 4 was under pressure to pull Rory Bremner's satire on the Queen's Xmas broadcast - Princess Di doing a parallel one.

Opposing censorship does not mean passivity in the face of sexist, racist or homophobic images or texts, nor that we in any way defend them. As socialists and feminists we have a good deal to say about the way women, black people, lesbians and gay men, disabled people are represented on our TVs and in film, in magazine adverts and on hoardings.

Everyday images

In many ways the images of advertising and mainstream TV programmes are much more pernicious, because more everyday, than pornography. But they remain all of them 'representations'.

They may reflect reality and reproduce ideology but they are not real. Nor is there any serious evidence that it is such images that produce or even encourage violent and sexual attack.

Even sexual images of children, on the Internet or elsewhere, per-

haps the most difficult area, while subject to political critique and exposure, should not be subject to censorship. First of all there are other laws which can be used to prosecute people actually abusing children, but more importantly, accepting some element of censorship opens the door to the censoring of images which we do want to be available - lesbian and gay images, sex manuals for teenagers, films about eroticism and sexual desire, which explore the links between sexuality and violence - it will be these things which suffer the censor's knife, not the grotesque violence of the films of the likes of Sylvester Stallone.

To call for censorship is to hand over power to people who have no interest in the rights and liberties of ordinary people. Just as we do not call on the state to police fascist and proto-fascist political groups and demonstrations, but try and organise labour movement responses, so in the face of reactionary cultural imagery, we should organise educational conferences, hand out leaflets and demand discussion - but not a ban.

A new moral plague behind these calls for censorship is against liberty and life, and ultimately against women and the oppressed.

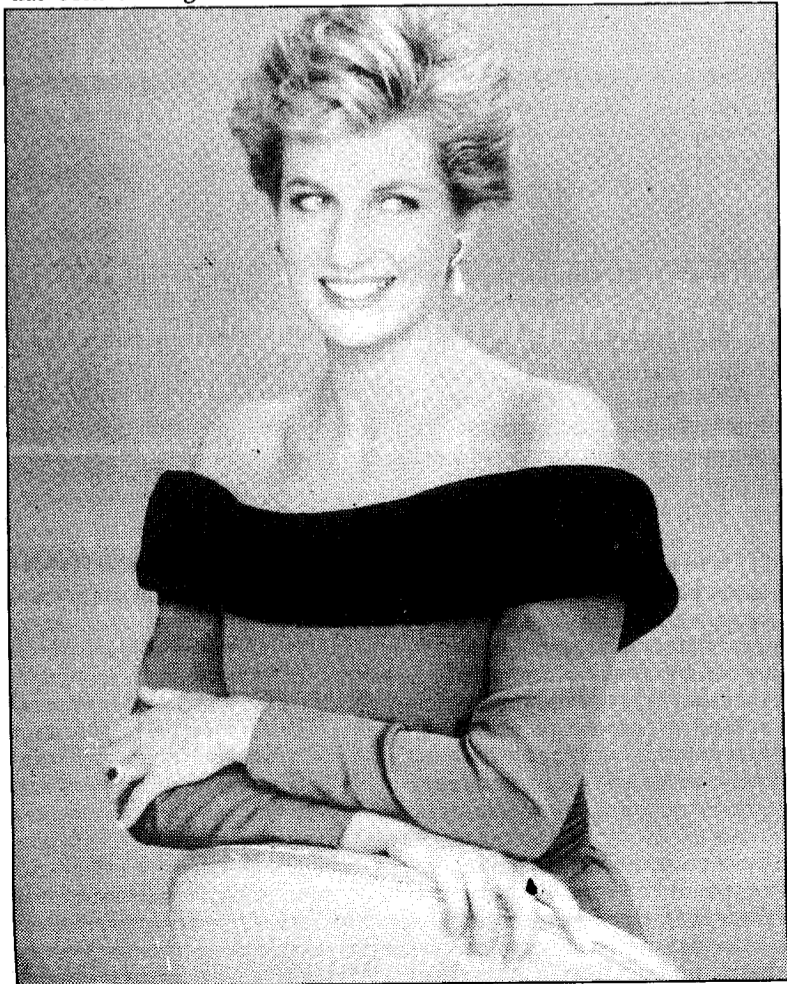
All authoritarian governments use censorship as a form of ideological control. From Hitler's Germany to today's fundamentalist Iran, who and what is seen or read has always been a question to be decided by the authorities.

Hitler

Hitler put on a special exhibition of modern art, 'Degenerate Art' in 1937, so that there could be no confusion about what was 'good' and what was 'bad' art. The fact that Goebbels collected the latter was not seen as a problem, after all he wasn't confused about the function of Nazism.

Today we could use the analogy with what happened in Nazi Germany: first they banned pornographic images of children and I did not object, for I did not use them; next they banned pictures of lesbian sex and I did not object, for I was not a lesbian; then they banned sado-masochistic sex and I did not object, I did not engage in such activity; later they banned teenage sex manuals and I did not object, for I was not a teenager; then they banned representations of heterosexual couples and I did not object, for I did not like nudity; in the end they banned sex outside of marriage and I wanted to object - but there was no-one left to support me.

Calling for censorship of words or images is a dangerous and slippery slope: we should not take even the first step.



Diana? or Rory? The heat was on Channel 4 to censor Xmas Day send-up

Shock as one of Socialist Worker's leaders discovers imperialism

DUNCAN CHAPPEL reviews 'Globalisation: a critique of a new orthodoxy' by Chris Harman in *International Socialism* 73

CAPITALISM has restructured the world economy since the mid-1980s and opened 'a new phase in the history of capitalism, just as the national concentration of capital did at the start of the century'.

So says Chris Harman, in attempting to explain how working people can stand up successfully against the powerful global reorganisation of capitalist production.

Harman aims to place the 'globalisation' of the world economy in perspective. He takes on the myth that 'global production lines' free capitalists from national borders and let them produce wherever in the world it is cheapest.

Apple computers are one of the few companies which do produce in this way: for example the 42 micro-processor chips in an Apple II E will

have travelled at least a million miles before being put together.

However Harman carefully stresses how exceptional that is. Only one fifth of world output is exported. However world trade has been growing at a similar pace to that of the rapid expansion of Europe's imperialist powers between 1870 and the first World War. Foreign direct investment grew four times as fast as trade in the mid 1980s: it still grows twice as fast.

Big multi-nationals have not lost their national 'bases' or started to invest evenly across the globe. Instead, explains Harman, big capitalist concerns invest in countries similar to their own - leading to 'a regionalisation rather than an internationalism of capital ... Nearly two thirds of the world is virtually written off the map as far as direct investment is concerned'

However it is not surprising that Harman's main effort is to undermine the idea that the dominant dynamic within today's multi-nationals is that of moving their capital at will to exploit cheap labour power and materials. The Socialist Workers Party, of which Harman is a central

leader, developed a theory in the 1960s that capitalism had outgrown the age of imperialism - during which the capitalist class of the great powers maintained their dominance over the world by exploiting the resources and the toiling masses in underdeveloped countries.

Harman's article, like a companion article in *International Socialism* 51, aims to use today's reality to revise this 30-year old keystone dogma which has led the SWP to mistaken political positions.

'Permanent arms economy'

These include the idea, developed by Michael Kidron that capitalism can avoid depression by building up a permanent arms-based economy.

Similarly the incorrect view taken by the SWP that the stalinist regimes were 'state capitalist' was bolstered by the idea that the main form of international capitalism was arms competition. The nuclear arms race 'proved' to the SWP that the USSR was a capitalist country.

More dangerously, this theory encouraged SWP leaders like Kidron

to totally identify the policy of each state with the policy of its ruling class. Because the state promoted this 'permanent arms economy', every state policy appeared to be determined by the needs of national capitalist accumulation.

Harman's two articles have taken the SWP's understanding of the world modestly forward, without threatening the mistaken policies which were developed on the basis of these previous errors.

Harman develops the arms economy theory by asserting that many multi-nationals are so dependent on major contracts - such as arms and defence contracts - with governments in their 'base' countries that capitalism can't break free of the national state set up.

However Harman's view deeply underestimates the multi-lateral relationships that are developing between the capitalist classes. Harman notes, for example that three quarters of world investment is directed at Japan, North America and Western Europe.

However he passes over the way that investment moves increasingly between capitalist classes within these three areas. As Europe's capi-

talists invest in each other's enterprises, for example, the tendency has developed towards a European trade zone which aims to protect itself from the two other world class economic zones building up around the USA and Japan.

New order

The reflects the SWP's dangerous underestimation of the quite distinct development of a new economic order based on the still unstable and uneven appearance of a 'triad' of zones of global capitalist exploitation.

For instance, Harman dismisses European economic and monetary integration out of hand as 'in the realm of fantasy'. This means the SWP risks standing to one side while the working class fights against this capitalist assault. Projects like the European marches pose a challenge to the SWP.

The overwhelming majority of the British far-left are now involved in this crucial initiative. Will supporters of the SWP follow their instincts and support workers co-ordination - or will they be hide-bound by the errors of their leaders?

Charting the history of South African radicalism

South Africa's Radical Tradition - a documentary history.

Volume One 1907 - 1950
Allison Drew (Editor) (Buchu Books, Mayibuye Books, UCT Press, Cape Town)
Reviewed by Charlie van Gelderen.

THIS BOOK, the result of years of diligent research by Allison Drew, will serve as a text book for all students of the development of South Africa from a racist colony to the democratic republic, inaugurated by the election of a black-dominated government by universal franchise.

The victory of the ANC under the leadership of Nelson Mandela, is the culmination of years of struggle by socialists and nationalists. These documents present a factual record of that struggle.

A documentary history has the one advantage over narrative history, in that it is free from the bias of the author. It is the nearest we can get to an objective view of the events recorded.

While there was resistance, often violent, from the onset of colonial conquests, these are not the subject of this book. Its theme is the birth and growth of the socialist and labour movement, and the struggle for national liberation.

Socialism and trade unionism were brought to South Africa by the skilled workers from Britain who came to work in the diamond and gold mines in the 19th century, and the immi-

grants fleeing from Czarist oppression in Eastern Europe. They brought with them the ingrained traditions of their countries of origin.

Drew's selection of documents faithfully chronicles these early years. The British workers, while often militant in their demands against their employers, never looked upon the non-white sector of the working class as allies in that struggle, but rather as a threat to their own privileged standards of living.

Macdonald

Thus we have a letter from the Cape Labour Party to Ramsay Macdonald (August 12 1908), then secretary of the British Labour Party, complaining that "... the interests of the savage Zulus, the comfort of the Chinese criminals in the compounds & the convenience of Indian coolies, seem to be nearer the heart of the English (sic) Labour Party than the continued oppression.... of their white brethren of the same flesh and blood...."

(Echoes of Ian Smith and the white Rhodesians' appeal to their 'kith and kin'.)

This division along racial lines was to run as a red thread throughout the history of the Labour and Socialist movement in South Africa right up to the end of apartheid.

Even the Communists and Trotskyists had difficulties in this regard. Although free of the racism and xenophobia of the South African Labour Party, which they subjected to intensive criticism, they accepted the orthodox Marxist view that the

struggle for socialism would be spear-headed by the organised industrial workers - and these were, for the most part, white, and, of course, male.

They tried to overcome this by all sorts of euphemisms, like "Black and white workers unite", or W.H Andrews - a founding father of the Communist Party - "equal pay for equal work".

Although the Communists made serious efforts to work in the Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union (ICU), and strongly opposed all racist legislation, it was not until Stalin's Comintern foisted the "Native Republic" thesis on the SACP that they began any in-depth study of the issues involved.

Until then the majority of communists and socialists saw the movement for national liberation and democratic rights as reformist goals, inherently subordinate to the working class struggle.

This thesis was strongly opposed by S.P. Bunting and Eddie Roux at the Sixth Comintern Congress in 1928, reflecting the views of the majority of South African communists at that time.

Trotsky

Although flawed, it turned the attention of the movement to the importance of what was then known as the "Native Question". Similarly, it was not till Trotsky's intervention in the debate with his "Remarks on the Draft Theses of the Workers Party of South Africa, 20th April 1935", that the Trotskyists began to relate the struggle for socialism with the struggle for



Mandela: jailed in 1964: President in 1997

The documents take us up to the outbreak of war, and its consequences as it affected the radical movement in South Africa.

Changed line

The SACP gave their full support to the war, until the Stalin-Hitler Pact drove them into opposition, only to change position again after the Soviet Union was invaded in June 1941.

The Workers Party, anticipating repressive legislation, voluntarily dissolved itself. On the Left, only the small remaining Trotskyist groups irrecon-

cilably opposed the imperialist war. The Fourth International Club, Cape Town and the Socialist Workers League, Johannesburg, issued this Joint Manifesto:

*Workers Of South Africa
Unite for the freedom of colonial peoples against the tyranny of Imperialist rule.*

Unite in the only just war - the war against the oppressors, the exploiters, against their perfidious agents in the working class.

Fight against capitalist rule, for the liberation of all oppressed regardless of race, colour or creed.

Build the Fourth International.

These documents represent the nervous system, the veins and arteries, the muscles and skeleton of South Africa's radical movement. We look forward eagerly to Volume Two.



Bloody Sunday: British troops vaulted over barricades to attack civil rights marchers. Most of the victims were shot in the back

No more Bloody Sundays!

David Coen

ON JANUARY 30 1972, British paratroops shot dead 13 unarmed civilians in Derry: one person died later from his wounds.

The Civil Rights Movement which over the previous 4 years had mobilised thousands against discrimination in jobs and housing, and which had been inspired by the mass protests against racial discrimination in the United States, was literally shot off the streets. Bloody Sunday showed the determination of the British ruling class to defend the Orange State literally to the death.

Already under growing pressure for interning hundreds of nationalists without trial the previous August, the British were forced to abolish the hated Unionist Government at Stormont in March 1972 and begin direct rule from Westminster.

Three lessons

The mainly nationalist and Catholic protesters drew three main conclusions from Bloody Sunday massacre. First, the Six County State could not be reformed and therefore had to be destroyed. Second, because the British stood behind the unionists, the real struggle was to drive the British out of Ireland. Thirdly, a large section of nationalists, particularly the youth, joined the IRA, believing that only military force could force British withdrawal.

In 1997 nationalists and socialists in Ireland are still faced by the same stark choice as in Derry 25 years ago. The unionists made it clear at Drumcree and the Lower Ormeau Road in the summer of 96 that they will not concede an inch - there will be no reforms of the Orange State.

The British ruling class led by John Major stands four square behind them, demanding a surrender

by the IRA surrender and threatening to unleash a sectarian bloodbath spearheaded by the loyalist death squads.

Those on the left in Britain, including Militant Labour and the Alliance for Workers Liberty who, as recently as last summer, were engaging the Progressive Unionist Party in fraternal debates, should consider that the reactionary alliance which demands IRA surrender extends from the loyalists, through the Unionist parties, to the British state itself.

Civil war

In the civil war in Ireland which ML and AWL claim to foresee, the loyalists will form the shock troops of British efforts to smash republicanism and socialism in Ireland. And why not. The British have armed and trained them in the RUC and the RIR and have used them in the secret war to kill Republicans from General Frank Kitson's Low Intensity Operations in the mid-1970s to well-attested recent cases.

Militant Labour and the Alliance for Workers Liberty in practice accept the British propaganda line on Ireland: essentially seeing the British as a benign force keeping two warring factions apart.

The ending of the IRA cease-fire was to them a provocation and IRA actions over the past twenty five years are seen as being mainly responsible for sectarianism. They completely leave out the diligent efforts of the British over the past century and more to whip up sectarianism and the structure of the Orange State itself which was built on sectarianism.

Mistake

No doubt they also believe Bloody Sunday to have been a tragic mistake which simply stirred up nationalist anger.

Bloody Sunday was not a mistake: it was a clear warning to nationalists that behind the bigots of

the Unionist Party and the Orange Order stood the might of the British State.

The British are not neutral peacekeepers without selfish strategic or economic interests in Ireland. Anyone who believes that the British spend £3 billion a year to keep the peace in Ireland or to uphold the rights of protestants in the Six North Eastern Counties betrays a naive and trusting nature not suited to a serious revolutionary.

While we in *Socialist Outlook* side with the oppressed against the oppressor in every case and do not put an equals sign between IRA violence and that of the British or its agents in Ireland, we do not believe that armed struggle will force the British out of Ireland.

The talks, even supposing the Republicans were allowed in, will not lead to British withdrawal and self determination; in fact, as Militant Labour have themselves pointed out, what is on offer at those talks is a deal which makes fewer concessions to the nationalists than the Sunningdale Agreement of 1974. In other words, it is a worse deal than was on offer more than 20 years ago.

Desperation

The British position since the IRA cease-fire of August 1994 comes not from strength however but from desperation. Major has been pulled and pushed by the conflicting forces inside the Tory Party and the ruling class as a whole.

There is no doubt that at several

points the British could have had a very favourable deal with the pan nationalist alliance of Dublin, the SDLP and Sinn Fein but at crucial moments these were lost because of the tensions which even the minor concessions necessary caused within the Tory Party.

Tensions

These tensions have usually been about policy on the EU rather than Ireland, but they had the effect of preventing any initiative which might have led to a deal.

Blair and Mowlem's "me too-ism" means that the second team has no alternative to the Tories. In Government their platitudes will sound good only until the next marching season.

With the Tories in opposition free to give vent to their ancient imperial and racial hatreds, Labour can be expected appease them and their Unionist brethren by repressing the nationalists - all in the name of opposing sectarianism of course.

In previous crises of de-colonisation the British ruling class were able to impose a solution, even if that meant sacrificing the interest of an important section of their own class in the interests of the class as a whole.

Major is incapable of doing that in Ireland without dividing the Tory Party from top to bottom. He also has the problem of being a minority government heavily dependent on Unionists votes at Westminster.

Opportunities

As the political crisis of the British State deepens it will present opportunities for socialists to divide and isolate its components, central to which is the Conservative and Unionist Party of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

Socialists in Britain have a duty to confront the activities of their own state in Ireland if only because as Marx said: a nation which oppresses another can never itself be free. We must protest against the appalling treatment of Republican prisoners in English jails, the most recent example being that of Roisin McAliskey. The prisoners are effectively British political hostages.

The message is clear: peace in Ireland and socialism in Britain can only come about through British withdrawal.

On the 25th anniversary of Bloody Sunday we must re-dedicate ourselves to that objective.

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man's attack recalled that by To many Palestinians, Friedman through the city's deserted streets. remain at liberty to swagger not apply to Jewish settlers, who not in Hebron. This curfew does to renew the curfew over the Pales- scores of terrified Palestinians, and Friedman, was to attack and beat The immediate response of the Hebron University in 1983, killing three students.

The immediate response of the Hebron market caused dozens of injuries, though luckily no deaths. Friedman, whose shooting spree in ended by Israeli soldier-settler Noam Tension has been further height- ultra-right wing community of Goldstein was a settler from the Baruch Goldstein on Hebron's 1994, when 29 Palestinian worship- ultra-right wing community of Goldstein was a settler from the Hebron is, for both Israelis and observers.

Hebron is, for both Israelis and observers. Hebron is no surprise to city of Hebron from the West Bank Israeli troops from the West Bank long-deferred withdrawal of Is- yahu to reach agreement on the Israeli PM Binyamin Netan- ian President Yassir Arafat and the time of writing) by Palestin- THE APPARENT failure (at Roland Rance

Although later arrested and sen- tenced to life imprisonment, the settlers - described by Israeli PM Yitzhak Shamir as "Good boys who have made a mistake" - were sub- sequently pardoned and released. During the Intifada, settlers' leader "Anyone who tells you we are leaving Hebron is telling you a lie. We are there, and we will be there forever."

Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu, Dec 29 1996

Rabbi Moshe Levinger twice denounced them as "thieves bent on destroying the prospects of peace". Meanwhile, according to reports from Israel, almost half of the cabi- net opposes Netanyahu's proposals regarding Hebron. It seems that the prospects are growing for the estab- lishment in Israel of a national unity government, dedicated to im- plementing the Oslo agreement.

The basis for this would be the draft agreement reached before last year's Israeli elections between Yossi Beilin and Abu Mazen, advi- sors to Peres and Arafat.

Under this plan, Israel would withdraw from further populated areas in the occupied territories, while remaining in open occupa- tion of about 80% of the area and maintaining overall military con- trol of the entire area.

A Palestinian bantustan would be established, with its 'capital' in the village of Abu Dis near Jerusa- lem (rather like proposing Potters Bar as capital of England), and the active support of Arafat and his forces.

This plan, supported by Labour as well as Likud parliamentarians and voters, has been rejected over- whelmingly in an opinion poll con- ducted by a Palestinian research institute in the occupied territories.

carve up Palestine

Sinister forces combine to

The Palestinian bantustan would have its 'capital' in the village of Abu Dis near Jerusalem (rather like proposing Potters Bar as capital of England)

Less than 10% of those polled were prepared to support the pro- posals, with over 70% opposed. Such a 'solution' would indeed, in the words of the Alternative Infor- mation Centre in Jerusalem, be a 'time-bomb solution'. A national unity government in Israel would withdraw from further populated areas in the occupied territories, while remaining in open occupa- tion of about 80% of the area and maintaining overall military con- trol of the entire area.

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