

Socialist Appeal

The Marxist voice of the labour movement

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Rise of Fascism in Europe?

Our 10th anniversary -
a great success!



- Should the unions dump Labour?
- Stephen Jay Gould - Tribute to a Great Scientist
- Don't get ill - The state of the NHS
- Leon Trotsky on the Popular Front

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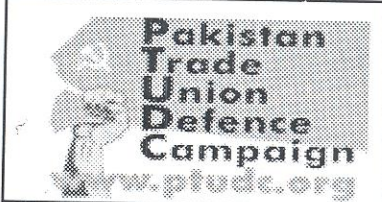
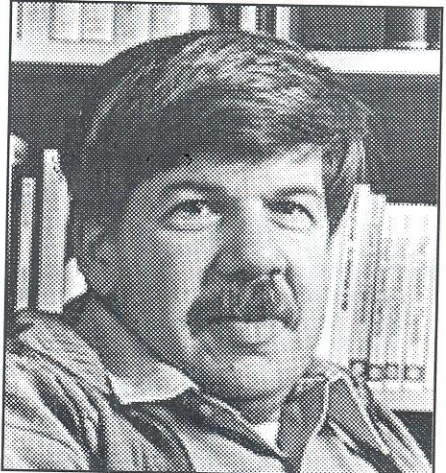
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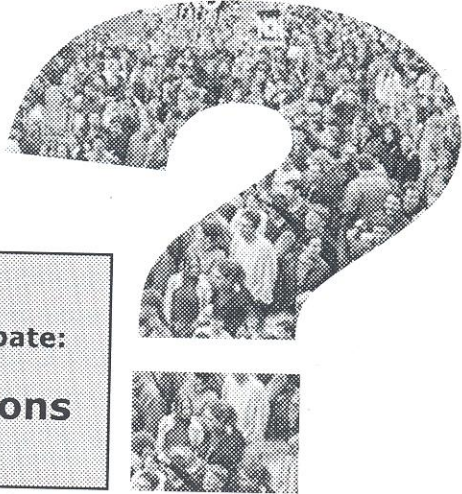


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**Free Hameed Khan!
 Defend Pakistan's Trade
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An appeal to support the
 Pakistan Trade Union
 Defence Campaign
 from Jeremy Dear

**After the French and
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 Is there a threat
 of Fascism in
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The deadline for articles for issue 103 is June 20th

One Scandal after another

The privatised railway system is a disaster. Once again it has wreaked death and devastation. The drive for shareholders' profits has completely undermined safety on the network. The latest crash at Potters Bar, responsible for seven more deaths and 90 injured, was tragically inevitable and will not be the last so long as private rail companies and contractors leech a living off the railways.

"It's a one off", stated Steven Byers, just before he resigned. What the hell is he talking about? At the site of each successive disaster crocodile tears accompany the cry of "never again" - and then nothing is done.

Liar

Lies have been piled upon lies. In regard to the Potters Bar disaster, Railtrack insisted that the points were installed only last December, when in fact they were seven or eight years old. Such was the concern about the state of these points that a 20mph speed limit was imposed in September before they were "repaired" in December and given the all clear. The "corner gauge cracking" was the same defect which caused the Hatfield disaster only five miles away from Potters Bar, where 18 people died.

Railtrack and Jarvis later confirmed that one of the two pairs of missing nuts on a rod keeping the point blades apart, which are believed to have caused the derailment, was found by the track 10 days before the fatal crash.

We were told bare-faced lies in an attempt to cover up their penny pinching incompetence. Rail workers had reported that bolts had been missing from the track three weeks earlier, but were

ignored. Even passengers complained. Their journeys through Potters Bar had turned into a "white knuckle ride" because of the state of the track.

Last year Jarvis Rail won the £50 million a year contract for the East Coast main line, where both the Hatfield and Potters Bar derailments occurred. Jarvis Rail is the same company which, as part of the Tube Lines consortium, stands to make £4 billion from the part-privatisation of the London Underground. Any new privatisation can only prepare new tragedies and must be stopped.

The railways were privatised into 100 separate companies, competing against one another to cut costs and boost the profits of their shareholders. Railtrack then subcontracted work to other companies, which, in turn, contracted out their work. This ended up with 2,000 rail infrastructure companies with some 84,000 temporary workers. At the same time, full-time permanent workers who knew the tracks were slashed by almost half to 15,000. This has been a recipe for one disaster after another. "The safety culture on the railways has been fundamentally undermined by fragmentation. We have contractors who use subcontractors, subcontractors who use agencies, agencies who use casual labour and they're all in it for profit not safety" says Bob Crow newly elected General Secretary of the RMT. "Maintenance needs to be brought back in-house now. We cannot wait for another tragedy like Friday's."

The relatives of the victims of previous rail disasters have been battling to get justice, but have been stonewalled. In relation to the Paddington rail

disaster where 31 people lost their lives, the Crown Prosecution Service announced that there was no chance of a prosecution of Railtrack bosses for manslaughter even though "the evidence in this case clearly reveals a history of corporate failings." Under pressure, they have been forced to reopen the criminal investigations, but there are no guarantees that the culprits will be brought to justice. So far, they have literally gotten away with murder.

Lord Cullen's inquiry condemned Railtrack for "lamentable failure" but hopes of a prosecution foundered because of long-standing loopholes in the law on corporate manslaughter which make it difficult to identify the "controlling mind" of a large company. Clearly the boards of directors are responsible for the tragedies and should be put on trial.

Passing the buck

British Transport Police will now reopen the case, but senior officers are concerned that key evidence will be off-limits. This is because any prosecution case will not be able to rely on evidence presented to Lord Cullen's public inquiry into the tragedy, which was given under immunity from prosecution!

The whole thing stinks. Companies pass the buck. The guilty are allowed to go free. The whole mess is allowed to continue. Punishing a few guilty corporate directors will not solve the chaos nor prevent future deaths, though. To do that, all the privateers must be kicked out of the railways.

Grudgingly, even the *London Evening Standard* has realised that the government has to step in and sort the

mess out. "Now, just as nothing can save Andersen [the auditors of Enron] from meltdown, the only remedy for Britain's railways after Potters Bar is a full blooded return to nationalisation of Railtrack." (13th May) The only people who refuse to see this are Blair, Byers and their cabinet.

But why stop at Railtrack? Privatisation of health and other services is preparing new disasters every day. This whole question of "free enterprise" is a lot of tosh. These privatised companies rely heavily on government subsidies. They are parasites. All they do is sit back and wait for their handouts - at our expense. Privatisation is a licence to print money and to destroy services.

The Labour government must be forced to act immediately! The unions must take up the fight inside the Labour Party. The railways must be renationalised without compensation to the fat cats. They have milked the industry and presided over disaster, tragedy and death. It is time this scandal was ended once and for all. The industry must be placed under workers' control and management, where those who work in the industry and the commuting public have a say in the running of the service. While private profit rules, disasters like Potters Bar will continue. The NHS and the Tube must not go the same way.

- No more privatisations. Profiteers out of public services.
- Renationalise the railways. For a fully integrated and publicly owned transport system.
- Trade unionists take up the fight for socialist policies inside the Labour Party.

Shamefully Low Wages... Support striking journalists in Spalding UK

National Union of Journalists' members are to strike at the Spalding Guardian in Lincolnshire, UK, where many journalists earn around half the UK average wage. At the moment trainees with university degrees are on £9,500 per annum. Qualified seniors with at least two years experience and all their professional qualifications earn just £12,000.

Government figures put the average wage for a non-manual worker in the UK at more than £24,000 with the overall average wage around £22,000.

Management have offered to increase the graduate starting rate to £11,000 and the newly qualified senior rate to £14,000. Other staff would receive a 2.5 percent rise.

These rates still compare badly with recent settlements so NUJ members at Spalding voted 100 percent for strike action in a ballot with an 85 percent turnout.

Spalding is the only office in the Johnston Press-owned Welland Valley Newspapers Group where the NUJ has recognition. At the other papers the pay is even worse.

Johnston Press is not poor. They have made record profits for the past two years and two months ago paid more than £500 million to buy Regional Independent Media, another newspaper group.

TIME FOR SOLIDARITY...

The journalists are to hold two strikes - from June 1 to June 5 inclusive and from June 8 to June 10 inclusive. Feel free to join the picket line at the Spalding Guardian office.

The first day of the strike - June 1 - is a Saturday so we are urging as many NUJ members and other trade unionists as possible to join us for a demonstration outside the paper at noon. Please bring your banners.

The strikers will need money. Please urge your union branch to hold a meeting and send a donation. You could organise a whip round in the workplace. Please make donations payable to "Spalding NUJ Chapel" and send them to Bieber House, Wilsthorpe, Stamford, Lincolnshire, PE9 4PE.

Messages of support can be a huge morale booster. Please take a few seconds to email your support to union rep Suzanne Roberts on suzanne@studio-33.co.uk

Please send polite emails protesting about the shockingly low wages to

Johnston Press's group human resources director Malcolm Vickers on mvickers@johnstonpress.co.uk

Thank you for your solidarity. ♦

Miles Barter
NUJ northern regional
organiser



FBU: All the way for 30K

This year's annual conference of the Fire Brigades Union, held as usual in Bridlington, was dominated by the demand for firefighters to be paid £30,000 a year. "All the way for 30k" was the call from delegates as it was made very clear that if negotiations with the management did not achieve the desired result then there would be a recall conference to approve a ballot for national strike action. At present professional firefighters get just £21,531 for risking their lives on a daily basis. Many at the conference noted the mood of support and sympathy towards the New York firefighters after September 11th and commented that such support did not extend, on the part of the bosses anyway, to ensuring that firefighters here received a living wage. In London the situation is now so bad that many firefighters cannot afford to live near their place of work due to the high cost of housing.

Some, according to Andy Gilchrist, FBU General Secretary, are having to sleep on station floors rather than travel the long distances backwards and forwards from home between shifts.

The FBU also joined other unions in rejecting the call to disaffiliate from the Labour Party and break the union link. It was made clear that the union should be seeking to strengthen the link in order to unify the movement but also to step up the fight for socialist policies and for a Labour government to reflect the demands and aspirations of the working class. This needs to be put into action so as to ensure that the full weight of the organised trade union movement is mobilised. The Labour link needs to be built up with trade unionists joining and becoming more active in the party itself, fighting for the Labour government to change course away from its current pro-big business line. ♦

"There's a new mood of confidence and a refusal to continue to accept poverty wages. Despite the downturn in advertising most newspaper companies are still making significant profits and our members are simply saying they want their fair share of the profits they helped create."

NUJ General Secretary Jeremy Dear

"Don't get ill"

I would like to write a few words about my experience in the UK as a Spanish nurse. This is my first year working as a nurse after having finished my studies. I work at St. Peter's Hospital in Chertsey, Surrey, which is an NHS hospital. I'm not in this country to learn English but because I need a job, and where I come from, the depressed south of Spain, it is very difficult to get one. I have now been working as a nurse in St. Peter's Hospital for four months and my experience has been quite shocking.

There are dozens of things that are in an appalling condition, starting with the hygiene of the hospital itself. The hospital is very dirty, which creates a dangerous situation for patients. This is due to the lack of personnel in the cleaning department, and to this difficulty we have to add the fact that cleaners are also delivering meals to patients. The quality of the food is also a great concern because the diet we offer is poor and it doesn't really follow the necessities of each patient, to the point that diabetic patients eat the same as non diabetics!

I think that working class people deserve a proper public service. It is a scandal that basic things like cleanliness and proper food in a hospital are put in danger because of privatization or because of the incompetence of the government, which is used very often as an excuse for privatization.

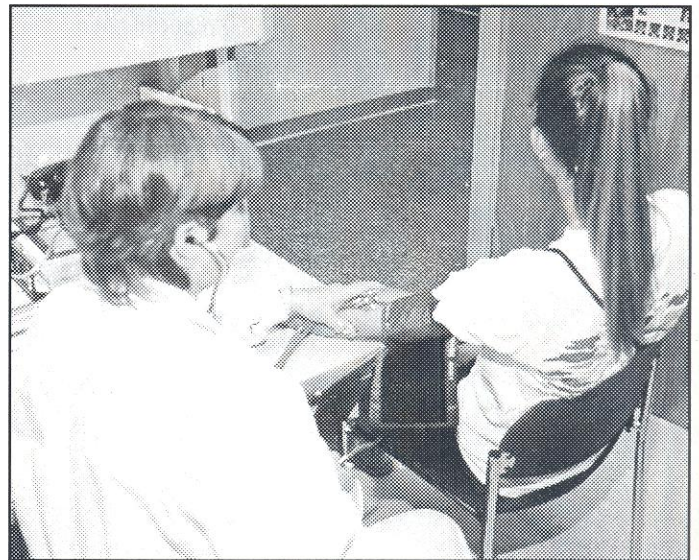
Another problem we are facing is the lack of nurses. This has got several causes. The job of a nurse is increasingly seen as second class, because it has a very low wage and it is a very hard job to do. For nurses with children it's nearly impossible to work because practically all the money you earn goes on expenses, to pay for crèche facilities, etc. The crèche facilities offered by the NHS are completely inadequate for the demand which exists. A rise in our wages and an increase in the availability of crèche facilities for nurses will be the first step to take if the government wants just to preserve the nurses that we have at the moment. And this is a very important issue to take into account. Nurses are vital for the proper running of a hospital. You can have a hospital more or less run-

ning for a couple of days without doctors, but you cannot do without nurses even for a couple of hours, and this is even more true nowadays, when nurses have to do all kinds of jobs that formally are not a nurse's responsibility.

The Labour government, which is supposedly meant to defend the interests of working class people, should plan our health services with the aim of providing good care instead of "as cheap as possible", which is what we have now.

I have not much time to watch television, but I have heard that there are some concerns about nurses coming from other countries. Don't believe everything you see on the tele. I am a qualified nurse and the only advice I can give you is - DON'T GET ILL! I know what I'm talking about. ♦

By a nurse (name withheld)



NEWS round-up

○ Workers at the National Galleries of Scotland are set to ballot for strike action.

Industrial action by members of the PCS could close the galleries and museums and lead to the cancellation of contracts for private functions.

Meanwhile Prospect members at English Heritage have won improvements to the original 3.5% pay offer as well as a restructuring of the pay system and a commitment from management to spend an extra

£500,000 a year on pay over the next three years.

○ College lecturers have voted by 2 to 1 to back a 48-hour strike over pay.

The move comes in response to the 1.5% pay offer from principals of colleges in England and Wales which union leaders describe as "insulting".

Action was set to take place as Socialist Appeal went to press.

○ The TUC has issued a call for British workers to get more bank holidays after a survey revealed workers in the UK lag behind the rest of Europe.

British workers get only 8 bank holidays compared to up to 14 in Spain and Portugal and many other countries still retain premium payments for those working on bank holidays whereas most UK employees do not receive such payments.

The report also revealed that union members in Britain fare better than their non-union counterparts averaging 29 days holiday a year compared to 23.

Crime and Punishment



By Rob Sewell

With every passing day, the Blair government seems hell-bent on stealing more clothes from the Tories.

The latest examples are taking child benefit away from those who have truant and unruly children, and docking housing benefit from tenants found guilty of anti-social behaviour. They come on top of a whole battery of measures, such as child curfews, anti-social behaviour orders, referral orders, child safety orders, parenting orders, action plan orders, detention and lock-up, and on the spot cash fines.

Additionally, Estelle Morris, the education minister, has announced that plans are in hand to permanently station police in as many as 4,000 schools in England.

Proposals are to be drafted which must overcome human rights objections, as well as the precise definition of anti-social behaviour offences. However, opponents have correctly pointed out that these latest proposals will simply hit the poorest sections of society, especially mothers on benefit, the hardest. They are penalising those forced to live in the most desperate conditions and situations.

For Blair, as for the Tories, the way of dealing with these social problems is by imposing stiff financial penalties on the most disadvantaged sections of society. It is only one step removed from the Dickensian methods

of discouraging idleness with the horrors of the workhouse, or the "deterrent" of cutting off the hands of thieves.

For them, social problems, whether they be unemployment, poverty, vandalism or crime are the fault of individuals. And these individuals need to be punished or "encouraged" to cure them of their unsocial habits.

Therefore, the unemployed must be forced into jobs, however badly paid or unsuitable, in order to get them off the unemployment register. They must be hounded back to work at whatever cost.

Socialists are opposed to crime, vandalism, hooliganism and unsocial activity. It is the working class who are affected most by these problems. To think that they can be solved through more police and financial penalties, without tackling the root causes of these problems, is a nonsense.

However, socialists recognise that crime, vandalism and unsocial activity is a product of the capitalist society that we live in. "Social being determines social consciousness" said Karl Marx. The great utopian socialist Robert Owen understood that a person's environment is decisive in moulding their outlook and attitudes. If you bring some one up in nice surroundings, with a good education, and decent living standard, then you will produce socially-minded decent people.

This was the approach of the socialist movement since

its inception. It was always the Conservative Establishment who sought to eradicate the problems of society through repression and stern laws. For them it was the individual that was to blame and not the capitalist system, based on the exploitation of man by man. In fact to protect the system, it was important to put the blame for the ills of society on the victims of capitalism.

The deliberate wholesale destruction of the mining industry by the Thatcher government and the creation of despair and hopelessness amongst young people are responsible for the scars of social dislocation and alienation. The destruction of swathes of manufacturing jobs, and their replacement by the dole queue or at best with low-paid dead-end jobs, has blighted once proud working class communities.

The last five years of Blair government has done nothing for these areas, which had eagerly awaited the end of the Tories and the coming to power of a Labour government. In a recent ICM poll, 40% said that life generally had got worse under Labour, with only 10% saying things had got better. "Worst of all", says the Daily Mirror, "they are convinced that Blair does not care enough about ordinary people - the very people who suffered the excesses of 18 Tory years and worked their ass off to get him into Downing Street." It is this disillusionment that resulted in the record abstentions in the 2001 general

election, and the record abstentions in the May local elections.

People are disillusioned with the politicians on offer. They have been let down. They are bitter and feel betrayed. The youth in particular are completely alienated by the Blair government, which is seen as little different from the Tories. They see no real future for themselves, especially in communities blighted by unemployment, poverty and squalor. At the same time, even under Blair, the rich are becoming even richer, while nearly 4 million children are officially living in poverty in 2002.

The lack of social amenities on the working class housing estates, the high cost of entertainment and transport, all serve to alienate young people, and tend to push them in the direction of vandalism, crime and anti-social behaviour. If they are lucky enough to have jobs, they are usually dead-end and on poverty pay. While not condoning unsocial behaviour, it represents an uncon-

scious rebellion against their conditions of life and the system that creates them.

Politicians beat the drum of "law and order" to show how tough they are in dealing with the problem. What they fail to point out is that the biggest criminals are the multi-millionaires in the boardrooms of big business, who everyday flagrantly evade laws on health and safety, pay little if any tax, and throw workers on to the scrap heap when it suits them. They preside over the dog-eat-dog, get-rich-quick society, that breeds greed and anti-social behaviour. Their whole morality is based on the rich dominating the weak and poor. And to maintain their ruling position in society, they seek to keep the lower class in submission through official morality, ignorance and repression. It is the capitalist system of society that creates these terrible social conditions which in turn create lumpen anti-social attitudes.

Blair came to prominence stating he would be "tough on crime, tough on

the causes of crime." We have heard a lot about being tough on crime and the need for more police and tougher laws, but there is complete silence on dealing with the causes of crime. This is no accident. Blair accepts the market economy and all the ills that accompany it. He is incapable of dealing with the causes of crime, as this would mean challenging the capitalist system.

Only with the eradication of capitalism, and its resulting poverty, unemployment, dead-end jobs and alienation, can real human relations be established. On the basis of a rational socialist plan of production, the resources of society, which would be brought into common ownership, would be used for the well-being of society. Unemployment would be abolished, and a living wage for all would be introduced immediately. The

working week could be dramatically reduced through the introduction of technology, allowing people the time to plan and run society. With rising living standards and a massive expansion of education, leisure and cultural activities, the alienation of class society would be overcome. Crime, hooliganism, vandalism and other elements of anti-social activity would become a thing of the past. The dog-eat-dog society would be relegated to the dustbin of history, along with the other relics of class society. Humankind would leap from the realm of necessity to the realm of freedom. The prejudices of class society would give way to the harmonious development of real human relations. ♦



Nice Little EARNER

The old saying about one law for the rich has been amply shown to be true with the publication of the details of the Queen Mother's will. Obviously not short of a bob or two, her entire estate has been left to the Queen. However under a deal worked out with the then Tory government in 1993, the Queen will not have to pay any inheritance tax! Given that the estate has been estimated as being worth around £50 million at least this represents a sizeable amount of money which will not be going into the public purse.

Ironically, the will asks for the Queen to make certain bequests from the estate to members of the Queen Mother's staff - who in turn will be liable to pay inheritance tax at the rate of 40%. No doubt some will say that it would not be right for the Queen to pay tax but in reply we should ask whose money is this anyway? In

truth all the money came from the "public sector" in the first place - although there is no evidence of any Royal joining Unison or the PCS! It is the state who has financed the institution of the Monarchy and kept them well stocked with palaces and race horses. As Marxists have long explained there is a reason for this to do with preserving the authority and prestige of the capitalist institutions and state even though the Monarchy no longer actually runs the country. Whereas the great and the good bleat on about the cost of public sector wages the cost of the Crown is something they are quite happy to bear even though they try not to publicise it too much.

Even the various Golden Jubilee celebrations we are having foisted on us during June, when we would all rather be watching the World Cup, are largely being paid for out of public money. The media complain that people are not being as loyal as was, so we are told, the case in 1977. Maybe this has something to do with feeling that schools and hospitals are more important than waving flags at wealthy scroungers hiding out in Buck Palace. ♦

Reinstate O'Reilly and McGlone

Fight for democracy in the TGWU

On April 26th 2001 two leading Irish trade unionists of the ATGWU, Brothers Michael O'Reilly and Eugene McGlone, were suspended after Bill Morris the General Secretary of the British TGWU intervened personally. This is an attack on union democracy, and thus on the interests of workers. The two were due to present a resolution at a meeting of the ITCU opposing the social contract, and it was likely to be passed. Socialist Appeal has been following their campaign for justice and reinstatement. We interviewed Michael O'Reilly to find out how the campaign is going....

Socialist Appeal: What has been the response to your campaign so far?

Michael O'Reilly: In the first days of the situation when Eugene McGlone, and myself were put on precautionary suspension last June, it was very difficult to campaign because we were forbidden to speak to members of the union, forbidden to go to the union offices, to talk to officials and other members of staff, or any member of the union. We were also forbidden to speak to any third party that had any connection

to the union. If you think about it, that covers pretty much everybody, so we were under a kind of house arrest, and therefore it was very difficult for us and our supporters to carry out a campaign. But notwithstanding that, the interest in the media in Ireland has been such that the case has been kept alive, and been kept before the membership. I was notified of my dismissal on the 4th May 2001, the dismissal formally took place one week before that on the 26th April, but I was not given formal notification till the 4th May. The media were

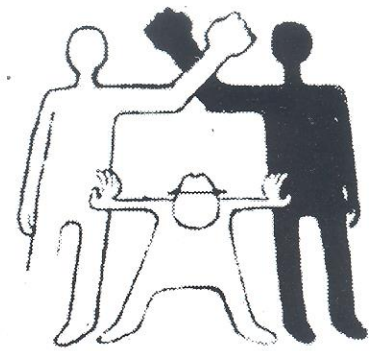
informed before I was, so I was able to learn of my dismissal on the radio. There is a lot of annoyance amongst the members about the way this was done, and that technically the union has been closed down for debate on this subject. The campaign itself is only really starting amongst the members. The only capacity the members have had to make a judgement on this was in the elections in Ireland for the General Executive Council. Two of the candidates, Jimmy Kelly and Norman Kennet, are absolutely known to be supporters of mine, they were very explicit in the material they put out and they topped the poll; Dawn Stuart, who was elected from the public services sector, made a very big issue of this and she also won the election. It is quite clear that where the members get the opportunity to make a judgement they come out in our favour. We want all of the material published, and our view is that we should be judged by the membership, the executives, and the constitutional committees of the union.

SA: What was the reason for your sacking? Was there a political agenda on the behalf of the leadership?

MOR: Well there are many views about this but there is not adequate proof at this stage. It is quite clear that our union traditionally campaigned in the republic for free collective bargaining against partnership, and the national pay deals we have had over the years. Obviously a lot of people in the ITCU and indeed the Irish government are not happy with that campaign, because it



WORKERS



TOGETHER

began to receive an echo right across the trade union movement. We succeeded in forcing a re-negotiation of the national agreement, something that has very rarely happened over the last 15 years; we were able to resolve in our favour disputes over inflation, extending the agreement to cover new groups of workers, and substantial increases above what was negotiated. That is very difficult to do when you are just one union campaigning in congress, but we succeeded in doing that. There is some evidence, and a lot of speculation, that the Irish government was in contact with Downing Street regarding the decision that the ATGWU Irish Regional Committee took to take in the train drivers union, ILDA (Irish Locomotive Drivers Association), and the consequent dispute that took place over that. There is a lot of speculation in the media that the Irish Government, the British TUC, and the ITCU were involved in this, and did not like the role that the ATGWU took. I think that is part of the backdrop to the reason why myself and Eugene were suspended, but I do not think that is the full story. The union has now unveiled a new strategy in the Irish region, which will have the effect of reducing largely the number of full-time officers thereby reducing the service to the membership, closing almost half of the offices. I think that is another part of the reason why we were removed. So there are political, administrative, and industrial decisions which I think played into the decision.

SA: Socialist Appeal has described the Social Contract as a 'Con Trick' for workers in Ireland, is this an accurate characterisation?

M O'R: I would describe it as Robin Hood economics, it has succeeded in redistributing wealth from workers to the large corporations. There has been spectacular growth in the Irish economy over the last number of years; there has been a very successful job creation campaign;

and there is almost 300,000 extra people working in Ireland. This has come about in the last 4 or 5 years. Over that period the actual share going to labour has decreased by about 16%, and that has largely gone to the corporations. We have a situation in Ireland now where we are paying the lowest corporation tax in the EU, we have a situation where banks, building societies, and service industries, have had their tax cut under these agreements from 38% down to 10%, which is absolutely phenomenal. We have opposed that because the big issues in Ireland are the questions of child care, transport, infrastructure, and health, and we need resources to be able to deal with these issues. These resources can be got by a different taxation policy in respect of redistribution of wealth, of course workers themselves can make a contribution to that if they are freed up and allowed to bargain locally. They can get some of the wealth that is being created, both into their pockets and contribute through the tax system via the government into better services.

The trade union movement has declined under these agreements, the percentage of trade union members in the private sector has gone from a figure of about 40% in the 1970s, down to about 25% today. So we are not organising, we have people in a kind of referendum club where they vote on wages and conditions every three years, and that is as much as the trade union movement does for them. So it is a very inadequate form of bargaining for workers, it has produced an unfair redistribution of wealth, and I believe it has served the workers of Ireland very badly, and the sooner we lay it to rest the better.

SA: Is it true to say that this period of 'Partnership' is reaching its limits, now that the bosses are turning on the workers more viciously?

M O'R: Well that may be so, I think when the unions are weakened enough

they will be discarded. But I can't make a judgement whether that is the case or not. We have just seen one of the most right-wing, Thatcherite parties returned, not with a substantial majority, but with the possibility of getting great influence in government at the moment. That is the Progressive Democratic Party, who went out with 4 seats in the last parliament and have come back with 8, they are a very right wing party, with a hard right agenda, and it looks like they will be in government with the majority party, Fianna Fail. The Labour Party has done very badly in the elections, but there has been a shift to the left in the vote of Sinn Fein and of the Greens who all have increased their votes. In the whole debate there was no intervention from the organised trade union movement, except the intervention I tried to make encouraging people to vote for the left parties, but nobody else tried to influence that debate, and that is a measure of how depoliticised the Irish Trade Union movement is.

SA: Socialist Appeal is read by many trade unionists in Britain, some in the T&G, what can we do in Britain to help your campaign?

M O'R: The campaign must be raised in the branches, I think we have to reject the idea that the members of the T&G cannot discuss our case. In my view the T&G is a union not a business; it should be run by a lay democracy, not a managing director. I think it is a real challenge to democratise the T&G and to make sure that the members find out what the issues are, and that no measures are put in place until the members make the decision. That should start with the demand that the Executive Council are given full and free access to all the information relating to our case, and the freedom to make their own decision, rather than being subject to the will of Bill Morris. ♦

The political levy debate: Should the Unions dump Labour



Tony Blair was accused recently of being "more Thatcherite than Thatcher." This was the verdict of the Transport Workers' Union after Blair's decision to privatise the defence yards at Faslane, Rosyth and Devonport. With thousands of jobs in jeopardy, this was a privatisation too far.

Blair has stolen the Tories' clothes and has taken the Labour Party far to the right. "The Labour Party is more pro-business, pro-wealth creation, pro-competition than ever before," Gordon Brown stated recently.

In 1997, millions voted Labour after 18 years of rotten Toryism. It was an overwhelming rejection of the Tories and all they stood for. Now, after five years of Labour government, patience is wearing thin. Blair continues with pro-business policies, public services are crumbling while the gap between rich and poor has grown into a canyon.

Blair has also linked up with the extreme right in Europe - Berlusconi and Aznar - to undermine workers' rights. Workers in Britain already have less workplace protection, work the longest hours and have the shortest holidays in Europe. Last year, the official figures for the number of deaths at work rose by 32%. There is even talk of increasing the retirement age to 70!

Blair, Berlusconi and Aznar

Blair, Berlusconi and Aznar have called on EU states to introduce "more flexible types of employment contracts"; to replace labour laws with "soft regulation"; and to increase "the effectiveness of public employment services... by opening this market to the private sector."

Anyone who dares oppose these pro-business policies, especially the trade unions, is denounced as a "wrecker" and a "small c conservative". This is an insult to the millions of public sector workers who are opposed to handing over hospitals to private profiteers. It is the Blairites who are presiding over declining services after years of neglect. They are Conservatives with a big C.

The mood in the unions is beginning to boil over. Last years Fire Brigades Union conference passed a resolution that called for its political fund to be used only to support organisations and candidates that support union policy. UNISON also passed a motion calling for a review of its political fund. The GMB has decided to cut £2 million to the Labour Party over the next four years, and the CWU and RMT have threatened similar action. Similar discussions will take place at a number of this year's trade union conferences.

The Socialist Alliance in their pamphlet "Whose money is it anyway?" by Matt Wrack, attempts to take up this question. "At a time when the Labour Government is carrying out sweeping attacks on public services the issue of the political fund is a vital one for every trade union member. This pamphlet, which argues for the democratisation of the trade union political funds so that union members' interests can be effectively represented, is presented as a contribution to the debate", states the pamphlet.

Who can oppose the "democratisation" of union funds, anymore than "democratisation" of the trade unions, or "democratisation" of the Labour Party for that matter? The members of the union must be able to decide the policy of the union, its

priorities and how its money is to be spent.

The pamphlet goes on to explain that the Labour Party was set up in 1900 by the trade unions as the



political expression of the working class in Parliament. Ever since the House of Lords ruling in 1909, the ruling class has repeatedly attempted to stop or undermine this trade union funding of the Labour Party, the latest being the Thatcher legislation on political funds.

And why was this? Clearly, the ruling class did not want the unions financing their own party, to represent the interests of working people. They regarded the Labour Party as a potential danger to themselves and their system, especially in times of social crisis.

Unfortunately, Matt Wrack's analysis skips over 90 years of Labour history from the Trade Union Act of 1913 to today's Blairite control of the Labour Party. In that 90-year period, the party has repeatedly swung to the left and swung to the right, has filled up and emptied out. After the highpoint of the left under Tony Benn, the last 20 years has witnessed an emptying out of the workers' organisations and a sharp swing to the right at the top of the movement, not only in Britain but internationally. This reflected the period of relative "boom", and the weakening of the class struggle. It was epitomised by the victories of Thatcher in Britain and Reagan in the United States.

This shift to the right also reflect-

ed itself in the victory of 'New Realism', social partnership or class collaboration within the trade unions. In the Labour Party it resulted in the victory of Blairism. The Blairites are in reality Tories that have infiltrated and taken over the tops of the party. But we should remember that this is nothing new. We just have to recall the role of Ramsay MacDonald.

More recently, the 1964-70 Wilson Labour Government carried through an incomes policy and attempted to introduce anti-trade union legislation. This created widespread opposition within the labour movement. In South Wales miners' lodges threatened to disaffiliate from the Labour Party. These policies led to defeat in 1970, and prepared a sharp swing to the left.

The same process took place in 1974-79, where the pro-business policies of the Wilson/Callaghan Labour Government pushed the unions into opposition. This was to culminate in the Winter of Discontent. The defeat of 1979, again pushed the Labour Party dramatically to the left.

Events decide. Events fill out the ranks of the movement, and experience pushes them to the left. An absence of such events, along with the lack of any lead from the left - who lack a programme and a perspective - leads in the opposite direction. If the perspective before us was one lacking in the events necessary to shake up the entire movement, then maybe Blair could complete his project - to wreck the Labour Party. But does anyone seriously propose such a perspective?

"So the Blair 'Project' can be viewed as an attempt to reverse the decision of 1900, that working people needed a separate political organisation to represent their interests. Indeed, Tony Blair has stated that he regrets that the split between Labour and the Liberals took place. The Blair Revolution is the process not

of modernising the Labour Party but of taking it back a hundred years", states the Socialist Alliance pamphlet.

It goes on to state, "all this creates a dilemma for the Blairites. They wish to distance themselves from the unions but unfortunately the unions continue to be a major source of funding for the party."

Unfortunately the author is missing the point. The 'Project' to destroy the Labour Party has ground to a halt, not because of the lack of alternative money, but the opposition from the Labour movement. The cracks in the Parliamentary Party are a reflection of the deep-seated opposition that exists to Blair's policies. The 'Project' is even now unravelling.

Stay in and fight

It is to be welcomed that Wrack, unlike others on the ultra-left, argues against the unions disaffiliating from the Labour Party. He also says people should stay in and fight. However, he is trying to face in different directions, and reduces the struggle against Blairism to a question of how the unions should spend their money. "The present political funding of New Labour by the unions means trade unionists are paying huge amounts of money to Labour in order to be ignored." Bro. Wrack says we could better spend the money in fighting privatisation. However, when has the fight against privatisation been a problem of finance? The problem has been the lack of willingness on the part of the union leaders to effectively lead such a struggle.

In any case to cut back the financial support for Labour is not going to defeat Blairism. BLAIR WANTS TO BREAK THE UNION LINK. He has considered state financing as an alternative. A fight against Blairism can only be a political struggle within the Labour Party. After all, who put Blair into the leadership in the first place? The bulk of the

unions supported Blair. The trade union leaders still support him.

"Unfortunately, the union representatives on Labour's National Executive have been some of the most loyal Blairites going", states the pamphlet. "What is the point of electing trade union delegates onto Labour's executive if they subsequently ignore the policies of their own union at every opportunity?" But surely that is the point! If they are not representing the members they should be removed and replaced with representatives who will.

When opposition to PFI was raised on the NEC, most, if not all of the union representatives supported Blair. It is the union leaders who keep Blair in power, not the members' money! In UNISON, it is well-known that the political fund - APF - rather than fighting for union policy in the Labour Party, is a way of bringing Blairite policies into UNISON. And whose responsibility is that?

The trade unions control 50% of the vote at Labour's Annual Conference. They have a massive influence and say in the party. Yet the trade union leaders have allowed Blair to get away with murder! They have given him a free hand. It is time we put a stop to this!

The logic of the Socialist Alliance's argument, despite any protestations to the contrary, would be disaffiliation. This would mean running away from a fight the unions easily have the power to win.

The attempt by the Alliance to defeat the Tory policies of New Labour by standing in elections is a blind alley. The last 100 years have proved that you cannot influence the Labour Party from outside. It has been tried repeatedly and failed.

The key to the Labour Party is the trade unions. The Labour Party was founded to represent the working class, but it has been hijacked by a bunch of middle class Tories. It is about time the unions

reclaimed the party they created.

A trade union led campaign to reclaim the party raised recently by Bob Crow and Mick Rix would find a big echo. The left unions have a responsibility to launch such an initiative. They must convene a conference open to all trade unionists to organise reclaiming the party. This would become the focal point around which the mounting opposition to Blairism inside the movement could rally, and provide a real means to defeat Blair inside the party. The unions should sign up their members to Labour not to support Blair but to stop privatisation, to renationalise the railways, to protect the NHS. Union delegates should flood ward branches, CLPs, conferences and executives to defend union policy and fight to reclaim the party.

That means a struggle for an alternative programme to the pro-business policies of Blair. It means a fight for an alternative socialist programme, based upon the end of PFI and PPP.

Demand your union takes up the fight! Join with us in the struggle to defeat Blairism and reclaim the labour movement for socialist policies! ♦

✚ Don't play into Blair's hands! Don't contract out - contract in!

✚ No more privatisation. Hands off the NHS.

✚ Renationalise the railways, and other privatised companies.

✚ Trade Unionists Reclaim Labour

✚ Defeat Blairism

✚ For Workers' MPs on workers' wages.

✚ Fight for socialist policies

The Struggle Goes On

On May 21st Socialist Appeal organised a successful public meeting in central London

by Sheila Clark

More than 100 people packed Conway Hall, with some having to stand, to hear Ted Grant launch his new book "History of British Trotskyism". The event was also to celebrate 10 years of Socialist Appeal - and 75 years of Trotskyism.

Chairing the meeting, Phil Mitchinson, said that Conway Hall was an historic venue, which had witnessed innumerable workers meetings. He said that the speakers on the platform had a joint total of 152 years' experience in the Trotskyist movement. Ted Grant, he said, was "the living embodiment of Trotskyism."

Greetings were read from Austrian young socialists, who paid tribute that: "Comrade Ted has kept the flame alive through very difficult times and inspired us to join the fight for socialism." Esteban Volkov, Trotsky's grandson, also sent greetings.

Mere Theoreticians

Alan Woods, editor of Socialist Appeal and a close collaborator of Ted's for over 40 years, spoke first.

He said that when the Soviet Union and Stalinist regimes collapsed ten years ago, the strategists of capital proclaimed the 'end of Socialism'. Fukiyama thought that the class struggle had finished. But colossal instability had followed.

Recent events had included an Italian general strike, events in Venezuela and - in Argentina - the beginnings of revolution. "What else is it when you have three presidents in a week? The only thing lacking was a revolutionary party."

He said: "I fight for the old ideas because we're still faced with the old prob-

lems."

75 years ago, Trotsky and the left opposition had been expelled from the Communist Party and persecuted. Many of them were imprisoned and executed - and Stalin thought he had solved the 'problem' - "But you can't kill a good idea."

"The Communist Manifesto, which is 150 years old, describes the present world situation and explains it."

Members of the Editorial Board of Socialist Appeal had been dismissed from Militant 10 years ago as 'mere theoreticians'. Their first fundamental task had been to defend the basic ideas of Marxism. The book "Reason in Revolt" had been published and became an international bestseller.

The website, Marxist.com, which he called the 'brand leader', had attracted 1,000,000 visits up to November 2001 and increasing numbers of visits (several thousand) every day.

Alan pointed to the beginnings of reaction to the capitalist market. He said, "The germs of revolution are present in America. There are a few surprises in store."

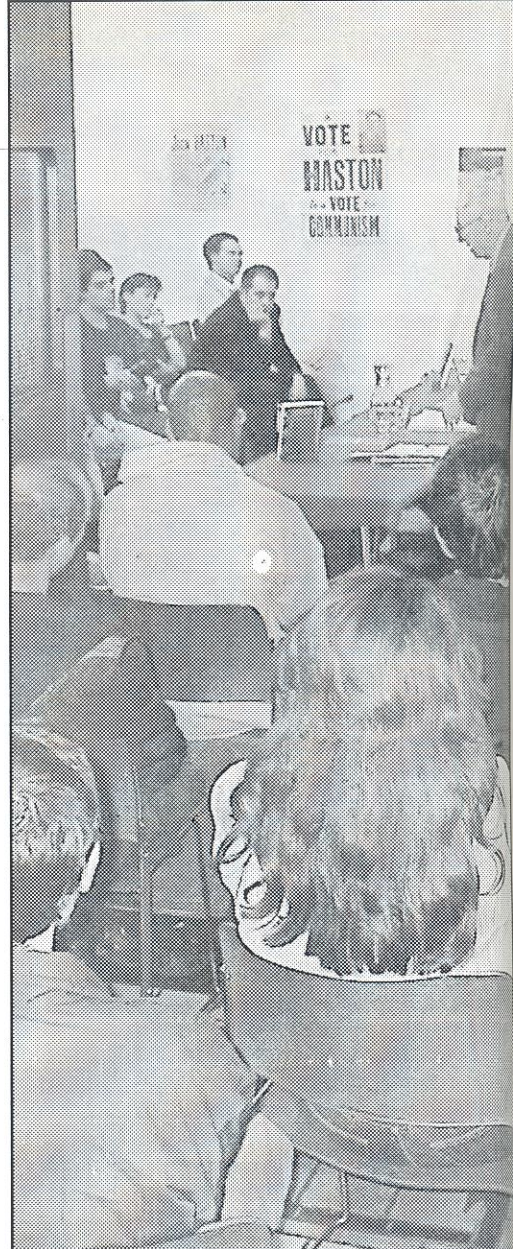
He believed that people were looking for ideas - not agitation - they already knew how poor they were! "Marxism, as Lenin said, is all-powerful because it is true."

"We are optimistic - we have faith in our class, the proletariat. With these ideas, we will not fail."

Paying Tribute

The next speaker, Rob Sewell, talked about the history of the Trotskyist movement. He said: "The new book sets the record straight about our origins."

He explained how Ted Grant had been recruited by Ralph Lee in Johannesburg in 1928 and they had come to work in Britain in December 1934.





"The real history of British Trotskyism begins with the formation of the Workers' International League (WIL) in early 1938. The leadership of Ralph Lee, Millie Lee, Jock Haston and Ted Grant made history in establishing the most successful Trotskyist group in Britain."

With the formation of the WIL, "Eight individuals plus Ted Grant turned their backs on sectarianism and aimed for the broad layers of the working class."

He said that during the Second World War they had argued not for pacifism, but for a revolutionary war against Hitler.

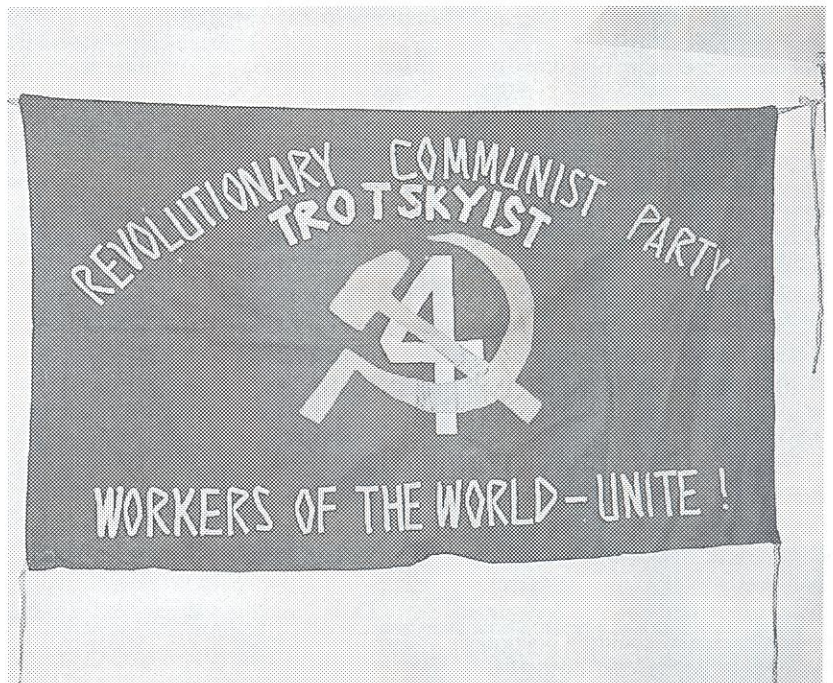
After the invasion of Russia by Hitler in June 1941, he said that the Stalinists took on "a rabid chauvinist and strike-breaking role" which was decisively challenged by the WIL.

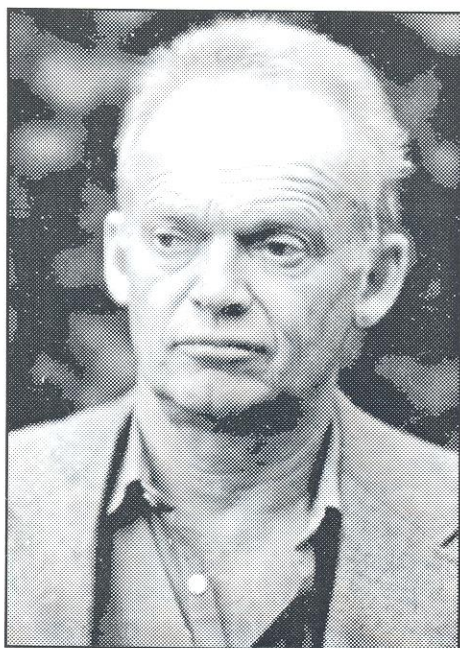
They had gone on to found the Revolutionary Communist Party in 1944, which stood Jock Haston as a candidate in the Neath by-election in 1945. The campaign helped to establish an important base in Wales.

Rob went on to pay tribute to many of those who had been involved in the struggle over the years, including miners' leader Trevor James, the Deane family in Liverpool, especially Jimmy, and Pat Wall who had "connected with the working class and helped establish a base on Merseyside."

He criticised the original Fourth International, which had made one blunder after another. Gerry Healy and Mandel had undermined the movement from within.

Socialist Appeal had since pub-





Greetings from Esteban Volkov

From Mexico, where Leon Trotsky fought his last battle, I send my warmest greetings to Comrade Ted Grant. In recognition of his tireless and uninterrupted struggle for the cause of the working class and socialism under the banner of Trotskyism.

Despite all the avalanche of calumny launched by the bourgeoisie and the media, today the ideas of Leon Trotsky maintain their absolute relevance and correctness. This is the only way forward!

I wish you every success with your work.

With revolutionary Greetings.

*Esteban Volkov
Coyoacan, Mexico City
May 2002*



lished "Lenin and Trotsky - What They Really Stood For" which had sold well internationally and now just been published in Russian.

Enduring Optimism

The final speaker, Ted Grant, said; "Our methods, ideas and policies have been shown to be correct again and again in the history of the movement."

He emphasised: "The fundamental ideas of Marxism and Trotskyism are the same. This meeting could be the start of a new phase in the movement. We must find fresh layers of the class - students and youth - to win to the ideas of Marxism."

Floor speakers included Al Richardson who spoke about how the WIL had been rooted in the working class and how Haston had been so concerned to develop each new comrade politically, that you could say he 'fell in love' with

every recruit.

The meeting hall included a colourful display of original posters from the Revolutionary Communist Party around the walls and the London Region RCP banner from the 1940s. A collection of photographs from the early years of Trotskyism was also on show.

Many speakers paid tribute to Ted's enduring optimism and Fred d'Allessandro said: "Ted has preserved the ideas. We should be absolutely confident that we can build on the traditions of Trotskyism."

The enthusiastic meeting raised more than £2,000 in a collection. Nearly 100 books were sold, together with a quantity of other material.

The "History of British Trotskyism" by Ted Grant is available from Socialist Appeal.

Order from the website - or from your usual seller. ♦



order your copy now!

Details:

History of British Trotskyism

By Ted Grant

**Approx. 250 pages
Illustrated
Wellred Publications
Special
readers price: £6.00
(normal price £9.99)**

**Reserve your book! Send £6 plus £1.20 p&p to
Wellred,
PO Box 2626,
London N1 7SQ**

Unison London Weighting Strike

The strike on Tuesday 14th of May was solid. Several thousands marched through central London, there were smaller marches in other areas, and most major workplaces were picketed.

Pam Woods, UNISON Convenor (Personal Capacity)

The dispute centres around what is called the London Weighting, which is the mechanism whereby workers inside London are paid extra to take account of the higher cost of living in London; what the London Weighting does not take account of is the way that the cost of living and working in London has greatly increased over the last period.

Public sector workers, even those on the higher end of the pay scale, usually cannot find a house, or cannot afford to live near their work. When they do find a place, miles away, the rent is so high that they have little left, the travel costs in London are high, childcare is expensive, and many are finding it hard to live on wages which have been falling behind other sectors. The London Weighting allowance currently stands at £2000p.a. for inner London, and £1300p.a. for outer London. The dispute is calling for this to be increased to £4000 for all public sector workers in London.

Given the reasons for the dispute it is no surprise that some of the most militant of the voices on the demonstration were those of the low paid, and especially the young low paid workers. These are precisely the people who most bare the brunt of the low wages, and high living costs, and those who stand to gain the most out of a victory.

The main issue however that arose from the action was the need for unity and greater cooperation with other unions in the struggle. Workers in other trade unions were very friendly towards our action, especially the teachers. Even the police who stewarded the demonstration were very sym-

pathetic towards us having just had their own pay claim settled. Virtually all workers in the public sector are facing the same problems, and other unions are in the middle of action on the same issue. This shows the potential to combine action with the other unions involved e.g. NUT, NATFHE, T&G, GMB.

An issue that must be resolved in the future is the status of workers whose jobs have been privatized. The government would like to increase the trend to transfer jobs along with services into private hands. At the moment these people are covered by the

same pay, conditions, and collective bargaining deals as their counterparts who are still in the public sector. These workers were not balloted for this dispute and so could not participate in defending and fighting for their rights; this is a potentially divisive issue.

Unison has now agreed to ballot those workers along with other public sector workers.

Workers in the GMB and T&G were also left in a difficult situation because they were reluctant to cross the picket line of their colleagues but had not been given any advice by their union. There was certainly some frustration among these

workers that their unions have been dragging their feet. However the GMB have just balloted on industrial action and the indication is that the members have voted very heavily in favour.

This dispute and the disputes of other unions show that there is a growing mood for struggle; public sector employees are reaching the end of their patience. Another two strikes are planned by Unison on June 21st&22nd, the priority now is to carry the struggle forward, for greater mobilization, and coordination with the other unions involved in the dispute. ♦

PCS: Right Defy Democracy

Over the last period there has been a trend for the election of an increasing number of left trade union leaders, this is a reflection of a growing mood of militancy. Parallel to this change has been the trend of the right-wing to attempt to cling to power at all costs, like squirming insects on the bottom of a damp brick, they cling on for dear life.

Recently we have seen the manoeuvring of Sir Ken Jackson and the AEEU bureaucracy to prevent defeat in the election at the hands of Derek Simpson; the friendly approach they have developed in relations with the bosses does not extend to some of their own colleagues; allegations of ballot rigging and other irregularities are flying in the press. Nevertheless, the left are still in a very strong position to win it.

Meanwhile in the NUM, Scargill has appointed himself to the specially created post of "Honorary Life President", a grand title with a financial package to match. The future of the British coal industry is in jeopardy, and it might be difficult for a lot of miners to see how Scargill's new life presidency will help save their jobs.

The most recent high profile attack on democracy was the report that the PCS General Secretary, Barry Reamsbottom, intends to go back on his initial agreement to retire from office

on June 1st, 2002; the position agreed by delegates at PCS conference. 18 Months ago Mark Serwotka stood for and won the General Secretary election, much to the shock of the right, and even some on the left. He was due to take over this month.

In a hurriedly called meeting of the newly elected right-wing NEC (itself facing an investigation into the validity of its election procedures) Reamsbottom was endorsed as General Secretary till 2004, going back on the decision of the members. The PCS President, Janice Godrich, has said that this meeting breaks the union rules and is therefore unconstitutional, and will take the issue to court to have its decisions reversed, if necessary.

The question on all honest trade unionists lips is why, when workers are increasingly coming under attack, are the right-wing leaders trying to stifle democracy, and debar elected leaders from doing the job of representing the members interests? Not by the bureaucrats preferred method of getting round the bosses banquet table and negotiating 'voluntary redundancies'; but by opposing the measures of the bosses, and leading a fight to defend jobs, and improve wages and conditions. Manoeuvre as they might, the right-wing, and their class collaborationist line will not survive the new period of struggle opening up. ♦

Our 10th anniversary



75 years of Trotskyism

75 years of Trotskyism - The Popular Front

By Phil Mitchinson

Trotsky's insistent call for a united front of workers' organisations to defeat fascism in Germany went tragically unheeded. Had the Comintern and the German Communist Party adopted the genuine Leninist policy advocated by Trotsky, Hitler would never have come to power. The whole history of the twentieth century would have been transformed.

The Stalinists were incapable of an honest appraisal of their errors. Instead they made another 180 degree turn. They had gone full circle and now arrived back at their starting point, having learnt nothing along the way. They returned to the errors which, without the intervention of Lenin and Trotsky, would have doomed the Russian revolution to defeat. They resurrected the essentially Menshevik position that Stalin had pursued before Lenin's return to Russia in April 1917.

Faced with the fascist menace they deemed it necessary to unite not only with the socialists and social democrats, but also with so-called progressive capitalists!

Such leaps and zig-zags had become characteristic of Stalinism, basing itself less and less on the interests of the international proletariat and more and more on the needs of the bureaucracy as it consolidated its grip on power.

The German catastrophe and the subsequent lack of dissent from the Communist Parties internationally had led Trotsky to conclude that the Comintern was dead as a force for revolution and that a new international would be required. The Spanish revolution and the events in France in 1936 marked another turning point in the degeneration of Stalinism and the struggle of Trotsky to defend the ideas of Marx, Lenin and Bolshevism.

This was the period of the Popular Front, which Trotsky defined as a "strike breaking conspiracy."

Seventy years ago this month, in June 1936, the working class of France had power within its reach.

The betrayal of the Socialist and Communist leaders snatched defeat from the jaws of victory. Four years later the Nazis were in Paris.

Following the German catastrophe the French Communist Party (PCF) adopted the new line of the Comintern and united not only with other workers' parties but also with the bourgeois liberals of the Radical Party to form a 'popular front.' The logic of this, the Stalinists claimed, was to guarantee the maximum unity of anti-fascist action. One of the key features of the popular front is that it abuses the workers' natural desire for maximum unity.

Middle class

The Popular Front, it was claimed, would win over the support of the middle class by implementing reforms while remaining within the capitalist system. Yet it was precisely this system which was ruining the middle class. The only way to win and keep the support of the middle layers is with a clear and bold socialist programme, not by deals with their political exploiters.

The Popular Front's programme of reforms, such as the 40 hour week, ensured a big majority in the 1936 elections. The Radical Party fell to third place, losing half a million votes, while the PCF's share doubled to one and a half million. In reality, the Radicals only kept the votes they got because of the support of the workers for the Popular Front. Thus the workers' parties pro-

vided the liberals with a lifeline, rather than their inclusion in the Popular Front being responsible for gaining the support of the middle class.

At the beginning of June the new Popular Front government took office. Expecting big things from 'their' government, many workers who had been on strike or occupying their plants during May returned to work. When they got there, however, they found that nothing had changed. The movement exploded anew. By the second week of June, the movement had spread across the country. Trotsky rightly commented, "the French Revolution has begun."

The workers were drawing profound conclusions from their own experience. They were gaining confidence and broadening their demands. Terrified, the bosses conceded to one demand after another. Their fear was matched only by that gripping the workers' leaders. Despite the immense breadth and power of the workers' movement PCF leader Maurice Thorez declared that the time was not right, the movement was premature. The policy of this 'leader' of the working class was to prevent defeat by refusing to fight. Why didn't the workers understand, they must defend capitalist democracy against fascism first, and not



Leon Blum

advance their own demands until later? The consequence would be the worst defeat imaginable.

The workers were in control of the factories, they had the support of the countryside, and increasingly of the troops and even the police. Thorez chose this moment to declare "we must know how to end a strike."

Had the workers' strike committees been linked together across the country, drawing in their growing support amongst the peasants and the soldiers, the revolution could have been carried out quite peacefully. The Popular Front would have been even shorter lived than its cousin the Kerensky government in Russia. A French October would have altered the entire course of human history. Had the PCF followed the policy of Lenin and the Bolsheviks. They did not. They followed the line of Moscow and the Popular Front, even as a revolution unfolded before them.

In the face of such a movement, reaction would have been swatted like a fly. The PCF leaders stuck stubbornly to the Moscow line though. The workers must not try to take power, only by keeping the Popular Front together could fascism be defeated. After all, wasn't that why they had entered the Popular Front?

It was precisely the role of the workers leaders and the Popular Front which led the workers to defeat, and led to the eventual triumph of fascism. Had Stalin's version of Menshevism been maintained by the Bolsheviks in the summer of 1917, if Lenin had not succeeded in rearming the party, fascism would have triumphed in Russia first. Now Stalin's line was leading the revolution to defeat and paving the way for fascism across Europe.

Across the border in Spain, the Stalinists and the Popular Front were preparing an even greater tragedy.

Faced with the threat of Franco, and again in spite of the awe-inspiring power demonstrated by the revolutionary movement of the workers - Trotsky commented that they could have made ten revolutions - the Spanish Stalinists, towing the Moscow line, declared that the revolution must not go beyond "democratic" tasks. In their empirical model, the revolution was divided into sharply defined stages. Stage one was to defeat fascism and secure capitalist democracy. This had to be completed before there could be any mention of the workers own demands for socialism. Any attempt by the proletariat to go beyond the limits of capitalism, they declared, would be premature and fatal. It was the Menshevism of the Stalinists which would prove fatal for thousands and thousands of workers.

Trotsky exposed the blatant flaws in

this 'theory':

"Fascism ... is not feudal but bourgeois reaction. A successful fight against bourgeois reaction can be waged only with the forces and methods of the proletarian revolution ...

The Bolshevik point of view ... takes the theory of permanent revolution as its starting point, namely, that even purely democratic problems, like the liquidation of semi-feudal land ownership, cannot be solved without the conquest of power by the proletariat; but this in turn places the socialist revolution on the agenda."

"The Spanish revolution once again demonstrates that it is impossible to defend democracy against the methods of fascist reaction. And conversely, it is impossible to conduct a genuine struggle against fascism otherwise than through the methods of the proletarian revolution. Stalin waged war against 'Trotskyism' (proletarian revolution), destroying democracy by the Bonapartist measures of the GPU. This refutes once again and once and for all the old Menshevik theory, adopted by the Comintern, in accordance with which the democratic and socialist revolutions are transformed into two independent historic chapters, separated from each other in point of time. The work of the Moscow executioners confirms in its own way the correctness of the theory of permanent revolution."

Trotsky on Spain

Trotsky's writings on Spain are a treasure trove and will form the subject of another article in this series.

It is impossible to address the question of the Popular Front without referring to those writings however. In relation to the Stalinists 'theory' Trotsky wrote:

"After a delay of several decades- and what decades!- the Comintern has fully rehabilitated the doctrine of Menshevism. More than that, the Comintern has contrived to render this doctrine more 'consistent' and by that token more absurd. In czarist Russia, on the threshold of 1905, the formula of 'purely democratic revolution' had behind it, in any case, immeasurably more arguments than in 1937 in Spain ... The theoreticians of the Popular Front do not essentially go beyond the first rule of arithmetic, that is, addition: 'Communists' plus Socialists plus Anarchists plus liberals add up to a total which is greater than their respective isolated numbers. Such is all their wisdom. However, arithmetic alone does not suffice here ... On the contrary, the political alliance between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, whose interests on basic questions in the present epoch diverge at an angle of 180 degrees, as a general rule is capable only of paralyzing the rev-

olutionary force of the proletariat ... The workers and peasants can assure victory only if they wage a struggle for their own emancipation. Under these conditions, to subordinate the proletariat to the leadership of the bourgeoisie means beforehand to assure defeat in the civil war."

Worse still the Spanish workers were being asked to subordinate themselves not to the bourgeoisie but to its shadow. The overwhelming bulk of the capitalists went over to Franco. They could see that a revolutionary mass movement in the prevailing circumstances, no matter how it started, would end up by challenging private property. Unlike the Stalinists they recognised, in their own way, the permanent revolution. Such a revolution could not be defeated by democratic means, so the Spanish bourgeoisie, save for one or two stragglers, went with Franco.

Counter-revolutionary

The Popular Front marked a new turning point in the degeneration of Stalinism. "I once defined Stalinism as bureaucratic centrism," wrote Trotsky, "and events brought a series of corroborations of the correctness of this definition. But it is obviously obsolete today. The interests of the Bonapartist bureaucracy can no longer be reconciled with centrist hesitation and vacillation. In search of reconciliation with the bourgeoisie, the Stalinist clique is capable of entering into alliances only with the most conservative groupings among the international labor aristocracy. This has acted to fix definitively the counterrevolutionary character of Stalinism on the international arena."

Events in Spain confirmed the further degeneration of the Comintern and the Russian bureaucracy. Not just through error, but now in their own material interest, they were playing a counter revolutionary role.

Trotsky considered the Popular Front to be the most vital question of the day. It continued to be so for decades. Through this policy countless thousands of workers perished. The tragedy of the Popular Front was repeated in Chile from 1970-73. Behind the facade of Popular Unity, the reaction of Pinochet prepared. Thousands upon thousands of Chilean workers paid with their lives.

Those who today genuinely wish to defeat reaction, to advance the cause of the socialist revolution must draw this lesson above all others, it is necessary to learn from history or repeat its mistakes and pay dearly. Study the history of the revolutionary movement, study the ideas and the life's struggle of Leon Trotsky. ♦



After the French and Dutch Elections

Is there a threat of Fascism in Europe?

By Alan Woods

After the recent elections in the Netherlands, the attention of the world's media concentrated on the spectacular advance of the so-called Fortuyn's List - the ad hoc right-wing, anti-immigrant formation formed around the recently assassinated Pim Fortuyn.

Coming hard on the heels of the electoral advance of Le Pen in France, many people are asking whether politics in Europe are heading to the right, and even whether there is a risk of fascism.

However, it is necessary to take things in proportion. The election in the Netherlands presented no clear winner. The Christian Democrat party took 43 of the parliament's 150 seats, meaning it is now the most powerful group in the parliament. The late Pim Fortuyn's political allies, who stood for the Lijst Pim Fortuyn (LPF) party on a variety of issues including - most notably - an end to immigration, took 26 seats.

As in France, the big loser was the Socialist Party. Labour lost 12 seats, giving it just 23, which means that the eight-year coalition led by the Labour leader Wim Kok is at an end. Its liberal VVD and Democrat66 coalition partners also suffered losses.

The Christian Democrat leader, Jan Peter Balkenende, is almost certain to become the next prime minister. However, he must strike deals with the parties that he hopes will back him in government. The VVD Liberals (probable partners) would take his grouping to 66 seats, but that still leaves the LPF - a Christian Democrat, VVD and LPF coalition would give the government 92 seats, a comfortable majority.

Balkenende has said he will not agree to Fortuyn's line on immigration as the price of counting the LPF MPs among his political allies but has not ruled out forming a coalition. Naturally, these "respectable" gentlemen do not rule out the support of anyone who promises to guarantee their comfortable jobs and privileges. And if the LPF joins the ruling coalition, they will certainly demand concessions for their racist line ("Holland is full").

What is the LPF?

The LPF won 26 seats, which means that it has more seats than the Labour Party, and is now the second largest party in the parliament! For a party that did not exist more than three months ago, this is an incredible result. This is attributable in part to the fact that Pim Fortuyn was assassinated on the eve of the election. Once again, we see how the criminal lunacy of individual terrorism served the interests of reaction. Under the circumstances, one might have expected his "party" to have got an even bigger result. However, the assassination in and of itself does not explain everything.

What this result indicates is the astonishing instability that exists in even the most prosperous and apparently stable capitalist societies at the present time. The main thing that appealed to voters was that he was perceived to be different to other politicians and challenging the Dutch political Establishment. Public opinion is discontented with the status quo, the old faces and policies that have no solution to their problems. There is a deep-seated sense of unease and a desire for a radical change. This can express itself today as a sudden swing to the right, but will be expressed tomorrow in an equally sudden and sharp swing to the left.

Pim Fortuyn was not a fascist, but a rather peculiar racist right-wing demagogue. An openly gay former sociology professor who supported legalised drugs, prostitution, euthanasia and same sex marriages, he also spoke out against bureaucracy, the Netherlands' open borders with the rest of the European Union, and wanted to repeal the first article of the Dutch constitution forbidding discrimination. This revealed the reactionary face behind the "liberal" mask. His opposition to immigration at current levels and attacks on Muslim culture (which he said was "backward") put him on the far right, closer to politicians such as Jean-Marie Le Pen.

Christian Democrat CDA party leader Jan Peter Balkenenden comparing himself with Harry Potter

The "List" is not a party at all, but a hastily improvised assortment of contradictory elements. It has no cohesive ideology, but merely expresses the confused strivings of the petty bourgeois for miraculous solutions. Since such petty bourgeois movements can only thrive on the basis of constant successes - such as Pim Fortuyn managed to obtain by his skilful demagoguery - its chances of survival are not great.

"Until now the [LPF] has not been very stable," one of its new MPs, Maxine Verhagen, said. "Opinions change and people leave." These words perfectly characterise the unstable nature of this petty bourgeois formation. If it enters a coalition with the Christian Democrats, the List's chances for survival will be even less. Some analysts have predicted that the coalition will collapse in less than two years and lead to fresh elections. That pleasant little island of prosperity, the Netherlands, has entered into the general instability that is now the main characteristic of politics in all European countries.

Reactionary tendencies

The events in Holland cannot be seen in isolation from the rest of Europe. Let us not forget the victory of Haider in Austria. There are also nascent Bonapartist tendencies within every one of the right-wing bourgeois parties: in the British Conservatives, in Forza Italia, even in the US Republicans. But this is not the dominant tendency at present. The class balance of forces is in no way comparable to the situation before the war, when there was a very large peasantry in Italy and Germany. Now everywhere the working class is in a big majority. This means that an immediate movement in the direction of fascist or Bonapartist reaction in the developed capitalist countries is ruled out - at least for the present.

However, the unprecedented degeneration of the Social Democracy and ex-Stalinist Parties inevitably produces disillusionment amongst the masses and prepares the

way for reaction. This is shown by the recent elections in France, where Le Pen defeated the Socialist candidate and got into the final round. This immediately gave rise to a rowdy campaign in the press about the alleged danger of fascism in France. In fact, Le Pen is not a fascist, but a reactionary racist and a pacemaker for fascism. If he had been elected, he would have behaved in the same way as Fini, the leader of the Italian neo-fascist party the National Alliance, which has become just another right-wing bourgeois conservative party. The same would undoubtedly have been the case with Pim Fortuyn, had he lived long enough to be elected.

We must, of course, combat reaction and racism at all times. But it is a serious mistake to sound the alarm bells and start shouting about fascism every time some reactionary demagogue gets an increase in votes. Such behaviour can seriously disorient the working class and actually disarm them when the moment arrives to prepare for a real struggle against reaction.

At this moment in time the real fascist organisations have been reduced everywhere to virulent sects. They may resort to terrorist activities, but this only expresses their impotence. The reason for this is obvious. The ruling class does not need these elements at the present time. The electoral victory of Le Pen in the first round of the French election immediately revealed the real state of affairs. The workers and youth came out onto the streets in all the main cities of France. This must have set the alarm bells ringing in the corridors of power.

No, the bourgeoisie does not need the fascists at this stage. Their provocations can destabilise the situation and provoke a massive reaction on the part of the working class, as happened in Italy in 1960. If they go too far with their provocations, the bourgeois state will take action against them, like a man who uses a



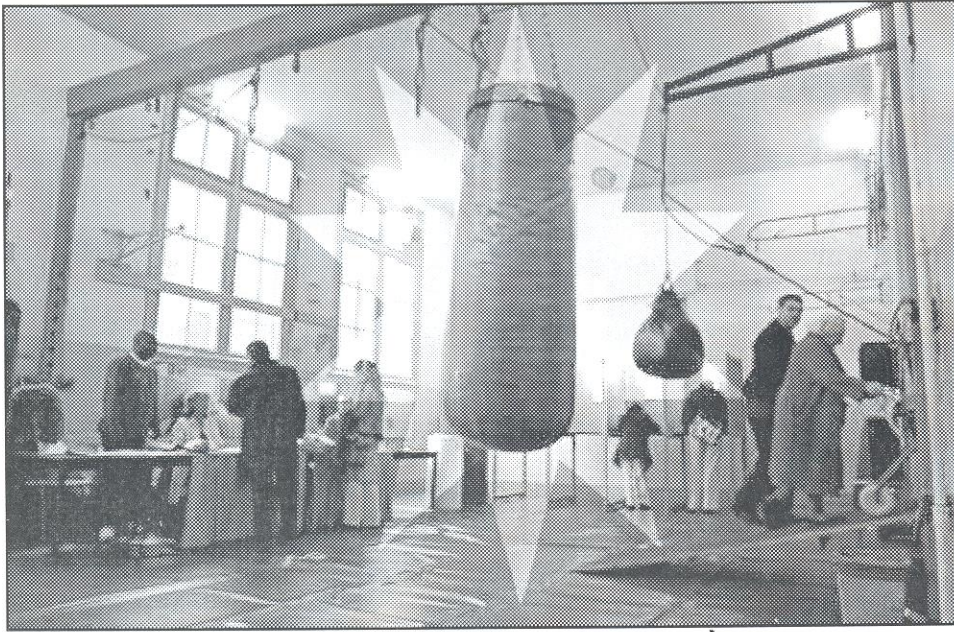
stick to control an unruly dog. But that does not mean that there is no danger of serious reaction in the future - quite the contrary.

The continuation of capitalism will inevitably mean one convulsive crisis after another: mass unemployment, homelessness, the ruin of small businesses, etc. In such circumstances, the right-wing parties (not fascists, but "respectable" democratic conservatives) will try to use the racist card to divide the working class and divert the attention of the masses from the real cause of the crisis. In times of boom, the bosses welcome the influx of immigrants as a pool of cheap labour to be exploited. But in times of crisis, they will try to blame the lack of jobs and houses on the presence of immigrants.

The bourgeoisie does not need the fascists at this stage. Their provocations can destabilise the situation and provoke a massive reaction on the part of the working class.

The real cause of these problems is the capitalist system itself. The working class of France voted massively for a change in society. They looked to the Socialists and Communists for a solution to their problems. But the leaders of the SP and CP tried to base themselves on

Fascism



Dutch polling station

capitalism and "the market". As a result, they succeeded in disappointing and demoralising their working class supporters. They therefore prepared the way for reaction.

The last period was very similar to the period of the Left Bloc in Europe in the 1920s. Having betrayed the revolution in France, Germany and other countries, the Social Democracy took power, but, on the basis of capitalism, found themselves impotent to solve the problems of the working class. The temporary boom in the USA (which was very similar to the boom of the 1990s) ended in the great Crash of 1929. Overnight, millions of middle class people were ruined and millions of workers were thrown out of work. In Germany, unemployment reached four million (now, for the first time since the 1930s, German unemployment has reached the same figure).

The policies of the reformist leaders in Germany, Austria and Spain in the 1930s led straight to fascism. In Britain, where capitalism was stronger and they had the empire to lean upon, the ruling class did not need to go so far (though they openly expressed their enthusiasm for Hitler, Mussolini and Franco at the time, as a "bulwark against Communism"). Nevertheless, the policies of the British Labour leaders led to the defeat of the Labour Party and the victory of reaction in the form of the National Government.

At that time, the SP and CP leaders argued that there was a

danger of fascism (which was true), and that the way to fight it was through the popular front, or unity with the so-called "democratic" wing of the bourgeoisie (which was false). In every case, the refusal of the Labour leaders to carry out the socialist transformation of society eventually led to the most terrible defeats.

This is an important lesson for the workers of Europe. The most important way to block the movement in the direction of reaction is to fight for a genuine socialist policy. The SP and CP leaders must break with the bourgeoisie and defend the interests of the worker, the peasant, the small shopkeeper - not only in words, but in deeds! Nationalise the banks and big monopolies! Provide the jobs and houses that people need. Give cheap credits to the small shopkeepers and peasants. That is the only way.

The fight against racism and reaction

The only way to fight reaction is by uniting the working class under a real socialist policy. Racism is a deadly poison that undermines the most important weapon of the Labour Movement - class unity. We will fight racism in all its forms and manifestations, open or disguised. However, racism cannot be eliminated by sentimental appeals or the moralistic demagoguery of "liberal" bourgeois politicians. It can only be eradicated by eliminating its social roots: that is the lack of jobs, hous-

es, schools and hospitals. On a capitalist basis, this is a completely utopian proposition.

The crisis of capitalism creates the kind of festering conditions in which racist and reactionary ideas can find an echo in sections of the population. Where the labour movement does not offer an alternative, people who do not understand the real reason why there are not enough jobs and houses can be persuaded by reactionary demagogues to look for a scapegoat. As the crisis deepens, sections of the "respectable" middle class can become frenzied and look for a saviour on the extreme right. The elements of this can already be seen, although only in a dim and obscure outline. The events in France and Holland are not the real drama but only a shabby and pathetic dress rehearsal. In the future, things will be far more serious.

For the last 200 years the working class of Europe has consistently fought for democratic rights. In all that time, the bankers, capitalists and landowners have consistently opposed every democratic advance. To the extent that democracy exists today in Britain, France and Holland, it has been because the working class and the labour movement has overcome the resistance of the property-owning classes.

In the long run, there will be splits in all the bourgeois parties, resulting in the formation of openly Bonapartist parties, and a polarisation of society to the right and left, preparing the way for all kinds of right-wing conspiracies like the Gladio conspiracy of the 1970s. But given the strength of the working class and its organisations, this can pave the way for an explosion of the class struggle and even open civil war.

The noisy propaganda about the "risk of fascism" in Europe is entirely false. The bourgeois in Europe burnt their fingers badly with fascism in the past, and are not likely to hand power again to fascist madmen like Hitler and Mussolini. When the times come when the ruling class in

Britain, France or Holland decide that democracy is no longer useful to them, they will use other methods, most likely handing power to the military. The fascist gangs will be used to murder and terrorise the working class, like Patria y Libertad in Chile. That is, they can play the role of auxiliaries of Bonapartist reaction, but they will not be permitted to take power.

But the bourgeoisie will not resort to open reaction until all other possibilities have been exhausted. Long before we reach this stage, the workers will have had many possibilities of taking power in one country after another. Only after a series of serious defeats of the working class would the danger of Bonapartist dictatorship be posed.

We will fight to defend all the basic democratic rights which have been conquered by the working class in struggle over generations. We will defend the freedom of expression, of the press, of assembly. Above all, we will defend the right to strike and demonstrate, and the right to form and belong to a trade union. We oppose all anti-trade union laws and all attempts to ensnare the unions with the state.

However, in the last analysis, we

recognise that democracy is only one of the forms by which the bourgeoisie exercises its class rule. Under capitalism, even in the freest bourgeois republics, democracy has only a partial and restricted character, and is more formal than real for ninety-nine percent of society. In a bourgeois democracy, anyone can say more or less what he or she wants, as long as the big banks and monopolies decide what happens. It is only another way of expressing the dictatorship of big business.

While fighting to defend democratic rights, and making use of each and every possibility available to us to defend the cause of the working class and change society, including participation in elections, we understand that the ruling class has never abandoned its power and privileges without a fight.

The ruling class does not support democracy out of sentimentality, but because it is usually the most economical way of ruling society, while deceiving the masses into thinking that they can decide affairs. In the last analysis, when they see that their fundamental interests are threatened, the bourgeois will not hesitate to resort to naked reaction, casting aside the mask of democracy and

the rule of law, to reveal its true face.

The movement towards the socialist transformation of society will not take place in a straight line. There will inevitably be ups and downs. Periods of stormy advance will be followed by periods of tiredness, lulls, defeats, even periods of reaction. There will be violent swings to the left and right. But every move towards reaction will only prepare even bigger swings to the left. At the present time there is no danger of fascism or even Bonapartist reaction in any developed capitalist country. But that can change in the period that opens up.

In the end, the choice before society is not "democracy or dictatorship" but the dictatorship of Capital or a regime of workers' democracy. ♦

- Down with fascism and racism!
- Fight reaction with class methods!
- Mobilise the workers' organisations for the struggle against fascism.
- Full political and social rights for immigrants.
- Workers of the world unite!

Paradigm Lost?

One of the most visible signs of the collapse of the "New Paradigm" dream, so passionately held by the financial experts during the late '90s, has been the decline and fall of the telephone (land line and mobile) sector. Now we have the latest set of figures to come from one of the biggest players in the industry - Vodaphone. They have announced losses of £13.5 billion pounds - or £37 million a day! This represents the biggest single loss in British corporate history. The initial response on the stock exchange was for share prices to rise since they had expected the figures to be much worse! How did they manage to mislay all this cash? The answer lies in the rush of overpriced mad purchases made by Vodaphone during the so-called tech boom which have now had to be written off.

The crisis in the industry since then has resulted in thousands of employees being laid off around the world. The penalty for management? Sir Christopher Gent, Vodaphone's chief executive, is set to get a £2 million pound payment representing the second part of a massive bonus payout agreed with him in 2000. This amount would have been more had it not been for the collapse in Vodaphone share prices. The company have tried to be upbeat about the future but some are not convinced. Mark James from Nomura has stated that he "... remains concerned... customer growth is slowing and spending is flat." (FT online 28/5/02) Unemployed telecomms workers may well ask what future rewards await their former bosses as losses continue to mount in spectacular fashion. ♦

"Russia's revolutionary days are not over."

On Wednesday May 8, Alan Woods interviewed Alexander Kuvaev, member of the Duma, and leader of the Moscow City Committee of the CPRF. There are several interesting features in the replies. In particular, the phrase we have cited in the title is a reply to Zyuganov who has stated publicly that, in his opinion, "Russia's Revolutionary days are over." Unfortunately, there was little time to develop the points raised, as the CPRF were busy with preparations for the big demonstration on May 9 (the anniversary of the victory of the USSR over Nazi Germany).

Q: How do you see the present situation in Russia?

A: Our country is now passing through a decisive phase. The general situation is very bad. 80% of the population is in extreme difficulties, but the present government has no solutions to offer. Moreover, the situation is going to get even worse before the parliamentary and presidential elections [due in 2003 and 2004].

Q: What is the position of the Putin government?

A: The present government will carry out all kind of manoeuvres to increase the number of right wing MPs in the Duma. The tendency is towards a presidential type of government and the aim is to reduce the presence of the Communists in the Duma. However, I can say that there will be all kinds of struggles between different groups within the oligarchy - fights between Putin, Chubais, Kasyanov, and so on...

Q: So the regime is still very unstable?

A: The whole situation is completely unstable - both from the economic and the political point of view.

Q: But in the West, the impression is being given that everything in Russia is going

splendidly. The economy is growing, so everything will be OK.

A: This is not the case at all. In fact, there is no real growth in the economy, apart from in certain sectors like oil, gas and coal. However, the basic sectors of industry - machine-tools, steel and so on, are not growing. They do not even publish any statistics about these sectors. And as far as agriculture is concerned, there is no development at all. We are completely dependent on food imports from the West. This includes even basic food items.

Q: And how is this reflected in living standards?

A: Living standards are falling here. Prices are rising steeply, especially the price of basic products like food and medicine. On top of all this, there is the so-called "reform" of rents, which means that the people will have to pay more for rent, gas, electricity and central heating. And wages are falling behind prices all the time. As a result we have an extreme polarisation between rich and poor. 5.7% of the population are very rich and 90% find it hard to make ends meet. In fact, 80% are living near the official poverty level. Of course, the situation is uneven. The situation is getting worse all the time. But in Moscow things are different. There is a lot of money around here... Moscow is the most

expensive capital after Tokyo. But it is not at all typical of the rest of Russia.

Q: This must mean a growth in the class struggle.

A: Well, for example, you saw what happened in Voronezh. That was a serious uprising. The immediate issue was the increase in rents. And this is only the beginning. In Smolensk a similar situation is being prepared.

Q: I understand the CPRF participated in organising the demonstration in Voronezh.

A: Yes, we were among the organisers. There were also other forces. But we participated actively, and not only there. In Moscow also in some factories where the workers were threatened with the sack, the CPRF is actively supporting the workers. We will be at the head of the protests - including in Moscow.

Q: What about Russia's external policies?

A: The oligarchy are dependent on the West, and are firmly linked to the West. Bush came here to try to weaken Russia's defence capacity. He would like to get his hands on Russia's resources, oil and so on. Therefore he would like to weaken Russia.

Q: In your speech on May Day, you

said that the CPRF must not collaborate with Putin but provide a left opposition. What did you mean?

A: I believe the CPRF must have a more radical position. It must come out far more decisively in the interests of wage labour. The working class is not only those who work in industry. It also includes the white-collar workers, the working intellectuals, many of whom support the Party. We must also defend people like small shopkeepers etc.

Q: What is the situation of the CPRF?

The CPRF is the only party that has been built up from the bottom. All the others were either founded by the government or by special interest groups. They existed for a short time and then disappeared. They are financed by the government or by these groups.

Of course, the CPRF has its own problems. A lot of our members are old people. But now many youngsters are joining us. Also many middle aged people. We have about 34% of the votes. In Moscow, though, we are relatively weak, as this is an anti-Communist city. But Putin only has 20% of the vote. And we have over 500,000 members throughout Russia.

Q: The crisis of world capitalism must affect Russia.

A: That is right. Everywhere we see there is a movement to the left - in France for example. And in Russia capitalism exists in a particularly savage form.

Q: And what do you think about the war in Chechnya?

A: This is a senseless war. It was deliberately created to divert the attention of the people from the real problems. This problem cannot be solved by military means. They tried that in Tsarist times, and the war went on for a long time. But this government has not got the will to solve the political problem by political means. They set it up themselves. Now every day 20-25 Russian soldiers are killed or wounded. The country is destroyed and the money that was supposed to be used to rebuild

Chechnya never arrives. Of course, there are powerful interests involved here, oil for example. But it is inadmissible to send young lads to their deaths in this way. We must find a political solution through negotiations with the Chechen people.

Q: In your May Day speech you spoke of proletarian internationalism, which I completely agree with. But some people say that the CPRF is a chauvinist party, and even that it supports or at least tolerates anti-semitism. What do you say to these people?

A: The CPRF is not a nationalist party. We stand for internationalism. We are opposed to fascism and all forms of aggressive nationalism. We consider that Zionism is one of these aggressive nationalist ideologies and we are opposed to it. But this has nothing to do with anti-semitism.

Fascism is an inhuman ideology. How can we support that? Communism is internationalism. Fascism and communism are mutually exclusive ideologies.

Q: What about Russia's support for the so-called war on terrorism?

A: Russia has been dragged into this after September 11. But these events were very obscure. Who was responsible? Terrorists or was it some kind of provocation? Either way, Russia should not support the so-called war against terrorism - although we are opposed to terrorism of any kind.

Q: US imperialism is utilising this to strengthen its

Of course, we are against capitalism. That is written in our programme. We stand for socialism. Our aim is to build a socialist society

position on a world scale.

A: Yes. Don't forget it was the CIA that helped set up the Taliban. Now the Americans are trying to install themselves in Tajikistan and other parts of Central Asia, setting up bases.

Q: To conclude, the last decade has been a catastrophe for Russia.

A: They have destroyed Russia. The USSR was a strong country, and just look at the situation now.

Q: So is the CPRF against capitalism?

A: Of course, we are against capitalism. That is written in our programme. We stand for socialism. Our aim is to build a socialist society.

Q: How is that to be achieved?

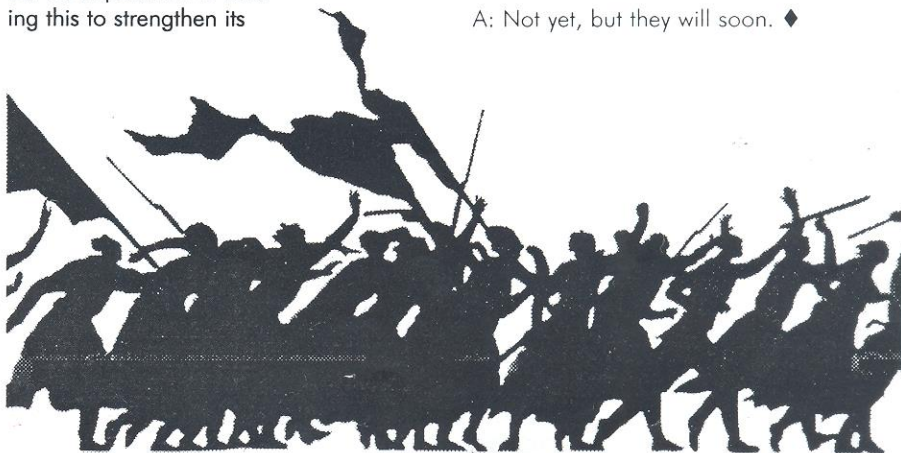
A: The central question is the question of power. In Russia today, genuine elections are impossible. The state will use all the administrative levers in its hands to hold onto power. The elections will be rigged. The judicial system likewise. Everything is rigged to ensure the continuation of the present system.

Q: So there will be a revolution in Russia?

A: I believe so. I believe that Russia's revolutionary days are not over.

Q: Do you think the conditions for revolution exist?

A: Not yet, but they will soon. ♦



Free Hameed Khan Defend Pakistan's Trade Unionists

As we reported in last issue of Socialist Appeal, on April 22nd over 60 trade unionists were arrested in the Pakistani province of Baluchistan, including comrade Hameed Khan the leader of the victorious civil servants strike of November 2001. The comrades were arrested on a demonstration called by the Workers Action Committee; an alliance of the Baluchistan Labour Federation (BLF), Baluchistan Civil Secretariat Staff Association (BCSSA), The All Pakistan Clerks Association (APCA), and The All Pakistan Paramedical Association (APPA). The protests were held on the main roads leading to the capital, Quetta, and other protests were held in the city itself. This protest was called under the banner of the Pakistan Trade Union Defence Campaign (PTUDC) of which comrade Khan is the organiser in Quetta. The protests were against the imperialists and against the military dictatorship in

Pakistan; and specifically because the regime had chosen to renege on the concessions won by the workers in the strike of November last year, in which the workers won a 40% increase in wages. The jailed leaders vowed to continue the struggle until this demand was met.

The PTUDC has begun a nationwide campaign and an appeal to the working class internationally to put pressure on the dictatorship to release these comrades, and to oppose the military dictatorship that is turning the regime towards greater repression.

On May 5th, there was a demonstration in Lahore in solidarity with the jailed trade unionists and the sacking of 1125 civil servants in Baluchistan which had been announced only hours before. This was the second demonstration in the nation's capital organised by the PTUDC in four days. Various leading trade unionists who support the PTUDC spoke at the rally

afterwards condemning the sackings, and demanding the immediate reinstatement of these workers, and the release of Hameed Khan and other trade unionists. At the rally the chair read out a message from Hameed that had been smuggled out of Quetta jail. He said: "imprisonment, torture, and repression cannot alter our will and our determination to struggle." He condemned the sacking of 1125 workers in Baluchistan by the military regime, and vowed that until they are reinstated and the demands of the workers are met there would be no let up in the struggle.

This is one of many the demonstrations, which have been going on around Pakistan in the last month. Hameed Khan is still in jail, the demonstrations both nationally and internationally continue, and his spirit and confidence in the struggle remains very high.

More strike action in Baluchistan Latest update on arrested trade unionists

The militant mood of the working class has once again pressurised the traditional leadership into coming out in favour of the movement. Today the Workers' Action Committee announced during a press conference that they are going to start strike action once again. Although they pointed out that they are going to start a 24-hour hunger strike from May 23 and it would become a complete hunger strike till death unless their demands are met, they did not announce the date of the hunger strike till death nor their other strategies till now. In this press conference the BLF leadership showed their deep concerns at the role of Pakistan Workers' Confederation and criticised them.

While on the other hand the GTA (Government Teachers' Association) started their long march towards the governor's house as they had announced earlier. The position of this march was very weak and there is news that about fifty teachers have been arrested from different part of Baluchistan. Heavy police forces were deployed in Quetta to counter any type of demonstrations.

In Baluchistan the transport workers have also been on strike for the last three days. Their main demands are: increase security and stop dacoits [robbers] on the high-

ways, and end all the checkpoints of the different law enforcement agencies. In all these events the Quetta administration implemented section 144 and also prohibited all kinds of leaflets and posters.

The PTUDC in Quetta is carefully following all these volatile events, especially the decision to come out on strike again, to see if they can revitalise the movement and we will plan our strategy accordingly. We will keep our supporters updated on the events as they develop.

Today we visited comrade Hameed Khan whose morale was very high. He sends a red salute to all our comrades in Pakistan and around the world. We are making every effort to get the comrades out on bail. But there is no guarantee that this will be granted. So keep up the pressure with the solidarity campaign.

Abid Hussain,
Information Secretary,
PTUDC Quetta

An appeal to support the Pakistan Trade Union Defence Campaign From Jeremy Dear



General Secretary of the National Union of Journalists (UK and Ireland)

I urge trade union organisations, members and activists around the world to support the Pakistan Trade Union Defence Campaign.

The Pakistan Trade Union Defence Campaign was set up following the assassination of Arif Shah, the President of the Punjab Labour Federation by hired agents of the employers in 1995. That brutal act highlighted the harsh situation faced by the trade union movement in Pakistan.

The conditions of the workers in Pakistan are miserable. There are millions of unemployed and there is no unemployment benefit or welfare state. Brutal exploitation is rife. Over one million children work in the carpet industry, another million are employed as domestics, over 300,000 as bonded labourers in brick kilns together with many more in soap factories, small garages, shops etc.

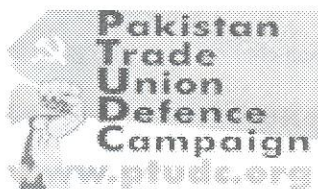
As a result of the assassination of Arif Shah, leading trade union activists established the Pakistan Trade Union Defence Campaign, sponsored by the Punjab Labour Federation, the United Labour Federation, the Progressive Workers Alliance, the Railway Workers Union, the Nation Union of Postal Employees, Manzoor Ahmed [Information Secretary, PPP Labour Bureau (Punjab)], and many others. The aim of the PTUDC is to defend trade unions from the physical attacks of the employers and to defend their right to organise!

Since then the PTUDC has worked to support trade unionists struggles and campaigns in Railways, Telecom, Postal, Banks, Sugar, Steel, Ports and many others.

The most recent campaign they have been involved in is the defence of the leader of the civil servants in Quetta, Hameed Khan. This workers' leader was arrested on April 22, together with other union leaders and protesting workers. This is an extremely serious situation and it is essential that trade unions all over the world protest against this action and bring every pressure to bear on the Pakistani authorities.

I urge all trade union activists to act immediately to protest against the brutal repression of our fellow workers and trade unionists in Pakistan.

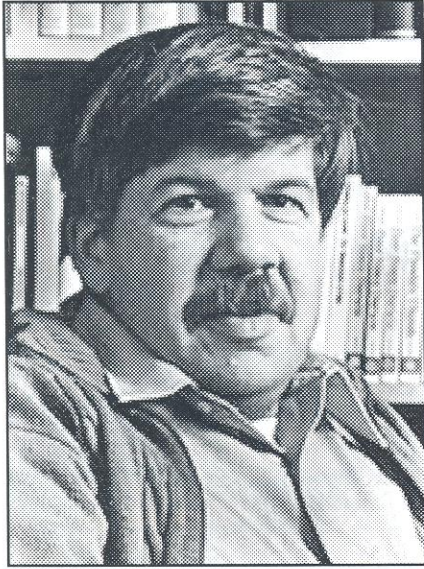
Yours fraternally,
Jeremy Dear,
General Secretary,
National Union of Journalists
London,
May 16, 2002



To pay money to the Pakistan Trade Union Defence Campaign through the banking system you must provide your bank with the following details:

Account in the name of: Pakistan Trade Union Defence Campaign
Reference number: K3414742PAK
Account number: 0005 0005
Sort code: 09 00 00
Swift code: provided via your own bank

Address of bank with whom PTUDC account is held:
Abbey National PLC,
21 Prescott St.,
London, E1 8AD,
England



A tribute to a great scientist

Stephen Jay Gould

Sadly, on Monday, May 20, Stephen Jay Gould the famous American palaeontologist died of cancer. He was 60 and died at his home in New York.

Gould made a major contribution to development of modern science with his theories on evolution. Prior to his studies scientists had accepted Darwin's view of a very slow and gradual process of evolution. Together with Eldredge in the early 1970s, beginning with a study of land snail shells, he discovered that there was another pattern to the evolutionary process. They saw that what the fossil records showed was not one continuous gradual process, but a series of sudden bursts of change followed by relatively long periods of very slow development. Gould and Eldredge coined the term "punctuated equilibria" to describe this process.

Gould and Eldredge then had to face quite widespread opposition from the scientific community. By patiently explaining their ideas they managed to convince many, but some to this day still reject their theory. •

Alan Woods and Ted Grant wrote their book, *Reason in Revolt, Marxist Philosophy and Modern Science* in 1995. The book was published 100 years after the death of Frederick Engels and the purpose was to update Engels' *Dialectics of Nature*. The last 100 years of scientific study have provided ample proof that the method of Engels and Marx, i.e. that of dialectical materialism, actually reflects the real processes of nature.

Stephen Jay Gould and Niles Eldredge demonstrated quite conclusively that these processes are sometimes slow and protracted and at other times extremely rapid. They show how a gradual accumulation of small changes at a certain point provokes a qualitative change.

In this they finally resolved the problem Darwin had in understanding what was known as the "Cambrian explosion". Prior to the Cambrian explosion very few fossil records have been found. Then "suddenly" life forms seem to develop very rapidly. In fact fossil records do not fit in to a gradualist interpretation of evolution. There are periods where life forms change rapidly, and then there are other long periods where nothing seems to change. Darwin believed that it was just a question of time before new dis-

coveries in the fossil records would show the gradual change that had taken place. But these records have never materialised. Gould and Eldredge understood what had actually happened.

This discovery was yet another confirmation of one of the fundamental laws of dialectics, the transformation of quantity into quality. Individual, almost imperceptible, small changes pile up one upon another. At a certain point the quantity provokes a sudden leap, a qualitative change. This has been confirmed over and over again in the natural world. It can also be applied to the development of society itself. Small changes over long periods of time suddenly lead to abrupt leaps.

However, the scientific-academic world is dominated by bourgeois ideology, that is, the way of thinking of the capitalist class. The capitalists cannot accept the idea that the natural world and society change through sudden leaps, i.e. revolutions. They want us to believe that everything is gradual. Thus they are imposing upon the real objective processes of nature, and of society, their own subjective viewpoint which is determined by their privileged position. Unfortunately for them the most advanced scientific research repeatedly contradicts this viewpoint. That explains why Gould and Eldredge faced such vehement opposition to the conclusions they drew from their studies.

Gould himself was actually aware of Marxist philosophical thought. In his book *Ever Since Darwin*, he refers to Engels' essay *The Part Played by labour in the Transition from Ape to Man* and he says the following:

"Indeed, the nineteenth century produced a brilliant exposé from a source that will no doubt surprise most readers - Frederick Engels. (A bit of reflection should diminish surprise. Engels had a keen interest in the natural sciences and sought to base his general philosophy of dialectical materialism upon a 'positive' foundation. He did not live to complete his 'dialectics of nature', but he included long commentaries on science in such treatises as the *Anti-Dühring*.) In 1876, Engels wrote an essay entitled, *The*

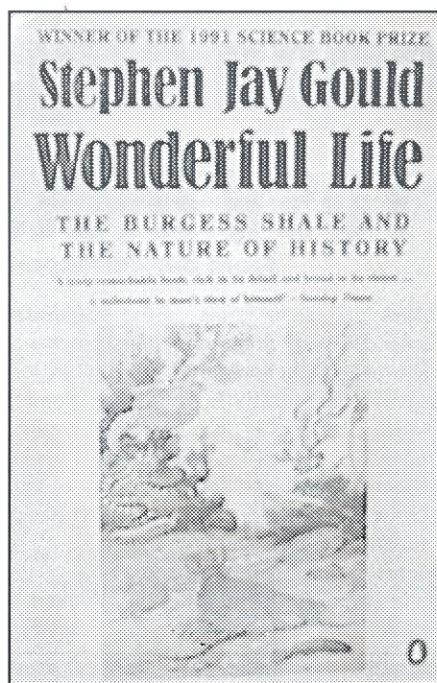
Part Played by Labour in the Transition from Ape to Man. It was published posthumously in 1896 and, unfortunately, had no visible impact upon Western science.

"Engels considers three essential features of human evolution: speech, a large brain, and upright posture. He argues that the first step must have been a descent from the trees with subsequent evolution to upright posture by our ground-dwelling ancestors. These apes when moving on level ground began to drop the habit of using their hands and to adopt a more and more erect gait. This was the decisive step in the transition from ape to man.' Upright posture freed the hand for using tools (labour, in Engels' terminology); increased intelligence and speech came later."

Gould understood the limitations of Western thought when he wrote that a "deeply rooted bias of Western thought predisposes us to look for continuity and gradual change."

Although the Soviet Union was a terribly deformed caricature of what genuine socialism should be, among Soviet scientists there was a greater understanding of dialectics. And in *The Panda's Thumb* he points out that: "In the Soviet Union, for example, scientists are trained with a very different philosophy of change - the so-called dialectical laws, reformulated by Engels from Hegel's philosophy. The dialectical laws are explicitly punctuational. They speak, for example, of the 'transformation of quantity into quality.' This may sound like mumbo jumbo, but it suggests that change occurs in large leaps following a slow accumulation of stresses that a system resists until it reaches the breaking point. Heat water and it eventually boils. Oppress the workers more and more and bring on the revolution. Eldredge and I were fascinated to learn that many Russian palaeontologists support a model similar to our punctuated equilibria."

Gould was not prepared to go all the way and accept that dialectics can be applied not only to science, and palaeontology in particular, but to society itself. Like many scientists he used the dialectical method in his own sphere of studies without grasping the overall outlook of Marxism. However, through his studies he made a major contribution to the development of human thought and of our understanding of the world we live in. Above all he provided more scientific evidence that strengthens the position of Marxism, for it proves that dialectical materialism is not a fantastic notion thought up by Marx himself, but it is sim-

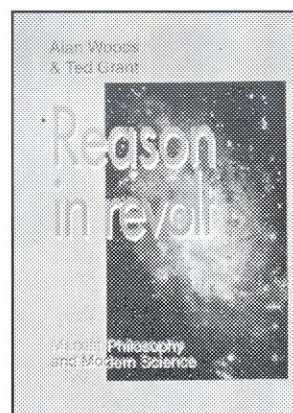


ply the reflection of the real material world as it is.

Through his works Gould became one of the most well-known American scientists. He wrote volumes and openly expressed his views in opposition to many gradualist evolutionary theorists. He also popularised his ideas and made them easily accessible to millions of readers. He wrote a long series of essays in *Natural History* magazine. He won the National Book Critics Award in 1982 and came 24th in the Modern Library's list of the one hundred non-fictional English language works of the 20th century. His works were always permeated with a progressive outlook. He totally rejected reactionary scientific theories. For example he refuted all attempts to use pseudo-scientific theories to justify racism and discrimination.

His presence will be greatly missed by all thinking people. We recommend that all our readers take the time to read at least his main works. This is the best tribute we can make to one of the great scientists of the 20th century. ♦

Fred Weston



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Hungarian elections: No rosy picture

From our correspondent in Hungary

Hungary went to the polling booths twice in April in an election which promised the return of the Fidesz-MPP/MDP coalition government. Before the first round every opinion poll forecast a comfortable victory for the centre-right government of Viktor Orbán after a successful four years.

The record of the Orbán government

Taking stock of those four years, the supporters of the government agreed that Hungarians have never had it so good. Their statement was based on Hungary's economic indicators, which produced impressive growth figures in the first two years of the last parliament, on its improved international standing, on its promising plans for joining the European Union in 2004, on its continuing building boom, and on increased wage levels.

However, a more thorough examination of Hungary's economy, produces a less rosy picture. Agriculture, which has always been a solid exporter and a strength of wealth production has been in the doldrums for years. The break up of the large co-

operatives and state farms produced a severe drop in agricultural production at the beginning of the 1990's, from which this sector is only now recovering. However, a recent survey, produced for the EU, concluded that the vast majority of agricultural enterprises are still far too small to modernise their production methods and produce food economically and competitively. Only 2,500 farms have land over 250 acres and the number of farms of a size considered the most stable number less than 50,000. The rest, about 80% of the total are small, uneconomic and uncompetitive. *Népszabadság* the old CP daily wrote on April 25th: "The data confirms the opinion that Hungarian agriculture does not possess that ideal structure which under the conditions of EU membership would ensure its ability to compete sufficiently."

Industry, the much boasted about success story of the Orbán government is also showing signs of stress. In the same edition of *Népszabadság* an article paints a somewhat worrying picture of a drop of 50% in GDP growth between early 2000 and late 2001, a slow down in the growth of exports and a steady drop in foreign investment over the last four years. The slow down in industrial investment is undoubtedly connected to a general tendency for foreign investors to take their money elsewhere. Hungarian industry has already been totally privatised. At a conservative estimate 80%-90% of it was sold off or closed down in

the last decade. However, this process has only just begun in earnest in the Czech Republic and especially Slovakia, so while that is where the big bucks are to be made, Hungary will see less and less of new Western cash.

Winners and losers

Still, the most consistent class base of the Fidesz might not have concerned itself with any of the above. The brash, new and vulgar "nouveau riche" of 21st century capitalist Hungary lived, and still lives, happily on government patronage, corruption and with crumbs from the tables of foreign investors, whom it slavishly serves. This prosperity, however, has totally passed by all the losers of this much praised "Hungarian model". Those in the countryside, without a job, de-skilled workers, employees of foreign enterprises without any employment protection with long hours and low wages, ethnic minorities in general and the Romany population in particular and finally all those people who in the past not only had a good, well paid job in industry, but the pride and future that went with that, and who are now either unemployed or eking out a precarious existence on the black economy. Vast swathes of former heavy industry now lies idle, destroyed or turned into shopping centres, the local population still trying to recover from the devastation of their lives.

The parties

In the first round of the election some 13 parties fielded a varying number of candi-

dates in an election fought in a complicated system of proportional representation. Some of the MP's were standing in a constituency, others were allocated seats in regional and national lists based on their parties' numerical voting strength. This system ensures that every party can put their leading figures on the national list, thus not facing the danger of a humiliating defeat and exclusion from Parliament. This, however, did not save the leading figures of any party that could not muster 5% of votes as that is the threshold for representation and which was only reached by two parties and a coalition of another two parties, thus making four in all.

These were: Fidesz, MDF, MSZP and SZDSZ. Fidesz formed a coalition pact with MDF, both roughly equating to a conservative, right of centre party, representing the beneficiaries of privatisation, upper middle class, entrepreneurial class. MSZP, the Socialist Party, which is the sanitised, successor of the old CP, with policies very akin to the British Labour Party and other European Socialist parties and the SZDSZ, which roughly equates to the British Liberals and other liberal parties in Europe. The SZDSZ has been in coalition with the MSZP before and while standing its own candidates were planning to form a coalition with the MSZP after the elections.

MIÉP, the far right nationalist party, representing anti-Romany, national chauvinist sentiment has managed to poll the largest vote amongst the parties





below the 5% threshold, but at 4.37% has no representatives in Parliament. This is an interesting turn-about in their fortunes, as this represents one of their least successful results over the last twelve years. This, in a year of the events in the French presidential election, is noteworthy. Some analysts claim that the Orbán government, especially in the last two weeks of the election campaign, was right wing enough for most voters and thus deprived MIÉP of its voter base.

Munkáspárt or the Workers' Party is one of the split-offs from the old pre-1989 CP, representing the old Stalinist wing. It was in the areas of devastated old heavy industry, with its traditions of working class politics and on the basis of its now reduced status, that the Munkáspárt polled extremely well. In an election campaign, which was notable for its lack of politics, they made an appeal to the losers of the last four years, those without hope, without the chance of a decent life and they have responded. Their vote of 2.16% nationally does not reflect some of the results, in places over 8%, they managed to attract in these areas. Additionally, they found an echo in some deprived country areas too, where their propaganda also hit a nerve.

MSZP victory

So, how did Fidesz manage to lose an election, which, even according to its opponents, was as good as in the bag? Amongst the myriad of reasons put forward by analysts, two stand out as the major reasons for this defeat.



First of all, answers could be found in the style of the party in general and Orbán himself in particular, betraying a lack of substance, arrogance and ignorance, which appalled all those thinking voters who expected better. The ultimate gem of this panic driven last minute campaign included a statement which accused anyone not voting for Fidesz as not being truly Hungarian, in effect branding anyone thinking of voting for the MSZP or SZDSZ as traitors.

Secondly, and this is the more substantial argument, vast swathes of the Hungarian electorate have learnt over the last four years, that the division of the country into have's and have not's has not served them well. This process started immediately after the fall of Stalinism at the end of the 1980's, but only now manifested itself in such a brutal and revolting manner. The major voter base for the MSZP was in the towns and an analysis of the vote betrays a clear class delineation of the vote in the capital, Budapest. In the swanky "nouveau riche" districts on the Buda hills and in the commuter belt Fidesz carried the majority of votes. Although, even there some surprises caused shocks, the vote going to some SZDSZ candidates in places. The working class districts have solidly lined up behind the MSZP, quite a few of them not needing second round voting, as the MSZP candidate carried more than 50% of the vote in the first round.

Interestingly, the traditional town and country divide, whereby Budapest and the largest towns have always

been considered left of centre and the backward, non-political countryside could be relied upon to turn out for any right wing party, has also had its shocks. As mentioned above, some country districts showed support for both MSZP and the Munkáspárt and the Liberals. However, some of this can be explained with candidates carrying a personal support arising from a variety of sources. In fact, this election campaign can be characterised as lacking the clear political focus British and European elections usually have. In fact, no manifestoes could be identified during the last weeks of the election and with the exception of one of the Munkáspárt posters, all electoral materials contained generalities, personalities, some promises, but no politics at all. As one comment I heard described: "They are all very similar, so what could they argue about?" There is a great amount of truth in that, but Hungarian campaigning is unfortunately, more and more dominated by personal insults, accusations and a low level of politics.

This was a very polarised election. For the first time in 12 years only four parties stayed in, which represents a class polarisation never before experienced in post-Stalinist Hungary. It was clear that the mass of people wanted to get rid of the Orbán government. The extreme right understood that a vote for MIÉP was wasted and voted for Fidesz. The Fidesz carried its class base, but lost those floating voters who put their faith in them four years ago. The majority of the electorate found the MSZP a valid alternative. There was a shift to the left and no significant support for the extreme right.

The Second Round

The final make-up of the new Hungarian parliament is:

Based on the coalition plans

MSZP	178
Fidesz-MDF	188
SZDSZ	19
MSZP-SZDSZ	1

of the MSZP-SZDSZ, this will give them an overall majority over the right wing parties of 10.

The future

What does all this mean for Hungary, can the MSZP-SZDSZ coalition government deliver on its promises? First and foremost, will they unite the country, as they promised, especially during the last two weeks of the campaign. This drive for unity proved a very handy slogan to counter the divisive policies of Fidesz.

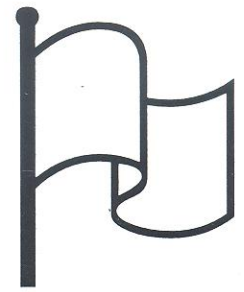
Will it deliver on its promises, which were announced during the campaign and some of which were contained in its election address posted to every elector on 20th March? Will they introduce:

1. less income tax
2. extension of family income tax relief
3. retraining of the unemployed over 45
4. raise the upper limit of tax free income for farmers
5. simplify the tax system for sole traders
6. provide free transport for commuting students
7. make agriculture profitable again
8. give a 50% wage rise to health workers?

These are modest promises, but even their fulfillment is much dependent on whether the MSZP is yet again getting ready to manage capitalism in the interest of the multinationals or is prepared to break with their system and establish workers' democracy, based on the common ownership of the means of production and a plan? If the former, it is doomed to failure and might even play into the hands of the extreme right as we have seen in France this year.

If the latter, history could be written in Hungary, like it was in 1956. The choice is theirs, the fate of the Hungarian people depends on it. ♦

Keep the red flag flying



This month's report on the fighting fund drive is, not unexpectedly, dominated by the magnificent collection of over £2,000 in donations and pledges raised at the London book launch of the "History of British Trotskyism" on May 21st. Over 100 people, packed into a room at Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, responded with great enthusiasm to the ideas and struggles recounted by the speakers by ensuring that the collection was a great success. One supporter had already pledged £500 before the meeting and this encour-

aged others to chip in with some splendid individual donations on the night. Prior to this meeting the flow of cash into our offices had been rather quiet with just £350 coming in during the first few weeks of May, although the final figure for April had rallied up to £914. The pressure needs to be kept up.

The May 21st collection shows what can be done. In marking 75 years of Trotskyism and 10 years of *Socialist Appeal*, we should all be very clear that the fight for socialist ideas can only be successfully continued if the cash is forthcom-

ing. Over the summer months we want to raise at least £5000 - a modest but essential target. This will be linked to a special appeal for donations towards the work of Marxists internationally of which more details will be given next month. I am confident that up and down the country, readers and sellers can mobilise to ensure that donations - small or large - are collected in and sent down. Remember comrades, this is our only main source of finance outside of sales. Without your support we would be in big trouble. Against all odds we have

kept the red flag flying over the last period thanks to your continued support - but don't relax now, the fight has just begun. Special thanks to all those who contributed over the last few weeks including Merseyside readers (£600), Damon Cummings (£50), Edinburgh comrades (£100), Siobhan Bardsley (£50) and many others - including all those at the May 21st meeting. Donations should be made payable to *Socialist Appeal* and sent to us at PO Box 2626, London N1 7SQ. ♦

Steve Jones

Socialist Appeal Stands for:

- ✚ **For a Labour government with a bold socialist programme!** Labour must break with big business and Tory economic policies. Vote Labour and fight to reclaim the party.
- ✚ **A national minimum wage of at least two-thirds of the average wage.** £6.00 an hour as a step toward this goal, with no exemptions.
- ✚ **Full employment!** No redundancies. The right to a job or decent benefits. For a 32 hour week without loss of pay. No compulsory overtime. For voluntary retirement at 55 with a decent full pension for all.
- ✚ **No more sell offs.** Reverse the Tories privatisation scandal. Renationalise all the privatised industries and utilities under democratic workers control and management. No compensation for the fat cats, only those in genuine need.
- ✚ **The repeal of all Tory anti-union laws.** Full employment rights for all from day one. For the right to strike, the right to union representation and collective bargaining. Election of all trade union officials with the right of recall. No official to receive more than the wage of a skilled worker.
- ✚ **Action to protect our environment.** Only public ownership of the land, and major industries, petro-chemical enterprises, food companies, energy and transport, can form the basis of a genuine socialist approach to the environment.
- ✚ **A fully funded and fully comprehensive education system under local democratic control.** Keep big business out of our schools and colleges. Free access for all to further and

higher education. Scrap tuition fees. No to student loans. For a living grant for all over 16 in education or training.

✚ **The outlawing of all forms of discrimination.** Equal pay for equal work. Invest in quality childcare facilities available to all. Scrap all racist immigration and asylum controls. Abolish the Criminal Justice Act.

✚ **The reversal of the Tories' cuts in the health service.** Abolish private health care. For a National Health Service, free to all at the point of need, based on the nationalisation of the big drug companies that squeeze their profits out of the health of working people.

✚ **Reclaim the Labour Party!** Defeat Blairism! Fight for Party democracy and socialist policies. For workers' MPs on workers' wages.

✚ **The abolition of the monarchy and the House of Lords.** Full economic powers for the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly, enabling them to introduce socialist measures in the interests of working people. ✚ No to sectarianism. For a Socialist United Ireland linked by a voluntary federation to a Socialist Britain.

✚ **Break with the anarchy of the capitalist free market.** Labour to immediately take over the "commanding heights of the economy." Nationalise the big monopolies, banks and financial institutions that dominate our lives. Compensation to be paid only on the basis of need. All nationalised enterprises to be run under workers control and management and integrated through a democratic socialist plan of production.

✚ **Socialist internationalism.** No to the bosses European Union. Yes to a socialist united states of Europe, as part of a world socialist federation.

noticeboard

June 2002



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- Birinci Emperyalist Savaş, İşçi Hareketindeki Tutumlar ve Sonuçları

Emperyalist savaşlar içinde bulunduğumuz çağın kaçınılmaz olgusudur. Bu savaşlar, emperyalizmin barbar doğasının ve yıkıcı özelliklerinin açığa çıkmasını sağlarlar ve varolan çelişkilerini daha da keskinleştirirler...
Tuncay Alp, Mart 2002

- "Yeni Dünya Düzeni" ya da Yeni Emperyalist Paylaşım

1989'da Berlin Duvarı deşşebeli gösterilerle yıkıldığında, burjuva yorumcular, dünyaya yeni bir barış çağının geleceğini vazediler. Öyle ya, yeryüzündeki tüm kötülüklerin kaynağı "Şer İmparatorluğu" artık yıkılıyordu. Ancak o günden bugüne yaşananlar, bırakalım yeni bir barış çağının açılmasını, eskisi kadar bile bir istikrarın sağlanmadığını ortaya koydu...

1 Mayıs'ta Alanlara



İşçi Har

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Socialist Appeal

Marxist voice of the labour movement

UNISON Conference/Ballot VOTE 'YES' FOR INDUSTRIAL ACTION!

The last time there was national industrial action in local government, Thatcher was in power, and the poll tax was looming. The Tories abandoned their bright idea for funding local government because it proved so unpopular it provoked revolts that were considered impossible by the right wing, so-called 'new realists' who led the trades unions. However, they did not abandon the 'death by a thousand cuts' approach to funding public services, particularly those provided by local government. One of the consequences has been the capping of local government workers pay for a number of years. There was a great deal of hope amongst these workers, that the new Labour Government in 1997 would at last value local democracy and the services it provides, and the workers who deliver those services.

Unfortunately New Labour has, whilst abolishing the Tories' Compulsory Competitive Tendering, continued with a more expansive and in many ways more savage method of forcing councils to privatise their services - they call it Best Value. This, together with continued under investment, has meant more and more pressure on fewer and fewer local government workers.

Since 1992 local government workers have seen their gross pay deterio-

rate against the average public and private sector pay, with settlements consistently below others. There is therefore an endemic problem of low pay, and over two thirds of all National Joint Council staff now fall below the Council of Europe definition of low pay. Over four fifths of those low paid are women. The pay gap for female non manual workers has widened. Over 20% of local government workers earn less than £5-00 per hour. The national average wage is £19,406 but two thirds of council staff earn less than £13000 per annum.

Last year an NOP survey of local government staff found that 68% had considered leaving, 63% felt poorly paid, 73% said pressure had increased during the year, and 36% reported cuts in staffing levels since the previous year. Recruitment and retention is an increasing problem. Why work as a Home Carer, taking personal care of a vulnerable pensioner, breaking your back lifting them in and out of a bath, or looking after violent children and being unable to defend yourself without the fear of accusation of abuse, when Tesco pay a cashier better? The average council worker gets only 1.6 days training per year.

This is an appalling record of under investment from a Labour government. We've heard a lot of lip service about public service from this lot. But when

you question further it becomes narrowed to a very few 'super-nurses' and high flyer teachers, as if they are the only public servants who have any worth. It is time we were valued too!

In 1989 it was just NALGO that took action and won. This time, the union leaderships in all three unions, T&G, GMB, and the biggest, UNISON are united for the first time. New Labour hawks have been waiting for the opportunity to take UNISON on, and the members have continued to pay the price for their leaders inertia. The pressure has become such that they can no longer sit on their hands. A co-ordinated ballot for industrial action to pursue 6% or £1750 is being held from 10th June. The only nationwide action planned so far is a one day strike, to be followed by local action, which does not seem the most likely course to bring the employers to their knees. But, clearly all three unions taking action over local government pay is a little more than New Labour bargained for.

There must be a massive 'Yes' vote in all three unions! We need a programme of industrial action across the country that will show the employers we mean business.

A (low paid!) Public Sector Worker

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