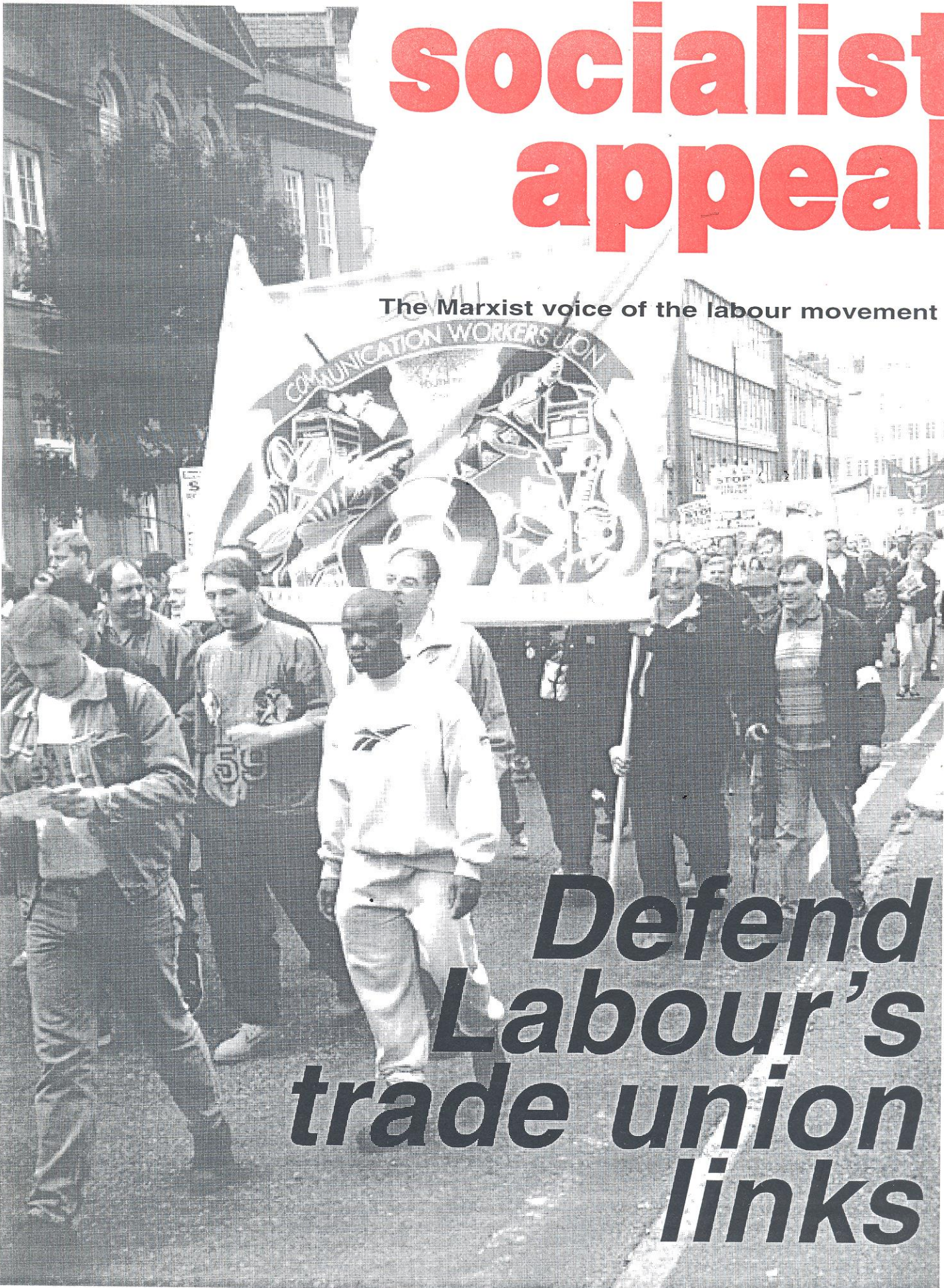


# socialist appeal

The Marxist voice of the labour movement



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# Seize the time!

Who would have thought that the run-up to this year's Labour Party Conference would have been anything but smooth as the Party managers carried on with their campaign of "heads down and don't rock the boat." But as we look back at the events surrounding the recent TUC congress we can see that reality has turned out rather differently.

The sight of John Monks being pushed into a critical, if still somewhat mild-mannered, stance against the Party leadership may have been a shock for many activists, but the congress can be seen as one of the defining moments of the recent period, where unity in the face of a likely Labour victory in the upcoming general election began to unravel. There is much debate about how long Tony Blair's post-election "honeymoon" period will last. But after the TUC we can see, in outline at least, the beginning of the end of such a period already. Blair's honeymoon is likely to be far shorter than that granted to any other incoming Labour government. And he knows it. That is precisely what all his "modernisation" is about. His agenda to change the nature of the Labour Party, "one member one vote," the ditching of clause IV, the reduction of the trade union vote at annual conference, the new rule book, the "road to the manifesto" and all the other constitutional changes, are clearly attempts to limit the growth of effective opposition when he is in office. And that is precisely why he sent David Blunkett and the previously anonymous Stephen Byers up to Blackpool. Over the months, activists have become more and more angry with Labour's front bench pronouncements on the

Tories anti-union legislation. Britain now has some of the most draconian labour laws amongst the big industrial nations. Labour voted against every one of the Tories anti-union laws when they were introduced. It would seem pretty natural to expect that once in power Labour would get rid of them. But, no. Blair himself has stated that the main planks of the legislation will remain. And then Blunkett came to the TUC and told trade unionists that there would be more, "binding arbitration" for sections of the public sector for instance. In other words some of Britain's lowest paid workers will effectively have their right to take industrial action removed. If this was not bad enough we have the fiasco of the minimum wage debate. The failure of the Labour leadership to set a figure is correctly seen by just about everyone as meaning that the figure will be low. In fact, Labour spokesmen have already been preparing business for a figure of about £3.50. So it is quite farcical when trade unionists are told they are "rocking the boat" when they come up with a proposal of £4.26.

## Minimum wage

£4.26 as a minimum wage is still a very low figure, only around £8000 a year. Less than the MPs current pay rise. But it would help something in the region of 5 million workers. And if Labour would campaign on the demand then these 5 million could be galvanised to support Labour in the forthcoming election. The fact that the TUC's debates on the minimum wage, job insecurity and unemployment were widely reported in the media highlight another significant fact. This would not have happened at any other time under the

Tories, when the trade unions were under all out attack. But now there is a growing sympathy for the trade unions. A recent poll in the Guardian pointed out that the number of people who believe that the trade unions should have more say in running the country had gone up from 35% in 1991 to 42% in 1996. There is growing recognition, even amongst the middle classes that things have been tipped way too far in favour of the employers.

The Tory "success" in shackling the unions and creating a "flexible" labour market has, in many ways, undermined their own support, even from what would have been previously seen as their traditional base. The Independent 13.9.96 puts it quite clearly, "...the public is now more willing to listen to the left's criticisms of the government's attitude to workplace stress. Job losses among the middle class in particular, and the perception that available work is increasingly temporary, low paid and part time, are having an insidious effect on the economic confidence of swing voters."

Unfortunately, Blair has picked just this time to launch his campaign of distancing the labour leadership from the trade unions. Labour should be setting a truly radical agenda that would reflect the sea-change in people's attitudes that has taken place since 1992. Instead, Blair is leading a campaign of trying to out-Tory the Tories. Even Major has begun to recognise the shift that has taken place. He sent his treasury chief secretary William Waldegrave out to promote the governments record. Half of people in temporary jobs last year have now moved into permanent work, he claimed. Of course, we must ask: what about the other half, at least

800,000 people, who are still forced to survive on the fringes of the labour market. Instead of taking up issues like this, Labour's junior employment spokesman, Stephen Byers, used his opportunity to speak to four journalists over a £165 meal in Blackpool to float the idea that the Labour leadership would hold a referendum to abolish the trade union vote at conference and remove the trade union representatives from the NEC soon after the election. It is clear that the right wing Party leadership are more concerned in trying to limit any potential opposition to its policies than to take up the real issues facing workers today.

## Fight

These moves, if they come, will be fought tooth and nail by Labour and union activists. Blair proved himself to have little regard for the real Labour Party when he wrote in the Observer that one of the great tragedies of history was the division of "radical politics" in Britain. "As a result," he argues, "Lloyd George, Keynes and Beveridge remain separated from Atlee and Bevin and Bevan, though in truth they believed in the same basis principles." Of course this fails to see why the Labour Party was set up in the first place. Why did the early Labour pioneers see the need to set up an independent party. If they had wanted to be in the same party as Lloyd George, so revered by Blair, they would have remained with the Liberals. The answer is simple. The Liberal Party was and is a party of big business, it can never genuinely represent the interests of working people and their families. And this is still true today.

## Immense

The problems are immense. But one thing is clear, unless a Labour government breaks with big business and commits itself to carry through a programme in the interests of ordinary people then it will face real problems. The recent Guardian poll points out that 43% of the population, and 63% of Labour voters, now favour more socialist planning as an answer to Britain's economic problems. This reflects the dramatic shifts of opinion that have taken place over the last few years. We are faced with an historic opportunity. Labour must seize it.



# Liverpool dockers: one year on

On September 28th, 500 Liverpool dockers will lead a demonstration through the city to mark the 12 month anniversary of their dismissal by the Merseyside Docks and Harbour Company (MDHC). The dispute between the dockers and the MDHC cannot be characterised as a simple case of employer verses employee. Sacked because they refused to cross a picket line, the struggle of the Liverpool dockers is above all a political struggle—MDHC taking full advantage of the Tories' anti-trade union laws to sack what was the last major unionised dock workforce in the country. The reintroduction of casual labour on Liverpool's docks marks a return to the working practices of the 19th century and the destruction of the gains won by the dockers through generations of struggle.

by Paul Nowak  
Wirral TUC

This fight against casualisation is not unique to the docks industry—which is one of the reason why the dockers' struggle has gained such an echo throughout the labour movement. Up and down the country and across all industries, employers are waging warfare against their workers; determined to squeeze the maximum amount of profit out of the working class. Such developments follow a typical pattern. Whenever the economy is in a downturn the employers attempt to maintain their profit margins by lowering wages and attacking working conditions—and they view the breaking of the trade

unions as central to this strategy.

The unfortunate fact is that in these efforts they are invariably aided by the labour and trade union leaders. "Social Partnership" and "New Unionism", as espoused by John Monks, are little more than a reworking of a tired and discredited theme and offer little hope to either the Liverpool dockers or the millions of workers throughout Britain who are suffering at the hands of big business. Instead of taking the fight to the employers, the labour and trade union leaders seem intent on surrendering before the battle has begun! Yet despite this, there are clear signs that the patience of their members is wearing increasingly thin—as witnessed by the ongoing postal and rail strikes, which are a harbinger of events which will develop over the coming period.

In reality the trade union leaders have failed the Liverpool dockers. Internationally, support—including unofficial industrial action—has been consistent and effective, as dockers from as far afield as the USA and Australia have rallied to support their Liverpool counterparts. But in Britain the union leaders have limited themselves to platitudes and vague gestures of support. Of course, part of the reason why solidarity action in support of the dockers has not been forthcoming is because of the anti-trade union laws, which have outlawed secondary action. But the reality is that these laws have been used as an excuse for inaction. This is reflected in the fact that the dockers were refused the chance to address the TUC conference, despite the massive support which exists for

them amongst the activists and the rank and file.

It is this support from the grassroots which has helped to sustain the dockers through 12 hard months and ensured that their struggle is not forgotten or buried in the slanders and lies which the MDHC has heaped upon them. It is essential that this support is not just maintained but is in fact extended and taken to every corner of the labour movement. Trade unionists should ensure that this issue is taken up in their branches and financial support should be supplemented with workplace collections and levies. Likewise, Labour Party members should raise this issue at every level within the party, linking this struggle with the Labour leadership's current refusal to commit themselves to repeal the Tory anti-trade union laws. The Labour and trade union movement cannot afford for the Liverpool dockers to lose their fight. Defeat would be a crushing blow for a movement already battered by hostile legislation. Victory for the dockers will help mark a turning point for the British labour movement—hastening an end to Tory misery and acting as a beacon of hope to millions of British workers.

● **Say No to casual labour!**  
● **Reinstate the Liverpool dockers!**

*Messages of support and donations should be sent to:*

J Davies,  
Secretary/Treasurer  
MDSSC, 19 Scorton St,  
Liverpool L6 MS

*The dockers are on the internet at:  
<http://www.gn.apc.org/labournet>*

Issue 45  
October 1996

Editorial	2
Postal dispute	4
NUJ	5
TUC review	6
Education	8
Cable Street	9
Information technology	10
USA	12
Blair's honeymoon	14
Labour Party	16
Australia	19
Iraq	20
Belgium	24
Hungary	27

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# Postal workers reballot

Under intense pressure from Tony Blair and threats from Royal Mail, including that of legal action, postal workers' leaders have decided to reballot the membership on further strike action.

Given the background, such a measure is being seen as an attempt to strengthen the leadership's hand in face of management provocations. What is needed now is a campaign of union activists to ensure a massive 'yes' vote for continued strike action. It is clear that Royal Mail is still determined to introduce team working, and changes in working practices, in their drive for increased 'efficiency'.

Postal workers have no alternative but to fight. To back down now would simply give the green light to management to ruthlessly trample upon all past agreements. Already, they have reverted to intimidation and victimisation of union activists up and down the country. Sackings on trumped up charges have already taken place in Edinburgh and London, with countless others in the pipeline facing disciplinary action. If the strike action against team working is called off, the bosses would have a field day. We must demand: *No victimisation! No provocations!* There must be no more threats or dismissal of union members involved in action. If any postal worker is attacked, we must be immediately balloted for strike action over this issue. An injury to

one is an injury to all. Many activists are particularly angry about the intervention of Tony Blair and co. in the dispute—seemingly on the side of the bosses - saying the deal was quite reasonable. Rather than preach the management's case, as Labour leader, he should be siding with the workers in dispute.

The Labour leadership should be giving full support to the fight of the postal workers not trying to undermine the struggle.

Postal workers have no alternative but to vote for further action to show that they are not cowed by the threats from the bosses and their friends in the Tory government. However it is clear the time has come to look at stepping up the action so as to push for a speedy resolution to the dispute—but with victory to the union. All sections of the labour movement should give full support to the fight of the postal workers.

*"We now have to organise to show Royal Mail that their offer is unacceptable, by a massive vote in favour of continued industrial action",* said Charlie Balch, secretary of RML, SE Wales Amalgamated. *"Our resolve is unchanged and a strong mandate will cement our unity and take us through to victory. Clearly we need now to step up the action for an all-out stoppage. That would bring Royal Mail to its knees, stop victimisations, and guarantee our demands."*

# Housing benefit rule change hits youth

**Since the Tories have been in office, young working class people have been consistently attacked, whether it be the homeless on the streets of Britain, young single parents or the low paid.**

As well as the coming of the hated job-seekers allowance, October also sees the introduction of a new set of Housing Benefit rules, affecting those below the age of 25 years.

These new regulations will directly affect young people who currently live in non-housing association private rented accommodation and who are not assured tenants i.e. most young single tenants. The new regulations come into force on October 7th and will affect those who make a claim after this date. Prior to January, if the local Rent Officer decided that the rent benefit that Housing Benefits were being asked to pay to a tenant was too high then they would put a restriction on the level of the figure. However, if the person was considered vulnerable then the Housing Benefits section could overturn the Rent Officer's decision. This obviously saved many tenants from finding themselves out on the street with all the dangers which that implies. Since January, however, the powers of the Rent Officer has been increased over that of the Benefit Office. The rent money paid to people considered vulnerable would now have to come out of payments for "exceptional circumstances" based on a set level of funds, therefore when the money runs out, so do the payments.

From October, the maximum eligible rent (i.e. what the Rent Officer considers housing benefit assessment

should be paid on - not what the landlord is charging) for a single person below the age of 25 years will be equal to the average rent for single room accommodation within the local area—this level is known as the Single Room Rent (SRR). A single room means bedsit so far as they as they are concerned:

"Accommodation consists of a single room with shared use of toilet and bathroom facilities."

If the rent that the tenant is being charged is higher than the Single Room Rent for that area—and they invariably are—then the SRR figure is used to calculate benefit, which means a rebate substantially less than what the landlord is charging, even if the tenant is on income support! The protection against this new ruling is minimal and will not favour those making a backdated claim.

As usual, it is the local Labour councils who will be carrying out this scheme on behalf of the government. Even though the Labour Party controls a record number of councils, the leadership's unwillingness to take on the government over these issues is allowing the Tories to trample over young people and put even more of them out onto the streets. The next Labour government should see as one of its main priorities the rebuilding of the welfare state and the restoration of council budgets to decent levels so that the more vulnerable in society do not end up homeless and destitute.

**Dave O'Brien**  
Youth and Student  
Officer  
Erith and  
Thamesmead CLP

**Socialist Appeal**  
**Labour Party Conference**  
**Fringe meeting**  
**White's Pub**  
**Cedar Square**  
**Blackpool**  
**opposite Winter Gardens**  
**Tuesday 1st October 7.30**  
**speakers: Ted Grant,**  
**Nigel Pearce (vice-chair**  
**Yorkshire NUM)**



# NUJ conference

## Back up words with action

NUJ Conference is set to open with an attack, backed by the NEC, on the Labour Party leadership's reversal of much of its policy on the media. It is not only on devolution, the privatised utilities and the minimum wage which Labour is abandoning its former position but on the media too. Journalists were sickened by the sight of Tony Blair flying half way round the world for breakfast with Rupert Murdoch whilst union members at News International titles are denied the most basic trade union rights.

by Jeremy Dear  
Vice President NUJ

The motions condemn Labour's "surrender to commercial interests" and instruct the union to campaign vigorously in the TUC to fight the increasing concentration of ownership of the media. In the wake of massive redundancies and a spate of takeovers in the national and provincial press, Conference is also set to hit out at the media fat cats — individuals "rewarded by the City for sacking staff and lowering the standards of their papers". But perhaps the most important debate of the Conference will be around the question of union recognition. For several years the NUJ has fought for the TUC and a future Labour government to commit itself to a policy of "union recognition without qualifications" and for the repeal of all anti-trade union laws. The current TUC and Labour Party policies will leave millions of workers without the right of proper union

representation, will still ban secondary action and fail to introduce limits on working hours and a host of other much needed workplace rights. But this year's Conference whilst reaffirming NUJ's radical stand looks to set to go one step further and call on the union to actively campaign around this issue. The amendment to motion 31 calls for the union to "mount an immediate recruitment and recognition campaign involving the maximum number of union members in publicity and lobbying and to prepare the ground for industrial action to win back union rights." Motion 32 calls on the NEC to "identify key workplaces in different sectors where a union recognition campaign on pay can be fought."

### Election

At last year's Conference a composite calling for the election of all union officials was lost by just three votes on a card vote. The composite called for the retrospective implementation of the policy — in effect meaning tearing up the contracts of existing members of staff and imposing new ones and it was on that point that a number of branches changed their vote. This year, Conference is given the opportunity to enhance the union's democratic process by voting for motion 76 which calls for "all new officials to be elected by a ballot of the membership of the sector they will serve and be subject to periodical re-election every five years." A further extension of union democracy can be achieved by backing motion 57 which calls for the publication in the annual report of "the expenses

claimed by NEC members and officials". Over £20,000 was claimed by members of the NEC in the first six months of 1996 and the membership is rightly concerned to know how much their NEC members are claiming and to make them accountable.

The NUJ also looks set to join a growing number of unions in passing a resolution condemning the single European currency and calling for the TUC to reverse its position in support of monetary union because "measures which need to be implemented to make Britain eligible for membership of a single currency are in direct opposition to the interests of working people". The Conference will also condemn the government's introduction of the Job Seeker's Allowance in motion 106 but also attack the Labour leadership's failure to develop a clear policy to tackle mass unemployment.

As the Conference meets, NUJ member Raghbir Singh will have spent 18 months in prison facing deportation on national security grounds despite still never having been

charged or convicted of any crime. Recently his application for political asylum was turned down and now the NUJ needs to step up its campaign on this issue to ensure he is not sent back to face torture or even death in India.

One of the highlights of the Conference will be the two guest speakers. Instead of inviting stuffy dignitaries the NUJ has thrown the floor open to two strikers — one from the Merseyside dockers dispute and one from the Detroit Newspapers strike in America. They will be ensured a warm reception by delegates.

The NUJ Conference will be full of fine words and a number of important motions will be passed. But words are not enough. Too often the radical nature of the Conference is diluted once the motions get to the NEC and its committees. It is up to lay activists to ensure the policies passed are implemented.

### Growing

The NUJ's membership is growing and there is a new feeling of confidence in many sectors of the union. We need to build on this to develop a clear strategy based around our current campaign work involving workplace campaign meetings and leafleting, local demonstrations, lobbies, a recruitment drive, all backed by a campaign amongst the membership to win support for industrial action not only to regain recognition but to begin to reverse over a decade of cuts in pay, longer working hours, worse conditions and an ever increasing burden of work falling on fewer workers.





# TUC highlights conflicts to come

After 17 years of a vicious, anti-working class government trying to take back every gain the movement has struggled for over the last 100 years, the Tories are finally on their way out. You would imagine therefore that a national meeting of the representatives of the most powerful force in British society, the organised working class, would be an exciting place to be just now. You would be wrong.

by Phil Mitchinson

It would be no more than reasonable for you to assume that on the eve of the first Labour government in two decades, the TUC would be debating what measures that Labour government should introduce in the interests of ordinary people. Again you would be wrong. Of course, with postal and railway workers taking action (and the Liverpool dockers still fighting

on) the TUC must have been too busy discussing what action to take to support them along with the other workers who are struggling against the bosses relentless drive to squeeze more and more profits out of them. You would still be mistaken.

Well, at least given the attacks on the welfare state, wages and conditions, etc. the TUC must have been deciding how to fight back? No. Clearly either you or the TUC general council must be out of touch with reality!

More than 5 million people, 23% of the working population are paid less than £4.00 an hour—so how could a £4.26 an hour minimum wage cost votes? British workers are being forced to work the longest hours in Europe. What about unemployment? According to the Bank of England's quarterly inflation report, the recent so-called fall in the figures can be entirely accounted for by those being forced off benefit rather than the

actual creation of new jobs. Against this background of unemployment and job insecurity, the bosses are trying to make us work longer and harder for less pay, so that railway workers, for example, end up being forced to go on strike to win the right for a toilet break!

These are the conditions which are forcing more and more workers to take action—and this is the best the bosses can offer at the time of a so-called boom. In July 152,000 working days were lost through strike action, up from a figure of just 32,000 in July of last year and representing more than half of the total figure for the whole of 1995. The TUC's own survey showed that 75% of the unions reviewed had organised strike ballots over the last 6 months with the proportion producing 'yes' majorities going up from 66% last year to 81% now. 65% of those unions interviewed responded by saying that they believed that strike figures would increase over the next 6 months. Of the strikes which have taken place during the review period 84% were either won or resulted in a "draw".

So why given all this and the prospect of finally getting rid of the Tories, was the TUC not a very exciting place to be? The answer was because all the sort of issues mentioned above were not the issues actually discussed. The theme of the congress was "new unionism"—sound familiar? The current obsession with putting "new" before everything reminds you of those adverts for "new" improved washing powders—and sure enough the new glossy packaging can't disguise the same old powder inside. All the film shows and rap songs in

the world can't hide the fact that "new unionism" is the same old "new realism"; the same talk of social partnership between workers and bosses i.e. the same old class collaboration, in the words of Arthur Scargill, "same old sell out."

Between the speech of Richard Trumka, Secretary-Treasurer of the American union organisation, the AFL-CIO (excepts of which are reproduced elsewhere) and Wednesday's debate on the minimum wage issue, the congress went to sleep listening to speeches on how the unions should work more closely with bosses to make their businesses more efficient (ie. profitable). But the debate on the minimum wage woke the congress up with a bang. John Monks and John Edmonds performed a double act along the lines of the "good cop/bad cop" routine familiar to fans of American police films. Finally the anger of delegates previously suppressed by the overwhelming desire not to "rock the boat" burst through to the surface and we got a glimpse of things to come with the TUC when we enter the period of a Labour government, a warning that the minimum wage is a line in the sand which the movement will not allow the Labour leaders to step over. Rodney Bickerstaffe, reflecting the mood of this year's Unison conference, challenged anyone speaking against the Unison/NUM motion to go away and "try living on £4.26 an hour." Bickerstaffe and Scargill received the biggest ovations of the congress.

The debate on anti-trade union legislation was overshadowed by Blair and Blunkett's attempts to 'out-Tory' the Tories on union bashing. Yet we still have the ludicrous situation of the TUC General Council not demanding that these laws be not only repealed but rendered useless in advance by non-compliance. All week the TUC leaders were condemning "armchair revolutionaries" and "class war rhetoric" but as Ken Thomas of the RMT explained, it isn't rhetoric we've had from the Tories over the last 17 years but "open class war." The delegates have sent a message to the Labour leadership that any failure to act in the interests of working people will not pass without an almighty struggle throughout the whole movement. A struggle will develop for real "new unionism" in which Marxism will play a full role just as it did in the founding of new unionism a 100 years ago.





# TUC delegates speak out

"New unionism - more like company unionism. The General Council are falling into the same trap as the Labour leaders, turning to spin doctors, film shows and gloss to impress the bosses, rather than inspiring workers with a fighting lead on the minimum wage, on pay and conditions, on defending jobs and union rights.

This so-called social partnership is just empty words—the only partnership the bosses understand is that between a horse and its rider, with themselves in the saddle of course. Social partnership we are told, can guarantee job security, increased investment - things we all want, but how can they be achieved? Not by taking one seat on the board, not by unions being the boss's tea boys, you can't control what you don't own. The bosses are only concerned with making profits that's what the capitalist system is all about. The so-called stake we are being offered is no more than crumbs from the bosses table—the only way jobs can be secured for all, pay and conditions be improved, and our industry rebuilt is by taking the key sectors of the economy into public ownership, under democratic workers control and management. We don't want nice words and glossy brochures, we want action.

I was shocked that only our delegation voted against this social partnership/stakeholder society nonsense. We got a lot of support from individual delegates, but they were mandated to vote for the General Council position, not to "rock the boat" in the run up to the election. But in the minimum wage debate, the trade union movement served a warning to the Labour leadership of what will happen if they fail to deliver for the workers who are going to put them into office. Then we'll see a real new unionism, rediscovering our traditions and offering workers a fighting socialist lead."

**Nigel Pearce**  
NUM delegate  
personal capacity

"This is my second congress, and it seems to me to be little more than a talking shop. If you pass a motion asking the General Council to investigate a problem, they come back with a survey; if you pass a motion calling for a campaign or some action, nothing gets done. Look at the minimum wage debate. Ken Cameron reminded us that last year's congress promised that the General Council would investigate and come back this year with a definite figure. We've been told not to get into an auction on the minimum wage, but now we've got Blair outbidding the Tories on

anti-union legislation. We shouldn't be co-operating with these laws, if someone hadn't broken the law in the past we wouldn't even be here today. all this talk about fairness seems to be camouflage for doing nothing. On common ownership we're told not to rock the boat, but we should be fighting for our members pay and conditions. In America they've had a campaign to go to the factories and recruit, we haven't been doing that. Ads in newspapers won't get new members. Mortgage and loan deals aren't the way to do it either. It's not legal benefits, but fighting

for wages, health and safety, that can build the unions.

The Respect Festival appealed to young people, and racism is a very important problem for us to fight. The future of the unions depends on winning youth. In my late 30s I'm one of the youngest in my delegation. To win young workers we need campaigns, we need to organise, we need to offer them something worth fighting for."

**Graham Goddard**  
Division 13 AEEU  
personal capacity

*In the run up to the general election the TUC should consider it to be their job to talk to the Labour leadership about what is needed from an incoming Labour government. We are all part of one movement after all and have more right to be listened to than the CBI and the City of London. To my mind there should be no division between the unions and the Labour Party but what is needed is for the Labour leaders to remember what side they are supposed to be on. The election will be won by fighting the Tories not copying them. Low paid workers are looking for the minimum wage to be set at a decent level and this was reflected from the floor of the congress during the debate on the issue. When you think about it, £4.26 is a pretty low figure anyway so we were right not to settle for less. The Labour Party shouldn't be settling for less either. Delegates like myself are also pretty angry about the suggestion that Labour will ban strikes in the public sector. We want to see the anti-trade union laws removed not added to. As a Labour Party member and as a trade unionist I want to see us win the next election on a fighting socialist programme that will give my kids hope for a better future.*

**Mary Hanson**  
CWU delegate,  
personal capacity

"Congress didn't wake up until the discussion on the minimum wage, it was the first real debate of the week. That's not a surprise when you consider that the whole theme of the congress has been "don't rock the boat," don't put any demands on the Labour leaders. My own view on the minimum wage is this - how can you go to a low paid worker and promise them a minimum wage without quoting a figure. Surely the way to win the support of millions of low paid workers is to tell them they're going to get £4.26 an hour, rather than saying well we don't know how much you're going to get, we haven't decided yet, we have to discuss it with not only the unions but also the bosses. Low paid workers know full well that those same bosses are the very people who keep their pay down in the first place."

**Pat Kenny**  
London Division AEEU  
personal capacity



# End Tory nightmare in education

Everyone who wants a viable future for the state education system will welcome the national demonstration in London on Saturday 19th October called by the National Union of Teachers.

Seventeen years of Tory rule with numerous pieces of legislation that were never seriously funded, have culminated in a very real crisis in the state education system. Teachers and other staff along with school governors are increasingly faced with this Tory generated nightmare.

The concept of the national curriculum is now generally considered by most to be a good idea but the Tories implementation is not about education, it is about tests at seven, eleven and fourteen years, with published leagues of exam results which take no account of a school's pupil intake. In these league tables selective fee paying schools are compared with schools whose pupils are from a deprived social and economic background as well as with pupils whose home language is not English. In addition special schools catering for pupils with moderate or severe learning difficulties are included in these tables.

Local Management Schools (LMS) is another area where there is some merit in school governing bodies having a say in the school's budget, but given the Tories dogmatic stance on the budget formula, which is entirely based on pupil numbers, LMS becomes a nonsense. This budget formula means that teacher's pay is calculated on average pay but the incremental pay scale has a range of approximately £10,000; thus a school with an older more experienced teaching staff is paying more in salaries than they are allocated by the budget formula. If a school is in deficit then the pressure is on the governors to get rid of experienced teachers and either replace them with younger inexperienced teachers often on

temporary contracts or to increase class sizes. Given that under LMS each school stands alone the tendency is that the consequences of any budget deficit is inflated. Furthermore, the fact that each pupil comes with a price-tag means that schools are forced to both compete for numbers and to enrol the more academically gifted and less disruptive pupils in the hope of achieving a better position in the league table.

The Tories introduced LMS and the National Curriculum and abolished Local Authority Inspection & Advisory Services as well as abolishing Her Majesty's Inspectorate, the national school inspection service. They have been replaced by OFSTED, a Tory quango, which is seen as having a political role in seeking out and destroying so called "Failing Schools". The fact that the Labour Party leadership have promised £3 bn for school buildings is to be warmly welcomed but on all other education matters the Labour leadership appear to be jumping on the Tory's bandwagon of rooting out so-called incompetent teachers and disruptive pupils without addressing the real question, namely the gross underfunding of the state education system. The labour and trade union movement must support the NUT demonstration on 19th October and go to develop the campaign for the proper resourcing of education based on the curriculum needs of the pupils/students within a comprehensive state education system that caters for all. As a minimum the campaign must also demand: the return to democratic Local Education Authority control, a maximum class size of thirty pupils, an end to league tables and the abolition of selective education.

**Councillor John Byrne,**  
**Member Manchester Education**  
**Committee,**  
**(in personal capacity)**  
**Bryan Beckingham,**  
**Oldham NUT**

## Trumka speaks at TUC

Richard Trumka, secretary-treasurer of the AFL-CIO and leader of the United mineworkers of America, addressed this years TUC congress...

**"We have a saying back in Washington that no working person's job, family or Harley Davidson is safe as long as the United States Congress is in session!**

**"Between 1947 and 1973, the median paychecks of American workers more than doubled, and the bottom 20% enjoyed the biggest gain. Since 1973, however, median earnings have fallen by about 15% and the bottom 20% have fallen furthest behind. More than 40 % of all earnings gains have gone to the richest 1%.**

**"The combination of productivity gains and falling wages has created an explosion in profits, which has driven the stock market to new highs. Companies are making incredible amounts of money, and corporate executives are taking home unprecedented and unjustified millions in salaries. And it has all come out of workers wages. The economist Lester Thurow called it, "The greatest redistribution of wealth without a revolution." We call it the wage and wealth gap and it's the biggest case of grand larceny in our history without someone going to jail.**

**"The wage gap has become the number one issue in our country. Workers and our families are suffering as they haven't suffered since the great depression. America needs a raise.**

**"Now if this sounds militant, be assured it is just that."**

**"Why not a lean mean fighting machine, one in every country, defeating politicians who turn their backs on working men and women and our unions. Why not?"**

**Why not a movement with strength again, the kind it takes to demand respect and workplace democracy from our employers. The kind it takes to rescue our children from slavery and our parents from poverty. That's the kind of labour movement America needs, that's the kind of labour movement the world needs. America needs a raise and the world needs a raise - why not a labour movement that delivers one?"**



# The battle of Cable Street

60 years ago, in October 1936, the workers of London's East End blocked the path of Oswald Mosley's Blackshirts - a defeat the fascists were never able to recover from. Ted Grant, a participant on the day, later wrote of the events in his 1948 pamphlet, *The Menace of Fascism*. To commemorate the anniversary we reprint an excerpt from the pamphlet dealing with this great event in the history of the British working class.

The laws of the decline of the capitalist system are the same in Britain as in other capitalist countries. The legend, assiduously cultivated by the leaders of the labour movement, that Britain is "different," has no basis in fact. This has been demonstrated on many occasions in the history of capitalist Britain. Fascism, as an expression of the decline of capitalist society, can become under certain conditions, as real a menace in Britain as it became in capitalist Germany and Italy.

The world slump of 1929-33 saw the emergence of the Mosley-fascist movement as a serious force for the first time in this country. The capitalist class of Britain recognised in the Mosley movement a militant and extra-parliamentary weapon which they could utilise against the working class in a period of social upheaval, in times of crisis and slump. Only the fact that the British capitalists succeeded in emerging from those critical years without the need for direct action against the workers determined their limited use of fascists at that time. Nevertheless, they kept the fascist movement in being as an "insurance"

against the future.

At this time the fascists were receiving support from numerous influential British industrialists. Towards the end of 1936, Mosley boasted in an interview with the Italian fascist paper *Giornale d'Italia*, that he was, "receiving support from British industrialists." And that, "a number of industrialists in the North who hitherto had given his movement secret support, fearing commercial boycott, are now stating openly that they are on the fascist side." (*News Chronicle*, October 19, 1936).

Mosley received the backing of the powerful newspapers, the *Daily Mail*, *Evening News* and the *Sunday Dispatch*. Then as now the Black Shirt movement carried out its anti-working class and anti-semitic provocations under the protection of the state. The British fascists were soon to prove that in brutality and method there was little difference to choose between them and Hitler's Stormtroops and Mussolini's Squadri. At a mass rally of British fascists at Olympia on June 7, 1934, the British working class were given an idea of what to expect if fascism triumphed. The savage and calculated brutalities inflicted by the specially

trained fascist thugs, upon any of the audience who dared to voice even the mildest opposition to Mosley's speech by interjections, outraged all sections of the population. Organised bands of fascists set upon hecklers, men and women alike, beating them unconscious, kicking them while they were on the ground. Nurtured and aided by the authorities and the police, the fascists insolently organised provocative marches in working class and Jewish districts, imitating the tactics of the Nazis at the dawn of their movement in Germany. The British working class gave the Blackshirts their answer. Every demonstration called by the fascists was answered by a great counter-demonstration of workers and anti-fascists. At Trafalgar Square, Hyde Park, in Liverpool, Merthyr, Newcastle - all over the country - the workers rallied against the fascists. In red Glasgow the fascists were unable to hold meetings. In the working class district of Bermondsey, London, barricades put up and manned by tens of thousands of workers successfully prevented the Mosley-fascists from marching through Long Lane.

Outstanding in these struggles of the workers against the fascists was the defeat of Mosley's projected march through the East End of London in 1936. Despite appeals from all sections of the working class movement, including even the Labour leaders, the then Home Secretary, Sir John Simon, refused to ban the march. On the contrary, he sought to facilitate it in every way. 10,000 foot and mounted police drawn from all over London and the provinces were mobilised to protect Mosley and his 2,500 fascists to ensure their march through the East End. This police protection was thoroughly organised even to the extent of

wireless equipment and an auto-giro hovering overhead. The weight of the state was brought to bear to protect the Blackshirts in the teeth of the opposition of the London working class. The police authorities planned for Mosley's protection as though it were a military project. Despite these measures of the state, the fascist march was defeated. Half a million workers turned out on the streets, rallying round the slogan, "They shall not pass," the workers formed a wall of bodies on the route through which Mosley was too march. From early morning, baton charges were made by the mounted police against the workers to clear a path for the fascists. But the determined opposition of the workers made it impossible. The police tried to create a diversion by clearing Cable Street. But here again, the workers of London threw up fresh barricades of furniture, timber, railings, doors torn from houses nearby, and anything that would help to bar the path of the hated fascists. This magnificent mass action, including and representing all shades of working class opinion and organisations, Labour, Communist Party, ILP, Trotskyist, League of Youth and YCL - forced the then Commissioner of Police, Sir Philip Game, to order Mosley and his thugs to abandon the route. United action of the workers had defeated Mosley. The defeat at Cable Street in 1936 dealt a severe blow to Mosley. Afraid of the organised might of the working class so militantly demonstrated, the East End fascist movement declined. The spectacle of the workers action gave the fascists reason to pause. It induced widespread despondency and demoralisation in their ranks; their victory over the fascists imbued the working class with confidence. This united action of the workers at Cable Street, demonstrated anew the lesson: only vigorous counter-action hinders the growth of the menace of fascism.



**Cable Street 60th anniversary march**

**Sunday 6 October  
assemble 12 noon  
Altab Ali Park  
(nr. Gardiner's Corner)  
march to Cable St.**



# Information technology-who does it empower?

The 1980s saw the transformation of work for millions of workers in offices, libraries and banks through the introduction of 'new technology'. The use of computers replaced typewriters with word processors and manual record keeping of all kinds was replaced by automated systems.

by Barbara Humphries

More complex information and services could be provided but jobs and working conditions were threatened. In non-union workplaces 'new technology' was introduced without safeguards and staff found themselves working all hours in front of a visual display unit. The cost to health and safety at work has not yet been estimated but the sufferers of repetitive strain injury, a debilitating illness, associated with the constant use of a keyboard,

has yet to be legally accepted as an industrial disease with compensation accordingly. To academics and researchers the benefits of desktop publishing meant that work could be disseminated without being accepted by a publisher. Anyone with a home computer could publish. Computerisation benefited the 'customer' as more services became available and information improved, but for employees, once the initial novelty wore off, there were few benefits.

## Revolution

The 1990s have seen the 'information revolution' which is supposed to transform peoples' lives, at home and at work. Communication is via electronic mail which can be sent and received simultaneously, to be read at the leisure of the recipient. The availability of electronic databases and indexes has saved hours of time of

researchers in colleges and universities, as well as in commercial organisations. Access is available to up to date information from governments and international agencies throughout the world. Finally there is the Internet-the 'information superhighway' which is a medium for the dissemination of information and documents across the world on to your own computer screen. Anyone can publish or receive information on the Internet, in theory anyway. There is no control and no censorship, yet. The Internet was until a few years ago the preserve of enthusiasts, computer buffs, academics and information workers, excited by the concept of this 'new' medium for getting the latest United Nations publications, European Union documents, seeing where in the world a rare book was held, and above all being able to publish research without going through the financially lucrative publishing industry. Surely this must be democratic? Anyone who wished could publish without the censorship of the market, which what going to a commercial publisher is all about.

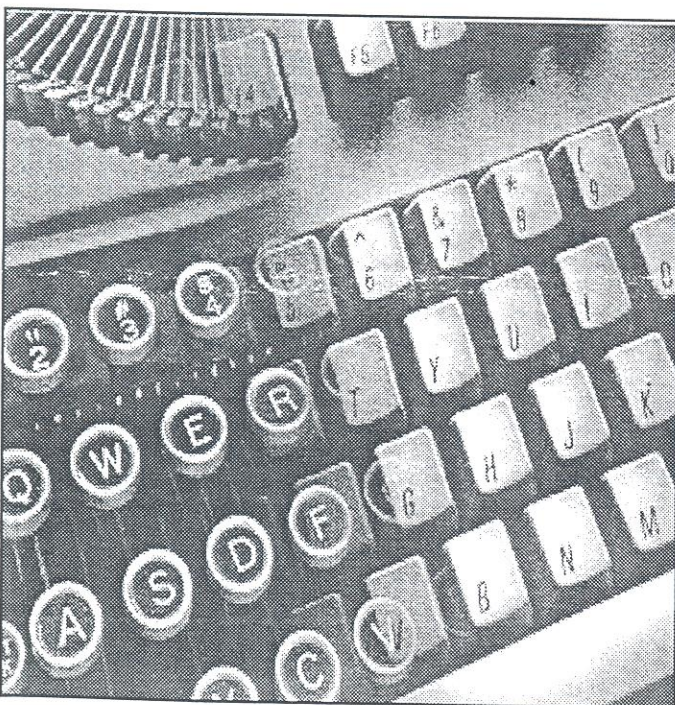
## Information

The potential of the Internet has now progressed beyond this small community and the prospect is being held out of everyone having access via a home computer and modem. People will be able to carry out their lives in cyberspace-order their 'virtual shopping', check out on travel information and follow the fortunes of their favourite football team while logged on to their computer? Is this a reality? Yes, it will be possible for most people. 41% of the population of the UK

own a home computer, many more will have access via their place of employment. But many people-the 'information poor' risk being left out of this. Those who are also unlikely to have access to a telephone, a car or a TV. This percentage increases dramatically in Third World countries. Bill Gates head of Microsoft has suggested in the USA that this gap can be overcome by investment in public libraries and his company might generously help to fund this, but he is not sure whether this service would be charged for and if it would be available only those who were already computer-literate! In Britain the public library service is facing serious cuts, and additional services such as loans of CDs are already regularly charged for. If the Tories were to win the next election privatisation of the library service is on their agenda and even if they don't it is hard to envisage that free access to the Internet would be provided in the current financial climate. This is even assuming that the initial investment to connect every library to the Internet is forthcoming.

## Luddites?

However in spite of the inequalities posed by the information superhighway, the left cannot afford to be Luddite in the face of this new medium. It is not the great democratic source of 'empowerment' embraced by the right in politics (and some on the left as well), but it has been effectively used by the labour movement. There are 'web sites' on the Internet for information about industrial disputes, left wing journals, campaigns and fringe groups who do not publish such as the Newbury road protesters have set up pages on the Internet. Access to the Internet is cheaper and easier than traditional publishing-think about the investment that a printing press entails. It has been used by workers in Eastern Europe and the Third World who have access to it cheaply. It cannot at the present time be controlled and censored by oppressive regimes, as can printed material and information can be beamed across frontiers. In defiance of national governments. The printed word has





not always been available to all. In the early days of the labour movement most workers could not read and could not afford newspapers. Information was spread by word of mouth at meetings and newspapers and leaflets were read out in cafes and pubs. This has been replaced by radio and television in the 20th century. Still today in many countries newspapers and magazines have restricted access.

The lack of censorship on the Internet has brought condemnation of the abuse of this medium by those peddling child pornography and prostitution but these are problems of our society, not of the Internet.

### Internet

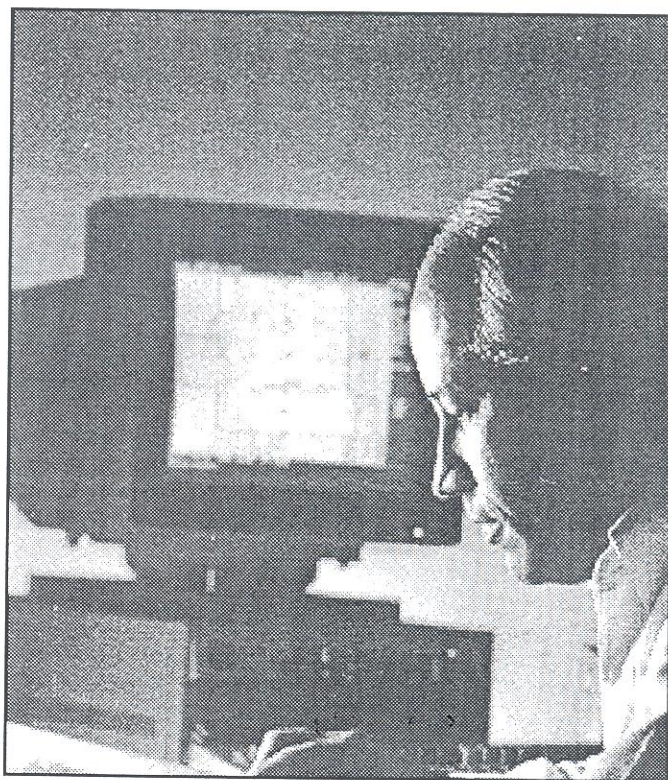
Perhaps the real question to be asked is not whether everyone will have access to the Internet or not, but what they will actually have access to when they get there? Big business has been slow in picking up on the Internet. Academics, some political activists and those anxious to take advantage of a new medium have been much more on the ball. All this looks set to change. Inevitably in a world controlled by capitalists, it will be they who decide what goes on the Internet—just as they decide what goes in the press. The pioneer years will soon be over. There is only so much space in cyberspace and it is likely that those who took the first strides will be bounced off in favour of commercial interests. Increasingly the Internet will be used by big business and in so far as ordinary people are touched it will like any other source of information. Increasingly information points will be restricted to subscription payers only and restricted by password.

Censorship by the market if not by governments will creep in. So who will benefit? Even with your own PC (personal computer) you will get the message "Access denied" or you will fail to connect because the lines are busy. Information technology posed the possibility of cheap and easy access to information for all. But technology cannot change society. Empowerment

can only come through the people taking power. In a class society it will be used for the benefit of the ruling class. The control of electronic information is already frighteningly under the control of a few large companies such as Microsoft. These companies whose annual turnovers are larger than that of a Third World country and whose directors rate among the world's top ten billionaires hold enormous power. Criticism has been made of state and ex-state monopolies such as British Telecom being offered rights by a future Labour Government to lay the cables to connect all schools to the information highway, (a policy which socialists should support, together with the re-nationalisation of British Telecom) but there is no watchdog or regulator for these companies which provide the software for browsing the Internet, supposedly the information medium on which we all to depend in the future. These companies first priority is their own profits, even their success allows generous gestures at the present time!

### Electronic

The same can be said for companies supplying electronic databases and information. A change in relationship has occurred between publishers and libraries. Libraries currently buy books and serials. Once paid for these publications are the property of the Library, to be available to future generations of library users. Not so with electronic databases and journals, including CD-ROMs. They are rented by libraries by payment of a subscription. Failure to keep up a subscription will mean not only loss of current information—but all back issues! Increasingly libraries are attracted to replace printed copy with electronic sources as they are easier to use. But some libraries are supposed to be the custodians not only of current information, but depositaries for posterity. This is now very much in question. Suppliers of electronic information will put up charges; they also demand restricted access by cost—hence librarians find themselves policing the use of electronic informa-



tion by dishing out password on the basis of proven identity. A far cry from information for all. The fears are that as these publishers gain a more profitable market they will ditch libraries altogether thus disempowering all those who do not have the funds to privately fund their information needs. It will then be too late to return to the printed word. At the same time government publishers such as HMSO are being privatised and are going down the profit-making road. Information is an important resource—its ownership cannot be left in the hands of a few profit making companies.

### Society

Technology cannot change the basis of social relations. It can be used for the good of humanity or for the profit of a few. In the hands of the many it can be empowering. Democratic rights can be enhanced and a future socialist society will use electronic information for economic planning. Today trade unions use electronic mail to organise picket lines. The use of IT is however not a substitute for organisation and meetings. Information technology can be used to contribute to the atomisation of society. At work people no longer talk to each other—they e-mail each other. This means that you do not

have to leave your desk in the course of a day. It is very unsocial and useful for management as workers no longer have cause to talk to each other. and thus "waste time". The logic of this is to extend homeworking, which would further undermine the solidarity of the workplace. Also at home you would organise your whole life on your PC. When do you go out and meet people? Your entire life is around a PC, that is how you communicate. As communities were broken up the use of telecommunications replaced the neighbourly visit. Now PCs will replace the human voice. Gates envisages distant games being played by two or more people remotely, sitting in their own homes using a computer screen. What will this do to social lives? You will live your life on a PC living in virtual reality, a substitute for life itself. This is the vision of the future of those who control the information industry. To conclude the control and ownership of information must be challenged by the labour movement. But also the potential of information technology should be harnessed to building a better world based on socialist ideals, not the atomised society envisaged by the strategists of capital.



# The end of the American dream

Next month millions of Americans are faced with the farce of choosing a President drawn from the two big business parties, the Democrats and the Republicans. Bill Clinton and Bob Dole in reality constitute the Tweedle-dee and Tweedle-dum of US politics. That is why the majority of those eligible to vote, as in 1992, will stay at home.

by Rob Sewell

For millions of workers and youth the American Dream has fallen apart. Between 1983 and 1989, the bottom 40 per cent of American families saw their net wealth tumble by \$256 billion as their incomes declined and their debts grew. This new generation has

experienced conditions not seen since the Great Depression. More than two million of the best paying jobs have been destroyed by down-sizing, out-sourcing and temporary contracts. The only new jobs being created by corporate America are those on poverty wages. As a result, the actual buying power of worker's wages, after taking into account taxes and inflation, has declined from \$10.81 an hour in 1973 to \$9.00 an hour in 1993.

## Richest

In contrast, over the same period, the richest of the rich - the top half of one per cent of all families - increased their total wealth from \$3.54 trillion to \$4.99 trillion. That's an increase of \$1.45 trillion! How

much is \$1.45 trillion? It's the same as providing 3.6 million workers with a \$40,000 a year job for 10 years.

In fact the richest 400 Americans saw their wealth increase by 382 per cent between 1982 and 1994. Today the super rich average \$878 million dollars each in wealth. According to the AFL-CIO News, in 1980 the average chief executive's pay was 41 times the average worker pay. By 1993 the average executive's pay was 149 times higher than the average worker pay. As the new American Labour Party stated: "A tiny handful of Americans are getting filthy rich while the rest of us stagnate."

The razzamataz and Hollywood-style public relations image of both the Republican and Democratic Conventions fail to hide the fact that they both represent the interests of corporate America. Each convention received around \$12 million from sponsorships and cash in-kind contributions from big business, equal to the amount provided from federal funds. Millions of American are already sick of the glitz, hypocrisy and the waste of millions of dollars squandered on the campaigns for the White House by Clinton and Dole. The nauseating spectacle of their wives and children paraded before the media in the vain effort to project American family values, and win votes, has turned many voters off. Dole had already spent his pre-nomination limit of \$37 million during the pri-

maries, a bit more than Clinton, but both will pick up around \$61.8 million from the Federal Election Commission. Even Ross Perot, the so-called independent billionaire, who set up his own Reform Party, also accepted \$29.2 million towards his election expenses - which is down on the \$60 million he forked out in 1992. According to Senator Phil Gramm of Texas, summing up the corrupt nature of US politics, money is the "mother's milk" of politics. Dole and the Republicans are trailing badly. Despite their victories in the House of Representatives and Senate in 1994, the rightwing "Contract With America" has alarmed many people. So much so, that Dole was obliged to quit the Senate and distance himself from Newt Gingrich and the Republican-dominated Congress. His desperate strategy has been to offer sweeping cuts in income and capital gains taxes, previously criticised by Dole himself.

## Trade unions

Despite the fact that the US trade unions meekly follow the Democrats, much as the British trade unions backed the Liberal Party in the last century, the Clinton administration has been no friend of the working class. He signed NAFTA in an attempt to undermine wages and conditions in the US, as well as increase the exploitation of US, Mexican and Canadian workers. There are now three million additional people living without health insurance today compared with 1992. He has cut the budgets of Medicare, Medicaid, education and other welfare programmes, even further than Reagan and Bush. He has cut the federal deficit by cutting welfare as do the Republicans, only a little less abrasively. Clinton's recent signing of welfare legislation putting an end to the 61-year guarantee of federal cash for the poor, is the latest example of how he intends to proceed. Introduced at the end of August, it prevents anyone from receiving benefit for more than two years at a time, with a five year lifetime



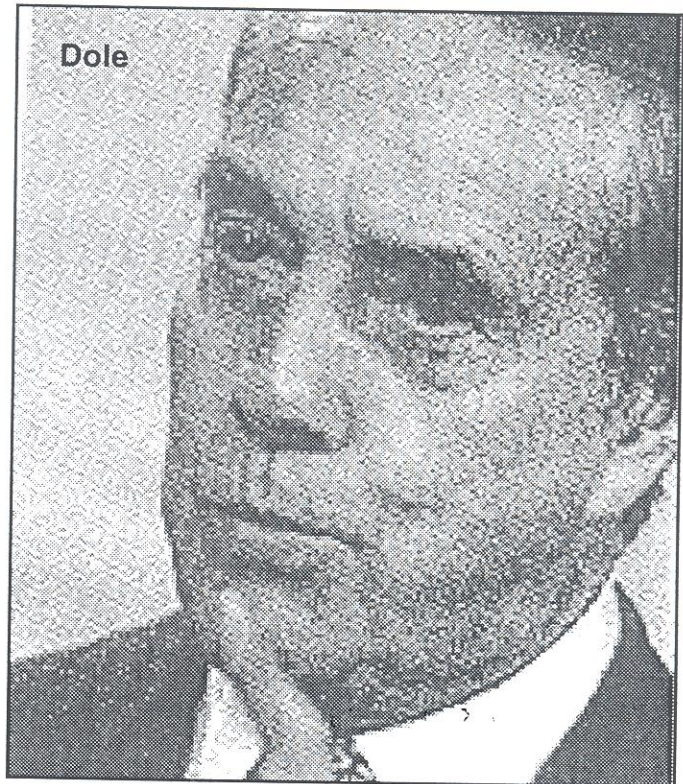


limit. In California, prenatal care for 70,000 women will be stopped immediately; also affected is spending on unemployment, retirement, food stamps, public housing, disabilities, non-emergency health and higher education. The new law also removes the right of immigrants to welfare payments and food stamps. According to the Financial Times: *"It is the first real break with Mr Roosevelt's New Deal. Endorsing it was politics. The aim was to re-establish Mr Clinton as a New Democrat. Middle America does not like welfare."* (30/8/96)

### President

Clinging to the Democrat's coat tails, the American unions have pumped in \$30 million to support Clinton for President, arguing that the alternative - Republican control of both White House and Congress - is worse. They will be sadly disillusioned in the event of a Clinton win in November, given a new economic recession in the next few years and the inevitable attacks on working people by a new Clinton Administration. The looming crises in the funding of federal pensions and in Medicare and Medicaid, and the cuts that will ensue, will be tackled once he is re-elected. As the Financial Times continued: *"His prospectus will not - as he claims - recreate the American dream. That is impossible. The effortless economic growth of the post-war decades which guaranteed the country's children a higher standard of living than their parents has gone forever."* The only alternative for American workers is the building of the American Labour Party that was founded last June in Cleveland, Ohio. The Labour Convention decided as a priority to develop its structures and build its membership before embarking on the electoral plane. A Convention in two years time will consider the question again, and debate standing candidates at a local and state level. If this was agreed, it could become the starting point for a shot at

the Presidential elections in the year 2000. A Labour candidate, under deteriorating economic conditions, could become the focal point for all the disillusionment in the present two party system. By that time, given the opposition to the Clinton Administration that would arise from the attacks on the working class in the coming period, a party of labour could really make its mark. The US Labour party could, under these conditions, experience a great fillip, and see its support grow rapidly in the trade unions and in the working class generally. It would mark the first serious intervention of independent Labour in US politics since the early 1920s. It would be a qualitative turning point for organised labour. Even the initial response for Pat Buchanan in the Republican primaries, with his anti big business stance, is symptomatic of the underlying shifts that are taking place in American politics and the discontent with the two party system. The same was true of Perot's campaign in 1992, where as an independent candidate he stood on an anti-establishment ticket, and was able to pick up 19 per cent of the vote. Recent polls have shown more than 60 per cent support for the formation of a third party. A radical Labour Party could easily tap into the colossal discontent that exists in American society, and transform the whole situation. Ironically, the British Labour Party leadership are looking to Clinton for inspiration. Ever since 1992, the rightwing "modernisers" have sought to ape the US Democrats and carry through a Clintonisation of the party. That is why Blair has distanced himself from the trade unions, thrown out Clause Four and adopted neo-Tory policies on a whole range of questions. Seeking to emulate the manner and approach of the Democrats, a host of Labour advisers were dispatched to the Democratic Convention in Chicago. People like Prescott, Gordon Brown and Chris Smith, from Labour's front bench, were there taking notes. In the words of



Prescott, *"You can't Clintonise British politics, but you can learn from them."* Learn what? What has this party got to offer working people in Britain?

### "New Labour"

*"For New Democrat substitute New Labour", states the Financial Times. "Partly it is a question of picking up sophisticated US campaign techniques - Mr Brown plays a pivotal role in the day-to-day planning of Labour's election strategy. But there are closer parallels."*

*"Mr Brown has long seen the New Democrats as a source of ideas for Labour's modernisation. Mr Prescott's instincts lie with the liberal wing of Mr Clinton's party. But the British guests have not missed the fact that Democrats are resting their hopes of re-election on the most conservative electoral prospectus in its recent history. The themes are fiscal conservatism, a determined embrace for family values, and a tough approach to crime."* (29/8/96)

Blair's attraction to Clinton shows how far to the right the Labour leadership has gone in recent years. They sent representatives to the Democratic Convention but refused to send official representatives to the founding Convention of

the US Labour Party.

The likely victory for Clinton in November is not based upon the support and inspiration of working people, far from it. The mass of workers will abstain. A layer will vote for Clinton given the extreme rightwing position of the Republicans. But in practice, as was seen by the welfare bill signed by Clinton, there is little to choose from these big business parties. Their differences are really minor. It is simply a question of method and style. They want to same thing: to make the American working class shoulder the crisis of corporate America. The next slump will bring this home with a vengeance. Blair's pandering to so-called Middle England and his right wing policies, far from securing victory, can serve to alienate Labour's natural supporters. No amount of razzamataz will inspire working people to support Labour. On the contrary, such an approach can turn people away. Only real socialist policies that can answer the problems of working people can inspire and motivate them to vote and support the party. British Labour has nothing to learn from Clinton or the US Democrats.



Socialist Appeal's economics correspondent, *Michael Roberts*, looks at the economic prospects for an incoming Labour government and how they will affect...

# Blair's honeymoon

Kim Howells, Labour's shadow industry minister, tells us that he's not interested in any sterile debate about 'isms'. He does not care whether we should live under 'socialism' or 'capitalism', only about "getting people back to work" under Labour. Well, that's all fine and dandy, but he's not got one ism of advice on how Labour will achieve full employment under this British 'capitalist' system (for that's what it is, Kim).

For those of us who have no problem with calling ourselves socialists and know what it means, the question at debate (sterile or otherwise) is not whether Labour is socialist in ideology or not, but whether a Blair-led Labour government can achieve anything at all. That will be decided not

by what Blair and Howells say, not by whether they declare for full employment or a minimum wage (whether a fixed figure or not), but whether British capitalism will be healthy enough to grant some improvements in working people's living standards in 1997 and 1998. The answer to that question will decide how long Tony has a honeymoon with working people, assuming he wins next May.

## Sluggish

So how is the British economy looking for next year? Well, at the moment, the UK is growing at a somewhat sluggish pace of about 1.5%. So much for the continued claims of John Major's lie machine, which talks of Britain being the fastest growing economy in Europe. But the economy is

beginning to accelerate. Most experts expect national output to rise at over a 3% rate next year. Sales in the shops are already rising at over 6%. House prices are expected to pick up by 10% next year (an important matter for our owner-occupier society). Unemployment is falling on official figures towards 2m. Of course, that is a completely misleading figure. There has been hardly any improvement in total employment since the recovery from the recession of 1990-92. All the jobs lost were mainly in manufacturing and were full-time. All the jobs gained have been mainly in services and are part-time. Naturally, they pay less. What has happened is that people who are really looking for work are no longer recorded by the statistics. This is partly because the government

has made it increasingly difficult to sign on. It's partly because many people have gone into some form of part time education because they cannot get a job. It's partly because some are desperately trying to make ends meet in the 'black' economy of small business and crime. And it's partly because some people have just given up.

And it's going to get worse under the Job Seekers Allowance that replaces unemployment benefit, because more will be knocked off the register more quickly than before. Nevertheless, the pick-up in the economy is making it slightly easier to get a job, and more important, slightly easier for those in work to negotiate slightly better pay increases. All this bodes for a slightly better standard of living for the average household in 1997.

## Desperate

Of course, this was what the Tories were hoping for as part of their desperate effort to claw back Labour's lead in the polls and snatch a victory next May. The irony is that Major achieved a surprise victory in 1992 in the midst of economic recession, because enough people remembered the heady days of the late 1980s, and thought the Tories could bring those days back. Now that we are nearly reaching a similar stage





as in 1987 in the current economic boom, the Tories are going to lose, because enough people will remember their shocking debacle over the devaluation of the pound in September 1992, the high levels of unemployment in the recession and the destruction of the welfare state and transport that was 'safe in their hands'.

So it's looking good in 1997 for Blair. He could have some room, given 3%-plus growth, to carry out his very limited promises (the five points on the credit card). At the very least, he may not have to hammer his supporters too hard. But how long will it last? That question can be partly answered by how Britain will manage to achieve faster growth in 1997. It's because, just as the Tories did to win the 1987 election under Nigel Lawson (remember him - the man who said that capitalism would always have booms and slumps), Ken Clarke has stoked up the economy again by lowering interest rates and spending more. They are doing it again to try and win the 1997 one.

### Inflation

In the late 1980s, the result of that policy was that inflation picked up (to about 9%) and the deficit on trade payments with the rest of the world rocketed (to a record deficit of £22bn on manufacturing trade) and to 4.5% of national output on the balance of payments. The problem was that weak British industry could not match the demand for goods and services coming from households and businesses in those heady days. So imports of foreign goods were sucked in, while prices rose. That made British exports uncompetitive and made the pound too high in world currency markets.

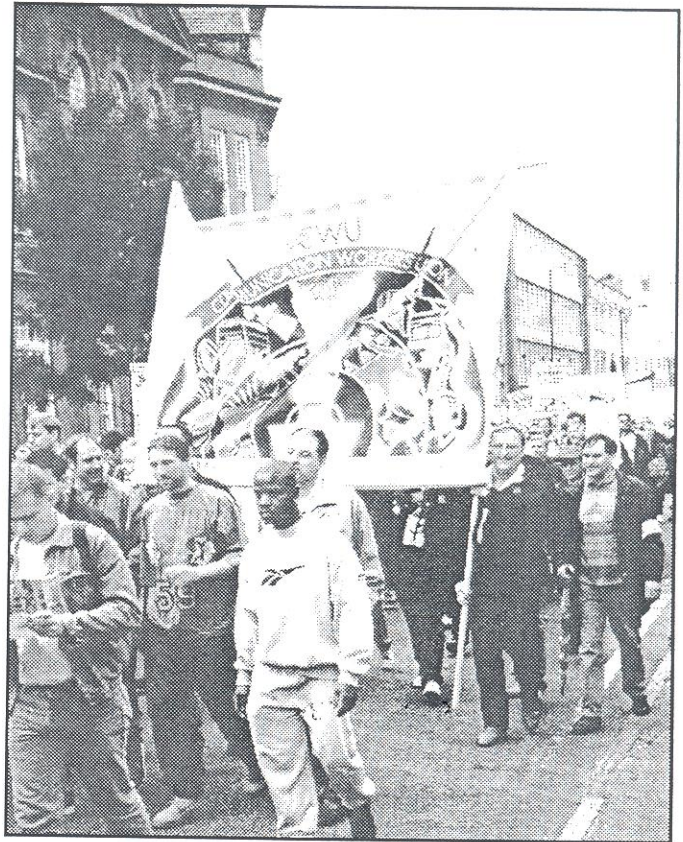
After the 1987 election, this policy lasted a year or so. Then the government had to jack up interest rates (mortgage rates hit over 15% cutting off the house price boom), eventually driving the economy into recession (just as it did for other capitalist countries). Once the recession hit, unemployment shot up and so

did the cost of financing benefits. The government started to run huge budget deficits, which it has been trying to get down ever since. All along, British finance capital did not care. It had not been investing in British industry for years. It continued to plough out its profits abroad.

So Britain became a country of the triple deficits: the deficit of the government with capitalist lenders; the deficit of British consumers and industry with foreign traders; and the deficit of capital investment overseas compared with investors into Britain. Britain was 'living beyond its means' and the pound finally cracked in 1992.

Now it's the view among many capitalist commentators that things will be different this time. First, they argue that Thatcher's governments did carry through an economic miracle, and the productivity of the British economy has leapt forward permanently. But as we have explained in previous articles, that's just rubbish. Productivity is only better because less workers are working harder and longer. After taking off the money to replace old machines, British industry has invested nothing in the last ten years!

Second, these commentators argue that even if British owned industry has not invested, then Japanese, European and Korean multinationals, attracted by wage levels lower than they pay their own workers and "tamed" trade unions, have invested hugely. And they are boosting productivity and helping the export drive. It's certainly true that British exports now increasingly depend for success on Japanese cars, Taiwan TVs and Korean semi-conductors. But it's not enough. As a recent report by the National Institute of Economic and Social Research shows, in the 1980s the share of the market for manufacturing goods in this country that went to foreign importers rose by 30% and has not been reduced. British industry may improve a little in exporting, but it's losing its home market even more quickly to foreigners.



So as the UK grows faster next year, it will merely cause a faster rise in its trade deficit with the rest of the world. It's already running a sizeable budget deficit worth about 5% of GDP, and of course the investment deficit is still there. Inflation is relatively low at present, but with manufacturing productivity actually falling, and the costs of production therefore rising at a faster pace, inflation will be heading back up towards 4% by the end of 1997. That will eventually mean higher interest rates.

### World economy

And then there's the world economy. As we've argued previously in these pages, growth in the big seven capitalist economies is likely to be faster next year, perhaps averaging 3%, and unemployment may at least stabilise in Europe. But the US is reaching the peak of its growth cycle. Unemployment has not been as low (on official figures) since the 1980s, and real wages are rising for the first time since 1982. That means higher costs for US industry and interest rates will start to rise. The US boom could well come to halt in

1998, and pull the UK economy down with it, just as it has done in so many other economic cycles since 1973.

So what does this mean for Tony and Kim? It suggests that if Labour wins next May they may have a year or so basking in a better economic climate. But unlike the late 1980s, the boom could come to a quicker end. This time public deficits and debts are much higher, so there is little leeway to boost government spending to keep the economy going. And interest rates will be rising faster than they did in the late 1980s.

So by 1998, international recession could be looming along, with a currency crisis in Britain. If the capitalist experiment with a European single currency blows up in their faces, that would only exacerbate the problem for Britain. Then Kim Howells may find that his dedication to 'getting people back to work' may be put sorely to the test. And after all, he may find that all the old 'isms' like socialism and capitalism will begin to revive their meaning. I know already which 'ism' Kim favours.



# Keep the party Labour

*"Real (not Old) Labour is alive and kicking. The more it believes that its ideals are being abandoned, the harder it will kick."*

**Roy Hattersley**

This is an historic conference for the Labour Party. It is an historic event for all of us. It is the last conference before the likely election of a Labour government. Finally after years of increasing attacks on the lives of working class people and their communities, the Tories are on their way out. Just rejoice at that, as Thatcher once said. Indeed the demise of the Tories will be cause for great celebration, but as Labour Party and trade union activists we have a duty to do a little more than just rejoice. A conference for us should mark an end and

a beginning. Our first duty is to ensure the end of the Tories, by rallying all our forces to the point of attack. But we must also plan what Labour should do in government. A conference like this should be an opportunity for party members and trade unionists to discuss how to get rid of the Tories, how to rid ourselves of their ailing "free market," how to begin the construction of a socialist society.

## Shadow-y

The spin doctors, the "shadow-y cabinet", the men Clare Short said "live in the dark," have been telling us for some time now that conferences should be no more than a TV platform for the leader's speech. Indeed their disregard for party democracy is amply demonstrated by

the drawing up of a manifesto, without the right to amend, then going over conferences head in a party referendum.

Of course, on the eve of an election in particular, the party conference should indeed be an important TV platform—but not in the way intended by the spin doctors. What an opportunity to rally the 5 million workers earning less than £4 an hour with the pledge to immediately introduce a National Minimum wage of £4.26 an hour, a pledge which could not only secure their 5 million votes, but could inspire them to join up, to go out knocking doors and ensure a famous victory. What an opportunity to declare Labour's intention to reverse the catastrophic attacks of the Tories on the welfare state, on our health service, our children's education, our local services. A chance to pledge to the 60% of the population who told a recent Gallup poll that the trade unions don't have enough power, that Labour will repeal all the vicious anti-union laws introduced by the Tories.

Just imagine the inspiring effect of promising to take back all our family silver auctioned off by the Tories to pay for tax cuts to their rich friends, using the profits currently lining the pockets of the fat cats to create jobs, to build schools and hospitals. Sadly these opportunities are not the ones which the leadership will be seeking to seize, far from it. In fairness to the Tories, you cannot deny that they have consci-

entiously represented the interests of their class over the last 17 years. A commitment now from the Labour leaders to represent our class with equal determination would drive the final nail into the Tories coffin. In the absence of such a speech from the top table, however, thank goodness for resolutions on these questions moved by delegates from the floor.

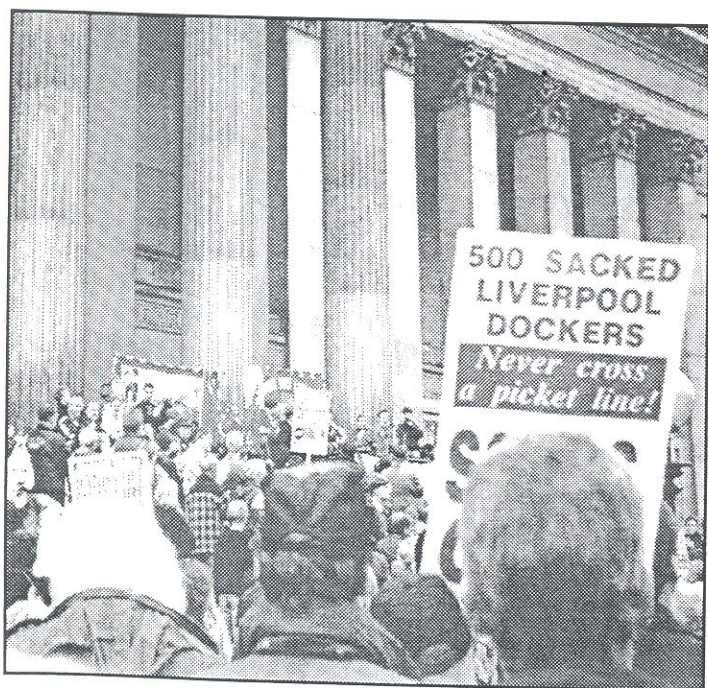
The TUC would hardly have provided much inspiration had it been no more than the General Council's speeches on "social partnership" and "new unionism," but at least the debate on the minimum wage was able to provide some enthusiasm and inspiration for millions of low paid workers.

Yet the leadership sees such debate as a nuisance, spoiling their credibility with the CBI. On the contrary, such speeches from the floor can counteract some of the damage currently being done to the party's support amongst ordinary working class and middle class people, by each successive statement from the leader's office.

There is a certain irony in constantly being told not to rock the boat, by people who seem determined to capsize it. We shouldn't put a figure on a minimum wage, but Gordon Brown can threaten to abolish child benefit for 16-18 year olds. We shouldn't demand that the anti-union laws are repealed, but David Blunkett can threaten to introduce new ones. The instinctive desire of workers for unity has made them swallow hard on a great deal of late, to get Labour in, but inevitably in the long run this will explode in the leaderships face.

## Election

There is a barefaced nerve on the part of MPs and General Secretaries, lecturing those of us most in need of a Labour government, that we might lose them the election. It is about time they were told to stop rocking the boat. If anyone is capable of endangering the election it is our own leadership.





Is it still possible to lose? With Labour running between 20 and 30 points ahead in the polls, a campaign now on a socialist programme could ensure a record parliamentary majority, and create the basis to begin a desperately needed socialist transformation of society. In the absence of such a campaign given the havoc wreaked by the Tories, a Labour victory is still a racing certainty. After quoting a long list of statistics proving the fact that we are in fact in a boom (honest), a recent Financial Times editorial (24/8/96), asks why the Tories are not benefiting from a feel-good factor. "One answer" they say "is that 72% of net financial wealth is owned by only 25% of the voters." With mass unemployment, poverty pay and increasing job insecurity for those in work, Labour's victory should be assured. The only threat comes not from the Tories, but from our own leaderships insistence not merely on rocking the boat, but drilling great big holes in the bottom.

### Win

Socialist Appeal supporters will fight as hard as anyone to make sure Labour win the election. But the Labour Party doesn't exist simply to get Tony Blair a promotion. We desperately need a Labour government to create full employment, to eradicate low pay, to save our health service, to offer youth a future, not to tinker with the current system but to replace it with socialism.

In this we seem to have support from a surprising quarter. Roy Hattersley asked a recent gathering of Labour front-benchers, "Why are any of you interested in winning power if you do not have as your fundamental message the advocacy of socialism and the redistribution of income from the rich to the rest of society?" The highly instructive reply of the Labour leaders present was, "We want to win because we want to govern the country better." These people believe that they can make capitalism work better than the Tories. Far from being "realistic" this is a hope-

less utopian fantasy. In fact the Tories aren't running the system badly on purpose, just for the hell of it. The problem is that the system doesn't work. That's why first the trade unions and in turn the Labour Party were created. The challenge facing the next Labour government is as great as that in 1945. There is a vital lesson we should all draw from that period. Although it was responsible for many reforms we have continued to enjoy until recently, the fact that the Tories have been able to dismantle many of the gains we conquered like the NHS and state education, proves that no reform we win can be guaranteed if the system as a whole is allowed to continue. The period when capitalism could afford reforms is over and now they are clawing them all back. The lesson then is that while we will of course fight for every step forward, in the end only the socialist transformation of society can make those gains permanent.

The current "solutions" on offer amount to no more than minor tinkering. Stakeholding, having one or two seats on the board of businesses, cannot force them to invest the profits our labour makes for them in creating more jobs and paying decent wages. We cannot have a stake in a system based on squeezing profits out of workers by making them work harder and longer for less pay. The only stake we want in relation to this system is one poised over its heart ready to finish it off. We don't want a tax on "windfall profits," we want to control how and on what all the profits produced by our labour are spent. We don't want a stake in industry, we want to own it and to run it democratically in the interests of the whole of society, not the lust for profits of a tiny few.

Tory style policies cannot solve the problems created by...Tory policies, if they could then you might as well vote Tory.

There can be no unity of interests between the Labour Party and the unions on one side and the bosses on the



other, they represent the needs of different classes in society, which are diametrically opposed. Rather we should be uniting the movement around action which if linked to a socialist programme could provide the means not only for struggling against the employers and their system but could also provide the basis for introducing scientific planning into our economy to replace the anarchy of the current system. This should be the "great new idea" for the new millennium. But you can't plan what you don't own. Labour should take over the key sections of industry and the banks. A labour government would then be able to draw up a plan of production in consultation with the unions and the workforce as a whole. The introduction of a shorter working week, would then allow workers today exhausted by the increasing pressure of work, the necessary time to participate in the democratic running of industry and all aspects of society. Having taken the purse strings out of the hands of the bosses we would then be able to eradicate unemployment, poverty pay, and job insecurity.

### Vision

Such a vision of a socialist future could guarantee Labour a landslide, and hold out a ray of hope to millions of young people who see no future under the current system. Instead of this kind of social

partnership however, we hear leaders of the party planning to break the links with the unions. This is supposed to be a vote winner, yet a recent poll published in the Economist found that 3 out of 5 people believe the unions should have more power, another showed that while "only" 8 million workers are organised in unions, a further 36% of non-unionised workers would join a union if asked. It isn't the unions who are unpopular, it is the fat cat bosses of British industry, and the Labour leaders would do well to distance themselves from them.

But not only are the Labour leaders threatening to try to break the links, now they are trying to out Tory the Tories, by threatening to introduce even more anti-union laws. Is that supposed to be a vote winner? There can't be many postal workers who would agree. Is this some kind of bad joke? The reason given is that the Labour leadership fear a rash of public sector strikes once Labour are in office. How absurd can you get. Millions of public sector workers are desperate for a Labour government, so desperate that they have been convinced to keep quiet until after the election. Labour should be inspiring these workers to go out and campaign in that election with a pledge to abolish Compulsory competitive tendering, to restore pay eaten away by tax



rises and public sector pay freezes, and reversing the Tories' colossal cuts in public spending.

The fear of public sector strikes demonstrates that it is not the Labour leaderships intention to do any of these things. If that is the case then public sector workers will have no option but to fight and to carry their struggle over into the unions and the party itself. The strength of feeling on the minimum wage at this years TUC should serve as a warning to the Labour leaders that they are expected to deliver. Any failure to do so will unleash an almighty explosion, which all the anti-union laws in the world will be powerless to prevent.

Given all the recent statements by Blair and other such "modernisers", clearly there is something more involved here than meets the eye. Socialist Appeal has warned for some time now about the Blair project to convert the Labour Party into a new version of the SDP. Now he himself has admitted in the Sunday Times (1/9/96) that he is indeed a Social Democrat. Stephen Byers followed this up by "raising" the idea of breaking the LP-trade union links. He has used the usual method of such people by pushing this through the back door using journalists. Despite all the denials this statement was no accident. Time and time again this has been the favoured means by which new policy shifts and retreats have been announced and tested out. They lack the guts to openly discuss this by putting a resolution up to conference so that the movement can decide. However, they may have gone too far this time. An emergency resolution from the TGWU and GMB will almost certainly, if put, get overwhelming support from conference to support the union links.

### State funding

The route Blair wishes to take is clear. He wants to introduce state funding of political parties. Ironically this is the only measure of nationalisation he enthusiastically supports. On that basis he hopes to break the party away from the organised working class and turn it

into some sort of 'people's party' along the lines of the US Democratic party. Ironically, it is just at this time that workers and trade unionists are looking to establish a new alternative to the Democrats in the form of a US Labour Party.

Lacking any real background in the movement, Blair and his friends have mistaken the surface calm for a permanent monolithic grip on the party. The mood following the TUC is just a taste of what will happen in the future. The task of Marxists is to look beneath the surface of events and organisations, to understand the processes taking place and see the struggles that will develop. Undoubtedly a few activists have become frustrated, largely due to a lack of perspective, and have drifted off into groups like the SLP. Seamus Milne's articles in - Guardian makes a number of somewhat tendentious claims about the potential for this process under the pressure of the leadership's move to the right. However, they should be taken with a pinch of salt.

### Struggle

The struggle will be in the movement. The muted criticisms of people such as Shore and Hattersley, Prescott and Cook, shows that even at the top there are signs of discontent. This will be as nothing compared to the fight that will come up from the unions and from the ranks of the so-called tame Labour members themselves. Socialist Appeal calls on all activists to join us in participating in this fight.

The hopes of millions of workers are hung on the election of a Labour government. Once elected, we will be told by the labour leadership that we must wait—well we have had 17 years of Tory government to wait through. The leaders of the Labour movement seem very keen on the word "new" at the moment: new unionism, new labour, and so on. As we approach a new millennium, we are entering a new stormy period in the class struggle, out of which will indeed emerge a new unionism and a new Labour, fighting for a new, Socialist Britain.

# ten points for a Labour victory

- For full employment. No redundancies. The right to a job or decent benefits - abolish the JSA. An immediate introduction of a 32 hour week without loss of pay. No compulsory overtime. Reduction of the age of retirement to 55 with a decent full pension for all.

- A national minimum wage of at least two-thirds of the average wage. Support for £4.26 per hour as an immediate step toward this goal.

- Repeal all the Tories anti-union legislation. Full rights for all workers from day one of their employment. For the right to strike and the right to union representation and collective bargaining.

- For real job security. Stop casualisation. Part time work only for those who want it. End the zero-hours contract scandal.

- Reverse the Tories privatisation strategy. Renationalise all the privatised industries and utilities with minimum compensation according to need - not on the market price of shares.

- Reverse all the cuts in the health service. End the trusts and the internal market. Abolish private health care. A properly funded health service must be available to all. Nationalisation of the big drug companies that squeeze their profits out of the health of working people.

- Return education to real democratic control through the local authorities. For a fully funded and resourced, fully comprehensive education system. Scrap Grant Maintained Schools. Abolish private education. End SATS. No to streaming or selection. No to voucher schemes. A guaranteed nursery place for all 3 and 4 year olds.

- Restore proper democratic local government. Restore local authority budgets to pre-1979 levels in real terms. Scrap CCT.

- Abolish the Monarchy and the House of Lords. Establish parliaments in Scotland and Wales, with real powers to tackle their chronic social and economic problems.

- Labour must immediately take over the "commanding heights of the economy." Nationalise the big monopolies, the 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.



# Australian workers storm parliament

Gareth Stephenson,  
CFMEU Shop  
Steward, Victoria  
Branch, reports...

The violent scenes on the steps of Australia's Parliament House as thousands of workers and Aboriginal activists fought hand to hand with police are a sign of the angry and fighting mood developing within the Australian working class six months after the election of the right wing Coalition government under John Howard. Two participants on the Canberra rally, a building industry shop steward from Melbourne and a Sydney Labour Student, report on the events of the day and the debate they have sparked across society and inside the Labour Movement.

On Monday 19th August, a crowd in excess of 30,000 gathered in Australia's capital. The Australian Council of Trade Unions had organised the rally at Parliament House to protest against the new Conservative government's proposed Workplace Relations Bill, which contains a vicious assault on the ability of unions to defend their members' jobs, wages and conditions.

The rally was also made up of Aboriginal protesters and various community groups concerned about the Federal government Budget being handed down the following day. It is well known around the world that a violent confrontation occurred between police and protesters at the entrance to Parliament House. There have been a variety of accounts as to what sparked the confrontation. Some are blaming what they like to call a "violent minority". Others are blaming poor organisation and a lack of rally marshals to direct marchers away from Parliament House. Still others are blaming the police for starting the violence. All these explanations miss the point and there has been a disturbing lack of political analysis

from the leaders of the Labour movement. Who threw the first punch is really of no significance.

The confrontation that occurred that day was merely a symptom of the political alienation that the government is imposing on working class people in Australia.

It is a confrontation that commenced the moment the government decided to launch an attack not only on our wages and conditions, but our basic right to organise.

It is not surprising that the Government and their friends in the media should express outrage about damage to Parliament House - their forum and the venue from which they launch their assaults. Nor is it surprising that they should try and restrict our protests to a form they find both acceptable and unthreatening.

What is perhaps surprising is the fact that ACTU officials have adopted the Government line and resorted to feeble denials of responsibility and actually joined the attacks on union activists coming from the media.

One senior Labour parliamentarian, the opposition treasurer Gareth Evans, appeared on television on the evening of the rally and described some protesters as "crazy, self-indulgent bastards". Although he chose to categorise Aboriginal activists and trade unionists in this way, it is clear most people in the community probably see politicians as the most self-indulgent bastards in the country.

The Prime Minister John Howard has described the events of the day as "un-Australian and undemocratic". Are we to assume that it is not un-Australian to hand down a budget that rips \$400 million out of the Aboriginal budget, puts up the cost of medical prescriptions for old age pensioners and substantially increases child care costs for working families?

Nor is it un-Australian to introduce legislation which is designed to allow bosses to kick hell out of workers - but it is un-Australian to break a window! As to the charge that the protest was undemocratic, the statement needs to be seen in the light of the government's own actions since being elected about six months ago. They have essentially broken every major promise they made and are basically saying to people - well, we won the election, we can do whatever we like and you have no role or influence in the processes of government. In that context and faced with that kind of definition of democracy it is no surprise that working class people will try alternative methods of trying to influence the nations' politicians. One of the unions most prominent in the Canberra protest was the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU). Although statements from some of the union's officials have not been very encouraging, at least the construction division of the Victorian branch have taken a very strong line in defence of the protesters and endeavoured to put the protest and the confrontation with police in a proper political context.

At its September general meeting the union carried a unanimous resolution promising support to any union member who may face police charges and committing itself to refocus its energies on fighting the government's Workplace Relations Bill. One thing is certain. There is a resurgence of a fighting spirit from Australian workers and neither government nor bosses are going to find that spirit easy to quell. The more savage their attitudes to workers, the more likely it is that they will provoke violent protest against such attacks.

When arriving at Parliament House forecourt, along with roughly 5-7,000 protesters marching from Canberra railway station, I was stunned at the magnitude and variety of the people at this rally. There is no way of describing the feeling you get when seeing so many people - nearly 30,000 fellow protesters felt as angered at this government steeped in disregard for workers.

The variety of protesters was staggering, and included Aboriginal people, teachers, firemen, university and school students, maritime, metal, and construction workers, miners, plumbers... The solidarity between all these groups was a wonderful experience, all bonded together in their hatred of John Howard.

I am unsure how the skirmishing started. A lone Aboriginal protester attempted to place the Koori flag in the door jam of the main doors. The Australian Federal Police then started to man-handle him and when fellow protesters went to rescue their mate the AFP moved in and scuffling started. One of my friends was punched in the face and had her shirt ripped off and then was taken round the back covered in blood. Once the crowd was in the gallery pressed up against the glass and bronze interior doors, attempts were made to prize open a side door. One bald AFP officer plugged the gap and other officers pushed from behind to overcome the pressure of the crowd. All the while scores of TV cameramen were in the front row near the doors filming the chaos. There was a feeling that the whole thing had been set up by the cops for the cameras to show the rally in as bad light as possible.

The AFP had crash helmets, sunglasses and no identification on their shoulders. These police brutally attacked those who got through the door, triggering the crowd into a greater frenzy, and directly leading to the smashing of the parliament gift shop by protesters. Everyone was extremely angered by the selective broadcasts of the TV networks, only showing the destruction of the protesters, and not one scene of the bashings by the AFP to show why the rally turned into a riot. But all in all the media coverage could not alter the fact that this rally was still a huge success with the huge numbers of people travelling the vast distances of this continent to protest against the government's policies.

Mathew Robinson,  
Macquarie University  
Labour Club, NSW



# Imperialist aggression in Iraq

The latest missile attacks on Iraq constitutes a new crime of US imperialism against the Iraqi people. It is a further manifestation of the extreme instability which now exists on a world scale, and particularly in the Middle East. The actions of Washington were designed to show the power of US imperialism; to terrify not only Iraq, but all the peoples of the region. But, in fact, even while flexing its muscles, the limits of American imperialism were exposed.

by Alan Woods

The Gulf War was fought under the pretext of defending the independence of "poor little Kuwait." The latest missile attack was carried out with the excuse of "defending the Kurds," and opposing the dictatorship of Saddam Hussein. This is just so much stinking hypocrisy. US imperialism is the main enemy of the oppressed colonial peoples of

the world. All its actions in the Middle East are dictated by the crude defence of its economic and strategic interests. The interests of oppressed nationalities are just so much small change used by US diplomacy to justify the attempt to rob and enslave all the peoples of the Middle East.

## Kurdish

In reality, the problems of the Kurdish people are the direct responsibility of imperialism, beginning with British imperialism. During the First World War, Britain promised the French they could have Kurdistan, and its oil wealth at Mosul, in the Sykes-Picot secret treaty of 1919. By the end of the war, however, London decided it needed the oil for itself. During the summer of 1919 British troops were struggling to put down a rising led by the Kurdish hero Sheikh Mahmud. Then in 1920 Kemal Ataturk threatened to seize the region for Turkey. To rally Kurdish opposition to this

attempt, Britain promised to back an independent Kurdistan (Treaty of Sèvres, August 1920). The intention was to manipulate the Kurds by promising them freedom. As Colonel T E Lawrence (of Arabia) put it: "Some day ... we will be able to hold Kurdistan and bore there for oil" (*Sunday Times*, 30 May 1920).

By the end of 1921 the differences with Ataturk and with the Arabs in Baghdad had been all sorted. London tore up the Treaty of Sèvres and proceeded to deploy RAF aircraft against the Kurds in their mountain strongholds. In the Treaty of Lausanne (July 1923), the region was parcelled out between Turkey, Iran and Iraq, with no mention of the Kurds. The Kurdish oil fields were placed under Britain's Iraqi mandate and, on 15 October 1927, oil "in enormous quantity" was discovered at Baba Gurgur near Kirkuk.

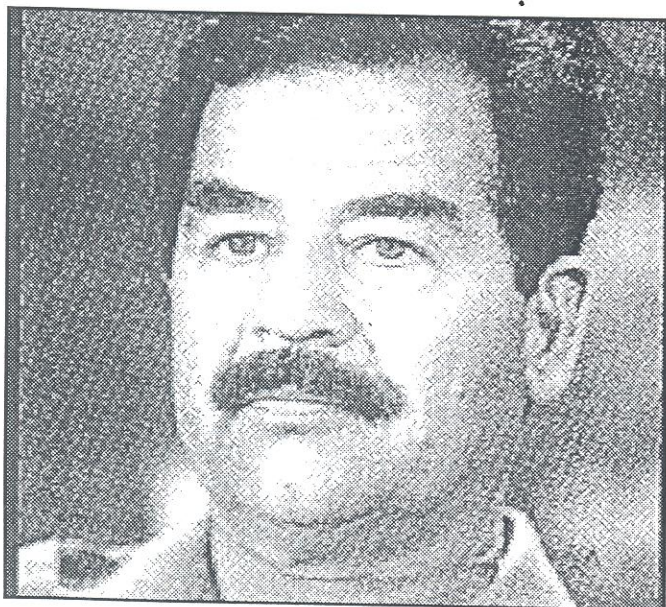
The Kurds are sometimes described as the "world's largest ethnic group without a nation" or the "world's largest nation without a state". The four million Kurds of Iraq constitute at most one-sixth of the total Kurdish population in the Middle East. According to David McDowall, author of *A Modern History of the Kurds*, the total population of Kurds is probably in the order of 24-27 million. About half of those, at least 13 million, live in Turkey where they form about 23 per cent of the population. For the past 12 years, the Stalinist Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK) has been fighting for control of south-eastern Turkey. There are also about 5.7 million Kurds in Iran. There they briefly set up an independent republic in 1946, and organised themselves as an autonomous

region after the fall of the Shah in 1979, only to be crushed by the forces of the late Ayatollah Khomeini. More than 2 million Kurds live elsewhere: in Syria, Europe and the former Soviet Union. But the great majority live in the mountainous region straddling Turkey, Iran and Iraq. They suffer national oppression in all these states. In the case of Iraq, they have been involved in a bloody war for over three decades. Iraq's rulers formally recognised a Kurdish identity after the overthrow of the monarchy in 1958. But there has been a constant conflict between the Iraqi state, increasingly centralised and totalitarian since the Ba'ath party came to power in 1968, and the Kurds with their mountain tribal traditions and growing self-awareness as a potential nation.

In Turkey, government forces are engaged in a ferocious struggle against the PKK, and have carried the war into Iraq. Until recently, the Turkish state denied Kurdish identity in any form, describing the Kurds as "mountain Turks" (in fact, the Kurdish language has no connection with either Turkish or Arabic, but is an Indo-European language related to Persian). Even today, there is no education in Kurdish. Only now the Turkish government, in an attempt to undermine the PKK, has offered to recognise a Kurdish identity. If these concessions had been made 20 years ago, they might have been sufficient, but, as always, it is a case of "too little, too late". Half hearted measures will no longer suffice. But, on the other hand, the PKK also offers no solution.

## Attack

The immediate excuse for the missile attack was the outbreak of fighting between the rival Kurdish factions, the KDP (Kurdish Democratic Party) and PUK (Patriotic Union of Kurdistan). Here we see the impossibility of solving the national question in the Middle East on the basis of capitalism. The establishment of a homeland for the Kurdish people is inseparably linked to the struggle for a socialist federation of the Middle East and Turkey. US imperialism, in its usual cynical fashion, made use of the Kurdish people's struggle against Baghdad in order to





establish its "protectorate" over the north of Iraq, the so-called "no-fly zone." This insolent act had nothing to do with the defence of self determination, but was aimed to cripple Iraq. US imperialism is the main counterrevolutionary force in the world. It was naive and stupid of the Kurdish leaders to expect it to uphold their interests. As we have seen on many occasions, especially in the Middle East and in the Balkans, the bourgeois leaders of small nations, under the guise of "self-determination" end up as the agents of one imperialist power or another. By what right does US imperialism claim to decide what happens on the territory of another country? Having bombed and starved Iraq into submission, and forced it to its knees, Washington now wishes to destroy its territorial integrity.

### Incursion

The latest armed incursion of Turkey into the allegedly "autonomous" Kurdish area of north Iraq cruelly exposes the real situation. Despite all the hypocritical protestations of the Americans, it is clear that Turkey would not dare to act without the tacit agreement of Washington. The threat to break up Iraq, using the services of the reactionary Turkish ruling clique, is completely reactionary, and opposed to the interests of Kurds and Iraqis alike. Moreover, it would inevitably be the pretext for new wars. Iran has its eye on the Kurdish part of Iraq, and has warned that it will not allow Turkey to walk in unopposed. This spells new horrors for all the peoples of the region.

Having gained nothing from the "protection" of US imperialism, one of the main Kurdish factions led by Massoud Barzani (the KDP) concluded that the establishment of an independent Kurdistan was not on the agenda, and appealed to Baghdad to help them against their rivals in the PUK, in exchange for accepting that the Kurds would remain within Iraq, on the basis of autonomy. This is, in fact, the best the Kurds can get, short of a socialist revolution. Even so, it is doubtful that Saddam Hussein would consent to a real autonomy for the Kurds. Nonetheless, he immediately seized a golden opportunity to regain his influ-

ence in the Kurdish area. Clinton could not afford to remain passive in the face of Baghdad's actions. The presidential elections were undoubtedly a factor. But America's strategic interests were involved. The USA wants to limit Saddam's power, and, if possible, overthrow him. But this would only be possible by all-out war. The bombing of Iraq was vicious, but ineffective. It did not prevent Saddam from giving artillery support to the KDP forces besieging Arbil. This probably tipped the balance in favour of Barzani, who took, not only Arbil, but all the other key cities, forcing the PUK to flee across the Iranian border.

The conduct of US imperialism proves that its aim was not to help the Kurds, but to weaken and divide Iraq. *The Independent*, 4 September, pointed out: "With the choice of weapons and targets—command and control centres in southern Iraq—Mr. Clinton has signalled he has no wish to intervene in the north where the Saturday's incursion took place but where separate Kurdish factions are jockeying for control, backed respectively by Iran and Iraq. Instead, Washington wants to weaken Saddam's ability to cause trouble in the strategically crucial states of the Gulf. Hence the decision to extend the area where Iraqi military aircraft cannot fly in their own country from the 32nd to the 33rd parallel, in practice the southernmost suburbs of Baghdad itself".

The aims of Washington were expressed quite cynically by the White House Chief of Staff, Leon Panetta who said: "Rather than engage in tactical efforts in the north it is much more important for us and much more important a message to Saddam Hussein to extract a strategic price". US Defence Secretary, William Perry added: "We should not be involved in civil war in the north. We should focus our actions where our interests are". (*The Independent*, 9 September 1996).

It goes without saying that the Labour movement is opposed to the brutal dictatorship of Saddam Hussein—just as we are opposed to the monstrous feudal monarchies of Kuwait, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia, who arrest, torture and murder



oppositionists, or the reactionary regime of King Hussein of Jordan or Mubarak in Egypt, which oppress their own people. But the task of overthrowing Saddam Hussein cannot be entrusted to imperialism, which backed the Iraqi regime with arms and money in the past, and only began to oppose it when the West's interests were threatened by the invasion of Kuwait. The task of overthrowing Saddam Hussein is the task of the Iraqi people, and in the first place the working class, and nobody else.

### Objective

In point of fact, the US failed in its main objective in the Gulf War. Despite the mighty display of firepower, with all the new technology and so-called "smart bombs," they did not succeed in overthrowing Saddam and installing a puppet regime in Baghdad. As always, "the first casualty of War is Truth." At the time of the Gulf War, there was a massive campaign of disinformation aimed to convince public opinion in the West that "pin-point" bombing would be sufficient to win the war, and that the accuracy of these techniques would mean that only military targets would be hit, thus minimising civilian deaths. This propaganda actually fooled some self-styled "Marxists" at the time, but we rejected it completely. It is now clear that the number of civilian casualties was vastly more than admitted, and that the damage caused to the Iraqi forces far less than what was claimed. The indiscriminate

nature of these so-called "smart bombs" was recently shown by the massacre of civilians in South Lebanon by Israeli bombardment.

The real reason for this insistence in the alleged effectiveness of air power is Washington's fear of committing ground troops in overseas wars. This is a legacy of the Vietnam War, when US imperialism was defeated, not so much by the Vietnamese as by opposition at home and among the American soldiers in Vietnam. One US general at the time compared the mood of the US troops to that of the Petrograd garrison in 1917. Had there been a genuine revolutionary party in America at that time, the USA would have been on the brink of revolution. All history proves that it is impossible to win a war with air power alone. In order to win a decisive victory, ground troops are necessary. But this is something the US wants to avoid at all costs. Even now, despite the changed balance of forces brought about by the collapse of Stalinism, the limits of imperialist power were shown in Somalia, where the US marines were compelled to accept an ignominious withdrawal in the face of barefoot irregulars, who could not even be described as an army but were more like bandit gangs led by local warlords. Clinton agonised for a long time before intervening in tiny Haiti, and only did so when a deal was struck which ruled out fighting. A similar position was the case in Bosnia. Iraq was different,



because oil is the life-blood of the US economy, and the Middle East occupies a central place in the global strategy of US imperialism. For example, if the Saudi regime were threatened with overthrow—and this is a real possibility in the coming period—they would have no alternative but to invade. As a relatively sparsely populated country, consisting mainly of desert, they could occupy the oil fields, and leave the rest to the Saudis. But such a development would cause an explosive situation throughout the colonial world. Despite the overwhelming superiority of the US military machine, which is equal to the combined armies of the next six powers, they will not be able to hold down the movement of the colonial masses once they begin to move. They are constrained by the fear of the US population, which does not want to be involved in foreign wars which would cost the lives of American soldiers.

Despite the US victory in the Gulf War, five years later, Saddam Hussein remains in power, and still possesses an army. The infamous blockade has mainly hit the masses, causing widespread hunger and suffering, but has not weakened Saddam's grip on power. Nor will the latest missile attack. On the contrary. It will only increase the masses' hatred of US imperialism, and thereby temporarily strengthen the regime.

From a purely military point of view, the missile attack was a failure. But even worse from Washington's standpoint were

the political consequences. The anti-Iraqi coalition painstakingly put together by US diplomacy at the time of the Gulf War has fallen to pieces. The Arab regimes are terrified at the reaction of their own people. At the time of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, it was possible to confuse Arab public opinion. But this is entirely different. The arrogance of America in extending the "no-fly zone" to a mere 30 miles from Baghdad has exposed Clinton's real intentions. The big majority of the population of the Arab countries support Iraq against the USA.

The fear of the Arab regimes is well founded. The whole region is now unstable. There is growing opposition in Saudi Arabia, reflected in splits in the ruling royal family. The monarchist regime in neighbouring Bahrain is threatened with overthrow, and, under Saudi pressure, is resorting to repressive measures.

### Monarchy

The 100% increase in the price of bread, the staple diet, has led to rioting in Jordan directed against the monarchy. Even more significant, the riots began among the Bedouin, the traditional base of support of King Hussein. As usual, the IMF was responsible for bringing about this situation, by forcing the government to cut budget spending. Mubarak keeps a shaky hold on Egypt. There have been riots of workers and students in the Sudan. Even in Iran, there is widespread discontent with the rule of the mullahs.

Under these conditions, the USA is compelled to base itself on Israel as its only firm point of support in the Middle East. (Turkey, its other main ally, is not really part of the Middle East, although it is an important player in the Iraqi situation, a fact which obliges Washington to take its interests into account). Arafat is now essentially a puppet of Israel. But the peace process has stalled on the basis of insoluble contradictions. Fearing the consequences of further instability, America has put pressure on Netanyahu to get the peace process moving again. But the whole area remains a powder keg.

The balance of power in the Middle East is extremely fragile. The situation is further complicated by developments in Russia. At the time of the Gulf War, America had an almost free hand in the area. Under Gorbachov, and, until recently, Yeltsin, Russia became virtually a puppet of the USA on the world arena. The shameful betrayal of Moscow was one of the main reasons why the Iraqi forces collapsed so quickly. But now the situation is completely different. The decisive sections of the Russian bureaucracy, especially the armed forces, are no longer prepared to play second fiddle to Washington. Primakov has threatened to veto the Americans in the UN Security Council, and would undoubtedly carry out the threat, if it were necessary. Russia is obviously aiming to rebuild links with its old allies, and not only in the Middle East.

### Isolation

The isolation of the US is shown by the reaction of its allies in the West. France came out against, and most of the others were of a similar opinion. Only Major was enthusiastic, thus underlining Britain's status as a third-rate power. Most significantly, the Arab League condemned the action. In the wake of the US missile attack, Saddam apparently withdrew his forces from the immediate vicinity of Arbil. Subsequently, Washington played down Iraqi involvement in the Kurdish conflict. This is typical of his manoeuvres. He just leaves the Kurds to kill each other. This suits his interests very well. In the meanwhile, he has bound the win-

ning faction to himself, and re-established his presence in the three northern provinces, at minimal cost to himself. The missile attacks have not undermined his military potential, but have pushed the population into his arms, at least for a time. Even better, it has wrecked the US-led coalition in the Middle East. Even in narrow tactical terms, the US has failed. The policy of an "exclusion zone" in the Kurdish north is in ruins.

The whole region is in a perpetual state of instability. On a capitalist basis, no solution is possible for the problems of the Middle East. For the whole of the post-war period, the masses have displayed extraordinary courage in the struggle against imperialism. But decades of nominal independence on a capitalist basis have cruelly exposed the inability of bourgeois nationalism to offer a way out. We are left with the permanent revolution as the only solution to the problems of the masses. The situation of the Kurds in Iraq is a case in point. Without revolution in Turkey, the idea of an independent Kurdish state in Iraq is a pipe-dream. It would be crushed by Turkey, which is now the main ally of US imperialism in the region, after Israel. Only a revolutionary class policy with an internationalist perspective can show the way forward, through the overthrow of the reactionary ruling cliques, and the establishment of a Socialist federation of the Middle East, with autonomy for the Kurds, Palestinians, Armenians, Copts and Druzes with equal rights guaranteed by a regime of workers' democracy.

Even this would not provide a complete answer. That would only be possible with the victory of socialist revolution in the advanced capitalist countries and the establishment of world socialism. But the workers and peasants of the Middle East cannot wait. The problems are too pressing. In one country after another, the workers and peasants will move to transform society. With correct Marxist leadership it would be possible to begin to carry through the socialist transformation. This would be a beacon to the workers of the advanced countries of Europe, USA and Japan, as was the October revolution of 1917.





# Nothing like the truth...

## Detroit newspaper striker tours Britain

We said it at the time but now the proof is there in black and white! A new report by the European Institute for the Media on the Russian presidential elections concludes that "the media coverage marred the fairness of the 1996 Russian presidential elections." Surprise, surprise!

by Jeremy Dear

Contrary to the view espoused by the Western powers that Boris Yeltsin was the only chance for "democracy" to prevail in Russia the report is a damning litany of bribery, corruption, cheating and being downright economical with the truth by Yeltsin and his supporters. Among the criticisms levelled by the Institute are that all three national TV networks worked for one candidate. The report states that "they marginalised Yeltsin's opponents....and avoided discussion of Yeltsin's record...All channels frequently contained interviews with celebrities coming out in support of Yeltsin. Anti-communist material was also offered to the viewers in the form of documentary and feature films...they were even shown on the day before polling in both rounds in apparent violation of the ban on campaigning." The report goes on to point out that before the second round of voting great play was made on the news of the endorsements from the first round losers for Yeltsin (including General Lebed) but the fact that Zhirinovskiy called on his supporters to back Zyuganov "barely rated a mention". The news also focused on alleged splits in the Communist camp whilst the clear split in the Yeltsin camp caused by the sacking of Korzhakov, Barsukov and Soskovets was "quickly dropped" from news programmes.

The time given by the networks to each candidate was also clearly biased in favour of Yeltsin who received 53% of the airtime compared to 18% for Zyuganov, 11% for Zhirinovskiy and just 18% between all the other candidates.

The institute kept a tally of positive and negative references on TV to the candidates during the first round of voting, with points being awarded for positive references and taken away for negative ones. Whilst Yeltsin scored 492 and General Lebed 10, Zyuganov scored -313, Zhirinovskiy -85 and Yavin -71.

The printed press did not fare much better with the report concluding that fact and opinion were interwoven in many news reports with the aim of denigrating Yeltsin's opponents with editors rarely giving any right of reply.

The report believes the reason for Yeltsin's dominance includes:

- \* Financial, logistical and administrative dependency
- \* direct and indirect pressure from the government
- \* the influence of financial groups
- \* voluntary co-operation by journalists

"Direct government interference in the media was clearly illustrated in the course of the campaign," the report claims. Eduard Sagalaev, the president of TV6, after a meeting with Yeltsin told Izvestia: "It is the television's job to convince both the electorate and Yeltsin's opponents that his presidency is the guarantee of freedom from the Communists".

Throughout the campaign regular meetings were held between Vitaly Ignatenko the first deputy prime minister with the editor-in-chief of various media outlets and an agency in the regional press was established under the auspices of the president. The Institute obtained documents showing that articles written for it in fact came from

the office of Nikolai Yegorov, the head of the president's administration with a covering letter asking the editors to get the articles published. The articles obtained by the Institute were "not factual but anti-Communist polemics".

The agency also brought editors of regional media to Moscow to discuss how to help Yeltsin's campaign. Valery Kucher, head of the Department for Information and Propaganda in an interview with the Institute monitors said: "We're not going to give the Communists equal time and conditions. They don't deserve it. They're an unconstitutional party".

Editors-in-chief reported receiving phone calls from high ranking administrators trying to influence what they printed and some reports were received that the journalists had trouble with their editors after having written article critical of Yeltsin.

The report also concludes that the new financial groups and commercial interests played a large role in the media backing Yeltsin. The director of "independent" TV channel NTV, Igor Malashenko, whose station is largely owned by Most bank actually joined Yeltsin's campaign staff during the election.

In its conclusions the report states: "Although it is impossible to quantify the relation between media coverage and election results, the marginalisation of opponents other than Zyuganov, the repeated insistence that Yeltsin was in the end the lesser of two evils, the denunciation of Zyuganov and the portrayal of Yeltsin as the choice for the future, may have secured Yeltsin's victory."

"We conclude that the Yeltsin administration showed that when its survival was at stake, it was willing to adopt every method available, however unfair, to use the media in pursuit of victory." Surprise, surprise!

The Detroit newspaper strike is entering its fifteenth month. 2,500 workers were forced out on strike by the newspaper giants Gannett and Knight-Ridder, whose aim was to destroy the union movement. It is typical of the employers' offensive against organised labour in the United States.

This month a striker from Detroit, Scott Martell, representing the Metro Council of Newspaper Unions, is touring Britain explaining the issues behind the strike and raising badly needed funds. Scott explained to *Socialist Appeal* that the advertising boycott has been very effective: "Something like 1,400 advertisers are still out, and 800 or so are in. And circulation remains in the gutter. Internal documents the union has obtained show that paid circulation for *The Detroit News* is off 61 percent from pre-strike levels, with a weekday press run of about 130,000, down from around 350,000. *The Free Press* is off by 40 percent or so. "It's been 14 months since we walked out, and everything from labour law to community support is in our corner. But Gannett, the company driving the strike, is so huge it seems we can't hurt them enough locally to get them to return to the bargaining table. It's frustrating. But it's also a sterling example of the power of money in this money-worshipping culture. Gannett's philosophy seems to be violate whatever laws they want now, pay the fine later and just chalk it up to the cost of doing business. It's the application of capital without any sort of guiding moral light, any sort of consideration for the lives of individuals, or for the best interests of the community. All in all, it's pretty fucking disgusting...."

Anyone interested in inviting Scott to speak at a Labour movement meeting, please contact Jeremy Dear on 0121 486 1809.



# Belgian state: slipping into crisis

Almost every day stunning new criminal revelations are sending shockwaves through Belgian society. Indeed since August a real hurricane has raged through the country.

by Eric Demeesters  
Brussels

Two young girls who had been kidnapped were discovered alive, almost by accident, by the police. The kidnapers were part of a larger network of child prostitution. Later the dead bodies of two other girls were discovered, the investigation revealed that they had been starved to death. The bourgeois press has laid heavy emphasis on the "wickedness" of Dutroux and his gang. But an analysis of the personal characteristics of the killers will give us only a partial answer to the question: how has such a thing been possible? Dutroux and his gang are a product of a monstrous society, a society which normalises and venerates violence. If you look very carefully at the acts of this gang you will recognise all the "values" and "virtues" of individual success in a capitalist society: cynical calculation, indifference to the life and death of others, a ruthless abuse of people.... The priest who organised the funerals denounced "the rich, the powerful, the politicians..." Male sexual violence as revealed in this case is also an extreme expression of the unequal male/female relations under capitalism. A mood of anger has spread throughout the whole population, and not only because of the horrific nature of the crime.

Indignation has also been fuelled by the fact that it was revealed that both the police and the justice system knew about the sinister nature of the Dutroux gang and didn't act. Very soon

the whole focus of the anger of the population shifted from the individuals responsible for the crime to the whole system. The parents of the first two discovered girls (Julie and Melissa), had already denounced last year the lack of interest by the police in their case, the secret nature of the enquiry and the profound contempt shown to them by the judges and police. Now their worst suspicions have been confirmed.

The struggle of the parents to know the truth has had great support amongst the population. This was revealed on the day of the funeral, where 100,000 people attended and most workplaces in the south of Belgium staged a minute of silence. Politicians and representatives of the government who attended the funeral were asked by the parents not to sit at the front near them, but to stay in the crowd. The King was explicitly asked not to attend. "He didn't help us when we asked for his help" explained one of the parents.

## Discredited

The police, the judiciary, and the idea that they defend the population against crime has been profoundly discredited. A recent television debate with the parents of Julie and Melissa and high level magistrates and police officers gives an indication of the shift in public opinion. At the beginning of the debate a poll indicated that only 3% trusted the judiciary system. At the end of the debate this was reduced to 1%. Another poll asked if they believed that this time the enquiry would succeed, 95% said they didn't think so. The new judge in charge of the enquiry into the children's death indicated that he would go "on to the end, if they let me do the job". Asked by the journalists to

explain, he simply answered "you know very well what I mean". Another judge denounced publicly "the immobility and inhuman nature of justice". With justice this is partially due to a lack of resources, a conflict of interests between different police departments and extreme corruption. But recent developments have shed new light on the contradiction between the official aims of the police and justice and their real aims.

More and more powers are being given to the national guard (a kind of paramilitary force) at the expense of the local police. This body dedicated 56% of its time to "keeping public order" (demonstrations, strikes, labour movement activities etc.). At one teachers demonstration, in front of parliament, on the second of April, almost 50 police cameras were busy filming the activists. One student leader arrested by the national guard heard one of the officers saying that they had 2 hours of videotape of his activities and 70 photos.

In one way the legal system has worked very well—for the bosses. For the last 3 years workers on picketlines have noticed the speed (some times only a few hours after the bosses complain) with which the courts rule against the unions. They can expect extensive police mobilisations when called on by the employers—at one factory, 25 workers on a picket line were surrounded by 70 members of the national guard!

A bourgeois state does not simply maintain itself by violence and power. Indeed, the use of these methods are exceptional. In "normal" times it maintains itself by convincing the majority of the population that it represents "the common interest". Its capacity to maintain a consensus around that belief deter-

mines the extent to which it then has to use brutal force. This is the real meaning of the crisis in the state and why its role is more and more being questioned.

This together with the growing national tensions between the Flemish and Walloon MP's and the government, which is putting a serious question mark over the future existence of Belgium, gives a lot of weight to the analyses of the French paper *Le Monde*. In an editorial it underlines the "empty zone in the heart of the Old Continent... we should help this country to solve a crisis which is perhaps the worst in an already chaotic history" (*Le Monde*, September 10).

The serious strategists of the bourgeoisie and the captains of industry are opposed to the splitting of the country, but some politicians are really playing with fire. >

## Historic budget

The crisis will probably accelerate with the announcement of new cuts contained in the "historic budget" due on October 1st. Last year the Belgian Prime Minister, Dehaene, feared that the French strike movement would have the effect of a "particle accelerator" on similar discontent in Belgium. Now with a mood of revolt starting to materialise across Europe this is more true than ever. The francophile socialist party is now severely weakened and will try to show its "statesmanship" by retreating on its few criticisms of the new austerity programme, and put the socialist unions under pressure not to go into action. If the union leadership accept these "suggestions" and does not listen to the rank and file, then a new crisis will explode in the working class organisations. The coalition government has probably never been so close to implosion. The capacity of the socialist leaders in the government to keep a check on the unions will determine the short term fate of the coalition. Another scenario is possible if the labour movement, the unions and the socialist parties take the initiative with an alternative not only to austerity but to the general decay of society. Then we could overcome the nightmare of crime, violence and exploitation and offer instead the joys of life to the future generations.



# Turkish Cypriot workers strike for their rights

In February 1996, this factory, which makes and packs fruit juice in Güzelyurt (Morfou), was sold to Mena (a Turkish capitalist) as part of the general privatisation process in North Cyprus. As North Cyprus is not considered by Turkish investors as a safe place to invest, the ones who are prepared to invest there are mainly those who look for a cheap way to make quick profits regardless of the means used.

In this case the factory was sold for \$5.5 million but with a very peculiar agreement which meant

that only \$500 were paid up front and the rest was going to be paid in two instalments a year of \$5,000.

The first decision taken by the new private management was to cut down wages by 70%, from 60M Turkish lira a month (£420) to 17M lira. They also abolished the collective agreement which gave the workers the right to have holidays, unemployment benefit, health care, an extra month's pay a year, etc.

The main part of the workforce in this factory is seasonal, so at the time when these measures were introduced, only 200 workers were employed. At the peak of

the season there are 1300 workers, 90% of them women.

Nevertheless they decided to go on strike on February 17th, just 10 days after the privatisation. A week after the beginning of the strike 100 Turkish workers were brought in as strike breakers. 20 of them had been brought from mainland Turkey and 80 others were part of the big colony of illegal Turkish workers in North Cyprus. (In North Cyprus there are 80,000 Turkish Cypriots, 80,000 Turkish settlers, 40,000 Turkish soldiers and 25,000 illegal Turkish workers).

The pickets tried to prevent the scabs from getting into the facto-

ry and there was a big battle with 250 policemen.

The workers (belong to the agricultural workers union in north Cyprus Tarem Sem, part of the Turkish workers' confederation Türk Sem) have organised three shifts of 50 people to picket the site 24 hours a day. The main demands are:

- Get the collective agreement back.
- Maintain the same wages and rights.
- Renationalise the factory.

The main leader of the union is Ibrahim Koreli who is also a MP for the left wing TKP. They fear that the company, with full support from the state, will try to get a large amount of strike breakers by when the season starts. As the leaders of the union warned this could lead to a blood bath. Trade union repression, organised by the Turkish state, is rife in North Cyprus and these workers need all the support they can get from the trade union movement world-wide.

*Messages of support to:  
Ibrahim Koreli  
Tarim Sen  
Guzel Yurt  
Mersin 10  
Turkey*

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# Child labour - capitalism's hypocrisy

Until recently the scandal of child labour in countries such as Pakistan was something which was known about but never admitted to. Set alongside the vast mosaic of human misery in the third world it could easily pass unnoticed. Reviews such as those produced by organisations such as Unicef and the ILO paint a dismal picture: One in five children in the third world die by the age of ten, one in four do not even survive childbirth or are born disabled. 85 million children (50%) under five are considered to be malnourished in South Asia, 32 million (25%) in Africa also. Many thousands of children die daily from illnesses which are caused by poverty and poor conditions and which could be easily treated by modern medicine.

Against this background it is all too easy to see what fuels the market for child labour. Throughout the developing countries, poverty forces families to send their children to work in order to survive. It is estimated that over 73 million 10 to 14 year olds are economically active in one way or another throughout the world. For Africa that means one child in three with Asia not far behind—and accounting for about half of that total.

The work is hard but poverty is harder still. Children are seen as being ideally suited to jobs such as weaving and the cleaning out of places, such as the inside of containers, which adults would find difficult to enter. Many children, not unsurprisingly suffer from deformities and injuries brought on by the nature and intensity of the work. In countries such as Pakistan, some of these children are nothing more than slaves—bonded labour sold to try and meet inflated debts. A report in the *Financial Times* (8/8/96) speaks of "tens of thousands... kept in bondage at privately run jails on farms, where

*gunmen hired by landowners keep them in chains and force them to work in sub-human conditions."*

For decades nothing was said. Carpets were sold to the West who did not wonder how these could be made so cheaply or by whom. However, the economic crises in the West has led to the introduction of trade barriers and have used "human rights" as the means to justify this. Bad publicity over firstly the carpet industry and more recently the football industry has undermined exports and forced some limited action. Farms and factories have been raided and legislation such as the 1991 Children's Employment Act has been passed. But the surface has only been scratched.

The *Financial Times* article quotes a Mr. Ali Hassan, a campaigning journalist, as follows on bonded labour: "The basic reason (for lack of progress) is that most members of the parliament belong to the 'zamindari' (landowning class) who are more interested in the status quo than bringing about change." The article talks of a growing mood of opposition to any reform by the landowners who see their profits being threatened.

## Scandal

In the Pakistani paper 'Dawn' (17/8/96) Karamat Ali, director of the labour organisation Piler, spoke of the problems of resolving this scandal. He outlined the root causes of child labour: the question of debt and the feudal land system in Pakistan. "With land concentrated in a few hands, landlessness is increasing and small farmers are getting marginalised. We then find the flow of migrants, including children into the cities seeking work..."

Karamat Ali also does not feel very positive about what has been done already: "...there is a total lack of will in the government. It has only advocated

*piecemeal measures, such as 35 work centres, which cannot even touch the fringe of the problem."* Even if children are freed from work or bonded labour there are few alternatives for them, especially given the poor state of the education system.

## Socialism

He does however see a role for the trade unions in Pakistan on this question. But they would need to see the wider implications of any action they took and would need to not only open up membership to the youth but also organise on a wider, production rather than unit, basis. Socialist Appeal would argue that the fight for socialism in the third world is an essential task for the movement both in Pakistan and internationally. We should however pause to take note that the problem of child labour is not confined to the third world. Visit any Western city and you will see children working in shops, market stalls, sweatshops and so on. On 3 July 1996 in an adjournment debate at parliament, Jeremy Corbyn MP raised the question of child labour in Britain itself. He spoke of a "secret illegal workforce in Britain that deserves to be highlighted." According to the University of Paisley between 1.1 and 1.7 million 11 to 15 year olds are engaged in employment

in Britain. Their survey revealed that between 35% and 50% of the children interviewed had jobs. The work is low paid, often as little as £1.50 an hour or even just 50p. The hours were poor as well with some starting work as early as 4.00am although the law puts a time limit of no work before 7.00am. The lure of cheap labour appears to be just as attractive in Britain as it is in Pakistan or Africa. As the TUC in a recent document puts it: "Children provide employers with cheap and flexible workers who don't know their rights... in poorer families the child's wages may be very important to family income—and growing poverty in Britain makes that more likely." Some children pay a serious price as the document continues: "according to the Low Pay Unit, one in three working children have been involved in accidents." The price of deregulation is all too clear. Not surprisingly the Tories response to all this has been one of cynical smugness and complacency. Ultimately without tackling the root causes of poverty which incredibly make child labour seem a good option for many, little will change. Landlordism and imperialism remain the yoke to which the third world is bound. These chains must be smashed. Without alternatives, child labour will continue largely untouched but perhaps just a little more hidden than before. International support for the struggle of the masses against the grip of capitalism is an essential task for the labour and trade union movement as well as support for campaigns such as the Pakistan Trade Union Defence Campaign which campaigns to expose issues such as that of child labour and fights against these scandals.

Steve Jones





# Hungarian revolution 1956

23rd October 1996 sees the 40th anniversary of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956. That movement of the Hungarian masses signified the culmination of the growing discontent evident in Eastern Europe at the time.

by Juliana Grant

Eastern Europe has seen turbulence in its history for centuries, our present epoch being no exception. Since the fall of the Berlin Wall and the attempt to re-establish capitalism in the region, millions are coming to ask the crucial question of our time: If Stalinism was a hated and bankrupt system, which we were happy to see defeated and the move towards capitalism leaves thousands in poverty, unemployment and hopelessness, is there a social system that can provide a job, a house and hope, and if there is

one, how can we achieve it? The masses of Eastern Europe - and Hungarians in particular - could do no better than look at what happened in 1956 in giving them the ideas and a direction to follow. To quote Leslie Bain, a journalist and eyewitness of the events of 1956: *"No event in recent history has been so much lied about, distorted and besmirched as the Hungarian Revolution"*.

## Truth

It seems that it was expedient not to tell the truth about a small nation that rose, fought and lost. As far as the capitalist commentators were concerned this was simply a move to shake off Russian repression and a communist dictatorship, while the Stalinists called it a fascist counter-revolution aided and abetted by the CIA in order to defeat "socialism". It was

true that the demand for the withdrawal of Russian troops from Hungarian territory was a major item in all declarations made by the people and the hatred of the Stalinist regime was the main fuel of the revolutionary express. However, this uprising had very quickly moved on from basic demands like that and became what Bill Lomax says in his book *Hungary 1956* "a social revolution aimed not at restoring a previous regime but at creating a radically new social order, one that would be both more democratic than the capitalist West and more socialist than the communist East."

Lomax was one of very few chroniclers of the revolution who understood that the uniqueness of 1956 was in its finally clear cut movement towards establishing workers democracy, with Workers Councils, a Workers Militia, and the sort of true democratic freedom that Lomax felt was a brand new system, but which Marxists know as the re-establishment of the ideas and practice of Lenin and the early days of the young Soviet regime after the Russian Revolution. 1956 in Hungary was Trotsky's political revolution in practice, which is why it was drowned in blood the way it was.

So, how did it come about and what can today's socialists learn from its events? The seeds of discontent in the whole region of Eastern Europe were sown after the Second World War and in the forced establishment of so called "socialist" regimes in the image of the stalinist Soviet Union. While the first Hungarian parliamentary election in 1946 was

fought between a variety of parties, it did not take long before the totalitarian, one-party system was established backed up by the only true representatives of state power at the time, the Red Army. Repression and persecution of all and any dissenters from the party line were rigorously pursued, creating and fuelling the underlying hatred for the regime. Show trials in the grand old tradition of the 1930's were staged and several long standing communists, who survived the underground years, were now denounced as agents of Western Imperialism or friends of that dog Tito and executed. In the countryside forced collectivisation of the land was put through, creating poverty and discontent. In the factories, while the workers were told that the factory belonged to them, ever increasing speed-ups and high crippling production norms made them feel like slaves and possibly worse off than under the pre-war capitalist regime. Then at least they had their independent trade unions, now those too became part of the state machinery with fat cat bureaucrats in both the unions and the party living well on the sweat and toil of the masses. Due to the norm system, the compulsory purchase of "peace bonds" and the gross misappropriation of a large proportion of the national product by the bureaucracy, living standards were considerably lower by the early 1950's than immediately after the war. The new cast of bureaucrats, officials, their staff and all manner of spies and hacks numbered close on a million in a country of only 9 million people, of whom only 3 and a half million worked productively.

## Stalin

It was Stalin's death in 1953 that signalled a most welcome thaw and a move towards a partial relaxing of the extreme harshness of the Hungarian regime. Discontent both in Hungary and in other parts of the region, in East Germany especially, has also underlined the need for reforms, if only to forestall a movement from below. In fact the Hungarian workers had already fired several shots across the bows of the stalinist regime by organising strikes in the Matyas Rakosi iron and steel works in Budapest's industrial suburb on





Csepel island as well as at Ozd and Diosgyor in Eastern Hungary. The protest was against low wages, the system of work norms and food shortages. The strikers in Csepel only stayed out for 48 hours and got a considerable pay rise, so anxious was the regime to hush it up.

Imre Nagy became Prime Minister and introduced his 'New Course'. This meant an amnesty for political prisoners, the abolition of internment camps, a move towards increasing the availability of consumer goods and the relaxation of the iron grip of the censor in publishing and broadcasting. The 'New Course' was nothing revolutionary, but a reflection of the brewing discontent in the masses and one of the solutions to it by one strata of the bureaucracy. This however, did not stop many layers in society beginning to breathe more freely and reflecting more and more openly the desire for more democracy.

The first stirrings came from a group of journalists round the party daily paper *Szabad Nep*. As it is often said: "in stormy times the tops of the trees move first." The intelligentsia had an independent tradition in Hungary which raised its head time and time again, and this period was no exception. However, very soon the line from Moscow changed and the worry over the possibility of a movement, which the bureaucracy might not be able to control produced a clampdown. Imre Nagy was removed from all his party posts and the 'New Course' was abandoned. The next to move was the Writers Association, whose presidium resigned en bloc and drew up a memorandum opposing censorship and demanding greater freedom of expression. This resulted in further disciplining of the writers, but led to the establishment of the *Petofi Circle* which planned a series of public debates.

The real push in the open expression of discontent, at least among the intelligentsia and the more reform minded party leaders, came after the XXth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, during which Khrushchev delivered his "secret speech" denouncing the crimes of Stalin. This was in February 1956 and an explosion of political debate followed.

The Petofi Circle started organising public debates, first about how the decisions of the XXth Congress applied to Hungary, later on a variety of topics ranging from the freedom of the press, through economics, history and education, to philosophy. The schools and Universities were a hive of activity, until according to one account of those days, all and everybody was talking politics most of the time.

### Discontent

The level of discontent and frustration has also represented itself with open expression of hatred towards party bureaucrats and their lackeys. People spat on their cars until they were scared stiff even to walk the streets alone. Bolder and bolder articles and poetry appearing in literary and political magazines were published and tolerated by the regime, that was beginning to feel beleaguered. Dora Scarlett an English communist, who has been living and working in Hungary since 1953 wrote: "*It would be wrong to think that there was any such organisation as 'The Party' any longer, with a unified control. It was breaking up into its component parts - the tiny, rigid core surrounding Erno Gero, and the mass of members who were in varying degrees drawn into the tide of opposition, criticism and independent action.*"

Marxism teaches us that the first condition of revolution is a split or crisis in the ruling class or strata. By the summer of 1956 the situation was beginning to look critical for the Hungarian regime. Its reform wing was demanding the return of Imre Nagy, the intelligentsia was getting more and more bold in open defiance through articles, poems and even outright demands for artistic freedom, the Universities were seething with debate and the Petofi Circle picked more and more contentious topics to needle the regime with.

In June 1956 the working class has yet again added its own voice to the general discontent when in the wake of the brutal repression of the striking workers of Poznan in Poland a new strike wave and several disturbances demonstrated their solidarity with their Polish brothers. In July finally the much hated Matyas Rakosi was replaced as



Party Secretary, but the party was not offering anything new that would placate the discontent. Finally, it was on 6th October 1956 that it dawned on the masses that their potential power to organise was in their grasp. This was the date proposed for the re-burial of Laszlo Rajk one of the victims of the 1940's purge trials, which the party leadership eventually conceded. They hoped to carry it out quietly with no fuss, but after much pressure agreed to provide some party speakers and publicity. However, nobody, not even the people themselves, expected the estimated 200,000 that turned out for the funeral. It was at the end of this day that a group of 200-300 students marched off under both the Hungarian and red flag towards the city centre singing revolutionary songs shouting: "We won't stop halfway, stalinism must be destroyed!" The students had been in ferment for several months by then. At the beginning of the autumn term they demanded that a panel of Central Committee members come to the university and answer their questions about the Sovietisation of Hungarian culture, the Soviet troops in Hungary, the norm system in the factories and the privileges of the party elite. Ten days after the Rajk funeral in the provincial city of Szeged its university students demanded an end to the compulsory study of Russian and called for a strike in support of their demand. At the end of this meeting they decided to set up an independent student organisation and send representatives to other universities to ask for support.

Finally, on 22nd October in an all day and all night session the students of the Budapest Technological University worked out a set of 16 demands and called for a demonstration on the following day to show solidarity with their Polish brothers and put their demands forward. The day started in a disorganised fashion. There was a common meeting place, but no clear plan of action and a certain reluctance from politicians, intellectuals, and even some of the student leaders to head the march. It was as if the enormity of the events to come was already weighing heavy on those who knew full well that once the masses arise it is very difficult to stop them.

### Demonstration

The demonstration was on the whole very peaceful, only the law students turned up with placards and some duplicated lists of demands. As the day went on more and more people joined the students, some out of curiosity, others fully agreeing with their demands and aims. First amongst them stood the immediate withdrawal of all Russian troops, the demands for a free and independent students' organisation and many others which showed the students' awareness of the needs of workers, intellectuals and all strata in society. They demanded putting the Hungarian economy on a new basis, the opening of all the books on international agreements, the revision of crippling production norms, a freeing of political prisoners, a plurality of parties and free and secret ballots in elections.



Later, as the morning factory shift finished, industrial workers joined, adding to the numbers and to the social weight of the crowd.

It was a speech by Erno Gero, the first secretary of the Communist Party, broadcast on the radio, that inflamed the situation and quickly changed the mood of the people. He denounced the demonstrators as enemies of the people and would not even consider any of their demands, threatening them with arrest, unless they immediately dispersed. By this time the demonstration split up into several different ones. One of them approached the Parliament building, asking for Imre Nagy to come and address them, while another group moved to the Hungarian Radio building, requesting air time to broadcast their demands. It was here that the first battle of the revolution followed ending up with the insurgents' taking the building, but losing many in the fighting. Under the pressure of events this was the time when the ruling bureaucracy started its manoeuvring first conceding that Imre Nagy should take over as Prime Minister, then promising to disband the AVH (the Hungarian equivalent of the KGB) opening negotiations with the Russians for troop withdrawals, and finally abolishing the Party and re-establishing it under a new name. While the masses were first inclined to give them a benefit of the doubt, these measures were overtaken by what was happen-

ing on the streets and in the factories as the revolution itself unfolded in all its complexity. The variety of views, opinions and groups holding them, who both before and during these events tried to reform the old system, became a total irrelevancy in the face of the might of the people. A movement, that started with simple, sometimes basic patriotic demands, through the fighting, debating and organising entered a much higher stage. It not only became a movement of self-defence, but that of an armed rising to establish a new society.

### Tanks

When the Russian tanks were called in to put down the uprising, they soon found that they were faced first a well organised, fearless populace, which improvised with amazing bravery and was not going to be easy to subdue. There were also cases of fraternisation between the Russian soldiers, who were lied to when sent in to shoot at Hungarian workers. They were told that there was a fascist insurrection in Budapest, but as many of them were already stationed in Hungary and spoke Hungarian they could talk to people and stopped fighting as soon as they realised what was happening.

One of the most infamous atrocities of the revolution, was a massacre of unarmed civilians in front the of the Parliament building on 25th October. While it was blamed

on Russian tanks at the time, it was much more likely to have happened precisely to stop this fraternisation. There are many conflicting accounts of this event, but it is no accident that the machine guns situated on roof tops around Parliament Square started shooting first as two Russian tanks clad in Hungarian flags, drove into view, carrying many freedom fighters.

Very quickly several fighting groups emerged at strategic points in the city. Most, if not all, of these were in working class districts and at major intersections and in most, the fighters were workers, including the most lumpen elements, who were considered criminals under the stalinist regime. When one of these youngsters was asked why he was fighting, he answered: "Why not? I have nothing to lose! Would you like to live on 600 forints (less than £10) a month?" In fact, a large proportion of the fighters were very young, some only 10 or 12 years old.

In the meantime a general strike was declared and workers' councils started being set up in the factories. At this stage these councils were in their embryonic stages, their members mostly fighting, but already the ideas for how the working class can organise production and run all aspects of life in the working class districts was coming to the fore. The fighting continued, but as a result of several Hungarian army units either coming over to the side of the revolution or at least staying neutral, as well as the obvious tactical need for the Red Army to regroup and change the compromised troops for some fresh ones who didn't speak Hungarian, an agreement was made for the Russian troops to start withdrawing from Budapest on 29th October.

The following week saw a blossoming of freedom in the factories, other workplaces, theatres, writers' clubs and in all aspects of industrial, political and artistic life. The workers' councils and revolutionary committees very quickly became the only organs of both decision making and executive power that Hungarians recognised. Even during the fighting, but especially after it died down, ordinary people started taking the running of their society into their own hands. All strata of society

set about putting the new world into effect: the Army elected the Hungarian Peoples Army Revolutionary Committee, which became part of the new Revolutionary National Defence Committee - i.e. an armed people, not a standing army. Writers, students, actors, musicians, school students, housewives all joined in setting up their own organisations in the atmosphere of revolutionary freedom and enthusiasm. The revolution spread to provincial towns and villages, especially to the areas of heavy industry and mining, where workers' councils and revolutionary committees were set up and representatives sent to Budapest. The new government under Imre Nagy set about the tasks of involving some non-communist politicians in its ranks, declared withdrawal from the Warsaw Pact and carried on implementing its reform program. Negotiations with the workers have even gone so far that a call to return to work on Monday 5th November was agreed.

### Workers

However, some of the workers' organisations in the provinces have been sending warning messages to Budapest about new Russian troop movements and on the morning of 4th November a second assault began not only against Budapest, but nationwide. This time the tactics were different. Eye-witness accounts confirm that no Russian soldier got out of his tank this time round. The fighting was not only against the barricades and actual units, but included deliberate intimidation of the population of Budapest. On a major road several tanks would slowly go down and systematically shoot and destroy every other floor of every block with their cannon. These troops were from Central Asia, this time obviously believing that they were putting down a fascist rising. Instantly the working class moved into action. The general strike continued and the fighting was brilliantly organised. In the face of overwhelming odds, with minimal arms and a lot of initiative the tanks were resisted. One popular trick that seemed to work was to break off the handle of a frying pan and place it up side down in the middle of a main road. This tended either to stop the tanks,





the tank crew thinking they were mines, or got the soldiers out of their tanks investigating, thus becoming vulnerable to small arms fire. It was in the working class strongholds of Csepel (pronounced Tcheppel), Ujpest, Kelenfold, Angyalfold, Zuglo and several other industrial districts, where resistance held out longest. One fighter, Mark Molnar, who under the Rakosi regime was stripped of his military rank and became a coalman said of fighting in Csepel: "The routine was simple. Each man spent eight hours fighting, eight hours working in the factories manufacturing shells and guns, eight hours sleeping at home. From the very first moment I arrived, I was allotted volunteer medical students and I knew just where to put my casualties." The organisation, he felt "was far better than it had been on the Hungarian general staff, I had nothing to do but fight." Eventually, however, even Csepel fell and the armed resistance ceased. It was at this juncture that the workers' councils came into their own. The de facto power was in the hands of the Red Army. They occupied the factories and working hand in hand with the puppet government of Janos Kadar, which they had set up on 4th November, tried to re-establish their totalitarian rule. However, the general strike was solid nationally and the workers' councils began to flex their muscles. They knew, that as armed resistance now was not possible, the only power they had left was the strike weapon.

### Winter

With the bitter Hungarian winter approaching the government was desperate to get production going, coal mined, electricity generated, and most of all get the workers back into the factories under armed guards. This they would not do. Moreover, they kept pressing their demands, meeting first in factories, then gradually widening out into district revolutionary committees and finally on the Central Workers Council of Greater Budapest. They were not going back to work until they were met. Intimidation continued and slowly but surely arrests, beatings, torture and executions threatened them. The workers responded with organising their own press, mili-

tia and meetings which increasingly had to be held illegally.

The workers' councils set out their demands for workers democracy at the point of production. These included:

1. *The factory belongs to the workers.*
2. *The workers' council is the supreme controlling body of the factory and is democratically elected by the workers.*
3. *The workers' council elects its own executive committee composed of 3-9 members, which acts as the executive body, carrying out the decisions and tasks laid down by it.*
4. *The director is employed by the factory. The director and the highest employees are to be elected by the workers' council. This election will take place after a public general meeting called by the executive committee.*
5. *The director is responsible to the workers' council in every matter which concerns the factory.*

The work of these councils was conducted with the highest level of democracy. All officials and representatives were subject to instant recall and several councils frequently replaced their chair and/or secretary and delegates to other bodies during these months. Many felt that as soon as the leaders became unrepresentative of the masses that appointed them, they had to be replaced. In revolutionary times events move so fast that leaders are tested hourly and all those not up to it were replaced with those that were. One can also look at this from a different standpoint: many leading figures also felt that when they came to vital turning points in events they made no moves until their organisation confirmed them with secret ballots, so they were confident that they still carried their original mandate. After his election as President of the Greater Budapest Workers' Council, Sandor Racz, a toolmaker from the Beloiannis factory, did this several times, thus lifting workers democracy to a level of refinement not seen since the October Revolution of 1917. This living, breathing, direct system of workers' democracy continued even after renewed fighting, the workers always finding time and opportunity to exercise direct control over their representatives. While many of these workers' councils were only set up to



organise production and defend workers, it was inevitable, especially at a time of escalating persecution, that they would start co-operating and eventually linking.

### Budapest

The Greater Budapest Workers' Council was set up in the face of intimidation from both Russian tanks and the regrouping Hungarian state security only 10 days after the second Russian intervention. The clearly political nature of this body can be seen from some of their demands:

1. *The withdrawal of Soviet troops from Budapest and the whole country.*
  2. *Free elections in a multiparty system.*
  3. *Socialist ownership of the industries.*
  4. *The maintenance of workers' councils and the restoration of free trade unions.*
  5. *The right to strike and to assembly, freedom of the press and religion, etc.*
- Moreover the debate over their role in society, partially introduced by the intellectuals present, but frequently spontaneously erupting amongst the workers' representatives, was started. The age, experience, background and understanding of these workers' leaders varied enormously. Many were in their 40's, veterans of the pre-war communist underground and militant trade union struggles. Other were very young, bringing the brave and uncompromising spirit of youth into the

discussions. Some believed that the workers' councils must not take up a political role, as this might lead down the road to what went wrong in the past - i.e.: the party substituting itself for the workers. They believed that the workers' councils should organise the economic life of the country, free and independent trade unions should represent the workers' interests and the parties (of which there will now be many) should run the political life of the country.

There were others, who were clearly advocating the idea of the creation of district, city-wide and ultimately a nationwide revolutionary workers' councils as the only way to safeguard and ultimately develop further the achievements of the revolution. Whichever set of views was gaining the upper hand, reality created a clear case of dual power in Hungary during November/December 1956 and those who realised this could not fail to see its relevance to the political as well as the economic life of the country. In fact as early as the 4th November the Borsod County Workers' Council sent a delegation of 28 to meet with Imre Nagy in Budapest. In the program presented by them they included a demand for Parliament to be replaced by a National Assembly made up of delegates from the workers' councils. Admittedly, in an atmosphere of being pushed further and further underground, arrests happening every day and all organ-



isation having to go on under the watchful eyes of the Russian forces and the reconstituted AVH, the clear cut development of workers democracy was not easy. It was the preparations for the setting up of a National Workers' Council, called for the 11th December that pushed the Kadar regime to speed up its repressive measures, firstly trying to limit the rights of workers' councils to operate at purely factory level, then making all other councils illegal. On 11th December came the whole scale arrest of the leaders of the Greater Budapest Workers' Council which resulted in a 48 hour general strike to protest against the arrests and to further press the councils' demands. Strikes and sporadic resistance continued well into 1957 until the last workers' council was abolished 10 months later. The summary jurisdiction of the so called "Peoples' Courts" gave legitimacy to wide ranging powers of arrest, detention and torture that was exercised hardest against the workers and especially the workers' leaders. It is against a background of oppression on this scale that the achievements of the Central Workers' Council of Greater Budapest in organising and maintaining two rock solid massive general strikes and very nearly setting up the National Workers' Council with a clear program of workers democracy will go down in history as one of the greatest events of the world working class movement. The example of the Hungarian workers bravery, initiative and ability to rise to the task set by history is all the more amazing as the broad mass of movement during the revolution produced leaders, programs and a fighting force that rose spontaneously, without a revolutionary party and their struggle was fought out to the end. Over the centuries history has been written by the victors. The dispossessed masses have very rarely had chroniclers of their own, so subsequent generations tend to look at past events through the eyes of the ruling class or strata. However it is our century that achieved never before seen heights of the falsification of history, which was also attempted by the stalinist leaders of Hungary after 1956. The greatest slander that has ever been uttered against a heroic fighting working class, is

the one that has been perpetrated upon the Hungarian workers of 1956. The consolidated stalinist regime of Janos Kadar, having tortured, murdered, imprisoned or just simply beaten to death the flower of the Hungarian working class and youth dared to peddle the myth that this was a counter-revolution which aimed to restore capitalism.

### Socialists

A large number of socialists, survivors of the fighting and others, spent many years refuting this claim all over the world. In Hungary you did not have to, people had eyes and ears and they knew what happened. It is really heart warming to read of the black humour that also rose, which is a characteristic of the Hungarian soul, as hardship is so much easier to bear when you make fun of it. To this day there is a saying circulating in the provincial town of Salgotarjan in response to the slander that the workers' and miners' demonstration which was brutally put down by the AVH was actually made by fascists and reactionaries. It goes as follows:

*"While peacefully shooting in the centre of Salgotarjan, local security forces were subjected to a vicious, unprovoked attack by fascist miners hurling loaves of bread at them!"*

For the rest of the world there is ample documentary evidence that provides testimony against this Goebbelsian lie. No organisation that has ever gained any prominence, not even some one might have expected to, included any call for the return to capitalism, in fact all of them made absolutely sure that a call for no such return was included

in their demands. One organisation that called itself the Hungarian Democratic Independence Movement, and which mostly represented the ideas of intellectuals and revisionist reform communists of the pre-1956 era, issued a summary of its program in a publication called October 23 on 6th December in the following terms:

1. Complete and unconditional independence
2. Political democracy on the basis of the free activities of the workers' councils, revolutionary committees and political parties
3. The maintenance of the land reform and the social ownership of the factories, mines and banks.

What the movement in Hungary in 1956 lacked is a clear, conscious leadership that read and understood Trotsky's analysis of the degeneration of the Russian Revolution and the need for the political revolution to restore the power into the hands of the working class. Had it had a leadership like that events might have been different. However, the lessons are clear for today. Even without such a leadership the Hungarian workers created a program for workers' democracy clearly along the lines of Lenin's four points for a healthy workers' state. The Hungarian Workers' Councils of 1956 were in effect soviets and Lenin's four points about the election of all officials, a rotation of duties, all officials subject to recall and an armed people, while not expressed exactly in those terms were established in practice. The Hungarian workers also added one more demand, arising from their own experience, which was calling for a plurality of parties as long as

they accept the common ownership of the means of production, i.e.: the gains of socialism, as they put it.

Has history come full circle by posing a seemingly intractable question to the working class of Eastern Europe, Russia and all other ex-stalinist states? What is the way out? The stalinist regime of Janos Kadar fell to pieces and disappeared under its own contradictions, economic chaos and hatred of its people. What it was replaced by generated a thousand false hopes, only to be dashed as capitalism also was found wanting.

### Traditions

The Hungarian working class has had glorious traditions, which produced the heroes of 1956, but whose experience will have to be rediscovered and a new tradition created. The only route to peace, jobs, houses, economic and political freedom lies through another 1956. Take any program or demand from 1956, like the election of factory directors by the workers, the students demand for free association, or the writers' demands for artistic freedom - they can all be achieved through finishing what the Russian troops and Kadar's henchmen cut across in November 1956. The route to that society is through workers' democracy, as dreamt of and fought for by the thousands of freedom fighters who gave their lives for it.

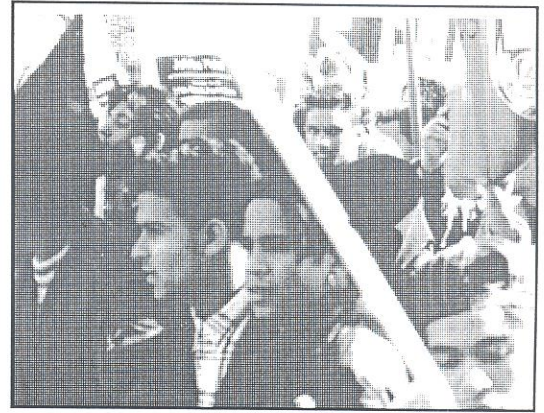
It is the destiny of this generation of Hungarian workers to make it real. We and they can celebrate the 40th anniversary of the 1956 revolution no better than by working towards that goal.





# socialist appeal

The Marxist voice of the labour movement



## Students: fight for your rights

As students return for the new academic year we wonder what we are going to be hit with next. Since 1979 we've had the abolition of unemployment and housing benefits, the initial freezing and then reduction of grants to a level that doesn't even cover our rent and most recently the implementation of student loans so we can expect to be thousands of pounds in debt by the end of our studies.

So what next? There has been a 25% reduction in funding per student between 1990 and 1995. There are now 30 less staff per 1000 students than there was in 1988 and the student loans company is set to be privatised. Not surprisingly this sustained Tory onslaught has led to great expectations in the upcoming Labour government.

### Future

The Labour Party is the only party capable of bringing progressive change to this country. But this chance for a better future won't be found in the Labour Party's present leadership, a leadership that spends more time trying to convince the captains of industry that it is business friendly than it does standing up for the hopes and aspirations of millions of working class people, young and old.

No matter how hard Mr Blair may try, it is not possible to please everybody. Big business is still failing to reach the levels of profitability it has reached in the past, investment is non-existent. So the only solution for their system is an attack on common people, an attack on the welfare state and that means an attack on education.

The NUS executive, dominated by the right wing of Labour Students, has recently drawn up a series of proposals to end the crisis in further and higher education and ensure full and equal access. How do they intend to achieve this aim? "we propose a partnership between Government, institutions, business and students." they tell us. Unfortunately we no longer live in the 50s and 60s, the hey-day of reformism is long gone, any partnership between the general population and business in these days of austerity and cut-backs will be the partnership of the horse and the rider. Even though they do advocate the implementation of a Business Education Tax, a few pages later they start adding in get-out clauses along the line that "good" employers would be exempt, in order to encourage the others to follow on and act nicely. Who decides what constitutes a good employer? Do the students have any say in this matter? In this

case the silence is deafening. They say their proposals are based on partnership, so lets see what students get out of this cosy deal. "Students will be guaranteed free tuition, adequate student financial support while they are at college, an institutional commit-



ment to end hidden course costs and an end to the regressive student loan scheme. In return, as graduates they will contribute to an "Investment in Education" scheme."

### Grants

Conspicuous by its absence is any commitment to maintain or increase the levels of student grants, indeed they are to be abolished. What do we have in its

place? They intend to abolish the current "regressive" student loan scheme and replace it with a so-called "progressive" student loan scheme. It doesn't matter how they organise the repayments, the fact is under this scheme put forward by our National Executive we have less money than under the Tories. This is no way to ensure working class students have equal access. In their own figures they point out that the studies of 40% of students suffer because they have to take on part-time jobs, this will increase massively if these proposals are put through.

What is important is that we have fighting student organisations that stand up for their members in the times ahead, there are almost 3 million members of the NUS who won't just sit down and take it after 17 years of Toryism. Labour Students should be at the head of this movement whether its present leadership likes it or not, socialist students must struggle to regain their traditional organisations and ensure they adopt a programme that will demolish the legacy of Thatcher and Major, put an end to student hardship and make sure education is a right not a privilege.

Alex Grant  
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# Labour to power on a socialist programme