



socialist appeal

The Marxist voice of the labour movement

*What's
happening
to the
working
class?*

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Europe wide movement shows future

If anyone was in any doubt about how the developing social and economic crisis would affect the workers movement in Western Europe you need look no further than this issue of Socialist Appeal. The articles from Germany, Spain, France, and in particular, Belgium, give us a taste of the future.

In Germany, the Kohl government's proposal to reduce sick pay from 100% of normal wages to 80%, has sparked off a widespread movement. Hundreds of thousands have taken to the streets in protest, and workers have walked out on strike.

Movement

In Belgium the movement has gone further. The Belgian government must have breathed a sigh of relief when another part of its "austerity" programme seemed to go through with no big movement of opposition. But within weeks Belgium has been engulfed by a huge social movement that goes to the very heart of society. The massive demonstration in Brussels a few weeks ago, possibly the biggest in Belgium's history, was not on the purely economic issues that affect all workers, but over the sacking of Judge Connerotte from the team investigating the child murders and paedophile ring in the Dutroux case. The spontaneous walkouts of workers in the big Fords and Volkswagen plants also reflected this situation. The mass of Belgian workers correctly recognise a cover up involving those right at the very top of official society. Rapidly the movement has moved on to take up other issues. A 24 hour general strike was called on 28

October on the issue of the cuts and for a shorter working week.

The Dutroux case would cause mass revulsion at any time, we only need to see the West case or the Dunblane massacre in Britain to see the truth of that. But it is precisely at this time that this revulsion in Belgium has moved much further into positive political action.

Why? It reflects the situation developing within every country of Western Europe.

Economic insecurity, social malaise, political bankruptcy: a crisis that effects every sector of society.

Workers in Brussels, marching against Connerotte's sacking were very clear about the issues when they talked about too much "flexibility," reflecting the deep seated anxieties about the radical changes that are taking place in workers lives at present - job insecurity, constant attacks on welfare, the bosses counter-revolution on the shop floor, casualisation, and so on.

In Britain this process of "flexibility" has gone further than almost anywhere else. The changes in British society since the seventies have been dramatic. The process of deindustrialisation, the attacks on trade union rights, mass unemployment and the creation of the new "flexible" labour market, have been the British capitalists response to the crisis of their system.

What this means in reality is that big business is attempting to maintain its "competitiveness" by increasing the burdens on the working class. John Major has openly said that we must compete, not with the higher tech economies like Germany, but with the "tiger" economies of South East Asia. We don't need to guess what that

means - we only need to go to South Wales where average incomes are now lower than in South Korea.

The problem for big business, though, is that their strategy is not working. Britain is still lagging way behind its European neighbours when it comes to what is important - investment, training, education.

Not only that, they have managed to erode even big sections of what was formerly their own social base, the "middle class," the professions, even sections of management - all are suffering from similar problems to the traditional blue collar worker. Delaying, downsizing, individual contracts, performance pay, constant assessment and pressure - all this has its toll. A recent survey showed that on any one day as many as 270,000 British workers are off sick with a stress related problem.

This is one reason why the Tories have miserably failed to rekindle the feelgood factor. Despite their talk of increasing consumer spending, a housing market revival and unemployment (officially at least) dipping towards the two million mark, they still languish way behind in the opinion polls.

In fact since the autumn of 1992 they have been historically the most unpopular government ever. Two events; the forced exit from the European Exchange Rate Mechanism and the mass movement off opposition to the pit closures sealed their fate. They have never recovered.

Seismic

But this seismic shift in the political arena goes much deeper than this. British society is in a deep malaise at every level - the Royal family

is in crisis, as are the established churches; the Tory Party itself is split and implicated at every level in "sleaze." More and more the ruling class looks for scapegoats for people's real insecurities: bad teachers, lousy parents; we see a whole parade of 'moral panics' as the Tories blame everyone for the ills of society except themselves and their friends in the City.

People have had enough! And that takes us back to Belgium. Because the social and economic conditions that have led to the mass protests there, are even more prevalent here.

What the Tories are most proud of over the last seventeen years are precisely the policies that are doing most to undermine their own position. An extremely insecure population, an increasingly "proletarianised" middle class, massive levels of unemployment and poverty; all this can only lead us to one conclusion. It is not a question of if such movements will take place in Britain but when. All eyes are obviously on the forthcoming general election, and for the mass of the population only a Labour victory holds out any hope. Despite Tony Blair's stated aim not to make promises he can't keep, you only need to look at his speech to this years Labour conference to see his potentially difficult predicament.

By sticking to the generalisations he may well open up the powderkeg. His promise of a "decent" society, a "secure" society, his talk about "communities" and "streets safe for women and children to walk down," may haunt him yet. People will expect him to deliver exactly these things. His vague promises on the minimum wage and trade union rights may well become flashpoints when he takes up residence in No.10.

Seventeen years ago the Tories set out to destroy both socialism and the labour and trade union movement. As we head towards the next century it is the Tories who are in the process of being ditched, and all the conditions are there for a revival of socialism and for a renewed and more militant movement. It's up to us to get out there and start organising for it.

Hot autumn in Germany

Since the end of September, hundreds of thousands of German workers have said "enough is enough" and participated in a wave of unofficial strikes and other forms of protest primarily directed against the attempt to reduce sick pay from 100% to 80% of the normal wage. On October 24th alone, 400,000 workers in the engineering sector downed tools in order to join the rallies and marches organised by the powerful IG Metal union as a day of action.

by Hans-Gerd Ofinger

The carworkers, especially those at the Mercedes Benz plants, set the pace. Although the existing and still valid collective agreements between unions and employers in this sector, as well as in many other branches of industry, clearly contain the right to 100% sick pay, the Mercedes bosses hastened to announce that they would ignore the agreements and introduce the 80% immediately. They have obviously miscalculated the mood of the workers who previously were seen as part of the "labour aristocracy," proud to identify themselves with the company. But the cut in sick pay was going too far and the Mercedes workers walked out on spontaneous strike. A senior shop steward at Mercedes Stuttgart plant, Tom Adler, stated, "The pressure came from below. The morning after the management board's decision to introduce the 80%, the morning shift went out on strike. It was a spontaneous movement, not organised by IG Metal or the local stewards. The late shift and the night shift also walked out. The rallies outside the facto-

ry gates were well attended and expressed a massive rage on the part of the workers, something I have never seen before. This was a situation in which nearly anything would have been possible.

The events of these days have demonstrated one thing: consciousness can develop in enormous leaps. Many workers have understood that something must happen. Many who were passive and reluctant only a day before came straight out on strike."

The militancy of Mercedes workers, who had not struck for 12 years, surprised not only managers and bourgeois politicians. The full time leaders of the shop stewards executive and the regional union leaders, most of them known for their compromising with the bosses, saw themselves exposed since the bosses didn't even consult them - and therefore had to take a fighting stance. After the first wave of strikes, Mercedes Benz lost in the region of 220 million DMarks, the bosses hastened to declare that they would withdraw the 20% reduction in sick pay until a general and binding solution could be arrived at in summit talks between union leaders and the employers federation.

The present boom in the German car industry, with massive overtime work and extra shifts on Saturdays, make the workers feel in a strong bargaining position. After years of attacks on social gains and living standards and the accumulation of frustration, anger and bitterness, it was the issue of the 80% sick pay that triggered this impressive movement. The mood at many workplaces does not allow any doubt potential is there for a massive strike movement and a decisive turn in the class struggle.

Although the IG Metal leadership did their utmost to get the employers off the hook, the summit talks failed, and the day of action on October 24 went ahead.

Steelworkers in the Ruhr struck for 24 hours. 40,000 Mercedes workers in the south came out once again, too.

"People who were fearful before have lost their fear," said a leading shop steward at the FAG Kugelfischer ball bearing-factory in Bavaria. While the workers at big factories are beginning to realise their potential power, it must not be ignored that under the pressure of high unemployment, shop stewards and workers in quite a number of workplaces have given way under pressure from the bosses to make concessions on wages, hours and conditions. The employers federations - spearheaded by those in the printing industry - have declared their intention to abolish the binding character of those collective agreements that lay down gains such as the 35 hour week, 100% sick pay, extra pay for holidays, etc. Trade unionists are increasingly realising that the bosses want to turn the clock back and reintroduce the misery and uncertainty experienced by previous generations.

Against this background it is well possible that hard and bitter struggles will take place over the winter. The unions are experiencing a new wave of tens of thousands joining. Kohl and big business felt too sure of themselves last winter when the union leaders offered them an "alliance for jobs." The recent attacks are about to destroy the German model of peaceful co-existence and collaboration between the classes and bring class struggle and militancy back on stage.

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Postal workers: no compromise on 'flexibility'

The result of the postal workers' ballot is due out just before we go to press. All indications are that it will back the continuation of industrial action against the bosses' plans for team working and attacks on the second delivery. However, union leaders are attempting to sideline the dispute.

Royal Mail has been determined to squeeze the 138,000 strong workforce in its drive for more profits. Not content with record productivity gains and £400 million profits last year, it wants to introduce greater 'flexibility' to make postal workers work even harder. At the moment, the basic wage is only £183.10 per week before deductions. In other words, many postal workers take home a pitiful £150 for a six-day week. Rather than longer hours, increased workloads and poverty wages, postal workers want an improvement in their living standards.

Last May workers voted 68 per cent for strike action on a 74 per cent turnout. Unfortunately, the

union leadership instead of organising all-out action, reverted to a series of one-day strikes.

This simply served to draw out the dispute with Royal Mail. All-out action would escalate things and quickly bring about a successful conclusion.

The scandalous intervention of Tony Blair in the dispute was condemned by the union and subsequently endorsed by the Labour party conference.

Correctly, CWU Labour party members all over the country moved resolutions to this effect at their local Labour party management committees. The job of Labour leaders is not to undermine trade unionists in struggle but to give them the maximum support.

Strike ballot

The national executive held a second strike ballot due to legal threats from Royal Mail. The bosses were threatening to go to court over a technicality (the number of spoiled ballots which had no effect on the ballot result), which could have resulted in legal damages being awarded against

the union by Tory judges. A second ballot was therefore called.

"We want them to confirm this rejection of Royal Mail's proposals", said Alan Johnson, the union's joint General secretary, "and reaffirm that they will support this industrial action to bring this dispute to a satisfactory conclusion." Management are eager to see the result of the strike ballot. It will determine their attitude to other related matters. For instance, union activists have been hauled up on so-called disciplinary charges in Edinburgh, Cardiff, Oxford and London. The bosses are trying it on to see how far they can go. In any settlement, there must be a general amnesty for union members "disciplined" throughout the strike. Royal Mail has refused to budge so far. It has relied on the Tory government, who are also behind this dispute, to put pressure on the union by suspending the Post Office monopoly. They have also threatened to hire thousands of casual workers as strike-breakers, and leaked a memo saying there would be 30,000 job losses. Only all out action can stop Royal

Mail bosses in their tracks! Unfortunately, it appears that sections of the union leadership are hoping to resolve the dispute on management's terms. Johnson has asked the union executive to consider other possible measures that could end the present stalemate, such as management-union working parties to discuss team working and deliveries. Such suggestions from the union leadership, which must come from secret "assurances" from the management, will not inspire confidence from the rank

Working parties

Unfortunately, the union executive decided by 9 votes to 6 to allow joint working parties to discuss the two issues in dispute. But no amount of "working party" discussions can eliminate the members outright opposition to team working or the attacks on second delivery. But where does this leave us? Will the executive now abandon the strike strategy - despite the ballot mandate - to pursue the joint working parties? To do so will mean abandoning the struggle and can only play into the hands of Royal Mail management. For the rank and file, there can be no compromise over these issues. Postal workers have had enough of management attacks over the years. It is time we stood firm - especially our leadership - and take all-out industrial action as the only real way of securing our just demands.

by a South Wales Postal Worker

Magnet Strikers stand firm

The 350 locked out Magnet workers in Darlington are determined to win their dispute. The factory, making fitted kitchens, has been in dispute since early September. The workers from UCATT, T&G, GMB and AEEU were forced into a showdown with management over the breakdown in pay negotiations. A ballot on industrial action was held, resulting in a 3 to 1 majority for action.

As so often with maverick employers, the workers were sacked and replaced with scab-labour. The Darlington workers have linked up with their counterparts in the Keighley plant, hoping to unify their struggles against the management. The Keighley workers have held collections for those at their sister plant. With the Keighley factory now in dispute over pay, with the workforce rejecting the company's offer by 2 to 1, a ballot for action there looks imminent.

The Darlington workers have received tremendous support from all over the country. It is vital that these workers are not left to fight alone. Speakers should be invited to all labour movement meetings and workplace collections held.

Invite a striker to you union or Labour Party meeting. Phone Ian on 01325 282389. Picketline mobile phone number 04020 72676.

Messages of support and donations to: Magnet Strike Committee, Labour Rooms, 123 Victoria Road, Darlington, County Durham. Cheques payable to Magnet Families Support Fund.

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Regular *Socialist Appeal* contributor, *Jeremy Dear*, has recently been elected President of the National Union of Journalists, becoming the youngest President of the NUJ and the current youngest president of a TUC-affiliated union. He spoke to *Alastair Wilson*.

What are the key issues facing journalists at the present time?

They are predominantly the same issues facing all workers no matter what industry they may be working in - low pay, longer hours, more stress at work and a continuing attack on trade union rights.

As media workers one of the biggest problems we face is the nature of ownership with an ever increasing concentration of the media in just a few hands. Despite what many people may think, their local newspaper, TV or independent radio station is likely to be owned by one of the big five companies who control something like 85% of the media. As a result the media is controlled by commercial interests. Whilst there is no formal state control of the press at present in Britain, censorship is practiced as a result of economic control through commercial pressures and control of the means of production, distribution and exchange - that is the presses and transmitters, the wholesale and distribution networks and the shops and retail outlets.

You mentioned low pay. Many people have the impression that journalists are a highly paid and privileged sector of society. Is that the case?

Certainly not! Whilst there are undoubtedly a few journalists who are extremely well paid, the vast majority have suffered from the general onslaught on wages and conditions of the last 17 years. The Tories' use of a pool of unemployed labour to drive down wages has affected journalists too. Just to give an example. Last week I went to speak to a union meeting at a local newspaper in the Midlands and of the seven reporters there, five would get a pay rise if there was a national minimum wage of £4.26! The lowest paid, who was college trained and working a 40-hour week, was earning just £6,800 a year. If the TUC and the Labour Party actively campaigned on just this one issue Labour would

TUC must stand up for workers rights

be swept to power and thousands of young workers would flock to join a union. Our conference last month recognised that we cannot rely on our so-called new friends in the City to deliver decent pay and has instructed us to launch our first national pay campaign for many years, involving a campaign of leafleting, recruitment drives, lobbies and where necessary industrial action. Whilst we should be supporting a figure of £4.26 we should also be saying that is not enough and should set ourselves a target of at least two-thirds of the average wage.

What is your view on the TUC's and Labour's plans for the unions?

Despite being a small union, the NUJ has consistently been at the forefront of the battle for real trade union rights. We must repeal all the anti-trade union legislation and when Labour come to power they must guarantee full trade union rights for all workers from day one - the right to strike, the right to representation and the right to collective bargaining. The current TUC policy of saying if 50% plus one want recognition then it should be granted is just a sham. As for Labour's threats to ban strikes in the public sector there should only be one response - a national one day stoppage across both the public and private sector.

As the youngest president of a TUC-affiliated union are

you concerned that few young people seem to be attracted to the unions and the Labour party?

Concerned yes, surprised no. After all, what are they being offered? When young people hear Tony Blair or Jack Straw or union leaders talk about squeegee merchants and curfews for the young, introducing workfare programmes, scrapping student grants or launching some 'moral crusade' whilst ignoring the real issues of youth unemployment, poverty pay, youth homelessness, the lack of resources for education and the health service it is little wonder they feel alienated from the labour movement. It is not because young people do not care - after all they have been

involved in dozens of campaigns from the poll tax to environmental issues - but because no one is offering them a vision of a better society, a way to change society. If Labour were to guarantee a job with decent pay, a college place or a genuine training place for every school leaver, if it were to introduce a national minimum wage, if it were to pledge to abolish private education, stop casualisation and renationalise the privatised utilities as a start, young people would be enthused. If it offered a vision of a socialist society based on need not profit, young workers would take their place at the head of the fight for a future for all - a socialist future.



Labour Party conference: the lull before the storm

This year's Labour Party Conference was the last before the general election. This inevitably coloured the whole of the conference proceedings, as delegates, despite anxieties about the direction and policies of the leadership, saw the need to close ranks to defeat the Tories. The desire for unity against the common enemy, along with the intense desire for a Labour government, represent the genuine feeling of millions of workers who are sick to death of the Tories and see a Labour government as a solution to their problems. Unfortunately, this sentiment and loyalty was cynically exploited at the conference by the Labour leadership to block real discussion and ensure an artificial consensus around its policies.

by Rob Sewell

It was the conference where ex-Tory minister Alan Howarth made his debut, but from which

many rank and file delegates were excluded from speaking. The party apparatus went into overdrive to secure a "successful" conference for the rightwing leadership, as epitomised by the "debate" over pensions. As a consequence this was probably the most stage-managed and sanitised conference in the history of the party. It was similar to the Tory conference in this respect. Speakers from the floor were hand-picked, mainly shadow cabinet spokespeople, MPs or prospective parliamentary candidates. With an estimated 80 per cent of delegates attending a conference for the first time, the party machine was able to manipulate the event to a far greater extent than ever before.

Pressure

Accordingly, the pressure on ordinary delegates and trade union delegations to conform was unbelievable. Special meetings were called to hammer home the need for unity behind the leadership; individuals with contentious resolutions

were picked out for special attention from MPs, trade union leaders and party officials. To this end, many of those delegates attending their composite meetings on the Saturday before conference were subjected to intense arm-twisting to prevent issues like a figure on the minimum wage or the issue of child benefit ever getting to the floor of conference. Many were blatantly asked and pressured by Walworth Road officials to break their local party mandates. So much for party democracy! If this had been the actions of the left all hell would have been let loose in the press and media about "dictatorship" and the rest of it. For the leadership it was vital that they won all its positions, even if it meant riding rough-shod over the democratic rights of the membership.

For socialists, the conference should not simply be gauged by the success of the leadership to get its line through - important though that is - but by the underlying mood and tensions that undoubtedly exist. Many delegates were prepared to swallow the notions of the right wing for the sake of victory at the election. However this was not all one way. The leadership was forced to make a number of important concessions to guarantee "peace" at the conference and in the run-up to the election. It is a price that they will be asked to pay in full in the next period.

The "debate" on pensions led by Barbara Castle was sown-up before hand, with union delegations being squeezed to change their mandates and vote for the NEC compromise of a standing commission with pension groups represented. The Labour leadership did not want to give a clear commitment to

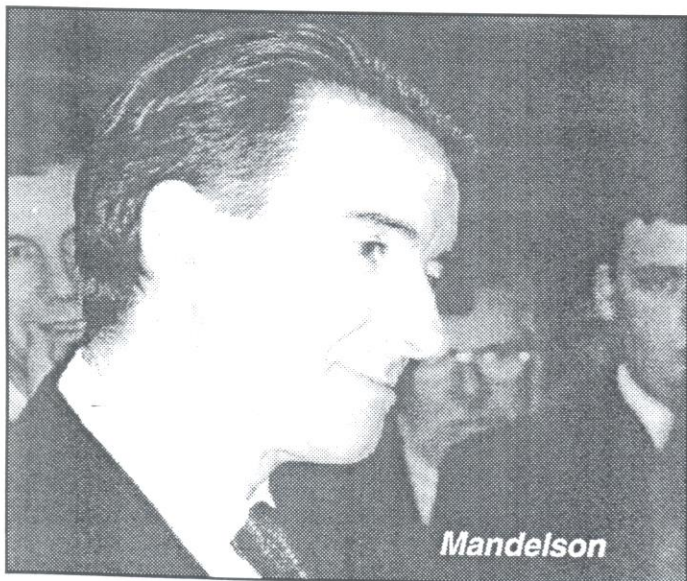
restore the link between pensions and earnings. But the "debate" also gave vent to the arm-twisting that had gone on to fix the issue. Barbara Castle was received rapturously when she said: "I believe that good debate only strengthens democracy, not weakens it. And that debate has put the pensions issue right back at the centre of our policies." She electrified the conference with a withering criticism of the centralised manner in which Labour's pension policy - and others - had been decided. "We should have had this root-and-branch examination before the policy was announced," she said. "But it has already been decided." Without doubt, she beat Harman and the party leadership in the argument, and the struggle illustrated the hidden tensions behind the slick stage management of the conference. The pensions issue will not go away, but can become a key issue - alongside the minimum wage and full employment - facing a Labour government. It has been said that the rightwing leadership were deeply grateful to Rodney Bickerstaffe of UNISON, who had been forced to defend the £4.26 an hour minimum wage figure at the TUC, for his help on saving the platform's bacon over the pension issue. It is clear the majority of the trade union leaders were prepared to back Blair on this and other contentious issues because a deal had been struck over what would be offered to the trade unions under a Blair government.

Old Labour

"There was more than a touch of Old Labour on display at the party conference", noted the Financial Times, "when most of the trade unions threw their still weighty votes behind Mr. Tony Blair's attempt to defuse the pension issue. With half the voting strength in Labour's governing body, the trade unions remain a force to be reckoned with."

"The constituency parties may account for the rest of the conference vote but, as the pension debate indicated, they are less susceptible to the leadership's demand for loyalty than the much-derided trade union barons." (3/10/96).

This deal with the union leaders was clear from Blair's 'Age of



'Achievement' speech on the Tuesday. Despite all the rhetoric and phrases like "Labour is not the political arm of anyone other than the British people", there were no attacks on the union link or the need for further internal constitutional reform. According to the Guardian editorial: "There was no attack on the party or its culture." (2/10/96). On the contrary, Blair was forced to pay direct tribute to John Prescott and Robin Cook, who are seen as representing the more traditional grass roots of the party. It was a nod in the direction of 'old' Labour and the traditional supporters of the party. Blair also gave the trade union leaders what they wanted to hear. He promised a "great, radical reforming" Labour government. After two years of saying he couldn't promise anything, he came out with a string of promises about jobs, workers' rights, the NHS, pensions, education, etc. Trade unionists were promised that where they could muster 50% membership in a workplace, a union would automatically be recognised. True, some promises were very vague, but in that case all the more open to interpretation. You could read anything into these promises. No wonder the trade union leaders praised the speech to the skies. Blair had given them what they wanted, and in turn they delivered their support.

Links

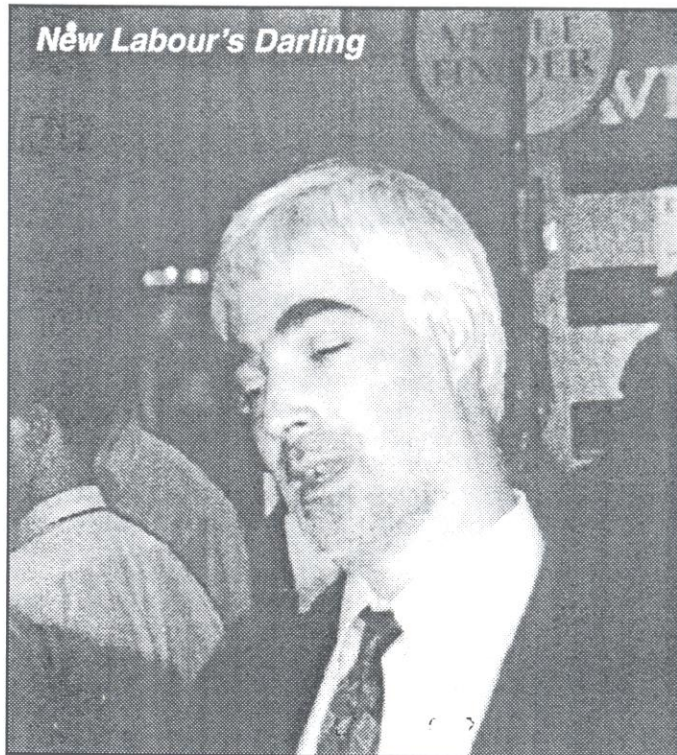
After the kite-flying at the TUC with Stephen Byers' reference to breaking the trade union links through a party referendum, the reaction from the trade unions was ferocious. Edmonds was joined by rightwinger Ken Jackson, general secretary of the AEEU, in calling for Byers sacking from his shadow employment position. The Blair leadership was on a collision course with the union leaders; the whole thing could have ended in disaster. Blair looked over the abyss and was forced to retreat, in effect repudiating Byers. Even the 700,000-strong AEEU, which was the only big trade union committed to ending the trade union link and turning the party into a "fully one member, one vote" organisation with no collective trade union involvement, has now reversed its position completely. If Blair couldn't carry the AEEU, how could the links be broken when

the trade unions still had 50 per cent of the vote at annual conference? Even the majority of CLPs would not stomach such an attack. Attempts to push it through would inevitably lead to civil war in the Labour movement. At this juncture, such a scenario would be a catastrophe. Blair had no alternative but to back down on these plans and offer the trade union leaders concessions to guarantee their support. The NEC was even forced to support an emergency motion from the CWU concerning Blair's unwelcome intervention in the postal dispute, calling for an end to "external interference." As Lew Adams, general secretary of ASLEF, warned: the Labour leadership had "better learn to live with the unions. We are not going away."

The Labour government will face demands for action over jobs, wages, health, education and a whole manner of problems that have accumulated under the 17-years of Tory rule. But it was made clear by Gordon Brown, the shadow chancellor - ironically dubbed the 'Iron Chancellor' by Blair, presumably a reference to the German Chancellor Bismarck! - that he was determined to follow the line of big business and the City of London and keep an iron grip on public expenditure. "No quick fixes. No easy options..." stated Brown. "There is no alternative strategy that will address Labour's goals." But orthodox capitalist economic policy will never satisfy the aspirations of the Labour movement or of working people. The whole history of capitalism testifies against this. To believe that somehow the present Labour leadership can run capitalism better than the Tories is completely utopian. To think that capitalism can be shaped to represent the interests of the working class is false to the core.

Underlining the real mood of the conference, however, was the increase in Denis Skinner's vote for the NEC by nearly 14,000 which was met with the loudest cheers from delegates. By contrast, Harriet Harman's vote fell by 10,000 votes, as a result of dissatisfaction with her decision to send her child not to the local comprehensive but to a grant-maintained school, although she still managed to scrape onto the NEC. She was beaten by Ken Livingstone in

New Labour's Darling



the vote, but was saved by the rule that three of the seven places were reserved for women.

On the surface, the rightwing got what they wanted, but at a very high price to the union leaders. The rightwing's real intentions are to change the very nature of the Labour party and transform it into another capitalist party by cutting the trade union links. Plans are being hatched to weaken the annual conference and change the relationship and powers of the NEC. At a fringe meeting, Barking MP Margaret Hodge put forward the case to abolish the annual conference, transforming it into a US style media convention. The LCC has also put forward plans on these lines to dissolve the conference and even the constituency parties. Tom Sawyer, the party's general secretary, is at present conducting a "review" of the NEC and the conference in relation to a new Labour government.

Determined

At all costs, they are determined to shield the Labour government against opposition from the rank and file. But these plans will turn to dust. Sawyer was already forced to reassure activists at the conference that no changes were planned to the conference or its supremacy over policy. Blair also stated that no changes were envisaged. Even if they

plan to go ahead after the election, the illusions of the rightwing that they can settle matters by tying up the constitution will be shattered by events. A frontal attack on the trade union links will inevitably provoke an explosion.

Tony Blair has talked about a 1,000 days that will serve to build a 1,000 years. But even with such rhetoric, it cannot conceal the opposition that will grow under a Labour government that attempts to operate under capitalism. The Labour party still remains the political expression of the trade unions - whatever the view of the party leadership. Any attempt by a Labour government to introduce pro-capitalist policies will meet bitter resistance. Even at this conference 45% of delegates voted for the resolution on common ownership. Future opposition in the trade unions will coincide with opposition in the ranks of the party itself. The struggle will unfold within this context to force the Labour government to change course. There will be no other alternative for working people. Under these conditions, the struggle for socialist policies will come to the fore, and we will see the transformation and retransformation of the Labour movement as a weapon for changing society itself. This year's party conference will be rightly regarded as a brief episode in the real struggle that is about to unfold.

Socialist Appeal fringe meeting

"After the general election, I'll get drunk on Thursday, Friday and Saturday. Then on Sunday, we'll have to start getting organised to force the Labour government to carry out policies in the interests of our class." These words summed up the humorous but down to earth contribution of Nigel Pearce, vice-chair of the Yorkshire NUM, who spoke alongside Ted Grant, at the Labour Conference Socialist Appeal fringe meeting.

The thirty delegates and visitors present, along with Arthur Scargill, listened with great interest to Nigel's contribution. "I must admit", said Nigel, "I felt very out of place in there (the conference), with all the sharp suits and mobile phones. But I believe we will have our day. I can't wait to get the Labour government elected, and then we'll see." He went on to criticise in a friendly manner the actions of those who split away to form the Socialist Labour Party. "However, events will prove who is right and who is wrong. In the end I believe we will be once again in the same party." Ted Grant outlined the crisis affecting all the European capitalist powers and the movement of work-

ers taking place in France, Germany, Spain and elsewhere. "The capitalists have no alternative but to attack the living standards of the working class. They face an insoluble crisis", said Ted. In Britain also, the reforms of the past are under attack. "Millions are suffering from stress in the factories and workplaces, which is sowing the seeds of a massive backlash." Ted explained that Blair had been forced to grant concessions to the trade union leaders for fear of the consequences of civil war in the party and the loss of the election. "He was forced to retreat", said Ted. Only on the basis of a socialist programme can the crisis be resolved in the interests of the working class. "That means the transformation of the Labour party and the trade unions. That means the socialist revolution." After a lively discussion, supporters and readers raised a magnificent £210 for the Socialist Appeal funds. Over 100 copies of Socialist Appeal and 30 copies of Youth for Socialism were also sold at the conference. In fact, sellers had sold out of journals and pamphlets by the Wednesday evening, showing the interest in real socialist ideas.

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.

40 years on: Suez crisis - loss of empire

This year marks the fortieth anniversary of the the Suez crisis. In early November 1956 the crisis culminated in the bombing and invasion of Egypt by British, French and Israeli troops in early November 1956.

by Mick Murphy

The West had refused to fund Colonel Nasser's plans for a huge Egyptian dam project, so Nasser seized the opportunity to "nationalise" the Suez canal by surprise on 26 July—the 4th anniversary of his ousting the monarch—ostensibly to raise the cash for the Aswan Dam project. The canal was a lifeline short cut for oil supplies and trade into Europe, and is even now a major source of GDP revenue. Nasser's initial offer to compensate British and French shareholders at the then market value was spurned (but later paid in full). As with the Gulf War of 1991, when they also felt their material interests were at stake, the imperialists acted to "teach Nasser a lesson." As one reporter said, it was as if Jones Minor had cocked a snook at the headmaster. The press, including *"The Daily Mirror,"* hysterically called him *"Grabber Nasser,"* and a *"new Mussolini."* Britain, France and the new Israeli state immediately began plotting to overthrow Nasser, under the pretence of *"opposing appeasement"* and *"freeing"* international rights of way. Suddenly, with astounding hypocrisy, the privately owned, profitable canal - built by 60,000 Egyptian forced labourers - was now *"the world's."* They also feared Nasser moving towards the Stalinists. (Incidentally, the heroic Hungarian uprising occurred during the long build up to the campaign, but the imperialists of course, hypocriti-

cally, did nothing to hinder the Russian Stalinists invading their own *"sphere of influence."*) A massive build up of French and British forces began from August onwards despite efforts to arrive at a *"negotiated"* settlement. The imperialists did not even officially declare war - there was *"a state of armed conflict;"* with plans being hatched in secret underground centres in the UK and French villas. Nasser cleverly gave no excuse for intervention, but a secret French plot was drawn up for the crushing of Nasser. The fledgling, reactionary Israeli state was also keen to attack in order to weaken Egyptian firepower, and as a warning to the other Arab states. On October 29th, the Israeli army crossed the border with Egypt. Their *"pretext"* was the minor but persistent attacks by a tiny guerrilla group from Egyptian soil. British and French imperialists would then step in as *"peacemakers," "protecting the world's lifeline"* etc. On October 31st Anglo-French forces started bombing. Imperialist arrogance assumed that the Egyptians would be unable to run the canal on their own, and they duly set up 11 propaganda radio stations in the area—but ironically, more traffic went through than before, and Nasser had increased popular support against the hated imperialists. Nasser had wanted to negotiate, but Eden denounced and rejected him; scuppering a planned conference.

Intervention

Labour leader Gaitskell had initially supported intervention, as is their way when faced with such crises, but under pressure Labour eventually moved over to the Tribune view - they had opposed intervention from the start - and opposition grew in

all classes. Bevan denounced intervention at a large rally in Trafalgar Square, and mounted police forced it back from Downing St. with violence - a rare occurrence at the time. After the November bombing, the Egyptians scuttled ships to block the canal, and accordingly raised the stakes. It seems strange today, but the American imperialists, strengthened after the Second World War, opposed direct intervention from the start, even denouncing it at the U.N. - but for their own strategic and economic reasons rather than any concern for *"international standards."*

The British conscript army were fed the same lies about precision bombing as would later be the case in the Gulf War, with *"friendly fire"* casualties being covered up at the time. The BBC tried to block Gaitskell's televised *"right to reply"* to Eden and when broadcast only officers in the armed forces were allowed to hear it rather than the ranks. Racist officers told tales of fighting *"wogs"* in the same way that during the Falklands War the media talked of *"Argies"* and during the Gulf War, talked of *"Towelheads."* The arrogant methods of imperialism never change. The degree to which the ruling class sank included censoring details of home opposition movements from the ranks' mail, and the surveillance of journalists; even regarding young the Robin Day as *"a pinko!"*

Despite some quick military gains and the benefit of being at the height of an unprecedented economic boom, without U.S. support and with war loans still being paid, a run on the pound occurred. Petrol rationing and price hikes were reintroduced in Britain, and the imperialists were first forced into a *"ceasefire"* situation by

the U.S., and then into a humiliating withdrawal. By November 23 the withdrawal had begun and the Egyptians celebrated in the streets.

Eden made no apology and said that Britain never would do. He was however forced to resign early *"for health reasons."*

The legacy was a watershed for British imperialism, humiliated by the U.S., which has dominated the region ever since.

The vicious armed Israeli state used the event as fire practice. A section of the British ruling class—and their main party, the Tories—have never accepted the result and continue to live in a gin-soaked haze of grandeur, as if we were still a major world power.

Nasser was popular for a time, and continued to balance between the US and USSR. Being a nationalist, however, despite the long boom of 1945-73, he failed dismally to solve the economic problems of the Arab masses. With Egypt remaining a pawn of imperialism and Stalinism; corruption, nepotism, and the inefficiencies of state industries flourished, and he failed in his aim to unite the Arab world; even ultimately losing land in the 1967 Arab-Israeli war.

Speed

The *"episode"* did help speed the independence movements in the colonial world - Macmillan, Eden's successor, was soon forced to make his *"winds of change"* speech. The movements for national independence of the 50's - 70's, particularly from British, French, Portuguese and Belgian imperialism, represented the greatest mass movement for national independence since the fall of the Roman Empire.

The Stalinist states were still moving forward economically at this period, and many liberation leaders were forced to at least call themselves socialists in name, and advocate planned economies. *"National independence"* in the ex-colonial world (now including South Africa) is now shown to be totally hollow, as the multi-nationals, IMF and World Bank continue to loot economies to further impoverish and subdue the *"developing world."*

Michael Collins

A film about the life of Irish republican Michael Collins, produced in Hollywood with, of all people, Julia Roberts in one of the leading roles as Collins girlfriend, does not bode well. But despite itself, it's a powerful and well made film. Ignoring the historical inaccuracies, and they are many, Neil Jordan, the writer and director, has crafted one of the years more unusual mainstream movies.

With Liam Neeson as Collins, and, in particular, Alan Rickman as Eamon de Valera we have some of the best performances you're likely to see down at your local cinema. After the defeat of the rebellion in 1916, the republican movement was leaderless. Collins, a volunteer at the Dublin General Post Office, is released from jail and

throws himself into the revival of the movement. Capturing arms from the police, he, and Harry Boland, go about the construction of a guerilla force, laying the basis for the emergence of the modern day IRA. They organise the escape of De Valera from prison, who then travels to the US to campaign for support for the cause. Collins, now the IRA Director of Intelligence, identifies the members of a newly founded British intelligence unit and sends in his units to assassinate them. On November 21, 1920, Bloody Sunday, 11 military officers were shot dead. The film's portrayal of these incidents is probably the most powerful of the film. The assassinations are presented with tremendous visual force. However, with the retaliation of the 'Black and Tans,' the newly founded paramilitary police force,

the film loses the thread. The army and police surround Croke Park, where the all-Ireland Gaelic football final is being held, searching for the assassins. Firing broke out and 12 people were killed. Jordan, though, is not content. In the scene in the film, Croke Park is filled with armoured cars which proceed, without warning, to machine gun players, spectators and all. Although it is a stunning scene it does not fit into Jordan's desire to move away from the simplistic version of history that people are fed most of the time. It is precisely from this historical angle that the film falls down. Collins is seen by many in the republican movement as a traitor for his eventual signing of the treaty with Britain which created the division of Ireland. And rightly so! But Jordan has set himself the daunting task of his rehabili-

tation. When De Valera returns from America he forces Collins to abandon the guerilla struggle in favour of more traditional military means. The IRA suffer setback after setback and are forced to the negotiating table. Collins, according to Jordan, is forced against his will to attend. Collins signs while De Valera condemns. One becomes traitor, the other a hero. The IRA splits and civil war begins. Collins later travels to Cork, the centre of the anti-treaty resistance, and is assassinated. Jordan wants to show that it's OK to compromise - signing the treaty was a pragmatic response to the increasingly defeated IRA military campaign. He is obviously hoping that Gerry Adams etc. go to see his movie! Irish history is littered with 'romantic heroes,' and Jordan wants to move away from these crude stereotypes. However, in Collins he has picked the wrong man. There is an alternative to the bankruptcy of the IRA military strategy, but it is not in Collins compromise with British imperialism. Despite all this, go and see *Michael Collins*. Entertaining and intelligent films are a pretty rare thing.

Iain Gunn

Brassed Off

A comedy about the struggles of a Northern brass band sounds rather like one of those films which you tend to see on television at Christmas, full of "characters" and with a generally upbeat message. Like the Ealing Comedies of old, these films delight in a simplistic struggle between the so-called underdog and the faceless forces of "the powers that be". However, the best of these films can act as a wry commentary on the times they were made in and reveal more than you might think about the mood of the period. "Brassed Off" falls into this category except that the political content is far more clearly stated than is usually the case nowadays.

The story is straight forward enough. A local colliery brass band enters a national competition. Gloria (Tara Fitzgerald), the granddaughter of a former band leader has returned to the area and joins the band, soon revealing herself to be an exceptionally good player. It doesn't take long

for the band to progress to the competition finals and for Gloria (surprise, surprise!) to start an affair with one of the band members. You wouldn't be far wrong if you assumed that what you were watching was an attempt to do for brass bands what "Simply Ballroom" did for ballroom dancing. However this is a film with a darker setting. The colliery is set for closure, this being 1992. The pressure on the miners to settle for redundancy has undermined the confidence of the band members and the fallout from the 84-5 strike is still very evident. Phil, the son of the band leader, was imprisoned during that strike and has lost his wife and kids and, thanks to loan sharks, virtually the whole contents of his house. His mood suicidal, he is reduced to playing a clown at a kids party which he then interrupts to deliver a tirade against Thatcherism. The band leader (Pete Postlethwaite) himself is revealed as having pneumoconiosis, thanks to working for years down the pit, and is hospitalised. Gloria is also exposed as being a spy for the

coal board, sent to check the pit out. Although she later resigns her job when she realises the real purpose of what she is being asked to do and then pays for the band to attend the competition finals in London, this is not a film which panders to a "feelgood" mood (despite the tone of the film posters). The miners do accept redundancy and at the end the band's future is somewhat uncertain. The final words of the film are those of the band leader, who has left his hospital bed to attend the finals, as he mounts the stage and delivers a speech attacking the betrayal of the miners. An indictment of the destruction of the mines and the communities around them is at the heart of this bitter comedy and in the music we can see the dented spirit of resistance. Socialists should make an effort to see this film which manages to balance between being entertaining and carrying a strong political message.

Steve Jones

Detroit striker speaks to Socialist Appeal

Scott Martelle, Detroit striker and member of the US Newspaper Guild, recently on a tour of Britain, spoke to *Alastair Wilson*.

What is the present state of the strike?

We're at a standoff. The papers' circulation is still cut in half, if not more - it's hard to get real numbers out of them. Advertising is way off, and we've stepped up our advertising boycott campaign for the Christmas advertising season. The trial against the company on nine counts that they provoked the strike through illegal acts has concluded, but a decision isn't expected for a few months. The 700 or so of us that remain active are standing strong. Some 10 strikers were arrested last week after occupying newspaper bureau offices in some of the suburban towns. More acts of civil disobedience are being planned.

What is the next step in the dispute?

The next step is waiting for the judge to issue his ruling, then fight the appeals the company has already said it is prepared to file. And we're keeping the pressure on the papers with the circulation and advertising boycotts.

What support are you getting in the US?

We're getting tremendous support, both from our union officials and union brothers and sisters. Unlike Great Britain, and the disgusting situation the Liverpool dockers find themselves in, our unions can get involved in our dispute, and they have. The United Auto Workers, based here in Detroit, have been incredibly supportive, both in body and in finances, making donations, manning picket lines, distributing the Detroit Sunday Journal - our weekly strike paper (<http://www.rust.net/~workers/strike.html>) - and just general moral support. The AFL-CIO remains firmly committed - the president and vice president were both recently arrested blockading the

front door of The Detroit News. And our fellow unions members in other branches of the six striking unions continue to support us financially and morally. It's invigorating, even as we face our 16-month anniversary.

How successful was the British trip? What were your impressions of British labour movement?

The British trip was successful on two fronts. One, I was able to raise some money. We picked up nearly 2,000 pounds while I was there, and more donations are expected (not to mention hoped for). Two, I was able to spread the word about what's happening here, and make comparisons between our situation and labor troubles there, from the coal strike in the '80s to Wapping to the current Liverpool dockers, postal workers and nurses. Different countries, dissimilar cultures, but very similar emotions and conditions. Our laws give us a little more freedom than allowed under British laws, but in both places the codes are stacked to benefit management. It is not a level playing field. While we have some hopes a Democratic Congress might change some of that here, it didn't seem as though Labour will be much help to labor there. I found that frustrating. Granted, I spent most of my time among union activists, but I got the sense that there's gnawing frustration among workers having to deal with limited rights in the workplace. About the only fringe benefit to weak unions is stability - without unions pushing to improve conditions, you get few work stoppages. Yet you also get garbage wages, poor benefits and lessening control over your own life. We become bits in an economy driven more and more by bytes. At some point, workers are going to vent their frustration

through action. My guess is that it will come from increased union activities. And while the activities will become more radical, the participants will not - it will be the rank-and-file, conservative core of the workforce that will finally understand how badly they are being treated. And then you will see a groundswell call for change. Let's just hope it happens sooner rather than later, and that Tony Blair's three-piece-suited cronies decide to ride the wave and help, rather than become full-blooded Tories.

Did you notice any similarities/differences with the situation in the US and Britain?

The similarities are simple - the economies in both countries do not value long-term employment. England discovered casual labor before the States did, but it's catching on over here. And it's more of a problem over here because we don't have the national health care you do. Our health care usually is obtained through benefits of full-time employment. With more people being hired part-time, fewer people are receiving health coverage.

The differences are radical reactions. Unions are growing here, in large part because of the uncertainty people feel about their own jobs. Happy, satisfied workers tend not to join unions; scared, frustrated workers do. (One of our slogans on the picket line is that it takes bad management to make a good

union). I see our strength growing, made easier by laws and traditions that punish companies for harassing workers engaged in union activities..

What can British trade unions do to help?

As always, they can help by sending donations to Detroit Strike-NUJ. And if your local news agents sell USA Today, encourage them to drop the paper until the strike is over. And if they don't, stand outside and hand out some informational leaflets. An aware public is a concerned public. And as Benjamin Franklin said over here in a different, history-laden moment, "We must all hang together, or assuredly we will all hang separately."

Richard Trumka, AFL-CIO secretary/treasurer, speaking at the TUC, talked about American workers Harley Davidsons being at risk. Are you still riding yours?

If I had a Harley, I'd definitely still be riding it, although winter's setting in here and those things are a bear to stop on ice. We're scouting around for sources for firewood and barrels to burn it in, for when the weather gets really cold. And it can get nasty here. One spell last winter it stayed well below zero Fahrenheit, with a steady north wind. You can only handle a few minutes on the line at a time in those conditions, even with the barrel fire. But we never thought it would be easy.

**Send donations to:
Detroit Strike - NUJ
Acorn House, 314 Grays Inn
Road, London WC1X 8DP
Make cheques payable to
Detroit Strike-NUJ**



Scott Martelle

Socialist Appeal's economic correspondent, Michael Roberts, looks at the Tories upcoming budget...

The last one is the most important

It's the last one and the most important. This month Ken Clarke presents his budget for 1997. By the time we start feeling its 'benefits', the election campaign will be under way. Apparently, John Major wants to call it for May Day. Everything depends on Clarke delivering.

So what's his plan? To create that 'feel-good' factor in every voter across the land, so that they forget the past and vote Tory. How does he plan to do it? You've got just one guess. Yes, you're right. He's going to make tax cuts. By cutting say 1% off the standard rate of tax, as Gordon Brown put it the other day, Ken and the Tories hope you will forget all about the 22 tax rises the Tories have introduced under successive chancellors.

When the recession hit the UK economy in summer 1990, it led to a massive increase in social security payments to the unemployed and a big drop off in taxes because less people were working. The government's finances turned from surplus to deficit. In 1993, the government borrowed £43bn or over 9% of national output. That couldn't continue.

Humiliation

So in rides Norman Lamont, remember him! Fresh from the humiliation of having spent £5bn of taxpayers money in trying to keep the pound from devaluing in 1992 and failing, Lamont now introduced two years of the biggest tax increases in the history of taxation. By raising VAT, fuel tax, income tax etc, he took out of our collective pockets about £17-18bn, or

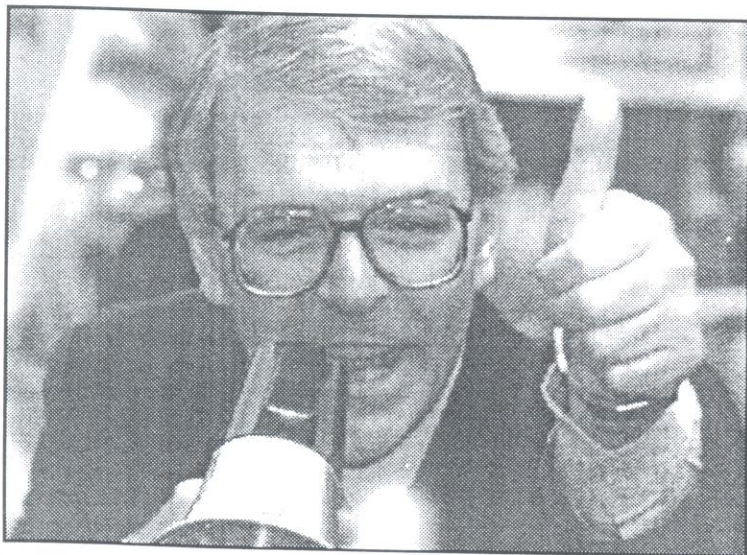
around 5% of our average spending over two years. By 1994, we were paying more taxes in total (that's income tax, national insurance contributions and VAT) than we did when Maggie Thatcher came to office in 1979 claiming that she would get the tax burden down. And of course, Norman made sure that those who were better able to afford tax increases got less of them, while those least able to afford it paid more.

Even so, the deficits have kept on coming in since 1993. Last year, the government had to borrow £35bn and this year the deficit looks like being around £28bn. And this Tory government has cut and cut and cut spending on key services like education, housing, transport. But it's done no good in reducing government spending and so making the books balance. When Maggie came to power in 1979, the government spent 42.2% of national income. Last financial year, the government spent 42.75% of national income. So, despite all the cuts, why is the government spending more? Well, there are only two areas where it is doing so. The main one is social security spending. There are many more unemployed than when Maggie came to power. Officially around 2m are getting unemployment benefits (sorry, job

seekers allowance). So whereas, £5bn went to the unemployed in 1983, now it's £10bn. Unfortunately for the government people don't die as soon as they used to. And old people cost money. Now it costs £38bn a year to pay the pitifully small old age pensions. And the sick and disabled benefits run to another £20bn a year, while family benefits now cost £20bn because pay is so low for some families that they are forced to rely on the state. The result is that whereas the total social security bill cost 12% of national income in 1983, now it costs 13.5%! Then there is the national health. It's safe in our hands, said Maggie and the Tories. In one way it seems true.

Spending

Spending on health now costs 7% of national income compared with 5.5% when Maggie came to power. But that's not because of the generous provisions of the Tories. It's just that there are more old people to care for, the level of sickness in an overworked and increasingly deprived population has risen, the cost of health technology has rocketed, and the cost of drugs made by the pharmaceutical monopolies has multiplied. So here's Ken's dilemma. He wants to make tax cuts. But he also wants to get rid of the deficit the govern-



ment runs on its books. The deficit requires borrowing. The government either has to issue bonds or print money to pay for the deficit. If it issues bonds, the big banks will only buy them for a good rate of interest, currently around 8% a year, with inflation at 3%. That's a nice profit. But the more bonds the government has to issue, the higher the interest rate it will have to pay the banks. That increases interest costs, yet another government expenditure. It becomes a vicious circle: the higher the deficit, the bigger the debt, the bigger the interest cost, the higher the deficit.

That's what's happened to governments like Italy, which now have huge public debts up to 120% of national output. Alternatively the government could just print money to cover the deficit. But that just means more money in the economy for the same amount of real production. The result is higher prices all round - the dreaded inflation, which this government of bankers is dedicated to fight.

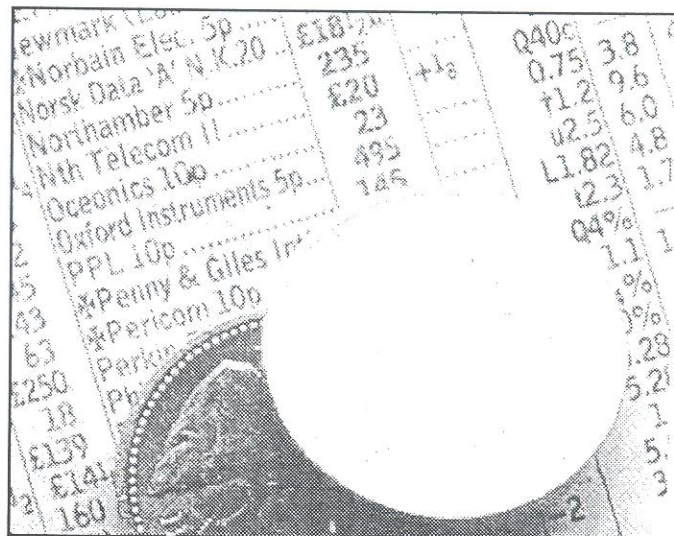
Now all the strategists of capital, the economists and big

business are telling Ken Clarke that he must get the deficit down, otherwise the government will borrow too much and force up interest rates. As it is, spending in the shops is picking up, and wage costs are on the rise (currently at about 4% a year). Given the inefficiency of British industry, the bosses will try to pass on those extra costs in prices. So inflation is on the march. The Governor of the Bank of England, big Eddy George, representing the needs of the bankers, says the government must raise interest rates now anyway to 'cool' the economy.

Election

Again Ken Clarke does not want to do that just before an election when he wants to win the votes of mortgage holders. A rise in mortgage rates during the election campaign would be disastrous.

So there we have it. Ken wants to keep interest rates down, cut the budget deficit and lower taxes. Can he do all three with his budget this month? We think not. So what will he opt for? The only



way he can have a lower deficit AND cut taxes is to cut spending even more. But there's not much left on the bone of public services. As we have seen, he can't cut much off social security spending whatever Peter Lilley plans to do about 'fraudsters'. There's just too many people out there without a job, or on low pay, or just plain too old and sick. So what he will do is cut taxes a little to put a few pounds into people's pockets before the

election, and not cut spending too much. That will still leave a sizeable deficit to be financed. And he won't allow the Bank of England to put up interest rates before next May. In other words, he will let the economy go and leave it to the next government to clear up the mess for capitalism. Expect Gordon Brown to raise interest rates next summer and put up taxes in November 1997.

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What's happening to the working class?

What is the working class? According to the '*Communist Manifesto*,' the founding document of the Marxist movement, it is 'the class of modern wage-labourers, who having no means of production of their own, are reduced to selling their labour power in order to live.'

by Mick Brooks

Class is therefore defined by your relation to the means of production. The capitalist class makes its living by owning. The working class makes its living by earning. Workers in the public sector are certainly working class, though they are not directly exploited by a boss. Workers such as electricians may move easily from public to private sector contracts. Others may find themselves in the private sector while doing exactly the same work as before because of privatisation, such as contract cleaners or coal miners.

Because the dividing lines between the classes inevitably have blurred edges, academics have experimented with alternative definitions to the Marxist one.

Some sociologists have been tempted to use lifestyles as the basis. Now lifestyles are important. We socialists know that miners are working class. More important, miners are well aware that they are working class. Even the people sitting in offices trying to sell miners a new brand of washing powder know they're working class. For the most part they live in tradi-

tional working class communities.

The post war sociologists, however, got things upside down. They knew the traditional working class lived in working class communities. When they saw new sections of the class, such as car workers in Luton, moving out of what were seen as traditional working class communities, they decided that these workers were becoming middle class. In fact car workers have been one of the most militant and conscious sections of the workforce since the Second World War

Money

A common sense definition of class would suggest that it's about how much money you've got. But what we're really interested in is not so much how much money you get but where you get your money from. There are quite wide differentials in pay levels between different sections of the working class, though nobody ever got rich through hard work, and your 'decent wages' are peanuts to a capitalist. Often the more well-to-do workers are the most militant - that's how they managed to build up a relatively decent standard of living. Another definition of class is by occupation. This is how the Registrar General divides us into C1s, C2s and whatever. This definition is also shot through with holes. For instance '*skilled manual workers*' includes both employed and the self-employed. Manufacturing is certainly the

heartland of surplus value production for capitalism. But the manufacturing sector, which employed over 8 million in the 1970s now has employment figures dipping below 5 million. This is '*deindustrialisation*.' What does it mean for the strength and cohesion of the modern working class? As we shall see, the working class, which is a product of capitalism, is continually changing along with the system that produces it. Deindustrialisation is a complex phenomenon which appears to be going on in all the advanced capitalist countries - but much faster in Britain. There are three possible explanations for deindustrialisation. The first is that we all want to spend much more of our money on services. This was the basis for the Tory claim ten years ago that 'manufacturing doesn't matter' (a convenient theory in view of the fact that British industry was nuked under the stewardship of the Tories). Services were to be the wave of the future, and by deindustrialising faster than anyone else we were staking our claim in the sun! As we've pointed out elsewhere there's no evidence that a big country like Britain can exist without manufacturing. In addition services is a non-definition, and services can't be separated out from other sectors. A holiday abroad counts as selling a service but depends critically on the aerospace industry and the construction industry at the other end to make it a reality. In any case the fact is we don't spend any less on manufactures than we did in 1979.



The second explanation is that we're getting better and better at producing manufactures, so less people can produce all we need. It is certainly true that manufacturing is the sector of the economy where productivity is rising fastest. Between 1979 and 1989 labour productivity in manufacturing rose by 4.7% a year. As a result at the end of the decade each worker was producing 50% more than at the beginning. But no more manufactured goods were produced in Britain. All that happened was that less workers produced about the same amount as in 1979 - jobless growth. Now it's worth thinking about that for a moment - there are certainly less workers in manufacturing industry these days. But they haven't lost any of their power. Manufacturing workers, despite their declining numbers, are still just as important to the capitalist system. That leaves explanation number three. True, all the major countries are deindustrialising, but not as fast as Britain. The reason is British capitalists' manufacturing failure. People are still buying as many manufactures as before - only they're not British manufactures.

Life

Enough has been said to show that widespread occupational shifts are a normal and inevitable feature of working class life - and the process is speeding up. But what of the middle class? We have divided society into those that own and those that earn. In Marx's time the petty bourgeoisie was a class that both owned its own means of production and worked upon them for a living - and they were by far the most numerous class in all continental countries. They made their way as small craftsmen or independent peasants. Smallholders in both industry and agriculture are wiped out by capitalist progress. It may have been possible to own a few tools and set up as a shoemaker a hundred years ago. These days a volume car plant is likely to cost £700 millions! Even as late as the 1950s when the common market was set up 20% of the population of Europe was making a living from their own small farms. That figure is now 2-3% in all the main Western countries. Farming is now big business.

Is there a new middle class based among white collar workers? As capital got bigger, it needed more organising. As it became more high tech, it required more technicians. There has been an explosive growth of the so-called service sector throughout the twentieth century. The mushrooming of the white collar area of employment has meant that the divide in status has in many cases been completely eroded and is constantly under attack. The vast majority of white collar jobs that have opened up offer their occupants no privileges. They are some of the most low paid and insecure going. The people who take them are for the most part daughters and sons of industrial workers who know there are no longer factory jobs for them to go to. These people are working class, and more and more they know it.

The analysis of the changing world of work in terms of disappearing factory jobs and an ever-expanding undifferentiated service sector therefore conceals as much as it reveals. There have been historically two different types of white collar occupation - the white collar proletariat and the so-called professional middle class. Now both of these are actually working class but their experience of work in the past has been different. This is not a new feature of capitalist life. In the nineteenth century there was a clear divide between craft workers and the unskilled. Characteristically there may have been a pay differential of 2:1 between workers with a five year apprenticeship and the rest. As we shall see, for much of the latter half of the nineteenth century craft workers kept trade union traditions alive in this country. In fact skilled engineering workers came increasingly under attack at the turn of the century with the introduction of new technology and management techniques (sound familiar?). Skilled engineering workers spearheaded many of the enormous waves of class struggle that swept the country around the First World War and made up a disproportionate number of the industrial militants that went on to found the British Communist Party. The difference with craft workers was that they had a monopoly of their own skill.



Nobody could tell them to work faster - they could control the pace of their own work. For capital, relentlessly trying to raise the rate of exploitation, that is bad news. That is why there is a tendency for capitalism to attempt to displace skills. The problem is that the trend to deskilling tends to cause skills to pop up elsewhere. They can replace skilled workers on the assembly line with robots - but somebody has to write the computer programme for it to happen. For decades the professional 'middle class' could kid themselves that they weren't workers. Like the craft workers nobody could tell them what to do at work. They could work at their own pace. Now the very mechanisms that destroyed craft 'privilege' are being deployed against the professionals.

Assembly line

Teachers are no longer dealing with kids - they are handling inputs, outputs and value added. This grotesque misuse of the English language has its uses. It brings teachers into the world of the assembly line, subject to Ofsted just like factory time and motion people, with the equivalent of stop watches and clipboards. Librarians, doctors and social workers are routinely treated to annual produc-

tivity surveys as if they were banging out widgets. Together with negative equity in the housing market, and insecurity over jobs, capital is eroding its own social reserves and forcibly reminding those who really don't want to hear 'You are all working class now.' Proletarianisation is the greatest social trend of the twentieth century. The definition of class was important to Marx since it was the basic clue to the dynamics of political development and made possible revolutionary struggle for a new socialist form of society. Workers were bound to become conscious of their class interests. 'It is not a question of what this or that proletarian or even the whole proletariat at any moment regards as its aim. It is a question of what the proletariat is and what in accordance with this being it will historically be compelled to do' As we have seen the working class is not a homogeneous lump all at the same level of consciousness - it is a series of layers. How do we assess the development of class consciousness? One measure - not the only one, but an important one for socialists - is the development of trade unionisation. Workers who have decided that they and their boss's interests are bound to collide are on the

way to thinking that the working class and the boss class have nothing in common. For forty years after the revolutionary Chartist period, from around 1850 to 1889, the only stable trade union organisations in this country were the craft unions. Sure, class consciousness was limited. The unions generally supported the Liberal Party. In many respects they operated as friendly societies in the absence of a welfare state, offering sickness and unemployment benefit. Remember when you get junk mail from your trade union offering car insurance, this is nothing new. It is actually a return to ancient traditions the movement outgrew before and will do so again. Since craft unions had a monopoly of their skill, they didn't need a picket line to get 'the rate for the job.' The union just passed the word round till the recalcitrant boss saw sense. Strikes were rare. There was one great certainty. It was impossible to organise the unskilled into unions because the unemployed would always be called upon to scab.

Then it happened. Around 1889 a new generation of generally socialist trained militants challenged this conventional wisdom. Picket lines and mass actions were the way to organise the unskilled.

How they cracked it has been dealt with in this issue of *'Socialist Appeal.'* But the sequel is also instructive, though sobering. The gains of this monumental upheaval gradually eroded over the following decade. Trade union membership hardly grew at all during the 1890s. Even where the gains hung on by a thread the new general unions survived by offering friendly society services and more and more making a pitch at the craft workers within their ranks.

The American Federation of Labor was in a bad way in the 1920s, but it hung on in there among craft workers organised in small plants. Sidney Hillman's Amalgamated Clothing Workers was typical. The big new factories in industries such as cars and steel were regarded as unorganisable. They were run by a combination of paternalism and violence with hordes of company spies on the shop floor. Indeed Ford's showcase River Rouge plant at Dearborn didn't fall to the United Auto Workers till 1941 for these reasons. Again a new generation of organisers had to try a

new way. By the time of the Second World War millions of American workers had joined new industrial, not craft unions, that represented the bedrock of the movement. After the War capitalism tapped in to its reserve army of women workers. From an old generation of male chauvinist trade unionists we heard speeches exactly like those of craft union leaders a hundred years before.

'Women only work for pin money' (whatever that is). 'We'll never get them in trade unions.' Of course the very next surge of mass unionisation in the 1960s and 1970s turned to a new generation of white collar workers where female employment is heavily concentrated. This surge took the trade union movement to a historic peak of over twelve million members. In its time it was as significant as the big push in 1889, or the huge wave of strikes around the First World War, or the mass organisation of American workers into industrial unions in the late 1930s.

Downswing

Once again we're in a period of prolonged downswing for union membership. From a peak of over twelve million members in the 1970s TUC affiliations are now down to around seven million. The reason for this is to be sought in the end of the great post-War boom after 1973 and the intensification of class struggle on the shop floor as a result. Take manufacturing. We pointed out earlier that 1979-89 was a decade of jobless growth, with the same output being wrung out of less and less workers. Productivity in manufacturing went up by 4.7% every year over the decade on average. Perhaps this was because of a much-needed retooling of the antiquated old junk that passes for investment equipment? No chance. Net (i.e. new, as against replacement) investment went up by only 0.6% a year over the same period, and was actually negative for 1981-84 inclusive. That's not all. A recent article in the *'Economic Journal'* reckons that net manufacturing investment over the decade was only one seventh of its pre-1973 average. Mass unemployment and the tearing up of workers' protection laws under the Tories put workers under the hammer.



There was an enormous intensification of labour - no new equipment, just making employees work harder with no legal redress and the threat of being cast on to the dole queues. Workers today are under the thumbscrews of management.

The buzzword for this assault is *'labour market flexibility'*. Viewed in textbook supply and demand terms unemployment is an excess supply of workers. The reason for excess supply is that workers are charging too much for their services. If the price of labour power goes down, employers will be able to afford to take more workers on. So *'workers are pricing themselves out of jobs'* as Chancellor Lawson told us ten years ago. The Tories have been kind enough to help us by making the labour market more flexible. Truth to tell, their list of *'reforms'* is just one long attack on workers' rights. They have emasculated the unions through anti-union laws. They have whittled away protection against unfair dismissal and abolished it altogether for millions of workers. They have abolished the Wages Councils, which provided minimal guarantees of pay rates for the lowest paid. They have torn up laws restricting the hours women and children can work. Maternity rights are the worst in Europe.

They have relentlessly cut benefits to force people to find work, however ill-paid and unsuitable. All this 'flexibility' and we still have mass unemployment, which acts as a whip against the employed population. Tories trumpet Britain as the *'enterprise centre of Europe'*. In reality they want to change us from workshop of the world to sweatshop of the world.

How far have they got? The proportion of the working population in full time permanent employment has fallen from 56% to 36% over the past twenty years - just over a third. Nine million have lost their jobs since the 1992 election. True the majority have found other work, but not under the same conditions. Part time jobs and temporary contracts have proliferated, giving capital a whip hand against labour.

Flexible

And it's true. British workers do switch jobs more than, for instance, Germans. Does this mean they're more flexible? Not really. Germany has evolved a high wage, high productivity economy since the War. Because they have to pay decent wages, the capitalist class there has to make sure it gets productive work (not just sweated labour). So they provide



training. Workers then stay with the firm because they can earn more than anywhere else. Britain has a notoriously low level of skills training. So the British concept of labour market flexibility means you can move around and take any job - as long as it's unskilled. It offers a future of 'MacJobs', flipping burgers. Is that the way British capitalism intends to compete in the next millennium?

Demarcation

Management are also putting the boot in to get more flexibility within the workplace. War has been declared on the old demarcation of jobs between production workers and maintenance. Here the buzzword is multi-skilling. Both assembly line workers and cleaners are productive workers in the Marxist sense, since both are part of the 'collective worker'. In other words, if cleaners were not at work, the assembly line would have to keep stopping. Contrary to management mythology that lines of demarcation were imposed by over-mighty unions, it used to make a lot of sense to keep the two activities separate. Since craft workers were paid about twice as much as the unskilled in the Victorian era, it didn't make much sense for management to pay them to sweep the floor.

Now that's all out of the window. Many of the changes taking place in the world of work are inspired by the undoubted success of Japanese capitalism since the War - a success which now has a huge question mark placed over it by the prolonged recession there of the 1990s. In fact most of the management techniques regarded as typically Japanese were pioneered in the USA. Just-in-time (JIT) production is one. It is usually contrasted to the old 'just in case' approach, where the factory stores held a multitude of spares. JIT was possible because the big Japanese companies leaned on their small suppliers and forced them to take up any slack in production, sometimes insisting on parts being delivered on the hour as requested. In addition British firms often carried enormous stocks of warehoused finished goods. We can see this as inefficient, as in effect a lot of money is sitting in a warehouse, but it did have its advantages for management. For instance in the old Wolf electric tools plant in Perivale any shop steward contemplating strike action had to weigh up the fact that the employers could live for months off the revenues from selling finished stocks without losing money. JIT on the other hand

means that any halt in production is immediately generalised. It therefore hands quite small groups of workers enormous potential industrial muscle. The Tories, who claim industrial policy is a dirty socialist trick, actually have a very clear industrial policy in one regard. Two fifths of all Japanese inward investment into Europe comes here. Surveys show this is because Japanese capitalists fear a fortress Europe putting up the tariff barriers to their goods in future. The Tories encourage this investment by bunging huge wads of money at these companies. In effect they hope to import Japanese style industrial relations with the investments, clustered in silicon glen, the north-east, south Wales and north Wales near Merseyside. Management intends to transform the relation between themselves and the workforce into one of master and slave by starting afresh on greenfield sites, and the Tories hope local capitalists will find the example catching.

This is all the more important to the employers, since the counter offensive against labour actually hasn't transformed attitudes on the shop floor yet. No doubt we have seen a big decline in union membership since the 1970s. But unlike the late 1920s and early 1930s this is not because workers have torn up their cards, or run for the cover of company unions. What has happened is that millions of workers with the union habit have lost their jobs in organised workplaces because of redundancies or closure. Most have got some sort of alternative employment, but in a non-unionised sector under worse conditions. It takes time for consciousness to catch up. Likewise in the existing downsized manufacturing plants management have not been able to steam in and create the servile multi-skilled workforce they want. An Income Data Services Report, for example, is entitled 'The myth of the flexible firm'.

Attack

Why are we under attack now? Our answer is that capitalism is now in crisis, and it tries to unload the effects on to the working class. During the great post-War boom from about 1948 to 1973 living standards of workers and the amount of profit for capitalists all went up year on year - everyone was a winner.

An alternative explanation is that we are now entering the age of 'post-Fordist' capitalism, or flexible specialisation in production as it is sometimes known. This new era is contrasted to the old 'Fordist' production methods which characterised the post-War boom. Fordism was defined by mass production and mass consumption. As is well known, Henry Ford didn't invent the motor car, but he was the first to apply assembly line methods to mass produce it. He was so determined to reap scale economies, that he wouldn't even allow cars to be sprayed different colours - all Model T Fords were painted black. Ford also realised that if he was going to sell all these cars, then somebody out there would have to have the money to buy them, and so he paid his own workers over the odds. (The truth is a bit more complex. The assembly line hell in Ford's first factories created a huge labour turnover. He had to up wages to hold on to workers.)

What the advocates of post-Fordism are in effect saying is that the post-War boom was an unstable equilibrium. Because of relatively full employment, workers were able to improve their living standards each year. This was resented by the capitalist class, but they had no reason to pick a fight. Rising living standards provided a mass market for consumer durables such as cars, which for the first time came within the reach of millions of workers. Profits were very healthy, and the class struggle was moderated.

Now that's all gone. The new age is characterised by segmented markets, and as a result production is done in batches in smaller plants. It's true that new technology can give marketing people the ability to identify relatively small groups of customers and target them directly. These days cars come in all colours. It's easy to look at the production of cars and consumer electronics as typical of an age just past. Actually the work process of society doesn't divide up so neatly. When this country was the workshop of the world, the four great staple export industries were textiles, steel, shipbuilding and coal. Coal mining has always been prisoner to the geology of the individual pit. Textile mills in the last century would often specialise in sari materials or the production of

African prints. Shipbuilding has always been one-off 'batch' production. Even steel, a classical mass production industry by its nature, was often attuned to particular customers such as shipbuilders or steam train rails. So was the Victorian age post-Fordist?

The construction industry has always basically produced custom built units, and the core technology has hardly changed for two hundred years. As a result employment has remained broadly stable at just over a million workers for the past quarter century - though not from week to week or year to year as any building worker will tell you. Manufacturing patterns can't be fitted into the Fordist or post-Fordist strait-jackets.

Are capitalist firms getting smaller, as the post-Fordist theory would suggest? One of the firmest conclusions of Marxist theory, and one most solidly backed up the developments of the past century is that 'one capitalist kills many'.

Competition between different capitalists leads to the concentration and centralisation of capital. The growth of big capital in turn leads to the supersession of competition and the era of monopoly capital. There is some evidence that plant sizes in this country have got smaller on average over the last twenty years. It was the biggest factories that went to the wall in the deep recessions of 1979-81 and 1990-92. It is also the case that the rapid productivity gains since the 1980s mean that plants are a lot less crowded with workers. In 1979 we produced about 12 million tons of steel with 200,000 workers. Now this country makes the same amount - but with less than 50,000.

Concentrated

While plants may be getting smaller, firms are still getting bigger and bigger. Ownership of production is becoming more concentrated, even if the production process itself doesn't need bigger factories. A few weeks ago the headlines proclaimed '358 billionaires own more assets than nearly (the poorer) half of the world's people'. A glance at the financial pages of any paper sees the news dominated by takeovers and mergers, breaking new records every year.

The post-Fordist theory puts it all down to technology - new technology to identify the market segments and smart technology to customise the production process. The changes that have undoubtedly taken place in the workplace are not triggered by information technology. As we showed earlier, British capitalists are not investing huge amounts on IT, whether to torment us at work or for any other reason.

Obviously the ubiquitous computer is one of the most obvious changes to have happened in the workplace. Technology is an enabler. For the most part computers have been deployed to do pretty menial filing of information. One of its great advantages for management is that it can supply data on output and monitor the productivity of the worker using it. The fact remains - productivity and investment in the economy as a whole went ahead much faster during the great post-War boom than it has done since. As the Keynesian economist Solow says, 'I see information technology everywhere - except in the productivity figures.'

Deindustrialisation and the switch to the service sector has meant the creation of millions of new jobs, though not enough to get rid of mass unemployment. But what sort of jobs? Most of the new jobs have been created in the service sector (a phrase we're lumbered with) and these white collar jobs pay an average 25% less than the manufacturing jobs they've replaced. Full time permanent jobs, mainly for men have been replaced with part time temporary jobs, very often for women. The ever-present threat of the sack and the existence of millions on the dole has given management their big chance. 44% of temps say they're temping because they couldn't get a permanent proper job. The same with part time working. The majority of part time male workers want a full time job. But most part timers are women and say they want to work part time. They say so because they know child care and nursery facilities in this country are some of the most diabolical in Europe. Some of these contracts, such as those offered by Burtons, are zero hours - in other words don't call us, hang by the phone till we call you. The

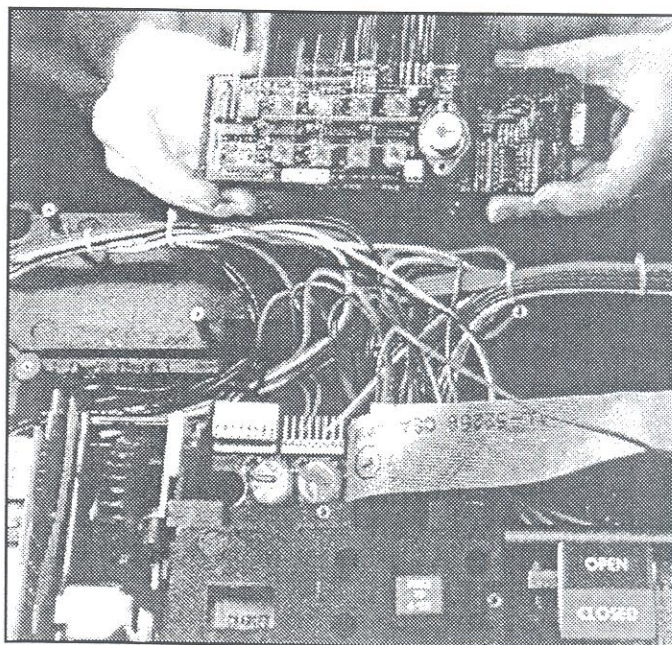
beauty of temporary and part time working for management is that employment rights are out of the window. We have also seen a rush to turn permanent posts into temporary contracts. Some people have been working temporarily for our local council for the last ten years. But they still have no pension rights, no holiday entitlement, and no sick pay. Another way to put workers under the hammer is compulsory competitive tendering (CCT) and contracting out. Very often this strategy applies to low tech or no tech sectors such as hospital cleaning or bus driving. The only gain is that existing contracts are torn up and new terms imposed. No real efficiency gains are yielded - privatised bus drivers can still only drive one bus.

Worst in the EU

Point for point, working conditions in Britain are the most 'flexible' - that is the most insecure and the worst in the EU. The UK is the only country in Western Europe with no statutory provision for a daily rest period, no daily restriction on maximum working hours per day, and no enforceable weekly rest period. Average working hours per week in Europe are 39 - in Britain it's 44. 16% of British workers regularly put in more than 48 hours. In the Netherlands it's 1.7%. One in four British workers does regular or occasional nightwork. The next highest percentage - 17% - is in Greece, the common market's poorest member. In

Germany just 9% work nights. Nearly two thirds of British manufacturing workers do shift-work - another European record. The next highest is Italy at 46%. In Germany it's 22%. Only Britain and Italy have no statutory paid holiday. The inevitable response of a capitalist firm or a capitalist country which has fallen behind its rivals is to blame and crack down on its own working class. It may be an inevitable response, but it's not an answer. Even if Britain plc could claw back market share (and there's no sign of that happening), that could only be at the expense of its capitalist rivals. They in turn will lash out at their national working class. There's no end to this game, and no winner either. The strategy of the ruling class is actually a blind alley.

Capital in Britain and the other advanced countries should spell out how low they expect us to go. The world benchmark seems to be China - where hundreds of millions are prepared to work a 14 hour day for £1. It is a simple fact that we cannot compete with that - even if we wanted to. The only way advanced countries can pay their way in the world is by going upstream, by using our accumulated skills and technology to produce things that poor countries can't. No doubt about it - British industry is in desperate need of modernisation. But only a socialist plan can accomplish it.



The White March for Justice opens a new chapter in Belgian history

Brussels 20 October: At 2 o'clock, the "White March" in solidarity with the parents of missing children starts. But there is a problem. Tens of thousands of people from all directions are heading to the North station, but aren't able to get there. The big avenues that link Brussels two main railway stations (and where the demonstration is supposed to be held) are already packed with more than 300,000 people, carrying white shawls, white hats, white balloons... Trains are held for hours outside the capital because the huge railway stations are packed with people, who are not able to get out because of the crowds outside.

by Jean Lievens
Editor, Vonk

This is not an ordinary demonstration. Today, tens of thousands will be marching for the first time in their lives. Yes, out of sympathy for the parents of the murdered and missing children. But they are also there for other reasons. They have lost completely their trust in the judicial system, because it is there to protect the rich and to treat ordinary people as dirt. They have lost their trust in the police force, because of the

criminal mistakes in the investigation of the missing girls. They have lost their trust in "the politicians", who are seen as responsible for all this. They are convinced that "people in high places" are involved in an organised paedophile network and that the authorities are trying to cover it up. And they are fed up with a whole series of crimes and scandals that were never solved by the police force and they suspect that this was done deliberately for the same reasons. They march because they demand justice and they want the truth to come out. And they are marching in probably the biggest demonstration in the history of Belgium.

March

The march was called by the parents of the murdered and missing children only three weeks in advance. It was not organised. There were practically no well known politicians, no trade union leaders on the demo, because they were scared of the reaction of the people. There were also very few placards and not many slogans. Instead, people... applauded! They rhythmically clapped their hands. It was an extremely impressive and powerful sign of their determination that society has to change.

After a six hour "round table" meeting in the Royal Palace with the King, the minister of justice and a whole series of "experts", the parents gave a press conference and called for a dignified demonstration in remembrance of theirs and all the other missing children and stressed that "this was no march for judge Connerotte and no march against the justice system". But it was. No doubt about it. And it was even more than that.

Necessity reveals itself through accident. The "accident" which triggered off one of the most powerful movements in Belgian history was the decision of the Highest Court to remove investigation judge Connerotte from the Dutroux case. In August this year, Connerotte and prosecutor Bourlet of the judicial department of Neufchateau had found, in the cellars of Marc Dutroux, two missing girls alive. "Marc et Corine", an organisation of parents of missing children, wanted to show their gratitude and invited them to a spaghetti-evening, where they had free spaghetti and were given also a small present, a pen. This "incident" was used by Marc Dutroux's lawyer to demand the removal of Connerotte from the case. As a judge, he couldn't show "sym-

pathy" for the victims. He had to be "neutral". The High Court agreed with this view and sadly enough, "lex sed dura lex" (the law is harsh but it is the law), they wished that they could have done otherwise, but they had no choice: Connerotte had made a big mistake, so they decided to remove him from the case. But the investigation could stay in Neufchateau and Bourlet could continue his job. With this compromise they thought that they could get away with their decision. But... they had made a very big mistake...

Hysterical

When this news was announced at 4 pm, the crowds before the Palace of Justice in Brussels went almost hysterical. Some people wept, but the majority shouted that it was a scandal. They were calmed down by a 18 year old Moroccan girl, the sister of a 9 year old missing child, who took the megaphone and urged the people to remain calm, because violence had no use now. When the workers of Volkswagen, the biggest factory in Brussels heard the verdict, they spontaneously stopped work and came out on strike. The same happened with the night shift. The same with the morning shift whose workers walked for 5 miles towards the Palace of Justice to show their anger. In the days that followed the verdict, there were hundreds of wildcat strikes all over the country. Also tens of thousands of school students came out on strike. All over the country the courts of Justice became "the point of attack"—sometimes literally—of thousands of angry workers and students. In every town, even the smallest, there were demonstrations. 10.000 people marched in Hasselt, a small

"The White March showed Europe and the world that there is more to Brussels than Eurocrats and bureaucrats. There are real people there. People who want to change Belgium. People who want to change the world."

town of 60,000 inhabitants. There was a demonstration in Gent of more than 20,000. It started as a student demonstration, but everywhere people joined in. There were very few incidents, although in Antwerp, where every day of the week thousands came out on the streets, there were also violent clashes with the police and there was a very grim atmosphere. All over the country highways were occupied by school students and instead of being angry because of the delay, drivers blew their horns in sympathy with the demonstrators; they opened the windows, put their thumbs in the air and shouted "well done"! The firemen of Liege drove to the court of justice and "cleaned it" with their equipment.

Movement

In the first days of the movement, not one politician, not one boss dared to complain. Each one of them said that "they understood the anger", even that they "agreed with the protest". The trade union leaders were not at all involved in these actions, but they had of course no choice other than to agree with the strikes and "cover" the actions. But the strikers did not want to be paid for the lost hours. In some cases, they did demand strike money not for themselves, but for the parents of the victims so they would be able to continue their fight. A worker of a small company of 200 workers said: "We all came out, the bosses aren't even aware of it. But this shows that there is more in the factory than just robots. There are people there, people with a heart. And they better take this into account. We are fed up with the long hours, with flexibility. There is so much unemployment. We have to demand a radical shortening of the working week, so we can spend more time with our family and with the real values of life. "They" better watch out, because now there is really something happening amongst the people."

René Stroobant, a former trade union leader of the now closed shipyards said: "I never experienced such a thing in my life. At first sight this is not a trade union matter. But we have to take it into account. We have to organise buses to go to

Brussels on Sunday. People have lost faith in everything. They have lost faith in the justice system. They have lost faith in the politicians. And they are seeing us also as a structure, as an official organisation. If we let them down, where will they go with their anger? To whom will they turn to?"

He couldn't be more right. The Vlaams Blok (Flanders extreme right wing party) was very active in the protest movement, although its leaders were met with a lot of hostility when they showed themselves before the Palace of Justice. But they have one "small" problem. This movement is a Belgian movement, in the sense that Flemish, Walloon, Brusselsois and immigrant people are all united against the establishment and they know and they feel that this unity is their strength. "We are fed up with this division. It's the politicians - who always try to divide us. But we won't take it any longer".

Indeed, there are a lot of things that the Belgian workers won't tolerate any longer. This movement was powerful because nobody organised it. So the government and the bosses couldn't blame anybody for it except themselves. But this lack of organisation was also its weakness. And this weakness enabled the government—who even used its last joker, the King—to put some oil on the water and temporarily hold back the movement. They made some concrete proposals to reform the justice system, proposals which were received rather well by the parents of the victims. In that sense, the "White March" was the height of the movement, but it was certainly not the end of it. On Monday there were still some strikes and ten thousand school students came out on the streets, but these were actions which had been organised the week before.

The government is enormously weakened. It will be watched very carefully by everybody now for every step it will take. Dehaene and his gang had already been very careful with the latest budget because of the "mood of society". In order to meet the Maastricht criteria, the government was trying to be very "skilful" in its attacks in an attempt to avoid a generalised movement. They raised some taxes (on petrol, alcohol,

"We are fed up with this division. It's the politicians who always try to divide us. But we won't take it any longer".

cigarettes, etc.), there were new cuts in unemployment benefits, health insurance and pensions, but they tried to avoid direct attacks. They "only" took away future advantages for the new generations, meaning that those in jobs now won't lose their rights and benefits, but that will change for the ones who will replace them. In other words, this government is attacking the youth in a vicious manner.

In the last fifteen years, taxes on profits and shares have diminished enormously, "because of the fear of capital flying abroad". But workers have to pay more and more. With the latest events, this is also coming to the surface: "we" always have to pay and "they"—who are able to pay—don't. Damn it, they don't pay anything! They even got away with murder!

Workers

As Marxists, it was very difficult in the last few years to speak about a "class society", "class justice", even about "workers" and "capitalists". Not now. The word "class justice" is very clear to everybody now. It has become common language, even for the journalists of right wing papers! People do not speak yet about "capitalists", but they speak about "people in high places" and they know exactly who they mean. "We do not have the money to buy pornographic videos where children are sexually abused or even murdered. These videotapes cost £2000 or even £5000. Who are the buyers?! We want names!", "In this society money dictates everything! You can even buy the life of a child! It is so disgusting! We are fed up with it.", "We are fed up with a government which is only talking about budgets and Maastricht. People are more important. What about the quality of life?"

The Belgian High Court consists of a bunch of reactionary aliens. There are few people more removed from the real world than these judges. Even the prime minister appealed to them publicly to find "a creative solution" for the case, suggesting that Connerotte had to stay on. The leaders of all political parties made statements in the same tone. But they also added that "everybody had to respect the decision of the High Court", because Belgium is a democracy, based on the "separation of the main powers." The fact is that all judges in Belgium are politically nominated. So this "division of power" is a sick, hypocritical joke and everybody knows it. But these ladies and gentlemen sadly did what they had to do. They were even angry because of the statements of the politicians. "They should all better shut up", they thought. They wanted to show who was the real boss in this case. So they dismissed Connerotte. And they let the country explode. Bad enough if it was a mistake. But if it was not a mistake... What did they try to cover up? Gino Russo, the father of Melissa, the 9 year old girl who starved to death in the cellars of Dutroux, is a metal worker. "It took us 15 months to be where we are now," he said in a television debate the night after the White March. "Before, nobody listened to us. Not the police, not the politicians, nobody. Today, more than 300,000 people came out in support of us and our children. We are not alone anymore. Now they are listening to us. But the teachers have already been fighting for two years. Wouldn't now be the time to listen to them too?" He was cut off by the moderator who said "we won't go into that now", but those who were watching the programme, thought exactly the same. And this will make future

events in Belgium very interesting indeed. The "small people" have shown that they "will not take it anymore". But they have found no answers yet. The proposed reforms of Dehaene are too little and too late. Their organisations, the trade unions and the socialist parties kept very quiet in the last days. They will have to fight to change these organisations as well. The socialist parties have to take up all the issues which are being raised now. People want to change society.

Well, the socialist parties have to adopt a programme to change society. A programme which introduces a 32 hour week (or less), so people can find the time to be involved in the running of society. They want more democracy, they want to exercise more control, but how can they do that after 38, 40 hours or more working as a madman in a factory? A programme that makes the rich pay, not by "more taxes" because they always find a way to avoid that, but by taking the main industries out of their hands and run them in a rationally planned manner, democratically controlled and run by the workers. Not in order to make profits, but to fulfil the needs of the people.

The Belgian state is paying 900 billion francs alone in interest on the huge state debt. This money goes directly to big business, banks, etc., who are not investing this money in industry, but use it to speculate and... to buy more state bonds! With this money alone, the state could introduce immediately a 32 hour week in the public sector, take on an extra 250,000 workers to improve the health service, the education system, to improve public services in general and even build hundreds of thousands of social houses. But this programme cannot be implemented in Belgium alone. The country would be boycotted by international business. So it has to be carried out on a European scale and even on a world scale.

Brussels is the capital of Europe. The *White March* showed Europe and the world that there is more to Brussels than Eurocrats and bureaucrats. There are real people there. People who want to change Belgium. People who want to change the world.

Reality more incredible than fiction

It is perhaps useful to give a short list of some of the most striking unsolved cases in recent history covering 15 years:

- The killer gang of Nijvel. This gang killed 28 innocent people in violent attacks on super markets in the 80s. They raided different super markets all over the country with riot guns, shot "at random" 5, 6 or 7 people dead and run away with practically nothing. But the victims were not so "at random" as at first sight appeared. Some of them knew each other very well and were linked to the boss of the arms factory FN, Mendez, who was murdered in 1986. By the way, Nihoul, who was arrested in the Dutroux case and who is probably "the brain" behind the whole network, is also linked to the Mendez case. When the investigation went into the direction of extreme right wing organisations, possibly supported by the extreme right wing of the Christian Democracy, the investigation judge was dismissed from the case and the investigation moved from Flanders to Wallonia. There, the 300,000 page dossier had first to be translated into French, which took years... The killers have yet to be found, although recently one of the survivors testified that he saw one of the killers in... the head quarters of the local national guard... in uniform...
- The "Pink Ballets", a sex scandal involving children and people in very "high" places (King Albert is one name which was mentioned in this case). In this case, two children were found dead. It was a very big scandal, but after a week, there was a sudden conspiracy of

silence in all the media. With the case Dutroux, it has come in the open again

- The hormone Mafia, where a vet was killed. The murder was ordered by the big meat producers, who use hormones to maximise their profits. In this affair, a Euro MP who fought against this Mafia was also nearly killed.

- the Agusta scandal, which led to the resignation of four "socialist" ministers and NATO boss Willy Claes. The SP's were given corruption money by an Italian helicopter factory, which was then given a large order from the Belgian army, against the advice of the Ministry of Finance and some army generals. One general committed suicide when the scandal broke out.

- The murder of former leader of the PS, Andre Cools. Van der Biest another former "socialist" minister has been arrested now, charged with the murder. But there are suspicions that Van der Biest was not the only one, and that the real responsibility for the murder have to be found even "higher" in the party leadership. It has even been suggested that the party leadership knew exactly why Cools was murdered and who did it, but covered it up to avoid "a revolution".

- Drug traffic in frozen meat and the VDB case. The company which was named in this case had a very interesting owner: former prime minister Paul Vandenoeynants (VDB). The investigator who was in charge of this case was dismissed from it and declared dead by the press. He is now living in France, appeared on television last week and is now prepared to speak before the Belgian parliament...

Vandenoeynants—who has proven links with the extreme right wing and even fascist gangs was named in the Gladio affair, a conspiracy of different right wing groups in Europe at the end of the Seventies, which were planning military coups in a series of countries (Italy, Belgium, Britain ...). The killers of Nijvel were supposed to destabilise the country, and prepare the ground for a military coup. During those days, armed policemen and even the army were "protecting" super markets, so people got used to their sight... Vandenoeynants was kidnapped some years ago and found alive. The ransom money is still missing. The criminals were arrested in Latin America. Later it came out that VDB knew them. Patrick Haemers, the leader of the gang, was later found dead in his cell. Suicide. He hanged himself... from a 60 cm heating system. Very clever... VDB is 77 now and he enjoys life very much: he plays tennis, goes swimming, goes on holidays... Sitting in his garden, he recently gave a television interview, where he declared: "I'm so happy that I left politics. In my days, there was no corruption. But when I see what has become of politics today. It's terrible..."

There are a whole series of other corruption scandals, too many to mention. Anyway, in Belgium reality is far more incredible than the wildest fiction. The BBC series *House of Cards*, *To Play the King* and *The Final Cut* are nice fairy tales compared with the real thriller in Belgium, the birthplace of surrealism. If you made a film on it, nobody would believe it...

Spanish public sector workers fightback

Last March, after 13 years of Socialist Party government the right wing Popular Party won the general elections in Spain although only narrowly. This fact has opened up a new chapter in the class struggle in Spain.

by Carlos Ramirez

The Spanish labour movement has a different perception of the right wing parties than that of other European workers. The Spanish right wing is linked to the Franco dictatorship and in fact many of the leaders of the Popular Party played an active role in and were directly responsible for the repression against the labour movement under Franco. This is the main factor to explain how, after a PSOE government which, especially in its last years, carried through an anti labour policy, the right wing was unable to get an absolute majority.

The first step taken by the Popular Party Government in Spain was to cut the budget by £1 billion, mainly on social expenditure. The second step was to increase tax exemptions for business profits and big fortunes, saving the employers £3 billion, while increasing indirect taxation. The Popular Party proposed budget for 1997 is the most vicious attack against the working class in many years.

It introduces a wage freeze for public sector workers, cuts the education budget, cuts unemployment benefit, and all the increases in the health service budget goes to contracting out services to private companies. There is also a plan to privatise most of the publicly owned companies, including the telephone company Telefonica, the oil company Repsol, etc. In one word, the policies of the right wing government mean a transfer of enormous resources from the pockets of the workers to those of the bankers and employers.

Strategies

The two main trade union confederations, CCOO and UGT are basing their strategies on endless negotiations with the government. As these negotiations and talks are not based on the strength of the movement on the streets, the unions are accepting deals which mean further setbacks on conditions in the workplaces. In fact, they have just signed an agreement on pensions which actually means a cut in future pensions.

This trade union strategy is provoking discontent amongst rank and file trade unionists. This has already reflected itself in the creation of an important opposition tendency within CCOO. This broad left had 36% of the delegates

at the last CCOO National Congress.

The policies of the PP have already provoked a fight back by the labour movement. The proposed wage freeze for public sector workers after losing 11 percentage points in their purchasing power in the previous five years has created a lot of anger. The unions were forced to call a national day of action with demos all over the country on October the 15th. According to the unions more than 650,000 public sector workers participated in the evening demonstrations, with 100,000 in Madrid and 50,000 in Barcelona.

On the same day the secondary students, called by the Students Union (SE), also participated in a day of action with rallies in front of the Education ministry offices all over the country protesting against unprecedented cuts in the Education budget. 10,000 participated in Madrid and 5,000 in Barcelona adding up to a total of 100,000 students all over the country.

The Students Union has called a students general strike on November the 14th with demos in the main cities. CCOO and UGT, pressurised by the mood amongst public sector workers have called a series of sectoral strikes in November ending in a March on Madrid on the 23rd. This

process could end up in a general strike of public sector workers in December. We are just at the beginning of a mass movement of the workers and youth against the right wing government's policies.

This movement will have its effect in the trade union and political organisations of the working class. Sections of them, expressing pressure from below will turn to the left demanding an open fight against the PP government. A clear policy of opposition from the labour movement organisations could easily put this weak government into a very difficult position. But the Socialist Party (PSOE) has a leadership which is compromised by its policies while in government, specially the organisation of state terrorism of the GAL. Its parliamentary group, led by Felipe Gonzalez, defends the convergence criteria, is making an almost unnoticeable opposition to the government.

Divisions

The working class entering into the scene and the possibility of the PSOE coming back to power on the medium term will increase its internal divisions. There will be a section of the party which is prepared to apply the policies needed by the bourgeois and another section demanding a shift to the left pushed by the social mood of struggle. United Left (IU), the organisation launched and led by the CP, is the only important organisation in the left clearly opposing the PP policies. Although this organisation does not defend a Marxist programme, it is a point of reference for a section of the labour movement, and therefore is being attacked by the bourgeois through the mass media. In a situation where there is a very unstable equilibrium they cannot allow any critical voice to be heard. We are entering a period when the working class will put its mark on events. This is precisely the obstacle the bourgeois will face in their plans.

Interview with French left trade union leader

Michel Pernet, spokesperson of the left wing trade union tendency in the French union CFDT, "Tous ensemble", spoke to Erik Demeester.

How was "Tous Ensemble" created?

Our origins go back to the Autumn 95 events. As members of the CFDT we raised three main criticisms of the leadership of the Confederation. First of all the unconditional support of Notat (leader of the CFDT) for the Plan to Reform the Social Security proposed by PM Juppe. In doing that, she also broke the fragile but nevertheless unique trade union unity achieved against that Plan. The other complaint is in relation to the social movement which dominated the country from November 24th to December 20th 1995. The Confederation leadership not only didn't support the movement but actively fought against it. Notat criticised the movement for being regressive, archaic and too anchored in the acquired rights. On the contrary, Notat's position was one of accepting the questioning of those rights. The third criticism is in relation to the railway workers movement which the Confederation leadership supported but only with a small mouth and before the end of the dispute declared that the movement had no reason of being because all the demands had been achieved—which was not yet the case. Her appeal to go back to work was very badly received by the railway workers. Faced with these developments we couldn't stay inactive. For all these reasons we took the step of going from raising unorganised criticisms to giving them a structure and to publicise them. Then the idea was raised of publishing a journal which would be the expression of another voice within the Confederation and which would work to reorientate the union.

How did the Confederation leadership react to this?

Obviously Notat didn't applaud us. At the beginning—4 or 5 months—until our General Meeting at Clermont-Ferrand in June, she behaved like we didn't exist. She ignored us in two ways: one, by considering us splinters who would soon join the members who had left the union in January to organise the SUD unions; secondly by thinking that we would destroy ourselves without overcoming the limits of the traditional opposition group. But after our General Meeting at Clermont-Ferrand, where we were able to have 1000 activists and people with positions in the union, from every region in France and almost from every federation, her attitude changed. Several articles were published in *Syndicalisme Hebdo* (the fortnightly union paper) trying to refute some of our positions but without ever referring to the national organisers of "Tous ensemble". She even made the National Council (the highest body between Congresses) pass a resolution condemning the appearance of "Tous Ensemble" but without proposing any sanctions at that stage. But at the same time more and more members and supporters with positions in the union suffered repression and were stripped of some of their powers. In a certain way this shows the weakness of the leadership which refuses to carry out an in depth trade union debate.

Some members decided to leave the CFDT in January. Is there a risk of you taking the same path?

For many reasons we have decided to wage our fight within the union. The first one is that we don't wish to leave the union to the present leadership, because at the end of the day we think that it hasn't got a majority for the kind of unionism it defends. Another reason flows from our conception of trade union unity. We defend unity of action between different trade unions but we want to go further. Given

the current dispersion and trade union division it is urgent to have a trade union reorganisation in order to avoid marginalisation of trade unionism in France. Unlike the comrades in SUD we don't think that is going to take place through the disintegration of all existing trade union organisations. It is true, the present trade unions have many shortcomings, we know it, but we have to work with the unions as they are today. If we destroy the present day unions, tomorrow there will be nothing to replace them or maybe they would be replaced by "micro unions" for each job title.

What support do you have to carry on this reorientation of the CFDT?

The main structures which identify themselves with "Tous Ensemble" and have participated in its foundation are: the General Federation of Transports and Equipment (i.e. the railway workers), and the Regional Unions of Auvergne, Basse Normandie and the Provence Cote d'Azur. In relation to the some 20 Regions and Federations these may seem weak. But we have also changed our approach and we appeal directly to the members and unions. That is why we have our own journal which is aimed to be a mass circulation journal (40,000 copies sold regularly). In order to have an idea of the echo we could have for our ideas in the different unions I will give you the following examples: without claiming to represent all them, 600 out of 2000 union branches supported our motion calling for an Emergency Congress to discuss the Autumn movement. These 600 unions represent 40% of the votes at a Congress. Even before we organised the current, the EC report was rejected by 52% of the delegates and a motion calling for a 32 hour week was passed against the wishes of the Confederation leadership with 56% of the votes. Therefore we are not marginalised as Nicole Notat would like it, but we have deep roots within the union.

In relation to the social situation for this Autumn, there are many political commentators and trade unions leaders who foresee a hot Autumn, what do you think?

It is impossible to foresee an exact repetition of the November—December 1995 movement. It is impossible to be so precise. We have enough trade union experience to know that it is not enough for the same ingredients to be present in order for them to lead to similar actions. On the other hand we are absolutely sure that the Autumn 95 movement went a lot further than rejection of the Juppe Plan. That movement also represented more than the simple sum of sectoral demands. What the movement expressed was the question: "What future for our children, what society we want to live in"? This question represents a clear rejection of the policies of austerity carried on until now. It is also the rejection of a kind of contempt from the "elites". These questions are still relevant, and are the fundamental questions for the coming years. To these we have to add the increase in unemployment—probably a further 150,000 unemployed by the end of the year. Sectoral demands are still there. In the railways we have witnessed a series of local disputes. In France Telecom the threat of privatisation. The EDF (electricity company) is threatened with being split up and also privatisation. There is a mood of discontent in many of these workplaces. This is mainly in public sector companies but not only there. The accumulation of social plans also affects the private sector. We don't say that a movement like that of last year will take place. But we are convinced that there will be extremely hard disputes. We are also convinced that the questions raised last year will remain without an answer from the Confederal leadership of the unions. The CFDT clearly has refused to take them into account, the CGT which has gone with the movement and has kept pace with its protest angle, has not been able to propose a counter project. This lack of leadership will be again on the agenda in the next movement. We think that we will witness a scattered movement, specially after the inability of the trade union confederations to offer a general perspective, an alternative project. The problems which provoked the autumn 95 movement are still there, sharper than ever.

General strike in Argentina

"I had no choice but to sign. Otherwise, how could have gone back home had I been sacked?" Fabian, aged 25 and for 4 years worker of the Cormec company in Cordoba, had just signed new working conditions, accepting a reduction in his wages from 4.95 pesos (or dollars) an hour to 2.68 plus 0.54 in food tickets.

by our correspondent in Buenos Aires

The living and working conditions of the Argentinean working class are suffering the worst attack since the so-called *Infamous Decade* in the 30s. According to the government's proposed new flexibility law, the working day will be able to last up to 12 hours. A percentage of the wages will depend on the profits of the company. Contracts will be mainly part time or short term and it will be almost free for employers to make workers redundant.

Health service workers, apart from visiting patients are forced to clean up rooms and toilets, do the ironing and cooking for 20 people, or to work 36 hour non-stop shifts. Postal workers have to walk 25 km with 25 kg of letters and packets for 14 hours a day. Whole families work in the land from sunset to dawn for the whole year for 40 pesos a month plus food and a simple shelter to sleep. The whole situations reminds one of that in the 19th century. And these are the conditions for the few privileged who can get a job. Official unemployment stands at 18% but around 50% of the workers are either partially or

totally unemployed.

This is the situation which has led to two very important general strikes in the last couple of months, the last one lasting 36 hours, on the 26/27 of October with a following, recognised by the government but latter denied, of 90%. In reality the following of the strike was 100% with massive demos in the main cities all over the country. The biggest one was in Buenos Aires with 70,000 workers protesting against the Peronist government. This enraged president Menem, who faced with the possibility of the CGT calling a new 48 hour general strike in a few weeks time, said: *"the leaders can call as many strikes as they like, I will not change course. In 48 years I will still be in power and they will be dead."* As you can see Menem is desperate to maintain himself in power, is not very worried about the passing of time.

Growing

While the economy was growing until mid 1994, the government was supported by all classes in society. The disaster of hyper inflation under the Alfonsin government had been an enormous weight on the shoulders of the labour movement. Peronism was put into power in 1989 by the workers with the hope of a return to the golden years of Argentina under Peron. But in fact its main task was to put an end to the welfare state inherited from that epoch. Nearly all state companies were sold for almost nothing. Thanks to the disastrous role of the rotten leadership of the CGT which accepted one after another of the economic and labour counter-reforms, the very

same Peronist party through which the workers achieved their highest ever share of national income forced workers into "pre-Peronist" conditions of savage capitalism. Nowadays the popularity level of the government is at its lowest level. The government is seriously worried by the defeat of the *intendente* (mayor) election in Buenos Aires were the Peronists came third, behind the *Radicals*, and the FREPASO (an alliance of different parties whose main component is the Broad Front, which originated as a split off from the Peronists).

The widespread discontent reaches even inside the ranks of Peronism whose inner tensions are reaching their maximum in recent days. The former government strong man and the designer of its economic plan, Domingo Cavallo, has just made serious accusations against the government saying it is infiltrated by mafia organisations. The former Home Affairs Minister has accused Menem of being the head of the mafia. This scandal is shaking the whole of society. Corruption is reaching a level where is leaving in the pale the most fantastic Garcia Marquez tales.

President Menem has announced a crusade against corruption and issued an arrest warrant against a business man friend of his for drug dealing and at least one murder. The implications of the case reach such a high level that it is very unlikely he will be convicted for fear he will implicate everybody else. The characteristics of the case make it likely to have an end like a real Mafioso story.

The struggle to replace Menem

has already started inside and outside Peronism. The Radicals are preparing themselves to jump again on top of the state's cake. The situation is so bad that even the unpopular ex president Alfonsin has possibilities of running for the presidency. And it is not even ruled out that, depending on the political process opened, the Radicals could again win the presidency in 1999. The first elections will be the Senate and Congress election in 1997. Important Peronist leaders are foreseeing a defeat.

The *Frente Grande* (Broad Front) leaders, which in effect is occupying the room at the left of Peronism and Radicalism, not only lack the correct programme but also the necessary boldness to win out of the disillusionment within the Peronist rank and file. The working class need more than the appearance of an opposition on the part of the FG in order to break with its traditional party.

Crisis

Peronism is in crisis but is not producing a class current evolving to a programme of class independence. A new political stage has opened in Argentina. The crisis is not sustainable but there is no one to lead the workers in struggle. The rottenness of capitalist society is in contrast, yet again in Argentinean history, with the lack of a leadership able to orientate the masses towards social transformation. The next years will be critical for the punished but also indomitable Argentinean proletariat to fulfil this task.

Labour's foundation years

As Labour heads towards its first election victory in over twenty years, and the party moves towards its centenary celebration in the year 2000, Barbara Humphries starts a new series of articles that look at the issues and characters involved in the party's history and development.

The Labour Party's history clearly illustrates that it was set up as the party of the working class in this country, with the trade union movement as its bedrock. From the adoption of Clause 4, in 1918, the Party had a socialist constitution which reflected the aspirations of the membership of the Party. It was its class roots and socialist vision which motivated the commitment of thousands of working people to build the party, into what became the major vehicle for change in Britain in the 20th century.

Within twenty years of its foundation Labour had become the main opposition party, replacing the Liberals, and four years later had formed a minority govern-

ment. The 1945 Labour Government led the reconstruction of Britain after the Second World War, with a programme of selective nationalisation and the establishment of the welfare state. The Labour Representation Committee, which was to become the Labour Party was set up by the Trades Union Congress in 1900, as a means of securing trade union representation in Parliament. This was after two decades of class struggle in which trade unions had successfully organised unskilled workers, changing the face of the TUC from a body which represented respectable skilled working men defending their relatively privileged status in the economy to an organisation which was coming into conflict with the capitalist class. Trade unions

which had operated like friendly societies were being outnumbered by those which organised strikes and picket lines. At the same time there had been a reawakening of socialist ideas, which had laid dormant since the 1840s. Political parties such as the Social Democratic Federation attracted thousands of members. Demonstrations and mass meetings not seen since the days of the Chartists took place in the 1880s. In this situation the TUC general council was coming under pressure to break from their alliance with the Liberal Party. The franchise was gradually being extended to working class people. So that the two main capitalist parties - the Liberals and Tories had to appeal to working class voters for the first time. This had led to concessions such as legislation upholding the right to picket peacefully in industrial disputes.

By the end of the 19th century the economic conditions for an independent labour party had ripened in Britain. The economy was increasingly controlled by monopolies. This meant the beginning of a massive concentration of wealth in the hands of a few and increasing division and conflict between capitalists and workers. It was revealed that only two-fifths of the national cake was consumed by wage earners. A quarter of the population lived in poverty. At the same time the hey-

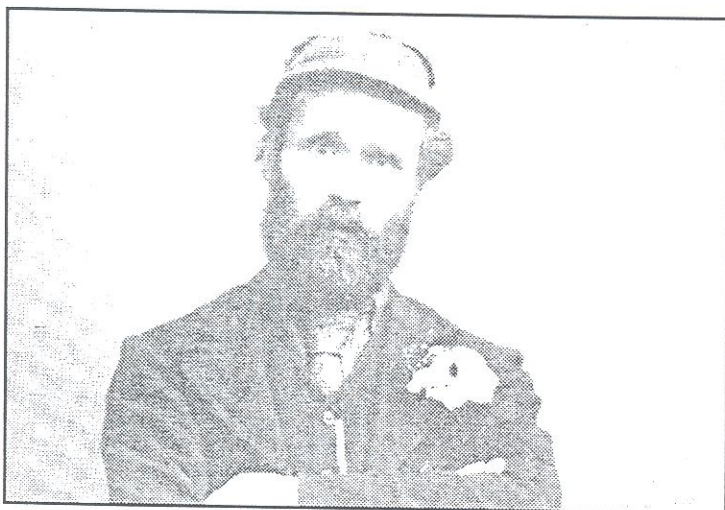
day of British capitalism was drawing to an end. British industry now competed with Germany, France and America for markets and raw materials and investment abroad. Victorian expansion and unbridled prosperity for industry was over - the economy was faced with one crisis after another. From 1889-1913 real wages declined by 10%. This was the economic background to the political upheavals.

The ruling class had grown used to the craft unions of the mid 19th century economic boom. These unions of skilled men had few quarrels with the bosses. They sought to better themselves by using their skills to restrict entry to the union, in order to maintain wages and in setting up Friendly Societies. These men like Broadhurst who was secretary of the TUC supported the Liberal Party.

The political climate was changed in 1886, when John Burns and Henry Hyndman, two leaders of the recently formed marxist Social Democratic Federation, began organising the unemployed. They led demonstrations of 75,000 people through the West End of London to oppose factory closures.

Attacks by police with batons on demonstrators brought about rioting, in which several people were killed. The ruling class, horrified by broken windows in London's West End, believed that a war had broken out between the haves and have-nots. The poor were now regarded as a menace and a threat, no longer 'the deserving poor' of Victorian England. The class struggle had begun in earnest.

John Burns, together with socialist trade unionist Tom Mann organised the Eight Hour League with the aim of reducing unemployment. This campaign rapidly gained support amongst the unskilled workers and was adopted by the London Trades Council, as a means of reducing unemployment and giving the workers more time for his family. Sections of workers like the Ayrshire miners who had been committed to supporting the Liberal Party and had the tactic of restricting the output of coal in times of recession, now took up the



campaign for the 8 hour day. Increasingly employers were using the unemployed to break strikes and enforce wage cuts. The unskilled workers were particularly vulnerable as *'they could be replaced by a hungry fellow from anywhere'*. Scottish miners were threatened that union members would be replaced by the Glasgow unemployed. One miner who was recruited to socialism was Keir Hardie. From the 'Eight Hour League', Mann and Burns went on to organise the unskilled workers, such as the dockers and the gasmen, the ones whom craft unions had left out in the cold. Deskilling was also to take place in industries such as engineering and shipbuilding and skilled workers had the task of organising the unskilled and semiskilled in their industry. There was a basis now for industrial or even general unions, rather than unions based on skills and crafts. Methods of organisation had to be different. Membership was liable to fluctuation. During the 1890s for instance, only 3% of dockers were unionised. Membership was difficult to sustain through slumps. The use of unemployed workers to break strikes inevitably brought the trade unions into conflict with picketing and property laws.

Unskilled

During the 1880s the main unions of unskilled worker were formed. The gasworkers led by Will Thorne won the 8 hour day. Some women workers - the matchgirls of Bryant and May - were organised, their atrocious working conditions became famous world wide. Women in the East End were consistently being disfigured by the use of phosphorus in the match industry. As far as the ruling class were concerned these people were an 'under-class' -on the fringes of humanity. But the early socialists took up their cause and attempted to organise them into the trade union movement. Inroads were made into the organisation of agricultural workers, 'railway servants' as they were then called and textile workers. All this was overshadowed by the dock strike of 1889. The dockers, one of the most exploited sections of the working class went on strike for six pence an

hour - the dockers' tanner as it became known. Oppressed for years by the system of casual labour, by which the employers hired and fired at will, the dockers came out and demonstrated through the streets of London for their rights. They carried red flags, and stinking fish heads to show what they had to live on. Their victory was gained from the support they received from the labour movement in this country and internationally.

It is in struggles like these that the Labour Party had its roots. There was nothing respectable or 'Blairite' about it at all. The rise of the unskilled unions raised the need for a party of labour. Their tactics were completely different to the old craft unions. They could not restrict entry to the trade, they relied upon strikes and picketing. The use of scabs was backed up with police and sometimes army protection. This caused widespread violence in industrial disputes, arrests and jail sentences for trades unionists. That is how the battles of the new unions became political. There were conflicts with the law and the state. Not since the days of the Chartists in the early part of the 19th century had the issue of political power been so sharply posed, or had society been so polarised along class lines. Increasingly socialists linked the trade union struggles with their political goals of changing society. The call for an independent party of labour was campaigned for within the trade union movement. Engels wrote as follows to the Labour Standard in 1881-

'the time is rapidly approaching when the working class of this country will claim...its full share of representation in Parliament...the working class will have understood that the struggle for high wages, and short hours, and the whole action of the trades unions as carried on now, is not an end in itself but a means towards the end, the abolition of the wages system altogether.'

The setting up of an independent party of labour was opposed by the old guard of the TUC, those who like Broadhurst represented the craft workers, the labour aristocracy and who wanted to maintain links with the Liberals. They declared that the time



was not ripe! But the campaign was maintained. Some socialists from groups like the Social Democratic Federation were also reluctant to support a party of labour on the grounds that it would be limited to labour representation in Parliament and would not be socialist! Others, like Engels believed that a party based on the labour movement would inevitably move towards the adoption of socialist policies as the parties of capitalism and what they stood for, became discredited. Finally in 1899 the Trades Union Congress voted to set up an independent Labour Representation Committee. After a decade of attacks upon the trades union movement and little support from the Liberal Party it was time to act independently. At the beginning this Labour Representation Committee did not gain the affiliation of the whole trades union movement. But that was set to change at a later stage. Also middle class reformers in the main did not give their wholehearted support to the Labour Representation Committee at this stage.

Reforms

They still had hopes that the Liberal Party would carry out social reforms, modernising British society and overcoming the growing gulf between labour and capital, whilst leaving capitalism intact. It was only

later that they jumped on the bandwagon, when the Labour Party was clearly poised to replace the Liberals as the opposition to the Tories in Britain, and the labour movement looked like a better bet for carrying out social reforms. The same can be said of the 'socialist think-tank' - the Fabian Society, whose 'socialism from the top downwards approach' had also led them to consider the possibility of influencing the Liberal Party before the founding conference of the Labour Representation Committee. Without the trade union affiliation therefore, the Labour Party would not have existed. So what of the socialist groups which had existed before the Labour Party? The aforementioned Social Democratic Federation had been in existence for over fifteen years. It is important to note that the term Social Democrat meant Marxist in those days. The model Social Democratic party was the German Social Democratic, which was soon to abandon its commitment to Marxism. Then socialists tended to abandon the term 'social-democrat', in favour of 'socialist' or 'Marxist'. The term was later to be used by a group of Labour MPs who left the Labour Party, attempting to split it in the 1980s and formed the SDP. However the Marxism of the Social Democratic Federation

was like that of the German Social Democratic Party. They believed that socialism was inevitable. The movement would continue to grow and the majority of the population would see the light. Hyndman, a conservative who had converted to Marxism did not see the connection between militant trade unionism and socialism, on one occasion condemning strikes as a waste of time because they left the capitalist system intact. The activities of party members however drew them into practical politics - some into trade unionism, others into the municipal socialism of school boards and health boards. But they did not see this activity as raising workers' consciousness. Tom Mann and William Morris eventually left the SDF because of its political sectarianism. William Morris went on to set up another organisation called the Socialist League. Nevertheless the SDF gained a sizeable following with 43 branches in London alone. It popularised the spread of socialist ideas through propaganda and won recruits to Marxism who were later to play a role in the foundation of the Labour Party, but it failed to make the breakthrough of becoming a mass party and forming an alternative to the Liberals and Tories. A party was needed which had links with the trade unions and which would challenge the Liberals and Tories in the parliamentary arena. By the 1890s the SDF was declining in favour of the Independent Labour Party. The Independent Labour Party had more success in the North of England. It was founded in Bradford in 1892. It had the

backing of Bradford Trades Council and was formed in the wake of the defeat of a strike at the Manningham mills which had involved 5,000 workers against the local mill owners. The trade union movement had suffered declining membership and attacks during the 1890s. Unemployment in shipbuilding rose to 20% and in Hull in 1891, one thousand scabs recruited by the employers broke a shipping strike under the protection of police, troops and gunboats. Of the towns magistrates, four were shipowners, and nineteen others had shares in major shipping companies.

Blatantly

This was how blatantly the forces of the state were arranged against labour. Many of these employers were Liberals as well as Conservatives, showing that the trade union movement could have little confidence in the representatives of these capitalist parties. Scab organisations like the National Association of Free Labour were set up to recruit strike-breakers on a national scale. The trade unions were becoming more in need of political representation, which strengthened the case of those who argued for the Trades Union Congress to launch a party of labour. As well as the ILP, the Scottish Labour Party added its voice to this campaign. This party had the backing of the Scottish miners recruited after a long strike in Ayrshire in 1886-87. The first independent Labour MPS like Keir Hardie were elected to Parliament.

Advice given to the first ILP MPs was as follows: '*A working man in Parliament should go to the House of Commons in his workday clothes..he should address the speaker on labour questions, and give his utterance to the same sentiments, in the same language and in the same manner that he is accustomed to utter his sentiments, and address the president of the local radical club. Above all he should remember that all the Conservatives and Liberals joined together in the interests of capital against Labour.*'

Keir Hardie was famous for arriving in his working clothes to Parliament, accompanied by a brass band from his constituency. In 1901 he submitted the following resolution - '*That considering the increasing burden of which the private ownership of land and capital is imposing upon the industrious and useful classes of the community, the poverty and destitution and general moral and physical deterioration resulting from a competitive system of wealth production which aims primarily at profit-making, the alarming growth of trusts and syndicates, able by reason of their great wealth to influence governments and plunge peaceful nations into war to serve their own interests, this House is of the opinion that such a state of matters is a menace to the well-being of the Realm and calls for legislation designed to remedy the same by inaugurating a Socialist Commonwealth founded upon the common ownership of land and capital, production for use and not for profit, and equality of opportunity for every citizen.*' But a growing number of Labour MPs were not as determined as Keir Hardie and the other founders of the labour movement. Many deserted their roots and succumbed to the pressures of the state as represented in Parliament. The 1890s had not been a good decade for the labour movement. The slump had seen setbacks and this was reflected in the founding conference of the Labour Party, which had the affiliation of less than half of the trade union movement and did not adopt a formal commitment to socialism. However the breakthrough had been made. This was to change in the first decades of the twentieth century.

From the outset there were two pressures upon the Labour Party, from the trade union working class base of the Party and from the ruling class itself by means of attempting to integrate the Party into the arena of capitalist state. This was done by alliances with other parties, such as the Liberals, and elevating Labour MPS and trade union barons into the circles of the bourgeoisie. But in a situation when the British working class could no longer be seen to benefit from Britain being the workshop of the world this became more difficult, but all the more essential for the ruling class. As the first industrial nation Britain had the strongest working class and strongest trades union movement at the beginning of the century. It was because of this that the party of the working class was based on the trades union movement.

Europe

This was not the case on the continent of Europe, where the Socialist parties in France and the German Social Democratic Party were stronger than the trade union movement at the time. The construction of the labour movement in Australia and New Zealand, and now in the USA, is on the Anglo-Saxon model however.

After nearly a century the Labour Party is still in existence. It has remained throughout that time a classic 'united front' of socialists, social-democrats and trade unionists. It has helped to perpetuate the reality of class politics by maintaining, for most of this time, electoral opposition to the party of British capitalism - the Conservatives. It has been capable of winning elections without alliances, and has achieved much in the way of carrying out reforms which have benefitted working class people. The 1945 Labour Government was instrumental in implementing the welfare state.

It is important for socialists in the Labour Party and the unions to fight for the genuine history and traditions of the British labour movement, and in so doing ensure the next Labour government acts in the interests of the working class.



Russian revolution

The collapse of Stalinism, most graphically symbolised by the fall of the Berlin wall, was hailed by bourgeois politicians, academics and commentators, as the conclusive victory of capitalism over socialism. George Bush, the then US President, talked about the creation of a "new world order" - based on free markets, and leaving the US, the only remaining superpower, as the world's unofficial "policeman". This "new world order" would embrace the former Soviet bloc countries, and integrating them into the capitalist world market.

by Paul Nowak

However, the impasse of capitalism on a world scale has meant that all talk of a new world order has remained rhetoric rather than reality. Nowhere is the failure of the free market more brutally exposed than in the former Soviet Union. The move towards capitalism in Russia and its neighbouring states has been an unmitigated disaster by any measure. On the economic front, GDP has more than halved since 1989; and while unemployment has doubled, real wages have been cut by up to a half. Despite bullish promises, Western investment in Russia has been only a fraction of what was expected due to the unpredictable character of the Russian economy. For example, between 1989 and 1994 total foreign direct investment (FDI) in Russia was \$1.6 billion; a pittance when you consider that over the same period China received \$82.5 billion. This instability is the reason why after 6 years of movement toward capitalism in Russia, the world's credit-rating agencies recently classified Russian government debt as "speculative" - news which is hardly likely to reassure already nervous Western investors. This economic collapse has resulted in the emergence, and worsening, of social problems such as unemployment, crime, drug abuse, poverty, malnutrition, and prostitution - in short, those problems which capitalism has left in its wake right around

the globe.

Politically this is represented by the open corruption, back-stabbing and manoeuvring which currently typifies Russian "democracy". The speculation over Yeltsin's health is sadly reminiscent of the attempts of the old Stalinist bureaucrats to prop up Chernenko, Andropov and Brezhnev—and is complicated by the fact that his rivals for the role of Russia's Bonaparte are busy manoeuvring for power, rather than running the country.

Yet despite all these problems, one factor has been conspicuous by its absence from this potentially explosive equation; namely, the Russian working class. At first sight this fact would appear completely paradoxical. It is precisely the working class that has suffered most under the move towards capitalism, as state owned concerns have been privatised, or have ground to a halt. Many workers have been forced to go without wages for months at a time, as the state puts its financial obligations to international capital before the livelihoods of its workers. However, although there is yet to be a generalised movement of the working class, there have been a number of significant movements, such as the miners strike earlier this year, which involved up to a million and a half workers throughout Russia and the Ukraine. There are on-going sporadic strikes nearly everywhere.

Solution

In addition, it is apparent that many workers have been looking for a solution to their problems on the political front. The West regarded a Yeltsin Presidential victory as essential if Russia was to continue its (albeit erratic) movement towards capitalism - but in reality, his victory was a hollow one. The Russian working class have waited 6 long years for capitalism to deliver - and the only current certainty is that this patience cannot last indefinitely. The Presidential elections saw a massive revival in the Communist Party vote; and more significantly the CP has seen an increase in its membership, which now stands at

over 550,000 - the biggest party in Russia. All this is despite the fact that Zuganov stood on an ambiguous platform, and more importantly that the Communist Party is tainted by its direct association with the crimes of Stalinism. A similar process is taking place in the old 'official' Stalinist unions - which are growing in both size and militancy. The question which should be posed in the next period is not *if* the Russian workers will move but *when*. Paradoxically, any slight improvement in the economic situation, (and things could hardly get much worse), could provide the catalyst for action which has so far been missing.

The orientation of increasing layers of the Russian working class towards its traditional organisations, the CP and the trade unions, is no accident. History illustrates that rather than creating new organisations, the working class strives, where possible, to transform its traditional mass organisations. The CP and the unions provide a familiar rallying point for the Russian proletariat.

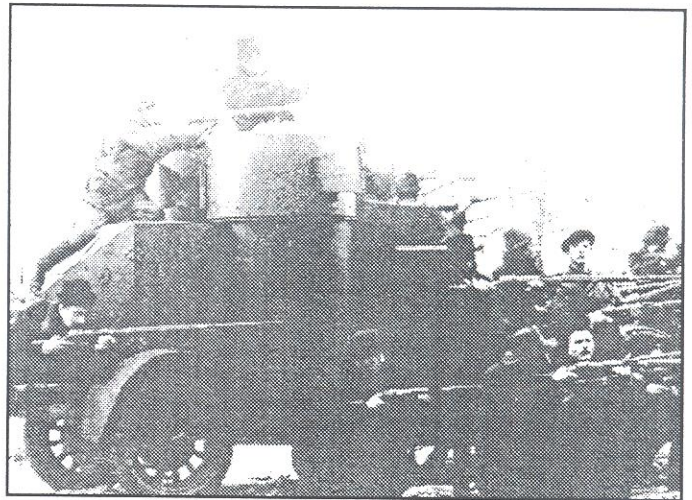
Counterposed to over 60 years of Stalinist degeneration is the memory of the October Revolution of 1917 - the single greatest event in the history of mankind. For generations both the Stalinists and the capitalists have sought to discredit the events of 1917, and to destroy the ideas of genuine Marxism upon which the revolution was built. Despite this, the legacy of the October Revolution remains untarnished, and its lessons as relevant as they were nearly 70 years ago. Only by placing the Russian Revolution within the context of the historic, world-wide struggle for the socialist transformation of society is it possible to begin to unravel the events of 1917, and their cause and importance. Such an approach has a valuable precedent. Both Lenin and Trotsky viewed the Russian Revolution not as an end in itself, but as the precursor to the socialist revolution in Europe and throughout the world; their aim was not "socialism in one country", but the triumph of the revolution

throughout the globe. In 1917, Russia was an unlikely candidate for socialist revolution. Semi-feudal in character, peasants constituted the overwhelming majority (80%) of the population. On the eve of the 1914-18 war, when Russian industrial production reached its pre-revolutionary peak, national income was still eight to ten times lower than in the United States. By every measure, whether it be length of railroad, steel production etc., Russia was far behind both the US and the major industrial powers of Western Europe. However this 'backwardness' represented only one facet of a two sided phenomenon. Russia was indeed a backward country, but one which also part of a world economy - one element in a capitalist world system. This necessarily meant that Russia had an economy where *"features of backwardness...combined with the last word in world technology and world thinking"*. This phenomenon of *"combined and uneven"* development found expression in every element of Russian society. Alongside peasant agriculture unchanged since the 17th century, stood massive factories, built with imported finance and technique. The contradictory nature of this economic development was completely ignored by the Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries (SRs). They contended that the *"backward"* nature of the economy, and the *"political immaturity"* of the Russian state, meant that any revolution in Russia would necessarily usher in a period of parliamentary democracy, based on the Western European model. As early as 1905, Trotsky advanced a completely contrasting perspective, one based on the lessons of the 1905 revolution. Recognising the inability of the nascent Russian bourgeoisie to carry through its own democratic revolution, and linking this to the *"combined and uneven"* nature of the Russian economy, Trotsky explained that, *"In accordance with its immediate tasks the Russian revolution is a bourgeois revolution. But the Russian bourgeoisie is anti-revolutionary. The victory of the revolution is therefore possible only as a victory of the proletariat. But the victorious proletariat will not stop at the programme of bourgeois democracy; it will go on to the programme of socialism. The Russian revolution will become the first stage of the socialist world revolution."*

As has happened so many times before in history, war provided the catalyst for the collapse of a ruling class which has outlived its historical purpose. The Great War of 1914-18 was not the cause of the Russian Revolutions of 1917, but what it did do was to exacerbate, and sharpen the already unbearable tensions and contradictions which existed in Russian society. The splits in the ruling class became chasms under the pressure of war. Food shortages, inflation, increased oppression, and the horrors of war combined to inflict blow after blow upon the working class and peasantry; while at the same time fuelling the *"molecular process of revolution"* - a process which reached boiling point in the latter weeks of February 1917.

The February Revolution

The February revolution revealed the enormous latent power of the Russian, and in particular the Petrograd, working class. In the space of a few days, between February 23-27, the revolution destroyed the 1,000 year reign of the Romanov monarchy. Basing themselves on the experience of 1905, the workers organised themselves into *'soviets'* (workers councils), as did the soldiers who had rallied under the flag of revolution raised by the proletariat. These soviets, based in the factories and garrisons, immediately established themselves not just as organs of revolution, but in effect as an alternative state power. At this stage, under the correct leadership armed with the programme of socialist revolution, the soviets could have established workers' power throughout Russia. Needless to say however, the reformist Menshevik and SR leaders who had established themselves in the leadership of the soviets, were not even considering the question of workers' power; instead they saw their task as handing power over to the capitalists, in the political guise of the liberal Cadet Party. For the reformists, the events of February were a confirmation of their perspective that Russia's revolution would be a *"democratic"* one - and they prepared to adapt themselves to the role of *'the loyal opposition'*, in the true parliamentary tradition. The February Revolution did not resolve the question as to which class held state power, instead it formalised the relationship between the classes through a



system of *"dual power"*. One side of this dual power was represented in the *"legal"* provisional government, which the capitalists had established with the help of their shadows in the reformist parties; the other by the soviets, which were based on the revolutionary workers, supported by the soldiers and peasantry. This *"dual power"* was by its very nature unstable and contradictory, and could never be more than a transitional form.

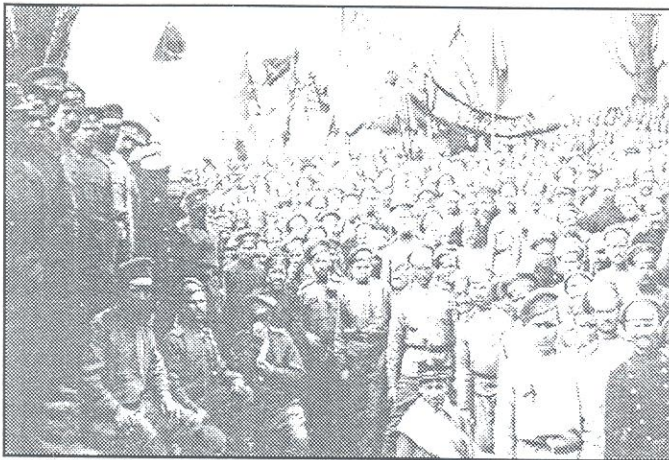
If the February revolution was a bourgeois democratic revolution as the reformists claimed, it was one without stability or purpose. The revolution had aroused the worker and peasant masses, bringing them onto the political stage for the first time - and yet the reformists were intent on applying a democratic veneer to the unsolved contradictions which remained in Russia. In the first instance this meant *"honouring"* Russia's obligations to its allies in the Great War - the very war which had precisely forced the masses down the road of revolution in the first place! In the name of the democratic revolution the working class was sent back to the factories for the war effort, and the soldiers told to hold their positions in preparation for a (doomed) advance. In addition, land reform, the basic demand of the peasantry was quietly swept under the carpet - to be considered when, or rather if, the Constituent Assembly was called. The oppressed nationalities in Russia and its surrounding regions remained repressed, albeit by a democratic *"provisional"* government, rather than the Romanovs. The February Revolution had caught the Bolshevik Party, the most revolutionary party in history, unawares - as it had all of the *'revolutionary'* parties. In the

events of February 23-27 themselves, the Bolshevik's failed to keep pace with the tempo of events. Trotsky in his *"History"* characterised the Bureau of the Bolshevik Central Committee as, *"hopelessly slow...The leaders were watching the movement from above - in other words they did not lead. They dragged after the movement"*. Often those party members closer to the factories and the working masses were more attuned to events than the party leaders, who revealed conservatism in the face of the revolution.

This confusion within the party was expressed even more graphically in the weeks between the February revolution and the arrival of Lenin in Petrograd. Clinging to the Bolsheviks' pre-revolutionary formula of *"a revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry"*, the majority of the Bolshevik leadership, including Stalin & Kamenev (editors of *'Pravda'*), came out in defence of the provisional government. Lenin, watching these proceedings with alarm from exile in Switzerland, sent his famous *"Letters from Afar"* in which he sharply criticised the Bolshevik central committee. In doing so he developed the perspectives which would form the basis of his *"April Theses"* - and converged with Trotsky's perspective of *"permanent revolution"*.

The April Theses

In describing the impact of Lenin's arrival in Petrograd on April 3 upon the Bolshevik Party, Trotsky notes that, *"Only from that moment does the Bolshevik Party begin to speak aloud, and what is more important, with its own voice"*. At the famous April conference of the Bolshevik party, Lenin swung the party membership from a position of



support for the government of the liberals and the "compromisers" to, "...conquest of power in the name of the socialist revolution...an irreconcilable struggle against defensism and its supporters: the capture of the soviet majority: the overthrow of the provisional government: the seizure of power through the soviets: a revolutionary peace policy: and a programme of socialist revolution at home and of international revolution abroad." Accepting that the Bolsheviks were a minority in the soviets, Lenin explained the need for the Party to "patiently explain" its ideas to the masses; He based himself exclusively on the idea that the masses were not at the moment capable of overthrowing the Provisional Government, and that, therefore, everything possible had to be done to enable the working class to become conscious of its power and class independence.

In formulating the April Theses, Lenin had in fact pre-empted the developing leftward movement of the masses, who by early June were beginning to lose their faith in the Kerensky government. This was strikingly shown in the Soviet demonstration held in Petrograd on June 18. For the first time since the revolution, placards and banners bearing Bolshevik slogans such as, "**Down with the 10 Capitalist Ministers**" and "**All Power to the Soviets**", predominated, revealing the changing mood of the masses.

However, it was during the so called July Days (July 3-5) that these undercurrents in the consciousness of the Petrograd working class violently surfaced. Against the cautious advice of the Bolsheviks, the workers and soldiers took to the streets, in reaction against the failures of the Kerensky government. Recognising that any move to

overthrow the Provisional Government - which in turn would pose the question of seizing power - was premature and unlikely to be supported throughout Russia, the Bolsheviks nevertheless placed themselves at the head of the movement. They had not called the workers into the streets - but now they were there it would have been criminal for the Bolsheviks to wash their hands of the affair, leaving the masses to the potentially bloody reaction of the Provisional Government. Trotsky in appraising the actions of the Bolsheviks in this period concluded, "*Thanks to the Bolshevik Party taking its place boldly at the head of the movement, it was able to stop the masses at the moment that the demonstration began to turn into an armed test of strength. The blow struck at the masses and the Party in July was considerable, but it was not a decisive blow. The victims were counted in tens and not by tens of thousands. The working class issued from the trial, not headless and bled to death. It fully preserved its fighting cadres and these cadres had learned much.*" In the immediate aftermath of the July Days, the Provisional Government launched a concentrated offensive against Lenin and the Bolsheviks, who they alleged were in the pay of "German Imperialism"! Lenin was forced into exile, and Trotsky and a number of other leading Bolsheviks were imprisoned. Blinded by this campaign of slander and vilification, the reformists and bourgeoisie alike congratulated themselves on the "*final and lasting*" rout of the Bolsheviks. Emboldened by their "*victory*" in July, the bourgeoisie began to cast doubting eyes on the Provisional Government itself. Kerensky's government was beginning to look increasingly fragile alongside the sovi-

ets, which though still dominated by the reformists, were beginning to reclaim some of the power that had been meekly surrendered in February. For the bourgeoisie, '*democracy*' is a device, an instrument of capitalist rule, not an end in itself. In the face of increasing soviet power, sections of the bourgeoisie were prepared to discard '*democracy*' for strong dictatorship.

On August 28th General Kornilov, who had actually been in conspiracy with Kerensky before splitting with him, began to withdraw troops from the front and deploy them against Petrograd. Immediately the Bolsheviks offered a united front to the reformist parties in order to defend "red Petrograd" from counter revolution. While Kerensky and the compromisers vacillated - now threatening, now appeasing Kornilov - the Bolshevik Party set about mobilising the Petrograd proletariat. In preparing his attempt at insurrection, Kornilov and his bourgeois allies had seriously miscalculated the mood of the Petrograd workers.

The bourgeoisie believed that the Petrograd working class had spoken its last word in defence of the revolution in July; in reality they were just about to speak their first.

The struggle against Kornilov was prepared on two fronts: military and political. While mobilising the working class and soldiers for the defence of the city, to the extent that the Red Guard stood ready to put into the field some 40,000 rifles, delegates were sent to Kornilov's advancing troops on behalf of the soviet.

After discussions between his troops and the Soviet delegates and agitators, Kornilov's army ground to a halt - refusing to take up arms against their brothers and sisters in Petrograd. Kornilov was left a General without an army. His offensive dissolved, and with it the last vestiges of Kerensky's authority.

The Kornilov events were a direct precursor of the October revolution. As a result of their role in the defence of Petrograd, the Bolsheviks established themselves at the head of the revolutionary masses. In contrast, the reformist parties were exposed as incapable of defending or furthering the revolution. Kerensky, in one last desperate attempt to turn back the flood tide of revolution, announced plans to move troops from the Petrograd garrison to the front.

This action was interpreted by the troops and the workers as a deliberately provocative act, and the issue immediately took a political significance.

This act of provocation by the Kerensky government coincided with the Bolsheviks winning majorities in the Moscow and Petrograd soviets for the first time and Trotsky being elected chairman of the Petrograd soviet, the position he had held in the 1905 revolution. Such developments were not an accident. In the eight months between February and October, the Bolsheviks had been strengthening their position at every level within the revolutionary masses. Since Lenin's return in April, the Bolshevik Party had built support in the soviets, factory committees, trenches and villages - guided by Lenin's advice to "*patiently explain*". The Bolshevik slogan of "*Land, Bread, Freedom*" had become the rallying point for the revolutionary masses. On the basis of the events of the last eight months, those workers and soldiers who had raised on their shoulders the '*Compromisers*' now stood solid behind the party of socialist revolution. The scene was set for the final act in the 1917 revolution.

Towards the end of September Lenin, who was still in exile in Finland, wrote to the Central Committee demanding that it make concrete plans for the seizure of power.

On October 10th the Bolshevik Central Committee agreed to institute an insurrection through the soviets. Lenin urged, "*We must not wait, we must not postpone. On the front...they are proposing an overturn. Will the Congress of Soviets ever be held? We do not know. We must seize the power immediately and not wait for any congresses.*" It was correct for Lenin to sound the alarm, but it was also correct for Trotsky and the other leaders to link it to the opening of the Second Soviet Congress and its defence.

The Military Revolutionary Committee

The Military Revolutionary Committee (MRC) under the leadership of Trotsky, was established by the Petrograd Soviet on October 16th. In the days which followed it prepared the ground for the forthcoming insurrection. On October 17th the representatives of the Petrograd garrison passed a

resolution withdrawing support from the Provisional Government - pledging to, "...obey only the orders of the Petrograd Soviet, through the Military Revolutionary Committee."

The coming over of the Petrograd garrison was an event of the foremost importance. It assured that the pending insurrection could not be strangled militarily, and as a result virtually assured its success. All that now remained was for the MRC to direct the actual, physical seizure of power - a task made many times easier by the fact that the Bolsheviks enjoyed the overwhelming support of both the Petrograd Soviet and garrison.

The coming over of the Petrograd garrison, and the subsequent split of the MRC with the government army headquarters, brought to an end the charade of "dual power". In desperation, and summoning up the last of its courage, the government passed a resolution declaring its intention to, "institute legal proceedings against the MRC: to shut down the Bolshevik papers advocating insurrection: to summon reliable military detachments from the environs and from the front". This resolution was clearly a declaration of war against not only the Bolshevik Party - but the revolutionary masses of Petrograd as a whole.

The Insurrection

To accompany this declaration the government began to mobilise what little forces it had left at its disposal; and in addition ordered the cruiser "Aurora", whose crew stood behind the Bolsheviks, to leave its position on the Neva to rejoin the fleet. Early in the morning of the 24th, a government commissar accompanied by a squad of "junkers" (officer cadets), closed down the Bolshevik printing press, smashing the presses and sealing the building. Immediately the MRC dispatched the Litorvsky regiment, and members of the 6th battalion of sappers to re-open the building and its presses. Within hours the presses were rolling again, this time under the watchful eyes of troops loyal to the Petrograd Soviet - the insurrection had begun.

At the same time the government seals on the Bolshevik presses were being broken, the MRC issued Order No 1218, instructing the crew of the

"Aurora" to hold her position, in defiance of the government - an order greeted enthusiastically by her crew. "These two acts of resistance, suggested by the workers and sailors, and carried out, thanks to the sympathy of the garrison, with complete impunity, became political acts of capital importance." News of these successes spread rapidly accompanied by a telephogram sent to all districts and units of the garrison announcing, "The enemy of the people took the offensive during the night. The MRC is leading the resistance to the assault of the conspirators."

As Trotsky explained, "Simultaneously or in regular order," Petrograd fell into the hands of the MRC; one by one the "...railroad stations, the lighting plant, the munitions and food stores, the waterworks, the Dvortsky Bridge, the Telephone Exchange, the State Bank, the big printing plants. The Telegraph Station and the Post Office were completely taken over. Reliable guards were placed everywhere". Reporting to his general headquarters, one bewildered government commander complained, "The situation in Petrograd is frightful. There are no street demonstrations or disorders, but a regulated seizure of institutions, railroad stations, also arrests, is in progress...the junker patrols are surrendering without resistance."

This absence of masses on the streets has been used by some bourgeois commentators to accuse the Bolsheviks of carrying through a coup d'etat rather than a genuine revolution. Answering these critics Trotsky explained that the October Revolution was, "The most popular mass-insurrection in all history. The workers had no need to come out into the public square to fuse together: they were politically and morally one single whole without that". The truth of this statement is provided by the incredibly small number of casualties reported during the revolution. In effect, it was a bloodless revolution. The only real centre of resistance was centred on the Winter Palace - where a motley group of Cossacks, junkers and a women's battalion made a half hearted, and futile, attempt to defend the symbolic home of reaction. The 2nd Congress of Soviets opened on October 25th (7th November in the new calendar). Petrograd, with the fleeting exception of the Winter Palace, was under the control of the

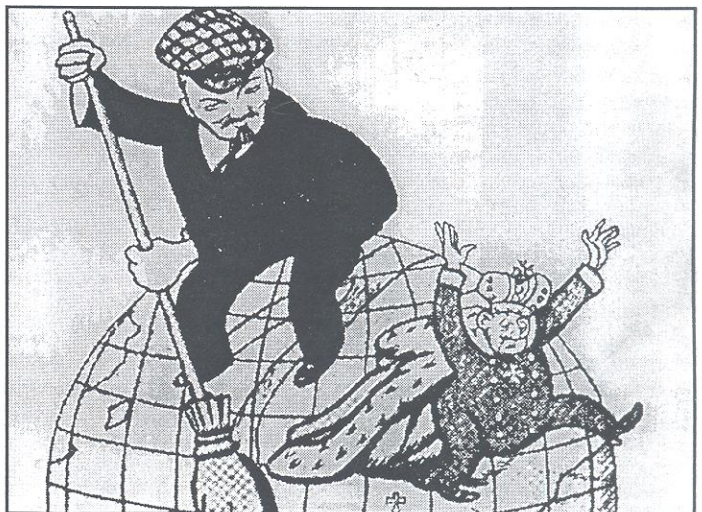
Petrograd Soviet. This state of affairs was being replicated across Russia as city after city fell into the hands of the Soviets. Kerensky had fled - his government had been arrested. Eight months had passed since the Tsar had been forced from his throne; months which had seen the Bolshevik Party, the party of socialist revolution, put into practice the living programme of Marx and Engels. The Mensheviks and SR's who in February had settled themselves into a seemingly unassailable position, now found themselves, consigned to the dustbin of history. Addressing itself to the workers, soldiers and peasants the 2nd Congress of Soviets assumed the power handed to it by the Petrograd Soviet MRC, and declared its intention to, "...propose an immediate democratic peace to all nations, and an immediate truce on all fronts...assure the free transfer of landlord, crown and monastery lands to the Land Committees, defend the soldiers' rights...establish workers control over production...take means to supply bread to the cities and articles of the first necessity to the villages, and to secure to all nationalities living in Russia a real right to independent existence". All this was encapsulated in Lenin's simple declaration to the Congress that, "We shall now proceed to construct the Socialist Order!"

Lessons of October

The October Revolution was, and remains, the most significant event in history. If the revolutionary wave which engulfed the West following the 1914-18 war, (which was inspired in no small measure by the events of 1917), had not been crushed, October 1917 would have

marked the point that mankind made the leap from the "realm of necessity to the realm of freedom". Instead, as revolution in the West was shipwrecked time and time again, and the Soviets lay exhausted after the bitter years of Civil War, (which was funded, and aided by the governments of the West), the October revolution became isolated; a process which culminated in the deformation of the Soviet state and the Stalinist policy of 'Socialism in one country'. For socialists today perhaps the most important lesson of the October Revolution, and the failed revolutions which followed it, is the role of Marxist leadership. Among Lenin's greatest contributions to the ideas of Marxism are his writings on the role of the Party - ideas upon which he built and moulded the Bolshevik Party.

The "Lessons of October" are practical ones, which socialists should use both as a guide to action, and a source of unrivalled inspiration. We no longer live in a world of certainties - be they economic, social or political. As the crisis of capitalism develops on a world scale, so the socialist transformation of society will be once more placed on the order of the day. Nowhere is this prognosis more relevant, or immediate, than the former Soviet Union - mafia capitalism could once again break at its 'weakest link'. Movements of the Russian working class in the coming period have the potential to dwarf even the events of "Red October" - and would lay the basis for socialist construction, not just in Russia, but throughout the world. Toward this end it is essential that socialists study the events of 1917—and in doing so reclaim them for the labour and trade union movement.



socialist appeal

The Marxist voice of the labour movement



Labour must repeal the JSA

On the 7th of October the Tory government introduced the jobseekers allowance. This piece of reactionary legislation means that unemployed people will no longer receive unemployment benefit and income support but instead will be covered by either the "contributory JSA" or the "means tested JSA."

The unemployed will only be able to claim contributory JSA if they have paid sufficient national insurance contributions, as well as satisfying new and far stricter "availability for work" and "actively seeking work" tests. But even then claimants will only receive this benefit for six months as opposed to the current one year period for unemployment benefit. After six months all unemployed people will transfer onto the means tested JSA which will follow similar rules as income support.

This would mean that claimants with partners may lose their benefits completely. These new rules will mean particularly severe restrictions for two groups - the under 25's who face an immediate cut of £10.35 a week and those with an adult dependent whose £29.75 addition will be slashed completely. The government's aim in bring-

ing in these new changes is to save £400 million in the first two years and to halve the unemployment benefit bill by the end of the decade. The government also anticipates that these measures will cut the unemployment level by 25,000 in the first year. However, according to Parliamentary written answers 70,000 claimants will lose all entitlement to benefit after six months and a further 95,000 will be forced to apply for a means tested benefit six months earlier than at present.

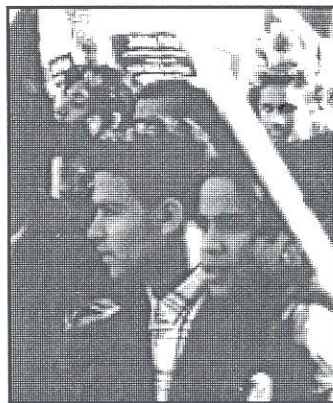
The Unemployment Unit has calculated that, "combined with other changes, this will make a quarter of a million claimants worse off in the first 12 months." After all the misery of the Tory government's years in office people are looking to a Labour government to lift them out of poverty. However, the best that the Labour party can offer is a commitment to review the JSA. But Labour's employment spokesperson Ian McCartney insists that "we have not gone soft on the Jobseeker's Act," going on to say that Labour wants to tackle "the unemployment trap through welfare to work programmes..." Also contained in the JSA is the provision to stop benefit altogether if he or she fails to comply with the instructions.

Employment Service officers can give claimants a written direction at any time requiring them to undertake a specific action aimed at increasing a claimants employability in order to get them a job. This could mean that a man with long hair could be

Or in other words it can be used as a means of further attacking the unemployed.

Another aspect which is worrying the the CPSA and the PTC, the unions responsible for implementing the JSA, is that their members will have to deal with some extremely angry and sometimes violent claimants without the necessary office safety measures. This is because the JSA will be dealt with from open plan jobcentres whereas previously these so called "benefits of last resort" such as income support were dealt with from Benefits Agencies where the staff work from behind screens. The Employment Service management is resisting requests from the unions to for staff safety measures to be incorporated into jobcentres. The refusal to implement these safety measures has led to CPSA members taking industrial action on both a local and national level.

A national campaign should be launched by the TUC to fight for the immediate repeal of this draconian piece of legislation and for the next Labour government to bring in a minimum wage and full employment in order to oust and for all eradicate the misery of unemployment.



instructed to get it cut. If not it could result in the loss of their benefit for four weeks.

The provision to stop a claimants benefit on failure to comply with the rules is the "thin end of the wedge" according to Frank Bonner, a full time official with the PTC. He believes that once you have the provision to stop benefit for non compliance, "you can widen the range of instructions and extend the degree of sanctions. It's a money saver."

Labour to power on a socialist programme